ABSTRACT

SEXUAL SOCIALIZATION IN LESBIAN-PARENT FAMILIES

By Rachael Cohen

Utilizing a symbolic interactionist and queer theoretical lens, 10 lesbian mothers of children ages three to 21 years old were interviewed to examine how and what lesbian mothers teach their children about sex/uality. Major themes were related to how lesbian mothers teach their children about sex/uality: (a) being open; (b) using books to facilitate learning; (c) dealing with heterosexism/homophobia; and (d) establishing/maintaining boundaries. Additionally, major themes were related to what lesbian mothers teach their children about sex/uality: (a) broad notions of sexuality; and (b) what they want their children to know. These results have implications for family practitioners and future research.
Sexual Socialization in Lesbian-Parent Families

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Introduction

Families have been undergoing significant changes in the past few decades, such that two-parent heterosexual families are no longer the norm and the number of families headed by gay and lesbian parents is on the rise. Indeed, it is estimated that anywhere from one to nine million children are being raised by at least one gay or lesbian parent (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001), and the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) indicated that approximately 250,000 children under the age of 18 were being raised in same-sex couple households in 2000. Research has shown that there are few differences in terms of developmental outcomes between children raised in heterosexual-parent families and children raised in lesbian-parent families (Golombok et al., 2003). As most of the studies on gay and lesbian parents and their children have compared them to heterosexual-parent families, there is a need for more research that looks at gay and lesbian families in their own right to explore their unique strengths and challenges (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

Few studies have explored sexual communication between lesbian parents and their children despite evidence that these children may experience some unique benefits in this regard (Gabb, 2004). For example, talking to a child about sex can be difficult for any parent, but initial research indicates that lesbian mothers may feel comfortable talking with their children about sex and explaining where they came from (Mitchell, 1998). Further, it may be advantageous for children to learn about the many aspects of sex in the context of a lesbian family, because reproduction and sexuality must be separated given that the two women cannot reproduce (Gabb, 2004; Mitchell, 1998). In addition, there is some evidence that children of lesbian parents may develop broader notions of sexuality than children raised in heterosexual-parent families (Kuvalanka & Goldberg, in press; Tasker & Golombok, 1997). These findings led me to want to know more about how lesbian mothers teach their children about sexuality, as well as two closely intertwined topics—sex and reproduction. As only two previous studies (Gabb, 2004; Mitchell, 1998) have explored this, 10 lesbian mothers were interviewed for the present study in order to examine how and what lesbian mothers teach their children about sex and sexuality—or sex/uality (Gabb, 2004).

Theoretical Perspective

The current study utilized both symbolic interactionism and queer theory to conceptualize how and what lesbian mothers teach their children about sex/uality. The theory of symbolic
interactionism operates on a number of assumptions: (a) the assumption that people think (define and interpret objects and events in their environment) before they carry out actions, (b) behavior is constructed from a definition of objects and events in our environment, and (c) through social interactions people carve out roles relative to one another (Winton, 1995). Typically, when children are taught about sex they are taught about heterosexual sex and reproduction simultaneously (Gabb, 2004). Gay and lesbian individuals, however, experience sex/uality in a non-heteronormative way, which may in turn influence how and what they teach their children about sex/uality. More specifically, lesbian mothers who have their children in the context of a lesbian relationship experience sex and reproduction as two separate things; thus, lesbian mothers may be more apt to discuss sex and reproduction with their children as distinct entities that are not always related. Further, lesbian mothers likely hold non-traditional views of sexuality, which they may share with their children when teaching them about sex/uality. A symbolic interactionist perspective prompts us to explore what “teaching kids about sex” means to lesbian parents who have a unique perspective on sex/uality.

Queer theory seeks to break down the binary categories of gender (male/female), sexuality (heterosexual/homosexual), and family (genuine/pseudo) (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). In the United States, family is usually defined as people who are related to each other either biologically or legally, thus leaving other family forms to be viewed as less genuine or valid (Oswald et al., 2005). Lesbian mothers ‘queer’ their families by configuring them in ways that defy the heterosexual norm. ‘Queering’ something refers to acts and ideas that resist heteronormativity by challenging the gender, sexuality, and/or family binaries (Oswald et al., 2005). Queer theorists argue that it is important to consider gender, sexuality, and family together because they are so interrelated (Oswald et al., 2005). For example, lesbian mothers reject heteronormativity by (a) being lesbian and (b) having children. By rejecting heteronormativity lesbian mothers may give their children broader definitions of gender, sexuality, and family, but it is unclear how this occurs. Is it an implicit learning, whereby simply having lesbian mothers contributes to children’s expanded understandings, or is it because lesbian mothers explicitly teach their children that there are many sexualities and, thus, broader notions of gender and family as well? More research is needed to shed some light on this.

My symbolic interactionist/queer theoretical perspective led me to wonder, at the most general level, how lesbian mothers sexually socialize their children. Sexual socialization is “the
process through which an individual acquires an understanding of ideas, beliefs, and values, shared cultural symbols, meanings and codes of conduct regarding sex and sexuality” (Shtarkshall, Santelli, & Hirsch, 2007, p. 116). Prior to discussing the methods of the current study, I will review the general literature on sexual communication between parents and children, as well as the literature on how lesbian mothers teach their children about sex/uality.

**Review of Literature**

*Sexual Communication with Youth*

Most of the studies on parental sexual communication focus on communication between (presumably heterosexual) mothers and their children (Lefowitz & Espinosa-Hernandez, 2007). Numerous studies have found that adolescents were more likely to approach their mothers than their fathers as a source of information about sex (Heisler, 2005; Olge, Glasier, & Riley, 2008; Sprecher, Harris, & Meyers, 2008). What kinds of things influence the quality and the frequency of sexual communication between mothers and their children? In a sample of predominantly African-American children it was found that the more comfortable and knowledgeable a mother was about topics related to sexuality, the greater (more frequent) the mother-child sexuality communication (Pluhar, Dilorio, & McCarty, 2008). Along the same lines of being comfortable talking about sex, embarrassment seems to be a prevalent reservation for both parents and teens when it came to discussions about sex-related topics (Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon, 2000). Interestingly, a study by Heisler (2005) found that homosexuality was a topic that youth rarely discussed with their mothers. According to a recent study, African-American parents were more likely than parents from any other racial group to discuss sex-related topics with their adolescents (Sprecher et al., 2008). It is clear that there are many influences at work here – comfort level with the topic, degree of embarrassment, the subject matter, and race/ethnicity. Perhaps being a lesbian-parent family might also have an influence on parent-child sexual communication.

*How Do Children of Lesbian Mothers Learn About Sex/uality?*

Few studies have examined how lesbian mothers teach their children about sex and sexuality. People who oppose gay and lesbian parenting often state that the reasoning behind their worry is that the children will later identify as gay themselves (Wardle, 1997). Studies have
shown that contrary to popular belief, the children of gay and lesbian parents are not much more likely to be gay or lesbian than the children of heterosexual parents (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). A 1995 study provides support for this conclusion; the study found that the vast majority of the sons of gay men identified as heterosexual (Bailey, Wolfe, & Mikach, 1995). However, a longitudinal study comparing young adults raised by lesbian mothers to young adults raised by heterosexual mothers found that, while the children of lesbian mothers ultimately identified as heterosexual at the same rate as the children of heterosexual mothers, they were more open to the idea of entering into a same-sex relationship (Golombok & Tasker, 1996). In fact, the children of lesbian mothers were more likely to have considered being in a same-sex relationship and to have been in a same-sex relationship in the past (Golombok & Tasker 1996). Further, participants in a more recent study of young adults raised by lesbian/bisexual mothers felt that their parents provided them with more broad and fluid conceptualizations of sexuality and gender; one participant stated: “I was raised with an openness….Because I never thought it (homosexuality) was wrong, I was more open to the possibility” (Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009). What we do not know is precisely how lesbian mothers provide their children with broader notions of sexuality.

Furthermore, while some believe that gay and lesbian parents prefer their children to also identify as gay or lesbian, few studies have investigated this claim (Wardle, 1997). In a 1993 study, gay/lesbian and heterosexual single mothers were asked about their attitudes regarding their children’s sexual behavior and life choices (Javaid, 1993). Seven out of 13 lesbian mothers expressed an acceptance of gay and lesbian behavior in their children, while three preferred that their children be heterosexual (Javaid, 1993). In Kuvalanka and Goldberg’s (2009) study of youth of lesbian/bisexual mothers, some participants felt their parents were very supportive of their non-heterosexual and non-gender conforming identities, while others felt their parents were less so. For example, while one participant stated that “having gay parents means that the kid is willing to experiment and will know that their parents will accept them no matter what,” another participant reported that, “My mother said to me, ‘I wish, if there’s anything in the world I wish, I wish you weren’t gay’” (Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009). In other words, it seems that gay and lesbian parents do not have uniform feelings regarding their children’s sexual identities. More research that provides insight into what lesbian parents hope or aim to teach their children about sexuality is warranted.
Two important studies specifically explored how lesbian mothers teach their children about sex and sexuality (Gabb, 2004; Mitchell, 1998). Mitchell interviewed 26 lesbian mothers of children ages 4 to 24 years old and aimed to describe their experiences of communicating with their children about sex and reproduction. One common theme that was identified was that the mothers sought to teach their children tolerance. Mitchell suggested that lesbian mothers encouraged tolerance by “consciously addressing the experience of people being different from one another – with respect to who one loves, how one loves, and what (or who) constitutes a family” (p. 408). Another finding was that many of the mothers supported gay-friendly sex education – that is, several mothers sought resources that addressed gay, lesbian, and bisexual choices because they felt odd about presenting their children with a sexual world view that had no provision for people like themselves. The mothers, however, were unable to procure such resources. In Gabb’s (2004) study, 21 lesbian parents and 13 children (ages not given) were interviewed with regard to their sex communication practices. All of the children interviewed identified as heterosexual, but explained that unlike most children they reflected upon their sexuality to come to this conclusion. Gabb noted that most children just believe they are heterosexual and do not question their sexuality because of how heteronormativity is so ingrained in our society; thus, children from lesbian families may differ from children from heterosexual families in that they separate the categories of sexuality and family from acts of procreative sex (Gabb, 2004). More research is needed to specifically explore this possibility.

**Teaching About Sexuality and Family**

Lesbian mothers may give their children a broader definition of family – a topic closely related to sex and sexuality – than the typical nuclear family: mom, dad, and children. A study by Dundas and Kaufman (2000) found that when questioned about family, children of lesbian mothers included all people who cared about them in their definition of family. Gabb (2004) addresses this idea by saying that in a lesbian family “heterosexual (procreative) sex is seen as an aspect of sexuality; it neither signifies nor constitutes family form. In this way lesbian parent families irrevocably separate sex and sexuality from the exigencies of the (heterosexual) family” (p. 30). Similarly, in a study by Litovitch and Langhout (2004), lesbian mothers and their children were interviewed; it was found that the majority of the mothers in the study recalled that they were open with their children and had started discussing the concept of sexual orientation at a very young age. It has been suggested that because children raised by lesbian mothers have this
early discourse on sexuality they have a broader understanding of what makes a family (Litovitch & Langhout, 2004). Thus, in the present study, we aimed to further explore this connection between family and sexuality.

**Research Questions**

Utilizing a symbolic interactionist/queer theoretical perspective, I developed the following research questions that guided my study:

1. How and what do lesbian mothers teach their children about sex/uality and reproduction?
2. (How) do lesbian mothers discuss issues of family in relation to sexuality?

**Methods**

The current study was exploratory in nature, as surprisingly few studies have attempted to investigate how lesbian mothers teach their children about sex and sexuality. Furthermore, the current study also served as a pilot project for a larger, longitudinal study currently being planned by Drs. Kuvalanka and Lynch at Miami University; this larger study will, among other things, explore how several Midwestern lesbian-parent families teach their children about sex/uality, family, and gender. Qualitative methodology was used in the pilot project, as the goal was to understand the experiences of lesbian mothers communicating with their children about sex/uality (Creswell, 1998). After successful completion of the thesis proposal meeting, an “application for approval of research involving human subjects” explaining the following methodology was submitted to and approved by Miami University’s Institutional Review Board.

**Procedure**

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used to recruit interview participants (Creswell, 1998). To be eligible to participate in the study, participants were originally required to: (a) self-identify as lesbian or bisexual; (b) have at least one child between the ages of five and 18; (c) currently be in a relationship with another woman; (d) and currently live in the Midwest. Recruiting participants from the Midwest proved difficult; thus recruitment was opened up to participants from other parts of the U.S. Study information was shared with the Gay and Lesbian Employees At Miami (GLEAM) listserv; the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Community Center in Cincinnati; and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Center in Dayton. A letter was mailed to the staff at each of the LGBT centers explaining the
study and asking their permission to spread the word about the study (Appendix A). Email announcements explaining the study were sent out to GLEAM listserv; the GLBT Community Center in Cincinnati; and the LGBT Center in Dayton. The announcements explained who qualified for the study and the nature of the study (see Appendix B). Members of the thesis committee also shared study information with friends and acquaintances, which resulted in the recruitment participants. Potential participants contacted the researcher by phone or email, and set up an interview time and location that was convenient for them. On the day of the interview, participants were asked to sign a consent form that informed them of their rights and gave them further information on the study (Appendix C). However, if the participant was interviewed over the phone, the researcher read her the consent form and asked her if she consented to the terms of the study. If the participant agreed and participated, a copy of the consent form was emailed to her for her records.

Eleven interviews were conducted; however, one participant was removed from the sample, because she did meet the requirement of currently being in a relationship with another woman. Three of the interviews were conducted in person and eight were conducted over the phone. There were not any noticeable differences between in-person and telephone interviews in terms of interview length or ease with which participants shared information. The researcher’s contact information, as well as her advisor’s information, was given to the participants on the consent form in case they had any questions or concerns pertaining to the study. Participants were then individually interviewed either in person or over the phone. The interviews, which lasted 30 to 45 minutes, were tape/digitally-recorded. The participants answered demographic questions related to age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, and family structure, as well as open-ended questions such as: tell me more about the specific roles you and your partner playing in teaching your children about sex, sexuality, and reproduction? How are you teaching your children about these topics, what are you teaching them? (For a full list of the interview questions see Appendix D.) During the interviews, participants had the opportunity to reflect upon their parenting, which may have caused them to wonder about how they could better communicate with their children. Following the interview, the researcher provided the participants with a list of resources (see Appendix E) for discussing sexuality and family with children, which may have been beneficial to the participants.
As interviews were being completed, Family Studies undergraduates assisted the researcher in transcribing the interviews and received research credit for their help; Dr. Kuvalanka supervised them and assigned them grades. The undergraduate workers signed confidentiality forms (see Appendix F), thereby agreeing to keep identifying participant information confidential. The participants were given pseudonyms in transcripts and reports to protect their identities. Any other identifying words such as names of children, cities, schools, and friends were either changed or blacked out. The data will be kept in my private home office for no more than five years at which point they will be destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis consisted of open and focused coding which is part of grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 1995). Grounded theory methods aim to discover and define people’s experiences (Charmaz, 1995). Open coding involves coding each line of interview data and allows the researcher to begin to make sense of the various topics/themes that emerge. The researcher read through the transcripts and made notes in the margins about the initial themes that were apparent. For example, one participant reported using a book to facilitate a discussion about sex with her child, while another participant reported using a book to address lesbian families with her child. The researcher then took these initial themes and started using focused coding, which involves making more abstract codes (Charmaz, 2002). The researcher put the experiences of those two participants under the code ‘using books to facilitate learning,’ as the goal was to create broader codes for the initial codes to fit beneath. The researcher then went back through the data and followed these leads, using them to sift through the data and to verify whether the focused codes were broad enough to capture the data (Charmaz, 1995).

In order to ensure the credibility of the research, the researcher had her advisor check her coding and themes. This helped to ensure that bias had not led to identifying themes that were not apparent to anyone else. Quotes from the participants were included that illustrate the themes identified. The researcher strove to be as detailed and accurate as possible in order to allow another researcher to replicate this study.

**Sample**

The sample consists of 10 women from the United States (eight from the Midwest and two from the Northeast). All of the participants identified as lesbian and Caucasian. The participants were between the ages of 40 and 48 ($M = 43.9$ years; $SD = 2.84$). In terms of
education level, most participants \( n = 7 \) held graduate-level degrees (four had their master’s; three had their doctorates); one held an undergraduate degree, and two attended some college. Most of the participants’ partners \( n = 5 \) held master’s degrees, while two held doctoral-level degrees, one held a college degree, one held an associate’s degree and one attended some high school. Participants had one to three children, who ranged from age 3 to age 20 \( (M = 10.82; SD = 4.31) \); all participants had at least one child between the ages of 5 and 18 years old. In terms of religious affiliation, one participant identified as Catholic, one as Buddhist, one as Christian, and six had no religious affiliation. In regard to the participants’ partners’ religious affiliation, the majority \( n = 6 \) had no religious affiliation, one person identified as Presbyterian, one as Pentecostal, one as Buddhist, and one as Christian. In terms of the participants’ children’s religious affiliations, five participants indicated that their children had no religious affiliation, one was Catholic, one was Pagan, one was Pentecostal, one was culturally Jewish, and one mother was not sure about her child’s religious affiliation. See Table 1 (Appendix G) for demographic characteristics of participants.

For a breakdown of each individual participant’s age, race, relationship length and family context please refer to Table 1 (Appendix H). In regard to family context the majority \( n = 6 \) of the participants conceived their children in a previous heterosexual relationship, three conceived through donor insemination, and one adopted her children. One couple (Brooke and Katherine) was interviewed, but each person was interviewed separately.

**Results**

Several themes emerged from the data as participants described a diverse range of experiences related to teaching their children about sex/uality. Major themes were related to *how* lesbian mothers teach their children about sex/uality: (a) being open; (b) using books to facilitate learning; (c) dealing with heterosexism/homophobia; and (d) establishing/maintaining boundaries. Additionally, major themes were related to *what* lesbian mothers teach their children about sex/uality: (a) broad notions of sexuality; and (b) what they want their children to know. These major themes, as well as sub-themes, are described below.

**How Lesbian Mothers Teach their Children about Sex/uality**

**Being Open**

Almost all of the participants \( n = 9 \) discussed being open and honest with their children in regards to sex/uality. Two related sub-themes emerged from the data: (a) being open and
honest in general in regards to sex, sexuality, and reproduction; and, more specifically, (b) being open and honest regarding the parents’ own sexual orientation. These two sub-themes are described below.

Four out of the 10 participants emphasized that honesty and openness was an important part of how they discussed sex/uality and reproduction with their children. For three of these participants, honesty and openness was mentioned in general, but one participant mentioned honesty specifically in terms of providing factual information in regards to sex and reproduction. Hannah, who has an 18-year-old daughter and a 20-year-old son, explained her straightforward approach:

I was brutally honest; I didn’t really use the birds and the bees analogy. I just said, “you know, this is how babies are made, and this is the reproductive way of doing it. And then there’s an emotional attachment you have to have to the person, but don’t confuse the two ‘cause the emotional attachment is the only thing you need.” ...I was always more textbook with the kids. I didn’t use some analogies like, “we found you on a door step” or “you were delivered by a stork” or anything of that nature.

Thus, it appears that for these participants it was important to be frank with their children, perhaps avoiding the use of analogies that may be misleading to children.

The majority of the participants were also open with the children in regards to their own sexuality. While two participants felt that their children were too young to understand the concept of sexual orientation, eight out of the 10 participants stated that their children knew that their mothers were lesbians and had a working definition of the term lesbian. The definition that most mothers gave of the word lesbian was: “two women who loved each other.” According to Amanda, her children (a 3-year-old girl and a 10-year-old girl) define a lesbian as, “Women who have chosen to be with another woman as her partner.” For Brooke, honesty was important in regard to discussing her own sexuality with her 11-year-old daughter: “And I certainly – we don’t lie. We don’t alter the truth for Avery, ‘cause that, first of all, is ridiculous. Second of all, it’s immoral, third it’s unethical, you know, to be parenting through lies.” Being honest in regards to their own sexuality seemed to be a matter of principle for some of these parents. Lesbian parents may have a different experience than heterosexual parents in this regard. While heterosexual parents rarely think they need to be "honest", i.e., "come out" to their kids, about their sexual orientation, they do not realize that they do indirectly reveal this information, for example, when discussing how their families came to be (Mitchell, 1998).
Using Books to Facilitate Learning

Six out of 10 participants stated that they had given their child(ren) print materials that addressed puberty, sex/uality, and/or reproduction. Some of these books seemed to serve as tools for self-discovery. Two of the six participants recalled giving their child(ren) workbooks that encouraged self-reflection. Katherine described the books she got for her 11-year-old daughter:

We got her, um, and I couldn’t tell you the names right off the top of my head ‘cause I think she has them down in the library downstairs, but I think, um…she has gotten several other books about adolescence. Like even some fun stuff about, like, The “Me” Book or whatever, and she writes about herself and it gives her a chance to do some self-reflection on herself. But, um, it’s been more like that kind of stuff, like a book called Girl Stuff, and it’s just another kind of, um, survival book on growing up. So she has some books like that to get a chance to read through and understand, you know, maybe why she feels certain ways about different things.

Two of these six participants specifically mentioned children’s books about having two mothers. For example, Amanda spoke about the book Heather Has Two Mommies:

I can’t think of any books that we gave her that were kind of generally about sexuality…although the broader issues of kind of like…you know…being in a lesbian family. Like she’s had books like that. Like, Heather Has Two Mommies, and you know that kind of stuff.

As family and sexuality are two closely related and intertwined topics, books that teach children about lesbian families were used by some parents to help explain aspects of sexuality.

Dealing with Heterosexism/Homophobia

Having to deal with heterosexism and homophobia is a challenge that children of lesbian mothers often face (Litovitch & Langhout, 2004). Three out of 10 participants brought up actual or anticipated incidents of heterosexism or homophobia their children experienced. Parents used these opportunities to discuss aspects of sexuality that are ingrained in our culture; for example, they taught their children about the societal meanings associated with “gay” or “lesbian.” When Brooke’s daughter, Avery, was in the second grade, she entered an essay contest and wrote about why gay people should be allowed to marry. Brooke and her partner, Katherine, tried to explain to Avery that she might not win, because her topic is controversial – not because of her writing skills:

Um, she’s already quite the activist, um, from a political perspective. You know, in second grade she wrote an essay on why gay people should be able to be married. And it was a school-wide contest, so it was up for, you know, judgment, um, and she really wanted to win. And Katherine said kindly, “Avery there’s a good chance you’re not
going to win, probably because of what you wrote about, not because of your writing skills or the actual content of your thinking, but the subject matter’s pretty dicey and we’re in a rural farming community. So is it okay if you don’t win?” And Avery was like, “yeah this is okay. This is important to me. This is what I want to write about.”

Thus, while trying to prepare Avery for potential heterosexism she may face, the mothers were simultaneously teaching her about societal views of non-heterosexual identities.

Another participant, Sarah, recounted a story about how her 10-year-old daughter was told by another little boy that she had to have a father, and it was impossible to have two mothers. This illustrates heterosexism, because the child was assuming that heterosexual families are the only families. Sarah explained how she handled the situation and what she said to her children:

Mia (daughter) had a friend who, around the time they were five, they started getting into an argument where Donald (Mia’s friend) said, “You have to have a dad. Everybody has a dad.” And Mia, being very stubborn would say, “I don’t have a dad.” So that kind of prompted us to start talking about the fact that yeah, they don’t have a dad, and they’ll never have a dad…. I mean there’s nobody labeled as a dad, but they have a biological father.

Sarah drew a distinction between a ‘dad’ and a ‘biological father’ to help her daughter understand the difference, and this prompted a discussion about the mechanics of reproduction:

And so then we had to explain the difference between a dad being someone who you grow up with who loves you who helps take care of you who helps raise you, and a biological father being someone who donates sperm. And so we used the word ‘sperm,’ and we had to go through and kind of explain in not a lot of detail about how, um, men have sperm and women have eggs, and how they meet and then they create a baby.

Three participants specifically referred to their children hearing or using the homophobic expression “that’s so gay.” This is a popular expression in which the word ‘gay’ is used as a synonym for something negative, such as stupid, weird, or boring (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007). Jessica discussed how she handled it when her children (an 11-year-old boy and a 14-year-old boy) used the phrase:

The big thing with kids now is, “oh, that’s so gay.” We’re very clear with our kids on, that’s not, I mean, “I understand what it means in your crowd, I get it, it just means ‘weird’, I don’t like being called ‘weird.’ I’m gay, so Mom and I would prefer that that’s not the word that you use. You use the word ‘weird’ or whatever it is.”

Another participant, Tracy, stated that this expression made her 10-year-old son very upset.
Our youngest son especially is very um, very hurt by the term…you know a lot of kids in elementary school, you know, say, “Oh that’s so gay,” …and he’s very upset by that. I and we try to explain to him that it’s a term that you know most kids that age don’t even know what they’re saying. It’s just something they hear and it’s something they repeat and it’s, you know, he feels that they’re being mean to us. And, you know, what we tell him is that: “It doesn’t matter to us that that’s what they’re saying,” and that “it’s just a word.”

Thus, these moms utilized these opportunities to explain the connection between sexuality (oftentimes their own sexual identities) and the actual or potential heterosexism and homophobia that their children encountered.

Establishing/Maintaining Boundaries

All of the mothers reported that they were generally comfortable discussing sex/uality and reproduction with their children. However, there seemed to be an unspoken boundary between parents and children about what is appropriate to discuss. Four participants explicitly stated that they drew the line at their own sex lives. Brooke reflected upon what makes her uncomfortable:

So what makes me uncomfortable is her (daughter) thinking about Sarah and my sex life. Yeah, yeah. …And clearly my discomfort is ‘cause I don’t want her to think about her mom and I strapping it on, that’s not okay for me. But she can think about anybody else! So, that’s where we’re at. That’s it for my discomfort though.

Three of these four participants stated that discussing specific sexual acts made them uncomfortable, especially when their children wondered about their parents’ participation in those actions. Amanda shares an awkward conversation with her daughter:

I can think of just one time when we were talking [and] specific sex acts somehow came up. You know. And she like responded like, “What?! You and mommy do that?” (Laughter) …So I guess in terms of asking about the specifics of exactly what we do, it turns into a little discomfort. And wanting to keep that private, you know and out of her thinking of us.

It seemed that it was a challenge for some mothers to balance maintaining their own privacy and comfort while still preserving open and honest communication with their children about sex.

What Lesbian Mothers Teach their Children about Sex/uality

In addition to themes regarding how participants spoke with their children about sex/uality, themes also emerged in regard to what participants discussed with their children in regards to sex/uality.
**Broad Notions of Sexuality**

Six out of 10 participants talked about their children having broad notions of sexuality, such that they understood that there were options beyond heterosexuality. While three participants specifically stated that they believed their children had previous romantic experiences with someone of the same sex, four participants spoke about their children being open to the possibility of developing non-heterosexual identities and relationships in the future. For example, Sarah reported that her daughter had once suggested that if she did not end up marrying a man, perhaps she and her same-sex friend would become partners. Thus, for Sarah’s daughter, Jennifer, there was no stigma attached to the idea of two females being in a loving relationship; partnership with another female was seen a viable option, because she has grown up with lesbian mothers.

Jennifer said, “Well you know, maybe John and I, maybe we won’t be friends you know when we get older. I probably won’t marry him, I’m not sure who I’m gonna marry. Maybe I’ll just be partners with Tara (who is her other friend).” I mean it was a total non-sexual thing, but in Jennifer’s mind you could be either; she could grow up and marry John or she could be partners with Tara and both seemed like a pretty good option to her. And so we were in some ways really proud of her that, you know, there’s no stigma attached to it.

Amanda’s daughter also saw a same-sex relationship as a plausible option for her future:

We always talk about kind of like, “well, when you’re married—and that might be a man or a woman.” …In fact, when she was in kindergarten she had a friend who was sure they were going to get married—another little girl. (They had) all these plans about how each of them was going to adopt four kids, or she was going to adopt two and other one was going to you know do the same or something. You know they had all kinds of plans about it. Um… so I think in her consciousness, I think she feels like, that’s a choice and that’s kind of connected to how things evolved for her.

Thus, some of these mothers intentionally and explicitly taught their children that non-heterosexual identities and relationships were potential options. Indeed, when asked how they would feel if their child(ren) turned out to be gay or lesbian, all of the participants stated that they would be accepting of it. Samantha emphasizes to her son and daughter that the sex of one’s partner is irrelevant; the important thing is finding love:

Yeah, we talk a lot about, you know, men: “Sometimes men and women get married, but sometimes it’s men and men, and sometimes it’s women and women, and when you grow up you’ll have a partner, and it might be a man, it might be a woman— you get to decide, and you know what’s important is that you’ll have somebody to love.”
What They Want Their Children to Know

Three sub-themes emerged in response to the question “What would you like your children to grow up knowing or learning about sexuality?” The themes were: (a) sex/uality is normal; (b) sex comes with responsibility; and (c) comfortable in own skin.

Sex/uality is normal. Five out of the 10 participants emphasized that they would like their children to learn that sex/uality is a normal part of life. Brooke believes her daughter already knows that sexuality is shared by everyone, but it is an important point she hopes to drive home: “She already knows that it’s normal, that sexuality is a normal part of who we are – it’s our identity.” Jessica stressed to her children that diversity in regards to sex/uality is to be expected and respected: “Everybody has their own likes and dislikes, and as long as it doesn’t hurt anybody, you should respect that.”

Sex comes with responsibility. Two participants mentioned they wanted their children to know that sex comes with responsibilities attached to it—responsibilities to your partner and in terms of practicing safe sex. Hannah expressed this:

I would love them (her son and daughter) both to understand that they have an enormous amount of responsibility; they can’t pawn that responsibility off on their partner. Everyone bears a responsibility to safe practices and understanding exactly how the other individual kind of feels and what they’re going to think about anything they do.

June explained that she wants her children to be cautious with sex and believes that the pleasure aspect is only a minimal portion of a sexual relationship.

It’s something you have to be very, very, very careful with. I mean, the pleasure part of it is, like, 2% of it. No, 2% is pretty close to right, because it only lasts that much out of your life compared to what the repercussions can lead to.

Comfortable in own skin. Six out of the 10 participants stated that they wanted their children to have a positive sense of themselves and to feel comfortable in their own skin. Samantha explained that how her children identify in terms of sexual orientation is not important to her; what is important to her is that her children feel good about themselves and build good relationships with others:
I would love for them to grow up and to just have such a positive sense of themselves and their bodies and to have really good relationship skills, and if and when they choose to be sexual that they’re not ashamed of it at all, that it’s just something that they really enjoy and that you know on the one hand they’re not ashamed of it, but on the other hand they get what the boundaries are around those kinds of relationships. You know I just I don’t really care if they’re gay or straight or anything in between. I don’t care if they stay their gender or turn into something else, like I really I don’t care about any of that. What I care about is that they feel good about who they are that they have a good relationship with their body and that they have good relationships with other people. That’s what I care about.

Brooke emphasized that she wants her daughter to feel free of shame and guilt: “Parts of sexuality that perhaps the rest of the world is uncomfortable with, we don’t care for her to have shame and guilt about.” Perhaps Brooke and some of the other mothers are teaching their children that there is a broad spectrum of sexualities so that their children will grow up to embrace their identity, whatever that may be.

Discussion

This study, informed by symbolic interactionist and queer theoretical perspectives, explored how and what lesbian mothers teach their children about sexuality. These perspectives led me to focus on the potential role of familial environments in influencing the sexual socialization process. Six primary themes of interest emerged from the qualitative interview data from 10 lesbian mothers; each theme will be discussed in turn, followed by limitations and directions for future research.

The first four themes dealt with how lesbian mothers talk to their children about sexuality and reproduction. The first theme that emerged was in relation to openness and honesty. Similar to Litovitch and Langhout’s (2004) findings, almost all of the participants placed an emphasis on open and honest communication in regards to teaching their children about issues of sexuality. Furthermore, the majority of participants said their children understood the term “lesbian” and knew their mothers identified as “lesbian.” This is consistent with Mitchell’s (1998) findings that the majority of her participants had defined the words “lesbian” or “gay” and had explicitly told their children that their mothers were lesbians. This is also consistent with Litovitch and Langhout’s (2004) finding that lesbian mothers started discussions with their children about sexual orientation early on. Perhaps participants wanted to demonstrate for their children comfort with and pride in their sexual identities by being open and honest about who they are. While heterosexual parents do not generally think to identify
themselves as heterosexuals to their children, these lesbian parents may feel it necessary to be explicit about their non-heterosexual identities and to give their children the language to describe their parents’ relationship. Consistent with symbolic interactionism, discussing sexuality with children early in their development can influence how children interpret their environment.

Another theme that emerged from the data concerned the use of books to facilitate learning about sex/uality, reproduction, and families. Some participants had given their child(ren) print materials that addressed the aforementioned topics; two participants gave their child(ren) the book *Heather Has Two Mommies*, which is a children’s book addressing lesbian families. These findings are similar to Mitchell’s (1998) study in which she found that several lesbian mothers sought gay-friendly sexual education resources, as they desired to give their children resources that reflected their own lives. Also of note is that these mothers were simultaneously teaching their children about sexuality and about family, reinforcing the notion that heterosexual coupling is not the only avenue to family. It has been suggested that children raised by lesbian mothers have broad notions of what constitutes a family (Litovitch & Langhout, 2004). Perhaps this is due to the fact that lesbian mothers both implicitly (i.e., simply by being lesbian mothers) and explicitly (e.g., through books that depict lesbian-parent families) teach their children that “family” does not require heterosexual sex/uality (Gabb, 2004).

The third theme that emerged was concerned with navigating a world in which heterosexism and homophobia exist. Participants used these incidents as opportunities to teach their children about the societal meaning of sexuality. One participant recounted a story in which a classmate told her daughter that she ‘had to have a dad.’ This mother took this opportunity to explain that her daughter had a biological father, which is different than a ‘dad.’ This is an example of how lesbian mothers may teach their children about sexuality and reproduction as two separate, but often related, entities (Gabb, 2004). Some participants referred to their children hearing or saying the phrase ‘that’s so gay’ and how they chose to deal with it. These participants discussed the implications of this phrase—both for lesbian and gay people in general and for their own families. Although heterosexual families could also discuss heterosexism/homophobia when teaching about sexuality, it seems that this may be an especially salient topic in lesbian families.

Establishing and maintaining boundaries was the fourth theme that emerged in relation to how participants educated their children about sex/uality. Some mothers in the current study
stated that they refused to talk about their sex lives with their children because it was inappropriate and made them uncomfortable. Further, some mothers also stated that it made them uncomfortable to discuss specific sexual acts with their children. Feeling uncomfortable or embarrassed when discussing certain sexual topics with children is not unique to lesbian mothers. Researchers have reported that heterosexual parents and their children are generally uncomfortable discussing sex with one another (Jaccard et al., 2000; Lefkowitz & Espinosa-Hernandez, 2007). Given that heterosexual parents and their children often experience discomfort when discussing sex, it is not surprising that lesbian mothers in this study also reported some discomfort. This finding is consistent with Mitchell’s (1998) study of lesbian mothers in which she found that:

Many felt strongly that both they and their children deserved to have a clear boundary about personal sexual behavior at this time in their lives, that their own sense of modesty or personal privacy required this, and that respect for their child’s autonomy required it as well. (p. 406)

So, while it is important to many of these lesbian mothers to be honest and open with their children about sex/uality, they also want to have respect for their own, and perhaps their children’s, privacy.

The last two themes dealt with what lesbian mothers in this study taught their children about sexuality and reproduction. The fifth theme that emerged was that some of the participants reported that their children had broad notions of sexuality. Four participants spoke about their children considering gay and lesbian relationships as an option and/or actually experimenting with someone of the same sex. This is consistent with Golombok and Tasker’s (1996) study of adult children with lesbian mothers in which they found that adult children of lesbian mothers were more likely than adult children of heterosexual mothers to have considered being in a gay or lesbian relationship and to have been in a same-sex relationship in the past. These findings are also in line with Kuvalanka and Goldberg’s (in press) findings that young adults who were raised in lesbian households felt that their parents provided them with more fluid conceptualizations of sexuality. Perhaps this occurs as a product of simply being raised in a lesbian family, or it could be because these children were taught about sex/uality and family in a non-heteronormative way. It may also be because their parents specifically addressed gay and lesbian relationships with them. Furthermore, when asked how they would feel if their children later identified as gay or
lesbian, all of the mothers said that would be fine with it. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, it would appear that the children’s environment (being raised in a lesbian family) is influencing the possibilities they imagine for themselves. It seems that these children’s views of sexuality have been ‘queered’ because of their mothers’ nontraditional views of sexuality (Oswald et al, 2005).

The sixth theme is made up of three subthemes that emerged when the participants were asked, “What would you like your children to grow up knowing or learning about sexuality?” Two things that participants wanted their children to know are that sex/uality is normal and that sex comes with responsibility. These values that informed the mothers’ sexual education decisions were consistent with the values of Mitchell’s (1998) participants. Her participants placed great importance on providing accurate and sufficient knowledge, so that their children could make informed sexual decisions and they advocated for sexual responsibility. Participants in the current study also wanted their children to be comfortable in their own skin no matter what their sexual identity. Perhaps these mothers’ experiences of having non-mainstream sexual identities influenced their feelings about not wanting their own children to internalize heteronormativity in regard to sex/uality. Indeed, while all participants said they would be accepting if their children were to identify as lesbian or gay themselves, the only hesitation for some mothers was centered on the fact that they did not want their children to have difficult lives. They believed – based on their own experiences – that being gay or lesbian can be a stressful life, and they did not want their children to have to struggle.

Implications for Practice

The strengths and challenges identified by the participants have implications for parents in general and family practitioners who are working with lesbian families. It may be beneficial for all parents to provide their children with a broad range of sexual information covering more than just heterosexual options and families. This would facilitate more open-minded thinking about sexuality and make those with non-heterosexual identities feel more included. It would be helpful for family practitioners to develop print materials and other resources that provide a more comprehensive overview of sex/uality and reproduction. It may also be useful for practitioners to develop resources for parents about how to establish and maintain appropriate boundaries when talking to their children about sex and reproduction. We know that being comfortable talking
about sex with children is a large part of having good sexual communication (Pluhar et al., 2008), so it is important for practitioners to help facilitate this in any way possible.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

While this study achieved its intent to add to the growing body of literature on the sexual socialization of children in lesbian-parent families by exploring the experiences of 10 lesbian mothers, it is important to note the limitations of the study. The biggest limitation was the homogeneity of the sample in regards to race and education level. All of the participants were Caucasian, which limits the diversity of their experiences; further, the majority of the participants held advanced degrees, which is not reflective of the population. Sprecher et al. (2008) found that African-American heterosexual mothers were more open with their children than Caucasian heterosexual mothers; thus, it would be interesting to learn more about the experiences of African-American lesbian-parent families and see if this racial/cultural difference holds true for lesbian-parent families as well. The study also only included the perspectives of parents, and left out their children’s perspectives. It would be interesting to interview young adults who grew up in lesbian families about this topic. Kuvalanka and Goldberg (2009) have started to address these questions in their research with “Second Generation” youth [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth with LGBTQ parents], but there is still much to be explored. Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct observational studies with lesbian-parent families to see what additional information can be gained about what these parents are implicitly and/or subconsciously teaching their children in regard to sex/uality. Lastly, this study only included the experiences of lesbian mothers (a limitation that is common among previous studies of children with non-heterosexual parents); gay fathers may have different experiences to report.

In summary, future research is needed on how and what lesbian mothers teach their children about sex/uality and reproduction in order to better understand the strengths these families bring and the challenges they face. Specifically, lesbian mothers with different ethnic backgrounds and varying levels of education should be interviewed. Additionally, future research should be done to assess how and what gay fathers teach their children about sex/uality and reproduction. A longitudinal study would be especially informative because it would provide insight not only into how and what lesbian mothers/gay fathers teach their children about sexuality but how it changes over time. It is likely that there is much more we need to learn
about how gay and lesbian parent families address topics of sexuality. These parents may be providing an open and accepting environment for their children’s development—learning more about how they accomplish this may be beneficial to all families.

References


Appendix A

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Rachael Cohen, and I am a graduate student at Miami University in the department of Family Studies. I am working with Dr. Katherine Kuvalanka conducting a study on how lesbian mothers teach their children about sex, sexuality, and reproduction. I am trying to recruit lesbian or bisexual mothers who are in a relationship with another woman and have at least one child between the ages of five and 18 years. I am writing to ask for your assistance in recruiting my participants. I would really appreciate if you could forward my recruitment flyer to the people on your listserv and help me spread the word about my study.

For the study, participants will be interviewed one-on-one and asked to answer questions about themselves, their families, and their experiences talking with their child(ren) about sexuality and reproduction. The interviews will last approximately one hour. The answers to the interview questions will be kept confidential. The benefit of the study, scientifically, is it will help us understand more about how lesbian mothers teach their children about sex, sexuality, and reproduction. The study has been approved by Miami University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact my advisor at (513-529-8058, kuvalaka@muohio.edu) or me at (513-280-0235, cohenra@muohio.edu).

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Appendix B

Study Announcement:

“How Do Lesbian Mothers Teach their Children about Sex?”

If you are lesbian/bisexual woman who is in a relationship with another woman and are raising children, you may be eligible to participate in a new study conducted by researchers at Miami University. Lesbian and bisexual mothers are invited to participate in this study. The purpose is to help better understand how lesbian/bisexual mothers teach their children about sexuality and reproduction.

If you volunteer, you will participate in an informal interview either face-to-face or over the telephone with an interviewer. The interview will last about an hour. Participants are eligible to be entered into a drawing to win a $50 gift card to Target.

If you would like to participate in this opportunity, please contact:

Rachael Cohen
Principal Investigator
Miami University
(513) 280-0235
cohenra@muohio.edu

This study has been approved by the Miami University Institutional Review Board: 08-287
Appendix C

“Sexual Socialization in the Lesbian Family”
Participation and Informed Consent

Dear __________________________,

I, Rachael Cohen, am the Principal Investigator on this study. I am a graduate student in the department of Family Studies and Social Work at Miami University working with Dr. Kate Kuvalanka.

You are invited to participate in an exploratory study on how lesbian mothers talk to their children about sex, sexuality, and reproduction. You will be asked to take part in a one-on-one in-depth interview, during which you will be asked to answer questions about yourself, your family, and your experiences talking with your child(ren) about sexuality and reproduction. The interview will be audio-taped and/or digitally recorded; therefore by signing this form, YOU ARE AGREEING TO BE AUDIO-TAPED/DIGITALLY-RECORDED. Your answers to the interview questions will be kept confidential; your name and other identifying information will be kept separate from your interview transcript. Further, I will assign you a pseudonym that will be used whenever we refer to your specific responses. The interview session should take approximately one hour. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the session at any time or refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. You will not be asked to do anything that exposes you to risks beyond those of everyday life. The benefit of the study, scientifically, is it will help us understand more about how lesbian mothers talk to their children about sexuality and reproduction. After the interview, you will be eligible to be entered into a drawing to win a $50 gift card to Target.

If you have further questions about the study, please contact Rachael Cohen at (513-280-0235, cohenra@muohio.edu) or Kate Kuvalanka at (513-529-8058, kuvalanka@muohio.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at 529-3600 or email: humansubjects@muohio.edu.

Thank you for your participation. We are very grateful for your help and hope that this will be an interesting session for you. You may keep this portion of the page.

************************************************************************

Cut at the line, keep the top section and return the bottom section.

I agree to participate in the study of how lesbian mothers talk to their children about sexuality and reproduction. I understand my participation is voluntary and that my name will not be associated with my responses. By signing below, I acknowledge that I am 18 years or older.

Participant’s signature ______________________________

Date ______________________________
Appendix D
Interview Guide

I appreciate your willingness to talk with me as part of a research study on how lesbian mothers talk to their children about sex and sexuality. Before we get started I am going to need you to sign (or verbally agree to) a form indicating your consent to participate in this study. The form explains that you have the right to discontinue participation in the study at anytime if you feel uncomfortable. Additionally it provides you with contact information for my advisor and me should you have any questions or comments about the study. (Read consent form to phone participants and await consent; give in-person participants the form to read and sign).

Okay first we are going to get started with some basic demographic questions.

**Demographics**

How many children do you have?________________________

What are their ages and genders?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child #1:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child #2:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child #3:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child #4:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is your date of birth? ________________ Age: ______

What is your partner’s date of birth? ________________ Age: ______

What is your sexual orientation/identity? __________________

What is your partner’s sexual orientation/identity? __________________
Do you consider yourself to be a member of a particular religion? If yes, which one?

Is your partner a member of a particular religion? If yes, which one?

Do your children practice a particular religion? If yes, which one?

What is your highest level of education?

What is your partner’s highest level of education?

How long have you and your partner been together?

Where do you and your partner live? (city, state)

Ok now we are ready to start the interview. Is it okay if I turn on the tape recorder?

1. **Tell me about your family.** Describe how your family was created (i.e., stepfamily, donor insemination, adoption).

   Prompts:
   (a) How many parents do/es your child/ren have/has and who they?

   (b) What is your legal/biological relationship to the child(ren)?

   (c) Partner’s legal/biological relationship to the child(ren)?
2. Through this study we’re hoping to learn about your children’s sexual education, so: How are they learning about sex, sexuality, and reproduction, and what are they learning about these topics?

3. Tell me more about the specific roles you and your partner playing in teaching your children about sex, sexuality, and reproduction? How are you teaching your children about these topics, what are you teaching them?

Prompts:
(a) If you have talked to your children about sex, sexuality, and/or reproduction, tell me about those conversations…

(b) What topics have you discussed (e.g., contraception, STDs, intimacy)?

(c) Have you given your child any books or print materials that address these topics?

(d) Does your child come to one of you more often than the other to ask questions about sex, sexuality, or reproduction?
4. How comfortable are you talking with your child about each of these topics we’ve been discussing: sex, sexuality, and reproduction?
   Prompts:
   (a) Are there any topics that would make you feel uncomfortable? Why?

   (b) How comfortable are you discussing your own sexuality with your children? Do they know that they have “lesbian” mothers?

5. What would you like your children to grow up knowing or learning about sexuality?

6. In terms of your children’s own sexual orientations or identities, how do you see them developing? How would you feel about your children identifying as heterosexual, bisexual, or gay or lesbian?

7. How do you foresee your child’s education about sex, sexuality, and reproduction continuing in the future? How will what you teach your children change over time?

Thank you so much for your time and participation. Two final questions:

A) Would you like to be entered into the drawing for a $50 gift card to Target?

B) May we contact you in the future to share the results of our study with you?
Appendix E
Resource List

Children’s Books That Feature Children with Lesbian Mothers

- Heather Has Two Mommies- Leslea Newman, Annette Hegel (Alyson Books)
- When Grown-Ups Fall in Love- Barbara Lynn Edmonds (Hundredth Munchy Publications)
- Felicia’s Favorite Story- Leslea Newman, Adriana Romo (Two Lives Publishing)
- Best Best Colors/Los Mejores Colores- Eric Hoffman, Celeste Henriquez, Eida De LA Vega (Redleaf Press)
- Zack’s Story: Growing Up With Same-Sex Parents- Keith Elliot Greenberg, Carol Halebian (Lerner Publishing Groups)
- Molly’s Family- Nancy Garden, Sharon Wooding (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
- ABC A Family Alphabet Book- Bobble Combs, Desiree Kane, Brian Rappa (Two Lives Publishing)
- 123 A Family Counting Book- Bobble Combs, Danamaric Hosler (Two Lives Publishing)
- All Families Are Different- Sol Gordon, Vivien Cohen (Prometheus Books)

Many of these books can be found at this website: http://www.pinkbooks.com/

Books About Lesbian Families for Adults

- Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is- Abigail Garner (Harper Paperbacks)
- Confessions of the Other Mother: Non-Biological Lesbian Moms Tell All- Harlyn Aizley (Beacon Press)
- For Lesbian Parents: Your Guide to Helping Your Family Grow Up Happy, Healthy, and Proud- Suzanne M. Johnson, Elizabeth O’Connor (Guilford Press)

Sex Education for Adolescents

- Adolescent Sexual Health Education: An Activity Sourcebook- Josefin J. Card, Tabitha Benner

Sex Education for Elementary School

- It’s So Amazing! A Book About Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies, and Families- Robie H. Harris, Michael Emberley (Candlewick)
Appendix F

“Sexual Socialization in the Lesbian Family”
STUDENT WORKER CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

I agree to keep confidential the identifying information of participants that I discover as I transcribe interviews or assist with data analysis for the above-named study. I will not share any personal information about study participants with anyone except the principal investigator of the study, Rachael Cohen.

If I have any questions about confidentiality, I will ask the principal investigator.

________________________________________________________
Print Name

________________________________________________________
Sign Name

________________________________________________________
Date
Appendix G

Table 1 Demographic Descriptions of Participants (N=10)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
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<th>%</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
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<tr>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td><strong>Partner’s Religion</strong></td>
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<td>Presbyterian</td>
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<td>Pentecostal</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Child(ren)’s Religion</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pagan</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
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# Appendix H

## Table 2 Summary of participants

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<th>Name*</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship Length</th>
<th>Family Context</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Amanda and her partner have 2 daughters that they adopted from China. The girls are 3 and 10 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooke</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>Brooke’s partner conceived their daughter in a previous heterosexual marriage. Their daughter is 11-years-old. Brooke’s partner is Katherine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Christy has a daughter who was conceived in a previous heterosexual marriage. Her biological daughter is 13-years-old. Christy also has 2 children from a previous relationship but has no legal or biological relationship to them. Her son is 11-years-old and her daughter is 9-years-old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Hannah conceived her 2 children in a previous heterosexual marriage. Her daughter is 18-years-old and her son is 20-years-old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>Jessica and her partner conceived their 2 children through donor insemination. The boys are 11 and 14-years-old. Jessica is the biological mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>June’s partner had a daughter who is 17 years old. Their other 2 children are June’s partner’s sister’s children. Her sister passed away and she was given Custody of an 8-year-old girl and a 9-year-old boy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>Katherine conceived her daughter in a previous heterosexual marriage. Her daughter is 11-years-old and her partner is Brooke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>Samantha and her partner conceived their 2 children through donor insemination. Their daughter is 4 years old and their son is 7 years old. Samantha’s partner is the biological mother. Samantha has legal rights to her children because she procured a second parent adoption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>Sarah and her partner conceived their 2 children through donor insemination. They have a 10-year-old girl and an 8.5-year-old boy. Sarah is the biological mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3.5 years</td>
<td>Tracey is the biological mother of her 10 year old son and 12 year old son. Her sons were conceived in a previous heterosexual marriage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities*