

lifestyle / Discrin

TITLE: The Lesbian Family

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TYPE OF PUBLICATION: NEWSPAPER BOOK MAGAZINE* OTHER Unpublished
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Further information

MAJOR POINTS OF THE PUBLICATION

Only 5% of lesbians can be identified by character
or behavior

Psych Rpts study

Psych Rpts study (see bibliography) shows no difference
in straight / lesbian group's response to
child behavior

Children of lesbians have been taught same
stereotypical myths & prejudices ~~re: homos~~
as rest of society

homo parents interviewed viewed relatives b/w selves
& family members as poor, most had come
from broken homes, or from families where
communication lacking
evidenc to support theory homos raise homos

IF RELEVANT, PERSPECTIVE OF THE AUTHOR(S) (FOR EXAMPLE, PERSONAL OPINION,
SURVEY RESEARCH RESULTS, ETC.)

Survey research results

IN YOUR OPINION, HOW RELEVANT IS THIS REFERENCE TO OUR SURVEY?

Some what relevant on selected questions

IN YOUR OPINION, HOW WELL DONE WAS THIS PUBLICATION?

OK - brief overview - see bibliography for primary sources

IS PHOTOCOPY ENCLOSED? Yes ✓ No, not needed _____ No, but I advise one _____

K. Hamilton

YOUR NAME (PRINT)

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THE LESBIAN FAMILY

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to address questions and assumptions that society and our legal systems hold concerning lesbian mothers and their children. Two main issues will be considered.

First, who is the lesbian mother? What are her unique problems and strengths? Are there significant differences in the ways that traditional and lesbian mothers respond to their children?

Second, how do the children of lesbians view their mothers and family life? Does a child's home environment influence the development of homosexual behavior?

THE LESBIAN MOTHER

Who is she?

There are three ways that a lesbian may be a mother. She may have adopted her child, but she is rarely considered by adoption agencies. The use of artificial insemination is rare, because doctors are afraid of future legal entanglements. The most prevalent, and the one that will be considered, is the biological parent. (Hall, 1978).

The lesbian mother is one who is "psychologically, emotionally and sexually attracted to and interested in other women and who, from a previous relationship with a man, had conceived a child. . ." (Mucklow, 1979, pg. 880-81). Her lover or partner will be considered in the role of a step-parent or co-parent, often bringing

her own children with her to the new family unit.

The lesbian mother is difficult to identify for only about five percent of lesbians can be identified by their appearance or behavior. (McCary, 1979). For this reason, most of the people involved in the studies were volunteers and fairly open about their homosexuality.

Her unique problems and strengths

The normal problems that ^awoman encounters as ^aparent are compounded by lesbianism. She often has a sense of shame and guilt and damaged self-esteem which comes from her struggle to maintain relationships (with her children, lover, friends, and family) in an unsupportive culture that considers her to be "sick." (Goodman, 1977; Hall, 1978).

The lesbian mother may also be in constant fear of custody battles. It may be difficult for her to be open with her children about her lesbianism, although it may benefit her children in the long run. *How so? cite studies*

If the lesbian is able to be freed of her guilt, she may be ultimately more able to function as a "~~seperate~~" productive and vital human being." (Goodman, 1977, pg. 17). Her children may be offered a multi-optioned adult life style independent of sexual preference. The lesbian is less likely than her heterosexual counterparts to feel bound by conventional sexual standards. Therefore, she may help her child to take an active role in making thoughtful, considered decisions about sexual

expression. (Riddle, 1978).

Can a lesbian be a good mother?

Mucklow carried out a study with 34 lesbian and 47 traditional mothers. The study computed responses on three personality aggregates, self-confidence, dominance, and nurturance. There appeared to be no difference in either group's response to children's behavior. (Mucklow, 1979).

Hall agreed when she wrote that the lesbian as a mother "may share more with heterosexual counterparts than with a lesbian who is not a parent." (Hall, 1978, pg. 380).

The issue surrounding motherhood should not be the mother's sexual preference, but rather how she sees herself. A high self-esteem and a well-developed sense of personal identity enables one to act both assertively and nurturantly. (Riddle, 1978).

CHILDREN OF LESBIANS

Relationships with their mothers

Something to consider is that the "children of lesbians have been taught the same stereotypical myths and prejudices against homosexuals as the rest of society." (Lewis, 1980, pg. 202).

Out of the 51 children interviewed in the two studies used, there was a wide range of first reactions to their mother's lesbianism. Some of the older children reacted

with "You're not one of those, are you?" The other extreme was relief or pleasure that the mother could be honest to herself and more real. Verbal acceptance and a denial of pain or anger was the general behavior of the children. It was difficult to ~~separate~~ the children's feelings about their parents' divorce and what they felt about their mother coming out as a lesbian. Most of all, the children wanted to support her out of love for her and out of their own self respect. (Lewis, 1980).

According to Hoppman, the problems that the children faced were related more to their mother's divorce than to her homosexuality. In general, they were glad that their mother was happy and that there was no more fighting in the home. (Cutrow, Hoppman, Lehman, 1980.)

Feelings about their new step-parents

Some children felt better about someone new coming into the house than having their father leave. Many feelings of anger and confusion were turned towards the lover, the new step-parent. To some of the children she was the outsider, the intruder. Many of these were the same feelings and problems that the children would confront if their mother was heterosexual and considering remarriage. (Lewis, 1980).

Another study showed that the children, ages 7-12, were functioning the same as or at a higher level than those in the heterosexual step-family in regards to rela-

tionships with their mother, their mother's lover, siblings, and peers. Reasons given for the childrens high level of adaptation were:

1. the mother's openness with her children concerning her divorce, ~~seperation~~, and lesbianism;
2. most of the mothers had their own lesbian support groups. (Cutrow, Hoppman, Lehman, 1980).

Most of the children did not have good relationships with their fathers prior to the divorce. Some of the children felt that they hadn't lost a father, but that they had gained a parent.

Will the child become a homosexual?

Some of the adolescent children weren't sure and questioned how their mother's sexual preference might effect them. A few of the boys wanted to be reassured of their maleness. They all found it helpful to talk to other children of lesbians to discuss their feelings.

Ibrahim carried out a study with 31 male and female homosexuals to gain a greater understanding of the factors influencing the development of homosexual behavior. Three questions were addressed:

1. Is there a positive relationship between an unhappy childhood and homosexuality?
2. Is there a positive relationship between homosexual behavior and confusion in sex-role playing in early ages?
3. Is there a positive relationship between the

presence of homosexual family members and the development of a new homosexual?

29 out of 31 viewed relationships between both themselves and their families and among family members as being poor. Most had come from broken homes, or from a family where communication was taking. There seemed to be no positive relationship between confusion in sex-role playing in early ages or the presence of homosexual family members and the development of new homosexuals. (Ibrahim, 1977).

Sexuality of any sort is an emotionally charged issue for adults and children, and it's usually the last issue to be discussed. "But, as one child pointed out, it was just as impossible to imagine his parents making love as it was his mother and her lover." (Lewis, 1980, pg. 202).

Children in these unconventional families seem to have developed in an apparently conventional psychosexual manner. (Green, 1978). Children are not isolated as they develop, and their parents are not the only factors involved in developing their sexual identity. The child's environment includes families of friends, T.V., books, and school activities. (Green, 1978; Cutrow, Hoppman, Lehman, 1980).

While most of the children were more tolerant and understanding of homosexuality than their peers, most were, and wanted to be heterosexuals.

CLOSING REMARKS

The mother who is a lesbian is difficult to identify and it appears that she differs noticeably from her traditional counterparts only in her sexual preference. "It seems probable that lesbian and traditional mothers are more similar than different in maternal attitudes and self-concept." (Mucklow, 1979, pg. 880).

The information gathered shows that the problems that lesbians have as mothers are not innate to the lesbian, but are related to her divorce and repairing, or are conditions that she must live under in our society as a homosexual. She needs the support from family and society that any mother would desire to fulfill her role as a mother effectively.

When the lesbian mother was able to openly communicate with her children about her divorce, lesbianism, and relationships, the children tended to adjust faster and with fewer problems. When questions and problems did arise, the channels were open for discussion.

Children need time and support systems to help them overcome the myths and prejudices of our culture and to help them understand their own feelings concerning lesbianism. The children loved their mothers and wanted to understand their situations better.

There is no evidence to support the theory that if a child is raised by a homosexual that he/she will become a homosexual. (Ibrahim, 1977; Green, 1978). According to Green, children being raised by female homosexual parents did not differ measurably in the development of

sexual identity from those raised in conventional households. (Green, 1978). What many homosexuals held in common was the memory of an unhappy childhood. This leaves us with a new question: Are children better off living in a home with loving homosexual adults versus living in a home with hostile heterosexual adults?" (Lewis, 1980).

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