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Constructions and Socialization of Gender and Sexuality in Lesbian-/Gay-Headed Families

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Constructions and Socialization of Gender and Sexuality in
Lesbian-/Gay-Headed Families

by

Salma Ackbar, M.A.

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of Psychology
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2011

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in Lesbian-/Gay-Headed Families

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ABSTRACT

West and Zimmerman (1987) postulated that “it is through socialization...that children...learn how to do gender in interaction and how to avoid sanctions for doing it wrong” (p. 457).

Drawing from a feminist, social constructionist approach, the current study examined the processes through which lesbian/gay/bisexual (LGB) parents constructed and socialized gender and sexuality with their children, the contents of the messages parents conveyed to children about gender and sexual orientation, and parents’ perceptions of the influence of external socio-cultural systems on children’s learning of gender and sexuality. Processes of socialization were explored using a tripartite model of parental socialization roles: parents as interactors with children, parents as direct instructors or educators, and parents as providers of opportunity (Parke, Ornstein, Rieser, & Zahn-Waxler, 1994). In depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-one lesbian/bisexual mothers and thirteen gay fathers. Results were analyzed and discussed using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. Analyses of parental accounts revealed a shifting between acknowledging and downplaying parental influence on children’s beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality, and between reproducing and challenging normative constructions and practices of gender, sexuality, and parenting/family. Patterns of differences were observed between mothers and fathers and in the treatment of daughters versus sons. Other family members, peers, schools, and the media were construed as having a significant impact on children’s beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality. Parents spoke to perceived strengths/benefits of LGB parenting and offered recommendations to other LGB and heterosexual parents.

DEDICATION

To my partner Danna whose unfailing love, support, and playful sense of humour have guided me through the darkest of moments.

“Where thou art, that is home.”

- *Emily Dickinson*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Alice: Nobody ever tells us to study the right things we do. We're only supposed to learn from the wrong things. But we are permitted to study the right things other people do. And sometimes we're even told to copy them.

Mad Hatter: That's cheating!

Alice: You're quite right, Mr. Hatter. I do live in a topsy-turvy world. It seems like I have to do something wrong first, in order to learn from what not to do. And then, by not doing what I'm not supposed to do, perhaps I'll be right...

- *Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland*

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to those who have supported me throughout this journey of learning. I am indebted to Dr. Charlene Senn for her unending commitment and encouragement as my research advisor. Above all, Dr. Senn has been an outstanding feminist mentor whose knowledge, determination, and integrity have impacted me in ways that I could never have imagined for myself.

“The first problem for all of us...is not to learn, but to unlearn.”

- *Gloria Steinem*

I would like to thank Dr. Patti Fritz, Dr. Rosanne Menna, Dr. Barry Adam, and Dr. Charlotte Patterson for their guidance and constructive feedback throughout this project. I am also grateful to the members of my research group and to my friends who have supported me over the years. I would like to recognize the Windsor Pride Committee for graciously assisting my efforts to recruit participants for this project. Finally, this thesis would never have been possible if not for my participants, who were kind enough to share their personal stories of love, courage, and dedication with me.

“Remember that everyone you meet is afraid of something, loves something and has lost something.”

- *H. Jackson Brown, Jr.*

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Overview

Imagine, if possible, a boy with a gentle temperament who is thoroughly and warmly supported by the people in his life – a boy who is allowed to pursue his interests without harassment or rejection. As he grows this boy would come to recognize his emotional reactions and his inclinations as intrinsic components of a worthy self. His self-knowledge would lead him to the very experiences in which he is most likely to flourish. He could excel there without fear of humiliation or private shame.

Imagine, too, that as the boy moves through his early grade-school years, his parents and teachers consistently reassure him that his interests don't disqualify him from being a boy. They might give him the opportunity and the language to describe his special gender experience. Perhaps, they would even communicate that they admire the inherent creativity of his nonconformity. With time, this boy might develop a progressively more nuanced, flexible, and sturdy sense of self. He might greet adulthood with a gendered self-experience that is whole, unique, and specific to him, and of which he feels proud. (Richardson, 1999, pp. 49-50)

Lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer (LGBTQ) families are considered to both challenge and accommodate to mainstream, heteronormative discourses of family and parenting (Folgero, 2008). Simultaneous transgressions and reproductions of heteronormativity on the part of LGBTQ parents have been explored particularly in relation to “how parents are supposed to ‘do gender,’ and how children (whose parents have presumably taught them how to ‘do gender’ appropriately) will do gender themselves” (Lev, 2010, p. 277). Lev (2010) postulated a number

of questions regarding how the socialization and teaching of gender and sexuality might function differently (or not) in LGBTQ-parented families. Some of these questions ask: are the children of LGBTQ parents exposed to less rigid gender role expectations; do they express greater gender fluidity; do they have more positive attitudes toward homosexuality, and are they more open to same-sex relationships in their own lives (Lev, 2010)? Given the history of negative scrutiny and systemic prejudice around homosexuality and the parenting rights of LGBTQ parents, researchers have typically been cautious about asking such questions for fear of being seen as undermining or jeopardizing the rights of LGBTQ peoples to be parents (Lev, 2010). Thus, only in more recent years have such questions been explored in the psychological research on LGBTQ-parented families.

The current study addressed some of these questions through exploration of the processes through which lesbian/gay/bisexual (LGB) parents directly and indirectly communicate messages about gender and sexuality to their children and through examination of the contents of these messages. This study also explored the meanings that parents attribute to the impact of socio-cultural factors (family networks, schools, religion/spirituality, media, neighbourhood/national cultures, and LGBTQ communities/cultures) on their children's understandings and expressions of gender and sexuality, and how parents manage the possibly conflicting messages that are communicated through such socio-cultural systems.

I drew from feminist theories and arguments that use a social constructionist approach to examine and critique mainstream psychological discourses of gender, sexuality, and family/parenting. Social constructionism regards the meanings of gender and sexuality as constructed through interactions between children, their families, and the social/cultural worlds in which they live (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). In drawing from these approaches, I

explored the diversity and resiliency of lesbian/gay parents as they navigate mainstream discourses and practices of parenting, and how in doing so, they simultaneously subvert and reproduce normative discourses and constructions of gender, sexuality, parenting, and family.

Psychological Constructions of Gender and Sexuality

In the last three decades, the profession of psychology has played a powerful role in shaping popular and scientific discourses about gender and sexuality. In this section, I have presented and critiqued some of the psychological research that has contributed to current understandings of sexuality and gender.

Psychological definitions of gender and sexuality. Several terms for describing gender and sexuality are prevalent in the psychological literature. These include (but are not exclusive to) sexual identity, gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation. In contemporary research, the term *sexual identity* is defined as “an individual’s enduring sense of self as a sexual being that fits a culturally created category and accounts for one’s sexual fantasies, attractions, and behaviour” (Savin-Williams, 1995, p. 166). It is most often used to refer to whether an individual considers himself or herself to be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Diamond, 2002), and thus is similar in meaning to the term *sexual orientation*.

The term *gender identity* is typically used in reference to a person’s identification as boy/man/masculine or girl/woman/feminine. Kohlberg (1966) viewed gender identity development as a cognitive-developmental process whereby a child learns to accurately distinguish male and female individuals and to identify with one sex over another. Although, more recent constructions of gender identity have acknowledged the socially constructed nature gender and sexual identities (Diamond, 2002), gender identity (or “healthy” gender identity) is still typically assumed to be a natural outgrowth of one’s biological/natal sex (Lev, 2010;

Newman, 2000). The term *gender-role* is typically used in reference to the expression or performance of gender through dress, mannerisms, behaviours, and activities, which have been socially constructed as masculine or feminine (Lev, 2010; Patterson, 2000). Gender roles are more often recognized as being derived from societal notions of gender differences and as being socialized or imposed on individuals (Diamond, 2002).

Psychological theories for gender and sexuality development. Psychology has long postulated explanations for the etiology and development of gender identity and sexual orientation in children and adults. Theories have typically consisted of a multitude or combination of biological, cognitive, developmental, and social learning theories. Although these theories have helped to clarify the complex natures of gender and sexuality, feminists and queer theorists have criticized these theories for reinforcing heteronormative, individualistic notions about sexuality and gender. Kitzinger (1987), in particular, has criticized psychology for attempting to manage and control homosexuality through its claim to scientific (and therefore “objective”) methodology and writing, and for its attempts to “conceal political divisions and to perpetuate the status quo through an insistent emphasis on individual responsibility, internal causation, and individual solutions to problems” (p. 35).

Biological theories. Biological theories for gender and sexuality have been regaining popularity in psychology and in popular culture and are especially favoured by the media (Rogers & Rogers, 2001). They are often seen as more convincing than other explanations because they claim to offer concise, simple, and overtly “scientific” explanations for gender and sexuality development (Rogers & Rogers, 2001). Biological theories promote the idea that there is something about gender identity or a sexual orientation that is biologically determined, that develops with age and remains fixed. By promoting these notions biological theories reinforce a

distinction between “normal” and “abnormal” patterns of gender identity and sexual orientation development.

Biological theorists tend to view gender and sexuality as inherently linked. A large number of studies have attributed deviations/differences in sexual orientation and gendered expressions to atypical levels of prenatal hormones. For example, studies on young girls exposed to abnormally high levels of androgen during prenatal development (a “condition” known as congenital adrenal hyperplasia or CAH) have suggested that, relative to girls without CAH, girls with CAH show greater preference for boys as playmates (Berenbaum & Snyder, 1995), more aggressive behaviour (Reinisch, 1981), greater preference for masculine-typed toys and games, more advanced spatial abilities (Dittmann, Kappes, Kappes, Borger, Stegner, Willig, & Wallis, 1990; McCormick & Witelson, 1991; Reinisch, Ziemba-Davis, & Sanders, 1991), and higher rates of lesbian and bisexual orientation or fantasies (Dittmann, Kappes, & Kappes, 1992; Zucker, Bradley, & Lowry Sullivan, 1992). Conversely, studies on boys/men with abnormally low levels of androgen have indicated decreased “male-typical” behaviour such as reduced spatial ability (Hier & Crowley, 1982).

Research has also suggested that differences in behaviours or abilities between men and women, and/or non-heterosexual and heterosexual people might be attributed to differences in biological/genetic composition and brain functioning. For example, studies have claimed that heterosexual men have higher spatial ability and lower verbal ability than both gay men and heterosexual women (Gladue, Beatty, Larson, & Staton, 1990; McCormick & Witelson, 1991), that gay men and lesbians have higher rates of left-handedness than heterosexual comparisons (McCormick, Witelson, & Kingstone, 1990), that gay men have a later than expected birth order and greater than expected proportion of male siblings than heterosexual men (Blanchard, Zucker,

Bradley, and Hume, 1995), and that lesbians are more likely than heterosexual women to report having gay relatives (Bailey & Pillard, 1995).

However, there are several inconsistencies and inconclusive findings in much of the data on the biological underpinnings of gender and sexuality. For example, the majority of women who are exposed to atypical levels of prenatal sex hormones eventually identify as heterosexual (Zucker et al., 1992), and most girls with CAH show female-typical gender identity and preferences for girls as playmates (Berenbaum & Snyder, 1995). Moreover, although some studies have found greater concordance of sexual orientation between monozygotic twins than dizygotic twins or adoptive sisters, researchers have been unable to identify a genetic marker for homosexuality in women (Hu, Patatucci, Patterson, Li, Fulker, Cherny, Kruglyak, & Hamer, 1995).

Cognitive and cognitive-developmental theories. Cognitive explanations focus mainly on the area of gender identity development, and less on sexual orientation, although such theories also tend to view the two as linked. Similar to biological theories, cognitive theories assume an internal component to gender. These internal components, called gender *schemas*, have been defined as organized networks of mental associations representing information about oneself and the concept of gender (Bem, 1981). Gender schemas are considered to change as a function of interactions between the individual and her/his environment and to influence an individual's gender-typed behaviour and preferences (Bem, 1981).

One of the earliest cognitive theories to explain gender identity development was Kohlberg's (1966) cognitive-developmental theory. This theory outlines three main concepts: (1) gender labelling - the ability to accurately label members of masculine and feminine genders; (2) gender knowledge - knowledge about the stereotypical characteristics of feminine and masculine

genders; and (3) gender constancy – the idea that one’s gender “stays the same” as one grows older (Kohlberg, 1966). Cognitive developmental theory postulates that cognitions about gender exist from an early age and facilitate children’s active role in constructing their own gender identity and expressions (Kohlberg, 1966). Cognitive-developmental theorists argue that once children acquire the notion of gender constancy they will seek out information about “appropriate” gender behaviour by observing and selectively adopting the behaviours of others (Aubry, Ruble, & Silverman, 1999; Kohlberg, 1966; Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002).

Another influential cognitive theory for gender development has been gender schema theory (Bem, 1981; Martin & Halverson, 1981). Gender schema theory explains how children abstract information from their social environments and how they apply that information to social groups and themselves (Martin et al., 2002). Gender schema theorists have suggested that children’s attention to, encoding of, and retrieval of gender-related information are filtered through gender schemas, and as children learn to evaluate themselves in terms of these schemas their attitudes, behaviours, and preferences become increasingly gender typed (Bem, 1981).

Cognitive and cognitive-developmental theories have been criticized on several grounds. One of the major criticisms is that it is difficult to define, measure, and trace the development of gender schemas (Martin et al., 2002). Also, such theories have typically focused more on gender constancy/consistency than on variability in gender development (Maccoby, 1990; Martin & Little, 1990; Martin et al., 2002; Ruble & Martin, 1998). Furthermore, gender schema theorists have admitted that schemas are prone to errors and distortions (Martin & Halverson, 1981), and that gender schema theory is not as effective in predicting behaviours as it is in predicting cognitions (Martin et al., 2002). As a result of some of these criticisms, cognitive theorists have

begun to consider the influence of social processes on the formation of cognitions and schemas (Martin et al., 2002).

Social learning and social-cognitive theories. Social learning theory suggests that children learn gender-typed behaviour from observing and modeling the behaviours of important others, especially parents/caregivers (Bandura & Walters, 1963). It argues that children more often imitate same-gender role models because they are more often exposed to same gender models than other gender models, and that children tend to imitate models that are more similar to themselves (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Social learning theorists recognize that people are selective in the models they emulate (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), and that it is the meanings people make of behaviours and events that determine whether gendered behaviour will be experienced as reinforcing or aversive (Rogers & Rogers, 2001).

In more recent years, social learning theory has integrated aspects of cognitive developmental and gender schema theories into its fundamental premises. One example of such integration is Bussey and Bandura's (1999) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). SCT conceptualizes gender development and functioning as the result of the interplay of cognitive, affective, biological, and socio-structural influences (Bandura & Bussey, 2004). It integrates the role of internal factors in the emergence and maintenance of gender-typed behaviour and acknowledges that children create their own environments through selection of playmates and activities (Martin et al., 2002). SCT also recognizes that the imposed environment exerts a powerful influence, such as when parents provide gender-typed toys and clothing for their children or respond to gender-role-inconsistent behaviours with disapproval (Martin et al., 2002). Thus, SCT postulates that people are producers of social systems in addition to being products of them (Bandura & Bussey, 2004).

SCT also offers a more complex view of modeling in which children are said to have the capacity to produce new strings of behaviour from their observations of others (Martin et al., 2002). For instance, SCT postulates that discordance within and between gender models (such as when parents instruct their children to behave in less gender-typed ways but model gender-typed behaviours) is used by children to determine whether and under what conditions behaviours and attitudes should be adopted (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). SCT also emphasizes the role of self-efficacy in children's gender role learning highlighting it as the primary motivational component behind children's gender-typed behaviours (Martin et al., 2002). Self-efficacy refers to children's beliefs in their capabilities to produce desired outcomes through engaging in gender-typed (or gender-neutral) behaviours (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Self-efficacy beliefs are considered important in determining whether children persevere in gender-typed behaviours (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

Proponents of SCT have been criticized for not having a solid empirical base of support for components of the theory. The theory has been critiqued for failing to explain how young children could selectively attend to same-sex models and differentiate masculine and feminine gender-typed behaviours before they have demonstrated the ability to label their own and others genders, and how modeling or direct instruction can lead to the development of such an advanced cognitive construct as gender identity (Martin et al., 2002). It has also been criticized for not explaining exactly how external standards of gender role conduct become internalized into personal standards (Martin et al., 2002).

Feminist Critique of Psychological Constructions of Gender and Sexuality

Critique of essentialism. One of the main feminist critiques of psychological theories of gender and sexuality development is that these concepts/identities are treated as biological

characteristics that originate and develop within the individual (Bem, 1993). This assumption stems from the bias of essentialism in which human qualities are seen to have some innate, biological origin as opposed to being seen as learned or socialized (Bem, 1993). Feminist theorists and some psychologists have argued that essentialist explanations for gender and sexuality polarize male and female behaviours (Tavris, 1992), imply that there is a “right” way to be male or female (Haldeman, 2000; Rottnek, 1999), suggest that gender identities cannot be changed (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1999; Rhode, 1997), and minimize the socially constructed nature of gender and sexual identities (Gottschalk, 2003; Knudson-Martin, 2003; Newman, 2000). Furthermore, essentialist theories of gender and sexuality have typically contributed to the social oppression of women (through the idea that women are biologically/physiologically inferior to men) (Bohan, 1993) and to the pathologization of same-sex sexuality and gender non-conformity (Gottschalk, 2003).

Instead, feminist and queer theorists have typically taken a social constructionist perspective of gender and sexuality, in which these identities are viewed as being constructed through interactive and continual processes between individuals and their social environment (Horowitz, 2001), and through the imitation and repetition of socially established practices (Butler, 1990). In a qualitative study that aimed to explore the psychological processes for women who made transitions from heterosexuality to lesbian sexuality without using essentialist models of sexuality, Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1995) argued that “for one to take a radical social constructionist stance implies not only to regard personal accounts as constitutive, rather than reflective, of social facts, but also to recognize that within this framework it is not possible to adjudicate between essentialism and social constructionism” (p. 102).

Critique of the notion that gender and sexuality are connected. Popular and scientific notions that gender typical expression is indicative of heterosexuality, and gender atypical expression is indicative of same-sex sexuality are also based within an essentialist framework (Martin & Luke, 2010). Early psychological models of same-sex sexuality such as the Inversion Model (Ellis, 1928; Kraft-Ebbing, 1950) were some of the first theories to assume a connection between gender and sexuality. Over the years, psychological research has claimed to find evidence for a relationship between childhood gender-typed behaviour and sexual orientation, such as lesbians being more likely than heterosexual women to report being tomboys in childhood (Bailey & Zucker, 1995), and gay/bisexual men displaying more effeminate behaviour as young boys (Green, 1987; Money & Russo, 1979). For these reasons, many researchers and clinicians continue to believe that gender non-conformity in childhood is a “pre-homosexual” condition (Minter, 1999).

However, some researchers have suggested that gendered behaviours and sexual orientation are not connected (e.g., Peplau & Garnets, 2000; Rosal, 1999). Moreover, biological models based on inversion theories have typically not been empirically validated (Peplau & Garnets, 2000), and much of the research on gender non-conforming behaviour in childhood has been done only with gay men (Gottschalk, 2003). Some developmental researchers have also been hesitant to draw links between childhood gender-typed behaviour and sexual orientation arguing for the lack of evidence that strongly gender-typed children are less likely to become gay/lesbian than children who show less extreme gender-typed behaviour (Serbin, 1980). Storms (1983) argued that gay men are no less likely to have masculine traits than heterosexual men, and lesbians no less likely to have feminine traits than heterosexual women, because they may still have all the traits of their gender but also traits of another gender.

Nevertheless, the notion that gender non-conformity in childhood is linked with homosexuality has become popularized in society to the extent that many LGBTQ peoples adhere to them strongly often looking for signs of other-gender behaviour in themselves (Gottschalk, 2003). Gottschalk has attributed this tendency to the powerful influence of the values, attitudes, and beliefs of dominant heteronormative culture, and has found that these experiences tend to occur more with those who endorse biological explanations for their sexuality. She found that lesbian women who rejected biological explanations for their sexual orientation and who were strongly influenced by feminism gave completely different meanings to their experiences of childhood gender non-conformity even when these experiences were almost identical to women who ascribed to biological explanations (Gottschalk, 2003). Moreover, she found that this tendency was especially true of women who became lesbians as a result of feminist awareness (Gottschalk, 2003). Gottschalk (2003) thus argued that the connection often drawn between gender non-conformity and adult sexuality is one that is socially constructed.

The various theories that the field of psychology have postulated for the development of gender and sexuality, and the relatedness (or not) of these two constructs, have one thing in common – they all speak to the ways in which beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality are passed from one generation to the next. Even biological/essentialist theorists have to acknowledge that as human beings who live in the social/cultural worlds that we construct, we are not isolated from the influence of other human beings, and so there is a strong social component to the ways in which understandings and expressions of gender and sexuality are reproduced across individuals and generations. Psychology has postulated that one of the most

important contexts in which these processes of reinforcement and reproduction of gender and sexuality take place is within the family.

Parental Socialization of Gender and Sexuality with Children

According to Parke and Buriel (1998), socialization is “the process whereby an individual’s standards, skills, motives, attitudes, and behaviours change to conform to those regarded as desirable and appropriate for his or her present and future role in any particular society” (p. 463). Feminist and social constructionist theorists have postulated that socialization is the mechanism through which children learn how to function in gendered social structures, and learn how to do gender “appropriately” (Martin, 2005). Although various agents (such as family, peers, schools, media, and cultural/religious institutions) function together to foster an individual’s social and personal identities and to influence socialization processes and outcomes (Parke & Buriel, 1998), the family is considered one of the most influential socialization agents for children.

Gender ideology, in particular, is considered to be “very influential within families as it provides a lens through which family life is interpreted and constructed and it also serves as a broader indicator of our culture’s attitudes about gender equality (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Greenstein, 1995)” (Davis & Wills, 2010, p. 597). Studies have found that parents actively attempt to socialize their children in accordance with normative gender expectations from the time of children’s birth, and that children’s experiences with their parents have a significant impact on their beliefs about and expressions of gender (Kane, 2006; Martin, 2005; McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003; Moen, Erickson, Dempster-McClain, 1997; Parke & Buriel, 1998; Thornton, Alwyn, & Camburn, 1983; Witt, 2000).

The family systems approach to socialization has emphasized the importance of examining socialization at the various levels or subsystems of the family context (Whitechurch &

Constantine, 1993) including the individual, parent-child, couple/parental, and sibling subsystems (McHale et al., 2003; Parke & Buriel, 1998). The majority of this research has been conducted with heterosexual-parented families and has typically focused on the socialization of gender roles. In the following sections, only bodies of research on the parent-child and couple/parent subsystems have been discussed as these are the most relevant to the current study.

Influence of the parent-child subsystem. Parke, Ornstein, Rieser, and Zahn-Waxler (1994) proposed a tripartite model of parental roles to account for the impact of parental socialization - (1) parents as interactors with children, (2) parents as direct instructors or educators, and (3) parents as providers of opportunity.

Parents as interactors with children. Parent-child interaction is defined as the direct contact parents have with their children through caregiving and shared activities (Parke & Buriel, 1998). Many facets of parent-child interactions have been studied including frequency of interactions, parent-child talk, displays of affection/warmth, degree of restrictions, allowance of dependency, reactions to child aggression, pressure for achievement, and encouragement of gender-typed activities (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). Some studies have found the gender of parents and children to interact in their contribution to parental differential treatment (PDT) of children within the areas of discipline, affection (Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980; Dunn, Stocker, & Plomin, 1990), endowment of privileges (Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2003), parent-child talk (Leaper, Anderson, & Sanders, 1998), involvement with children (Collins & Russell, 1991; Maccoby, 1998), and gender role socialization (Gervai, Turner, & Hinde, 1995; Lytton & Romney, 1991; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 1999).

Parents as direct instructors or educators. Parents are said to directly educate their children about the appropriate norms and rules of their culture, and provide support and directions to

children for coping with social situations and negotiating social challenges (Parke & Buriel, 1998; Parke et al., 1994). Research has found that parents typically attempt to guide their children into normative gendered behaviours (McHale et al., 2003), and that parental attitudes about gender influence children's beliefs and expressions of gender (e.g., Fagot & Leinbach, 1989; McHale et al., 1999; Weinraub, Clemens, Sockloff, Ethridge, Gracely, & Meyers, 1984). Some studies have found evidence for the role of conversations in parental education of children around issues of gender and sexuality. For example, Martin (2009) found that heterosexual mothers constructed heteronormative notions of sexuality with their children in early childhood through discussions of heterosexual love and marriage. Furthermore, mothers have been found to talk more to daughters than sons about relationships, menstruation and pubertal change, and moral issues around sexuality, and to construct these issues as being implicitly connected to gender (Martin & Luke, 2010).

Parents as providers of opportunity. In their role as providers of opportunity, parents are seen as socializing their children through the ways in which they organize their children's home environments, manage their children's social lives, and regulate opportunities for social experiences (Parke & Buriel, 1998; Parke et al., 1994). Research has found evidence for the differential treatment of children, based on parent and child gender, in the areas of provision of toys (Eisenberg, Wolchik, Hernandez, & Pasternack, 1985; Etaugh & Liss 1992; Fisher-Thompson, 1993; Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit, & Cossette, 1990), provision of cultural opportunities such as books and movies (Martin, 2009), bedroom decor (Martin, 2009; Pomerleau et al. 1990; Rheingold & Cook, 1975), provision of clothing (Cahill 1989), allocation of household chores to children (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981), and provision of recreational activities (Eccles & Harold, 1992; Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Feree, 1990; Lytton & Romney,

1991; Romich, 2001). Differential structuring of children's environments has been found to contribute to gender differences in children's selection of future role/career choices (Sutfin, Fulcher, Bowles, & Patterson, 2008). Moreover, studies have found that boys tend to receive more rigid gender socialization than girls (Eisenberg et al., 1985; Kane, 2006), and that fathers tend to be more rigid socializing agents than mothers (Bulanda, 2004; Fisher-Thompson, 1993; Langlois & Downs, 1980; McHale et al., 2003).

Research regarding the allocation of household chores to children has found that parents tend to assign different tasks to their sons and daughters (Blair 1992; Tucker et al., 2003; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981), differentially praise/criticize daughters and sons for performance of domestic chores (Block, 1984), and assign more housework to girls than boys (Peters, 1994; Timmer, Eccles, & O'Brien, 1985), especially when families include both a daughter and a son (Crouter, Head, Bumpus, & McHale, 2001). Moreover, some studies have found that when mothers are employed outside of the home they turn more to their daughters than sons for assistance with domestic chores (Benin & Edwards, 1990; Blair, 1992; Medrich, Roizen, Rubin, & Buckley, 1982; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). Furthermore, Cunningham (2001) found that, for both sons and daughters, parental modelling early in the life course had long-term effects on the allocation of housework to children and the performance of housework by children. He found that fathers' greater participation in female-typed household tasks when sons were very young influenced sons' participation in female-typed tasks thirty years later. Cunningham (2001) also found that mothers' employment outside of the home when daughters were very young led to a decrease in daughters' participation in female-typed housework as daughters grew older.

Influence of the couple/parental subsystem. Research into the influence of the couple/parental subsystem on children's beliefs and expressions of gender has found evidence

for the roles of several factors, including parents' division of labour in their own families of origin (Thrall, 1978), parental education, parental gender-role attitudes, maternal employment, and parental modeling of gender roles (McHale et al., 2003). Studies have found maternal employment and parental education, in particular, to be associated with less-stereotyped and more egalitarian beliefs and expressions of gender in children (Bliss 1988; Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Fan & Marini, 2000; Harris & Firestone, 1998; Huston & Alvarez, 1990; Lerner, 1994; Levy, 1989; Myers & Booth, 2002; Thornton et al. 1983). Moreover, factors of parental education (Thornton et al., 1983), gender role attitudes (Booth & Amato, 1994; Thornton et al., 1983), maternal employment (Mortimer & Sorensen, 1984; Wilkie, 1987), and parental division of household labour (Cunningham, 2001) have been found to be interconnected in the ways in which they impact children's attitudes about gender roles. For example, Gervai et al. (1995) found that mothers and fathers with post-secondary education held less traditional gender attitudes, and that parents with more traditional gender-role attitudes were more gender-stereotyped in their behaviours, and more likely to expect their children to behave in gender-typed ways.

Research has also found that fathers' gender-role attitudes and participation in female-typical household tasks are significantly associated with children's attitudes about gender-roles (e.g., Crouter, Whiteman, McHale, & Osgood, 2007; Myers & Booth, 2002; Turner & Gervai, 1995; Weinraub et al., 1984). For example, Weinraub et al. (1984) found that 2- and 3-year old children with heterosexual fathers who held more traditional family roles had more stereotyped gender identity and gender roles. Moreover, Turner and Gervai (1995) found that children of fathers, who participated more in female-typical household and child-care tasks, had less stereotypical beliefs about gender. Some studies have suggested that fathers' attitudes about

gender (whether traditional or egalitarian) may be more strongly predictive of children's beliefs about gender than mother's attitudes (e.g., Crouter et al., 2007; Davis & Wills, 2010). Davis and Wills (2010) attributed such findings to fact that, despite social trends toward more egalitarian beliefs about gender and families, fathers still maintain a higher status of power and authority within and outside of the family than mothers (Nock, 1998), and therefore, their beliefs about gender may be more prominently expressed in the home and granted more legitimacy by children than mothers' beliefs (Davis & Wills, 2010).

Parental attitudes and modeling of gender roles have also been found to interact with the age, gender, and sibling order of the child in their impact on children's involvement in gender-typed household chores. For example, Crouter, Manke, and McHale (1995) found that adolescent girls with more traditional parents participated more in housework when they also had younger brothers, and that adolescent boys with more traditional parents participated more in masculine-typed household chores. Additionally, McHale et al. (1999) found that, for girls, sex-typing in housework was more pronounced when they were first-born than when later-born.

Overall, the research on parental/familial socialization of gender in heterosexual-parented families is vast. Much less is known about how LGBTQ parents socialize beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality with their children. The remaining sections of this Introduction present the bodies of research on lesbian/gay parents and their children.

Lesbian/Gay Parents and their Children

It has been estimated that between 1 and 9 million children are currently being raised by at least one gay or lesbian parent in the United States of America (U.S.A.) (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001), and that one third of lesbian couples and one fifth of gay male couples in the U.S. are raising children (Cooper & Cates, 2006). The most recent Canadian statistics have suggested that

3% of all male same-sex couples and 16% of all female same-sex couples had children aged 24 and under living in the home (Statistics Canada, 2006). These statistics likely underestimate the prevalence of LGBTQ parents in Canada as they are subject to self-selection biases in their sampling, and they do not account for single LGBTQ parents, LGBTQ parents with children aged 24 and older, and/or LGBTQ parents with children not living in the home.

The majority of LGBTQ-identified parents in North America have consisted of parents whose children were born and at least partially raised within the context of a heterosexual relationship. These were some of the first lesbian- and gay-parented families to become visible in the U.S.A. and Canada through their engagement with the legal systems. Since the 1970's, cases in which lesbians and gay men have fought for custody of and access to their children following the dissolution of their heterosexual marriages have become more prevalent in the U.S.A (Patterson, 2003) and Canada (Arnup, 1987, 1999). Additionally, in the last two decades in North America, the number of gay men and lesbians choosing to bear and raise children as single parents or within a same-sex relationship has grown almost exponentially as a result of increased accessibility to options for conceiving or adopting children (Patterson, 2003).

There is a long history of lesbian/gay parents being denied custody of and access to their children on the grounds of sexual orientation (Patterson, 2003). This history has contributed to a wealth of psychological research into lesbian-/gay-parented families, and has presented a powerful response to the idea that lesbian/gay individuals are not "fit" to be parents. Research on lesbian-/gay-parented families has focused mainly on two areas, one of which has compared the functioning/dynamics of lesbian/gay couples/parents with that of heterosexual couples/parents on dimensions of psychological health and parenting skills. The majority of this research has compared lesbian and heterosexual mothers, and typically, studies have found no differences

between the two groups on measures of self-concept, happiness, or general psychiatric status (Falk, 1994; Patterson, 1992, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1997).

Other studies examining both lesbian and gay couples/parents have reported the majority of couples to be satisfied and happy in their relationships (Fulcher, Sutfin, Chan, Scheib, & Patterson, 2006; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; Patterson, 1996, 2000; Peplau & Cochran, 1990; Peplau, Padesky, & Hamilton, 1982), and to experience similar relationship/family problems as heterosexual couples (Patterson, 2000), but also to experience unique issues related to disclosure of sexual orientation and the impact of homophobia and heterosexism on the couple/family unit (James & Murphy, 1998). In terms of parenting abilities, lesbian/gay parents have been found to be as warm and responsive (Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983) and as nurturing and confident (Mucklow & Phelan, 1979) with their children as heterosexual parents, and no significant or meaningful differences have been found between lesbian- and heterosexual-parented families on measures of family competence, intra-familial stress, and severity of parent-child relationship problems (McNeill, Rienzi, & Kposowa, 1998).

The body of comparative research has also focused on comparing the psychological health and adjustment of the children of lesbian/gay parents with that of the children of heterosexual parents. Three areas of children's psychological adjustment have typically been examined: (1) general psychological functioning (e.g., self-concept, intelligence, psychiatric status), (2) social competence and relationships with peers, and (3) gender identity and sexual orientation outcomes. In general, this research has suggested that family process variables, such as parental and couple adjustment, are more strongly associated with children's psychological and behavioural outcomes than family structural variables such as parental sexual orientation or

relationship status (Fulcher et al., 2006; Fulcher, Sutfin, & Patterson, 2008; Patterson, 2006; Sutfin et al., 2008).

Furthermore, studies have not reported statistically significant or meaningful differences between the children of lesbian/gay parents and the children of heterosexual parents in any examined area of psychological functioning, such as self-esteem (e.g., Huggins, 1989; Tasker & Golombok, 1995), personality (e.g., Gottman, 1990; Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray, & Smith, 1986), cognitive functioning (e.g., Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua, & Joseph, 1995; Green et al., 1986; Kirkpatrick, Smith, & Roy, 1981; Steckel, 1987), internalizing symptoms (e.g., Chan, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998b; Flaks et al., 1995; Fulcher et al., 2006; Patterson, 1994; Tasker & Golombok, 1995), externalizing symptoms (e.g., Chan et al., 1998b; Flaks et al., 1995; Fulcher et al., 2006), and emotional functioning (e.g., Golombok et al., 1983; Kirkpatrick et al., 1981). In the area of social competence and relationships with peers, studies have found that although the children of lesbian/gay parents report being teased about their parents' sexual orientation (Tasker & Golombok, 1997) they report average peer relations and social competence (Patterson, 1996) and incidents of bullying/teasing are not significantly more than what children of heterosexual parents report (Anderssen, Amlie, & Ytteroy, 2002; Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2005; Gartrell, Banks, Reed, Hamilton, Rodas, & Deck, 2000; Golombok, Perry, Burston, Murray, Mooney-Somers, Stevens, & Golding, 2003; Golombok, Tasker, & Murray, 1997; Patterson, 1992; Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

The sexual orientation and gender identity of children of lesbian/gay parents have also been widely studied domains due to homophobic "fears" about the children of lesbian/gay parents having a non-heterosexual identification or having an "atypical" gender identity. However, studies have found that the numbers of children of lesbian mothers reporting a gay/lesbian

orientation do not differ significantly or meaningfully from the numbers of children of heterosexual mothers reporting a gay/lesbian orientation (Allen & Burrell, 1996; Anderssen et al., 2002; Bos et al., 2005; Bozett, 1988; Green, 1978; Golombok et al., 1983; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Gottman, 1990; Tasker & Golombok, 1995, 1997). Additionally, studies have not found significant or meaningful differences between children of lesbian/gay parents and children of heterosexual parents on measures/reports of gender identity (Brewaeys, Ponjaert, van Hall, & Golombok, 1997; Golombok et al., 1983; Golombok et al., 2003; Gottman, 1990; Green et al., 1986; Hotvedt & Mandel, 1982; Javaid, 1993; Kirkpatrick et al., 1981; Patterson, 1994, 1996). Furthermore, some studies conducted with sons of gay fathers have found the majority of sons to rate themselves as heterosexual (Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, & Mikach, 1995).

There is no question that the psychological research comparing lesbian-/gay-parented families with heterosexual-parented families has contributed tremendously to the greater social and legal acceptance of lesbian/gay parenting and continues to be invaluable in legal contexts to advocate for the rights of LGBTQ parents. However, some authors have argued that comparative studies examine only whether lesbian-/gay-parented families conform to mainstream societal norms (which contrasts sharply with a feminist commitment to eliminating such norms; Pollack, 1987), thus regarding “sameness” as safe and desirable and “difference” as deficient and unhealthy (Clarke, 2002), and implying that lesbian/gay parents need to be proven as the same as heterosexual parents in order to receive legal justice in child-custody cases and legitimacy for their parenting abilities (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). In these ways, this body of research is sometimes seen as overly valuing assimilation (Kitzinger, 1987) and reinforcing heteronormative biases about lesbian/gay parenting, thereby ultimately maintaining the position of lesbian-/gay-parented families on the margins of society (Benkov, 1995; Laird, 1993; Malley & Tasker,

1999). In their 2001 paper, Stacey and Biblarz argued that “when researchers downplay the significance of any findings of differences, they forfeit a unique opportunity to take full advantage of the ‘natural laboratory’ for exploring the effects and acquisition of gender and sexual identity, ideology, and behaviour” (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001, p. 162–163).

These arguments have led some researchers to take a different approach to research on lesbian-/gay-parented families, one that examines differences and explores some of the unique characteristics of lesbian-/gay-parented families. This literature has been beneficial for highlighting strengths and differences in lesbian/gay parenting and examining the ways in which lesbian-/gay-parented families challenge and resist dominant constructions of sexuality, gender, family, and parenting. As Benkov (1995) asserted, lesbian-/gay-parented families can teach the world about “different possibilities for intimacy, about creating change, and about the reciprocal relationship between individuals and society” (p. 63). Still, some caution against assuming that all lesbian-/gay-parented families actively and intentionally transgress traditional notions of family and parenting (Gabb, 2004b; Goldberg, 2010; Lewin, 1993). According to Goldberg (2010), such a view may neglect to consider the complex and contradictory ways in which lesbian-/gay-parented families may live as they attempt to navigate a societal system that is fundamentally gendered and heteronormative. Furthermore, some have asserted that a highlighting of differences is still fixed within a comparative paradigm, and as such, may maintain the more powerful, dominant position of heteronormative parenting/families and the marginalized, subordinate position of lesbian/gay parenting/families (Kimball, 1995; Rhode, 1990). These authors have suggested that what matters most is how similarities and differences (and their meanings) are socially constructed (Kimball, 1995), and “the political interests served by these constructions” (Clarke 2002, p. 220).

Goldberg (2010) has outlined some areas of research on life within lesbian-/gay-parented families that have been explored in the literature to date. These have included the arranging of domestic labour and childcare between partners; parental teaching and children's learning of gender and sexuality; managing and responding to homophobia and heteronormativity from external social systems; parental responses to concerns about gendered role models; the resiliencies of lesbian/gay parenting; and perceived benefits of children growing up in gay-/lesbian-parented families (Goldberg, 2010). A summary of the research on each of these topics has been presented in the following sections including a separate discussion of some existing literature on gay fathers and their children.

Domestic labour and childcare/parenting arrangements. Lesbian and gay couples are considered unable to rely on traditional gender differences when making decisions about the ways in which domestic labour and parenting duties are divided and shared (Ben-Ari & Livni, 2006; Silverstein, Auerbach, & Levant, 2002). As a result, researchers have been interested in examining how these couples negotiate sharing and division of household labour and parenting roles. The majority of the research, to date, has shown that sharing and divisions of domestic labour and parenting responsibilities in same-sex relationships are more likely to be based on the personal characteristics, individual needs, and preferences of each partner rather than traditional gender role divisions (Ben-Ari & Livni, 2006; Silverstein et al., 2002). White, middle-class, gay and lesbian couples have been found to report an egalitarian balance of power in their relationships (Patterson, 2000; Peplau & Cochran, 1990; Peplau, Veniegas, & Campbell, 1996), as well as egalitarian divisions of household labour (Chan, Brooks, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998a; Fulcher et al., 2006; Gartrell, Banks, Hamilton, Reed, Bishop, & Rodas, 1999; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Mitchell, 1996; Nelson, 1996; Patterson, 1996; Tasker & Golombok, 1998).

White, middle-class lesbian couples, in particular, have been found to have high levels of shared employment, decision making, parenting, and family work (Ben-Ari & Livni, 2006; Dunne, 2000; Fulcher et al., 2008; Patterson, Sutfin, & Fulcher, 2004; Vanfraussen, Pontjaert-Kristoffersen, & Brewaeys, 2003).

Interestingly however, research is beginning to find that the division and sharing of domestic labour and parenting roles in lesbian relationships may not be as egalitarian as has been previously thought. For instance, Wright (1998) found that the division of labour in lesbian households can change when one partner's job changes or has new demands imposed on her. Other studies have suggested that the notion of egalitarianism in household labour, while highly valued by White, middle-class lesbian couples, is not always realistic and as such lesbian couples may emphasize a division of labour that is "fair" rather than one that is equal, where the standard of fairness is negotiated between partners (Esmail, 2010).

With respect to parenting responsibilities, lesbian couples have been found to make decisions about sharing and division of labour based on structural and familial factors, which has sometimes led to differences between biological and non-biological lesbian mothers in the types and amount of parenting responsibilities that are assumed (Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2007; Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Patterson, 1996). For instance, Johnson and O'Connor (2002) found that, within primary lesbian-parented families, biological mothers ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.75$) assumed significantly more child-care responsibilities ($t(131) = 3.17$, $p < .01$) than non-biological mothers ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.74$ ¹). This finding supported Patterson's (1996) earlier finding for differences between biological and non-biological mothers on child-rearing work. Additionally, Bos and colleagues (2007) found that

¹ Johnson & O'Connor (2002) reported their scale intervals as follows: "1 = I do it all; 4 = We share equally; 7 = My partner does it all" (p. 153).

biological mothers ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.04$) scored significantly higher on structure and limit-setting ($t(100) = 2.09$, $p < .05$) than non-biological mothers ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.37$). It is important to note that, although differences were statistically significant in these studies, effect sizes were not reported and differences between means seem small, therefore it is not clear how meaningful such differences actually were. However, to further corroborate evidence for differences in child-rearing work between biological and non-biological lesbian mothers, Goldberg and Perry-Jenkins (2007), in their qualitative study, found that due to financial factors, most non-biological mothers returned to work within several weeks of the baby's birth, whereas most biological mothers reduced their employment hours after (and/or before) the birth, and thus biological mothers were seen as assuming greater responsibility for child care tasks.

Research on the sharing and division of household and parenting responsibilities between lesbian partners has been criticized for being biased in sample characteristics (Gabb, 2004b; Moore, 2008). Most studies have been conducted with White, middle-class lesbian mothers, who have been suggested to be more influenced by second-wave feminist values of egalitarianism in relationships (Moore, 2008). However, Gabb (2004b) has critiqued the notion that all lesbian families are inherently progressive and egalitarian. She found that, among working-class lesbian mothers, parenting roles were generally not shared equally and mothers often divided child-care and playtime behaviors into feminine and masculine categories (Gabb, 2004b, 2005), such that, in many cases, the biological mother was the primary caretaker and the non-biological mother played a more traditional, paternal role (Gabb, 2004b). Furthermore, Moore (2008) found that Black lesbian couples tend to emphasize the importance of financial independence and sharing of the provider role rather than equal share of housework and childcare. She found that in Black lesbian-parented step-families, biological mothers assumed greater responsibility for household

tasks and decision-making than non-biological mothers, despite both mothers' endorsement of an egalitarian ideology of household labour (Moore, 2008). This latter point may be applied in consideration to studies on White, middle-class lesbian mothers as well, as studies have not typically differentiated between reported and actual behaviours for couples.

Parental socialization and children's learning of gender and sexuality. As already mentioned, the majority of studies on gender identity, gender roles, and sexual orientation outcomes for children of lesbian/gay parents have claimed to find no significant differences in these areas compared to children of heterosexual parents. However, there is a small body of evidence suggesting that some children raised in lesbian-/gay-parented families may exhibit less rigid gender expressions and be more open to same-sex sexuality and relationships (Bos, van Balen, Sandfort, and van den Boom, 2006; Green et al., 1986; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Although in the absence of reported effect sizes it is sometimes difficult to ascertain whether differences are meaningful, it is worthwhile to outline and discuss some of these findings here.

With respect to gender roles, although many studies have not found significant differences between children of lesbian/gay parents and children of heterosexual parents in gender role behaviours (Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2005), Green et al. (1986) found that 52% of daughters of lesbian mothers compared with 21% of daughters of heterosexual mothers in their study chose traditionally masculine jobs (e.g., lawyer, engineer, astronaut). This difference was found to be statistically significant (Kendall's tau beta = 0.27, $p < .05$; Green et al., 1986) although no effect sizes were reported in the study. Additionally, Bos and Sandfort (2010) found that compared to children raised in heterosexual-parented homes ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.65$), children raised in lesbian-parented families ($M = 1.46$, $SD = 0.53$) received significantly less parental pressure to conform to gender stereotypes ($F(1, 130) = 5.14$, $p < .05$).

With respect to sexual orientation, although research generally suggests that the majority of children of lesbian/gay parents report a heterosexual identity (Bos et al., 2005), some researchers have found young adults raised by lesbian mothers to be significantly more likely to report considering the possibility of a same-sex relationship than young adults raised by heterosexual parents (Fisher's exact probability = .003; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Tasker & Golombok, 1995). Most recently, Bos and Sandfort (2010) also found that children in lesbian-parented families ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.71$) were significantly more likely to report questioning future heterosexual romantic involvement ($F(1, 130) = 3.49$, $p < .05$) than children in heterosexual two-parent families ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 0.76$). However, a glance at the means reported in the latter study might suggest that differences between means, though statistically significant, are not especially meaningful. In the absence of reported effect sizes it is difficult to draw conclusions about how meaningful these differences may be.

In an attempt to account for findings of differences between children of lesbian-/gay-parented families and children of heterosexual two-parent families, a group of researchers have suggested that it is not the sexual orientation or structure of lesbian-parented families that directly contributes to children's fewer stereotypical views and expressions of gender and sexuality, but rather that the impact of sexual orientation or family structure is mediated by factors, such as parental attitudes about gender and sexuality, arrangements of paid and domestic labour between partners, and organization of family/home environments (Fulcher et al., 2008; Sutfin et al., 2008). For instance, Sutfin et al. (2008) found that lesbian parents who reported liberal attitudes about gender roles and decorated their children's bedrooms in ways that were less gender-specific had children with more flexible gender role attitudes. Moreover, Fulcher and colleagues

(2008) found that both lesbian and heterosexual parents who modeled egalitarian divisions of labour and childcare had children who chose occupations less restricted by gender stereotypes.

Furthermore, Sutfin et al. (2008) concluded about their findings that, “although lesbian mothers and their children had less traditional attitudes about gender and their children had less gender stereotyped rooms...there was no evidence that the effects of parental attitudes on traditional gender attitudes, both mediated and unmediated, are different for families headed by heterosexual versus lesbian parents” (p. 508). Thus, these studies emphasize the point that flexibility in children’s attitudes and expressions of gender may not be a direct result of parental sexual orientation per se but rather parental gender role attitudes and behaviours. Thus if parents, regardless of sexual orientation, organize their attitudes and behaviours in an egalitarian manner children may be likely to develop more flexible attitudes about gender (Fulcher et al., 2008).

Some studies have also shed light on differences in parental socialization and gender attitudes/roles between sons and daughters within lesbian-/gay-parented families, such that sons have been found to show more traditional attitudes about gender ($d = .67, p < .01$; Fulcher et al., 2008) and have more gender-typed bedrooms than daughters ($d = .59, \chi^2 = 109, df = 1, p < .01$; Sutfin et al., 2008). Additionally, parents of female children have been found to report more liberal attitudes than those with male children ($d = .41, \chi^2 = 44, df = 1, p < .01$; Sutfin et al., 2008). In her qualitative study, Kane (2006) found that, whereas both lesbian mothers and gay fathers encouraged gender non-conformity in their daughters, they were more cautious and limiting in their encouragement of gender non-conformity in their sons for fear of others’ reactions.

A number of other qualitative studies have also explored parental socialization and children’s learning of gender and sexuality in lesbian-/gay-parented families, with respect to parent-child

interactions and the ways in which parents structure children's environments. For example, Martin (2009) found that the lesbian mothers in her sample were less likely to create gender-stereotyped bedrooms for their children, although many gender-stereotypical features were still present. Moreover, in her study on sexuality education in British lesbian-parented families, Gabb (2004a) found that, although none of the children in the study identified as gay or lesbian, some did report reaching their heterosexual identity through a process of self-reflection rather than presuming themselves to be straight. As one adolescent boy in her study stated "unless you've considered the possibility that you're homosexual how can you say you're heterosexual?" (Gabb, 2004a, p. 25). Gabb's (2004a) study also highlighted the role of conversations/talk as a mechanism of socialization/teaching around gender and sexuality in lesbian-/gay-parented families. She observed that lesbian mothers and their children either directly or indirectly talked about sexuality in their everyday family lives. Direct influences included attempts to talk with children about aspects of sexuality and difference, and indirect influences included mothers' involvement in feminist politics and political issues (Gabb, 2004a). Gabb concluded that parents' sexuality in combination with explicit sexuality education impacted children's attitudes and expressions of gender and sexual identity.

Managing the influence of external systems. Because gay/lesbian parents raise their children within a predominantly heteronormative society, they are routinely confronted with homophobia and heterosexism from systems external to the parent-child subsystem. There is relatively little research documenting the ways in which lesbian/gay parents navigate and manage the influence of these external systems. The research that does exist has focussed mainly on the impact of peers and school institutions.

Much of the research on the impact of peers has tended to examine children's experiences of homophobic bullying. Research has found that although lesbian/gay parents feel worried about their children being victimized by peers (Bos et al., 2005; Goldberg, 2010; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; O'Connell, 1993; Pollack & Vaughn, 1987; Tasker & Golombok, 1995; van Dam, 2004), and that children of lesbian/gay parents experience high rates of homophobic bullying by peers (Bos & van Balen, 2008; Bozett, 1989; Mitchell, 1998; Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristofferson, & Brewaeys, 2002), rates of bullying are not significantly higher than what children of heterosexual parents report (Anderssen et al., 2002; Bos et al., 2005; Gartrell et al., 2000; Golombok et al., 2003; Golombok et al., 1997; Patterson, 1992; Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Wainright & Patterson, 2008). Some authors have critiqued the highlighting of concerns about homophobic bullying as stemming from the "dominant cultural narrative, which portrays children of lesbian and gay parents as vulnerable to victimization and therefore at risk for problems in adjustment" (Goldberg, 2010, p. 90), and as being overly invoked by opponents of gay parenting as a basis for denying LGBTQ peoples their rights to have or adopt children (e.g., Clarke, Kitzinger, & Potter, 2004).

Research also suggests that lesbian/gay parents confront many difficulties in their children's schools (Lindsay, Perlesz, Brown, McNair, de Vaus, & Pitts, 2006). School curricula are often based on heterosexist assumptions, and teachers and school administrators tend to feel uncomfortable when parents or children are open about their family structure and sexual orientation at school (Lindsay et al., 2006). Teachers are said to commonly confuse issues of sexual orientation with sexual behaviour, believing that talking about gay-/lesbian-parented families necessarily involves talking about private sexual behaviours (Ryan & Martin, 2000). Additionally, schools are not often open to change (Lindsay et al., 2006), and although programs

and curricula, which promote and support sexual diversity within schools have grown in recent years, research suggests that they still have not had a broad impact (Chesir-Teran, 2003).

Lindsay and colleagues (2006) have suggested that the attitudes of schools toward the presence of gay-/lesbian-parented families can range from being overtly homophobic and stigmatizing to being openly supportive and accepting. Along the middle of the continuum, lesbian/gay parents may simply be tolerated and expected to maintain secrecy around their sexual orientation (Lindsay et al., 2006). Research has documented the experiences of lesbian/gay parents who have been excluded from participating in their children's school communities (Goldberg, 2010). A study conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008), found that 53% of the parents reported being excluded from their children's school communities in various ways such as, being prevented from being aides in the classroom or only one parent being allowed to attend school events. Another 26% of parents reported being mistreated by other parents due to their LGBTQ status. Moreover, Lindsay et al. (2006) found that lesbian parents often felt excluded from classroom discussion and stigmatized by heterosexist labels used on school administration forms. Lindsay and colleagues (2006) also drew attention to the importance of considering social context and demographics within and around school communities. The authors found that working-class suburbs and middle and upper-middle class suburbs were less accommodating and families who lived in a more open minded and diverse inner city suburb were more likely to have positive experiences with their children's schools (Lindsay et al., 2006).

Studies also suggest that lesbian/gay parents are concerned about how their own responses to homophobia and heterosexism in children's schools affect children's pride in their family structure, how children are treated by peers and teachers, and how children learn to manage

homophobia and heterosexism themselves (Chabot & Ames, 2004; Gartrell et al., 2000; Goldberg, 2010; Lassiter, Dew, Newton, Hays, & Yarbrough, 2006; Schacher, Auerbach, & Silverstein, 2005). As a result, when making decisions about disclosing their sexual identities and responding to homophobia and heterosexism in schools, parents have been found to consider a number of factors, some of which include their own personal comfort with disclosure to schools, children's safety (Chabot & Ames, 2004; Gartrell et al., 2000), the nature of the homophobic/heterosexist incident, perceived importance of responding to the incident, and children's developmental level (Goldberg, 2010). Lesbian/gay parents have also been shown to prepare their children for encountering homophobia and heterosexism in their school environments by warning them about the possibility of such incidents (Litovich & Langhout, 2004), discussing different types of families, emphasizing the importance of appreciating diversity, and role-playing responses to homophobic comments (Gartrell et al., 2000; Goldberg, 2010).

The research documents a variety of ways in which lesbian/gay parents have managed disclosure and responded to heterosexism/homophobia in their children's schools. Lindsay et al. (2006) identified three major strategies of disclosure among lesbian mothers - *proud*, *selective*, and *private*. In the *proud* strategy, parents were committed to active disclosure of their sexual identity (Lindsay et al., 2006). Parents who actively disclose their sexual identity have been found to be more likely to address heterosexism/homophobia in their children's schools by talking to teachers about their family structure and suggesting ways to integrate awareness of diversity into classroom curricula (Kranz & Daniluk, 2006; Lindsay et al., 2006). In the *selective* strategy, mothers chose to disclose or conceal their identity depending on the context (Lindsay et al., 2006). In the *private* strategy, parents deliberately did not disclose their sexual identity with

their children's schools, and thus were unable to challenge heteronormative assumptions and openly request support for their children (Lindsay et al., 2006).

Concerns about gendered role models. Heteronormative values about family, gender, and sexuality often postulate that complementary gender roles in parenting is best “for the well-being of the child” (Donovan, 2000; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999). Such heterosexist biases are also implicit in the psychological theories that are often called upon in support of this view. One of these theories is social learning theory, which postulates that boys need adult male models and girls need adult female models with whom to emulate and identify (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Such theories for gender development not only dichotomize gender but ensure that children do gender in conventional ways, thereby seeking to preserve heteronormativity and hegemonic constructions of masculinity.

As a result of such biases, gay-/and lesbian-parented families often come under fire for the absence of a parent of “the other gender” in the home. Lesbian-parented families tend to be more heavily criticized for the lack of male figures in the home and are frequently called upon by legal authorities to provide proof of their children's contact with male figures either within or outside of the family (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005). The issues of most concern are the gender and sexual identity development of children. There is a particular fear of having lesbian mothers raise sons without a male parent (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005) because of the belief that sons need to learn masculinity, that only heterosexual fathers can adequately shape masculinity in their sons, and that mothers will “contaminate” their sons through encouragement of feminine behaviours (Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994). There is also fear surrounding the sexual identity development of daughters raised by lesbian mothers, specifically that daughters will be

pressured or socialized to be lesbians through the absence of male models (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005).

Research suggests that many lesbian mothers do worry about their ability to provide their children with male models (Goldberg, 2010). These mothers desire male involvement for a number of reasons such as feeling pressured by social norms and expectations for providing male models, believing that it is more “fair” to children to have/maintain a relationship with their biological father, and a wish to have children exposed to a diverse range of people including gay and heterosexual men (Goldberg & Allen, 2007, p. 362). Additionally, in a study of both lesbian mothers and gay fathers, Folgero (2008) found that parents who stressed the need for male role models based their arguments on a consideration for children’s development, endorsing notions about potential harm for children who do not have close contact with a male caregiver.

The issue of fatherhood and what it means to be a “father” has also emerged in studies on lesbian mothers and their children. Lewin’s (1993) qualitative study found that lesbian mothers defined fathers’ roles in very specific ways. One of these roles was *instrumental* in which fathers were seen as being able to teach children certain things. The other role was *emotional*, in which biological fathers were seen as necessary for children’s development (Lewin, 1993). For some lesbian mothers who have children within the lesbian relationship, children may have social relationships with their *donors* in which the word *father* may not be used (Dunne, 2000; Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2008), or it may be used because mothers want their children to have “father-like” relationships (Goldberg, 2010). Lesbian mothers who have had their children in the context of previous heterosexual relationships and have maintained amicable relationships with their ex-husbands have often been found to express a need to maintain children’s

involvement and relationships with their fathers (Goldberg, 2010; Kirkpatrick et al., 1981; Lewin, 1993).

Clarke and Kitzinger (2005) have argued that there are typically two ways in which lesbian parents respond to the issue of the necessity for male role models - emphasizing the presence of men in the (extended) family, and/or emphasizing the presence of men in the world. In the first strategy, lesbian mothers typically focus on uncles, grandfathers, male friends, and/or nephews as legitimate examples of male role models. In the second strategy, lesbian mothers argue that there is no need to search for male figures in personal networks because children will inevitably come into contact with men in the outside world (e.g., teachers, peers) (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005). Goldberg and Allen (2007) found that many lesbian mothers in their study endorsed both these strategies in an attempt to respond to concerns about the lack of male figures in their families. They found that, even from the time of infancy, children were described by mothers as being exposed to a broad range of men in both the extended family networks and in society. The authors identified the emergence of three groups of women in their study: women who expressed the view that male involvement was very important and intended to make special efforts to ensure their children were exposed to men; women who felt that male involvement was important but did not intend to go out of their way to secure it; and women who did not intend to actively pursue male involvement (Goldberg & Allen, 2007).

Clarke and Kitzinger (2005) have critiqued lesbian mothers who are focused on finding male role models or father figures for their children as taking a defensive stance that does not challenge the notion that male role models are a necessity. Additionally, other authors have argued that discussions about the need for male role models do not often take into account the kind of men who are involved in children's lives, and instead promote the idea that exposure to

any kind of man will do (Saffron, 1996). In this vein, Silverstein and Rashbaum (1994) have asserted that society's search for the male role model can be destructive because it allows society to continue producing "the kind of male who is physically strong and brave, emotionally cut off and remote" (p. 96). In an article that has become controversial, Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) contended that successful parenting is not gender specific and that children do not need fathers, or mothers, but that any gender configuration of adults could parent well. Likewise, ten years later, Biblarz and Stacey (2010) conducted a review of the literature in this area and asserted that the "research has not identified any gender-exclusive parenting abilities (with the partial exception of lactation)" (p. 16). In fact, evidence that shows a developmental advantage for children raised by heterosexual married parents has most often compared these children to the children of single parents, and thus have confounded gender with number of parents (as well as social and socioeconomic privilege) (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). The evidence that tears apart these confounds suggest that the developmental advantage is not a function of the gender of parents but of the number of caretakers in the home (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Goldberg & Allen, 2007).

Strengths/resiliencies of lesbian/gay parenting. In addition to examining the struggles that lesbian-/gay-parented families confront when they engage with mainstream society, research has increasingly begun to explore the ways in which these families have built patterns of resiliency and strengths in their lives. Goodman (1980) has suggested that the children of lesbian/gay parents learn to "move beyond a defensive position, to embrace another value system that accepts the fact of individual difference and the need to develop this difference as essential to human life" (p. 163). Indeed, studies have found lesbian/gay parents to believe their children to be accepting to human diversity as a result of growing up in a family structure that is often

stigmatized (Hare, 1994; Golding, 2006; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Patterson, 1992; Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Wright, 1998). For instance, lesbian parents in Golding's (2006) study described the struggles they and their children had to overcome as creating greater sensitivity to diversity and a realistic view of the world.

Studies surveying the children of lesbian/gay parents themselves have also found children to report being accepting of diversity as a result of growing up with lesbian/gay parents (Gabb, 2004a; Goldberg, 2007; Mitchell, 1998; Saffron, 1998). For example, Hite (1994) found that boys who grew up with only mothers were more likely to have good relationships with women in their adult lives. Furthermore, Saffron (1998) found that children raised by lesbian mothers reported being accepting of women's independence and social diversity. Additionally, Gabb (2004a) reported that the children of lesbian mothers in her study, who knew about their mothers' sexuality, questioned heterosexist understandings of gender, and older children, in particular, were familiar and engaged with debates on family, sexuality, and prejudice.

Research has also found lesbian parents to demonstrate high levels of commitment to parenting, strong parenting skills, and high levels of closeness, warmth, compassion, communication, and emotional/physical affection with their children (Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2003, 2007; Bos et al., 2006; Golombok et al., 2003; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Mitchell, 1996). In her qualitative study, Golding (2006) reported that many lesbian families referred to themselves as open-minded and loving, and many mothers endorsed values of open communication and respecting one another's personal choices and independence. Some authors have suggested that that because lesbians often self-select into parenthood those who have children may be relatively affluent and well resourced and will be highly motivated and committed to parenting (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). Studies have also found gay fathers to be

highly nurturing, expressive, and affectionate in their parenting (Bigner, 1996; Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Bozett, 1987; Folgero, 2008; Patterson, 2000; Scallen, 1981; Schacher et al., 2005). The following section covers the body of research on gay fathers and their children in more depth, and includes a brief discussion on constructions and embodiments of masculinities in gay fathers.

Gay fathers. More than twenty years ago, it was found that up to 25 percent of gay men fathered children in the U.S.A. (Harry, 1983; Miller, 1979b). Recent research suggests that more and more gay men are choosing to become fathers (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007) despite having fewer options than women to become parents and the prevalence of discriminatory practices and societal stereotypes about gay men as fathers (Brown, Smalling, Groza, & Ryan, 2009; Downing, Richardson, Kinkler, & Goldberg, 2009; Lev, 2010). In general, gay fathers are said to be caught between gender-based biases such as that men are unable to nurture children, and homophobic biases such as that gay men are child molesters, sexually promiscuous, sexually abusive, and incapable of daily childcare (Lev, 2010).

In particular, gay fathers divorced/separated from previous heterosexual relationships have to worry about being denied custody and access to their children because of their gender and sexuality. Gay fathers (and fathers in general) are less likely to obtain custody of their children (Bozett, 1987) because courts typically favour mothers (Rivera, 1991) and tend to grant sole or joint custody to fathers only when mothers are perceived to be ineffective parents (Barrett & Robinson, 2000). Gay fathers are also confronted with the obstacle of living in a “double closet” because they are discriminated against by both heterosexual and gay male communities (Bozett, 1987). In some cases, gay fathers are not readily accepted into gay male communities because of

the view that having children is a restriction to an active personal life or an attempt to assimilate into heteronormative society (Barrett & Robinson, 2000; Bozett, 1987).

Gay fathers and their children. Research on gay fathers has moved from debunking homophobic myths about gay fathers (e.g., Miller, 1979a), to comparing the parenting/children of gay fathers with that of heterosexual fathers, to exploring life within gay father-parented families. There is relatively little research published on the dynamics of parenting and family life in gay father families compared to research on the dynamics of parenting and family life within lesbian mother families. Populations of gay fathers can be difficult to reach and obtaining representative samples can be costly and time-consuming (Barret & Robinson, 2000; Bigner, 1996). Some researchers have also speculated that gay fathers may be reluctant to participate in research if the research is seen as possibly negatively affecting their custody of and access to children (Bigner, 1996; Patterson & Redding, 1996).

Research examining adjustment outcomes for the children of gay fathers has found very few long-term problems for children of gay fathers due to fathers' sexuality (Turner, Scadden, & Harris, 1990). Additionally, gay and heterosexual fathers have been found to be similar in their motives for parenthood (Patterson, 2000), their parenting attitudes and styles, the ways in which they manage their daily family lives (Barrett & Robinson, 2000; Bigner & Jacobsen, 1992), their levels of involvement or intimacy with children, their encouragement of children's autonomy, and the ways in which they handle childrearing problems (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989, 1992; Bozett, 1987; Harris & Turner, 1986; Miller, 1979b; Scallen, 1981). The literature also holds some accounts of life within gay father families. Johnson and O'Connor (2002) found that, in primary gay father families, the fathers who did more of the housework also did more of the childcare. Studies have also suggested that some gay fathers are concerned about the lack of

female role models in their families (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002) and make an effort to provide such models for their children (Bozett, 1987). Some gay fathers have been found to pursue open adoptions because they want their children to maintain a relationship with their biological mother and consider the birth mother to be an important member of their families (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007).

Gay fathers and masculinities. One area of social science research that has attempted to examine the lives of gay men, including the parenting experiences of gay fathers, is the body of research and theoretical work on constructions and embodiments of masculinities in men. This literature has closely examined the idea of “hegemonic masculinity” defining it as “the configuration of gender practice...which embodies...the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees...the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Connell (1995) argued that hegemonic masculinity, though seen as the dominant form of masculinity practice (as reflected through its label), is an ever-changing construction that is context and culture specific and therefore “always contestable” (p. 76).

In North American cultures, hegemonic masculine ideology mandates heterosexuality for men (Connell, 1987, 1995, 2005; Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005; O'Neil, 1981a, 1981b, 2008) and promotes four main ideals – 1) men should be successful, powerful, and competitive; 2) men should control their emotional expression; 3) men should avoid affection with other men; and 4) men should put school/work before other interests (O'Neil, 1981a, 1981b, 2008; Sanchez, Westefeld, Liu, & Vilain, 2010). This ideology has resulted in the pitting of both femininity/women and homosexuality as being in opposition to and “subordinate” to hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1994). Such dominant masculine norms have been found to negatively influence gay men's perceptions of their own and others' sexuality, such that many

gay men, though they may reject hypermasculine behaviours, still endorse and embody traditional masculine behaviours (Connell, 1995; Hennen, 2005) and repudiate femininity in other gay men (Bailey, 1996; Bergling, 2001; Connell, 1995; Franklin, 1984; Sanchez et al., 2010).

The importance of masculinity to gay men has been found to be evident in their preferences for sexual and relationship partners. For example, studies have found gay men who place personal advertisements to emphasize masculine interests/behaviors in themselves (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Bartholome, Tewksbury, & Bruzzone, 2000; Phua, 2002) and to have a lowered evaluation of a potential partner's attractiveness if the male target's advertisement is indicative of stereotypically feminine interests and behaviors (Bailey et al., 1997). Furthermore, in their study of masculine gender role conflict and feelings about being gay, Sanchez et al. (2010) reported that masculinity was an important construct for many gay men in their study; that these men desired romantic partners who appeared masculine, and that in general the gay men in their study wished to be more masculine than they thought themselves to be.

However, despite the fact that many gay men may endorse and embody traditional masculinity, hegemonic masculine ideals serve to stigmatize gay men because a core feature of hegemonic masculinity involves the prohibition of affectionate behavior with other men (O'Neil, 1981a, 1981b). This contradiction has been said to contribute to the idea that some gay men have a different or "alternative" conception and embodiment of masculinity (Connell, 2005; Pleck, 1995) and that, as such, they are in a position to radically subvert hegemonic constructions of masculinity and male sexuality (Connell, 1995, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Plummer, 2005).

Theoretical work in the area of men and masculinity studies has examined how the experience of *fathering* relates to the construction and reinforcement of hegemonic and alternative masculinities (Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005). Gay fathers (particularly those in primary gay-father families) are a sub-group of gay men who are considered to especially present challenges to hegemonic constructions of masculinity (and heteronormativity) through their identities and practices as parents (Armesto & Shapiro, 2011; Folgero, 2008; Lev, 2010; Schacher et al., 2005; Silverstein et al., 2002). Gay fathering is seen as challenging societal assumptions about the ability of men (particularly gay men) to be effective parents, assumptions that sometimes impede gay fathers from successfully integrating their identities as parents and gay men (Armesto & Shapiro, 2011; Schacher et al., 2005).

Researchers have suggested that some gay men's fathering experiences may facilitate a re-exploration and re-framing of identity that incorporates and even prioritizes parenting (Armesto & Shapiro, 2011; Schacher et al., 2005; Silverstein et al., 2002). For instance, Armesto and Shapiro (2011) found that for the gay fathers in their study "parenting had transformed their lifestyles, organized their personal and professional priorities, and shifted their overall definitions of themselves as homosexual men. Their fathering self emerged as the new epicenter of their gay masculinity" (p. 80) and "their definitions of what it means to be gay shifted from more external...to more relational (e.g., being more emotionally connected)...sources of meaning and validation" (p.82).

This relational identity/orientation that is said to be re-constructed or to emerge in some gay men when they become parents (particularly adoptive gay fathers) is the main way in which some gay fathers are considered as strongly challenging hegemonic masculinity norms (Armesto & Shapiro, 2011; Schacher et al., 2005; Silverstein et al., 2002). Studies have found some gay

fathers to be highly nurturing, expressive, and affectionate in their parenting (Bigner, 1996; Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Bozett, 1987; Folgero, 2008; Patterson, 2000; Scallen, 1981; Schacher et al., 2005) - characteristics traditionally associated with feminine roles. For example, Schacher et al. (2005) found the gay fathers in their study to report having a strong emotional bond to their child and to show a wide range of emotional expression with partners and children. Furthermore, Folgero (2008) found that some gay fathers in his study emphasized values of intimacy, devoting plenty of time to children, and being emotionally close, caring, and compassionate. This different embodiment of masculinity as manifested by some gay fathers has been attributed to having to assume the “mother” role and “de-gender” their parenting (Schacher et al., 2005; Silverstein et al., 2002). De-gendered parenting reduces/eliminates the gendered division of labor and requires a more egalitarian balance of power (Silverstein et al., 2002). Some studies have found that, similar to lesbian couples/parents, gay fathers negotiate parenting roles based on personal choice, aptitude, and fairness, rather than traditional gender roles (Silverstein et al., 2002).

It is important to consider that the body of research on gay fathers is limited in quantity, depth, methodologies, and findings. We cannot take the experiences or reports of some gay fathers in a handful of studies to assume that all gay fathers emphasize values of emotional expression and closeness with their children, or that they are all able to negotiate both masculine and feminine roles with relative ease and confidence. Many gay men report feeling pressured and constrained by traditional masculine ideals, which can cause significant psychological distress (Good, Heppner, DeBord, & Fischer, 2004; Liu, Rochlen, & Mohr, 2005; Sanchez, Greenberg, Liu, & Vilain, 2009; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991) and feelings of shame (Thompkins & Rando, 2003). Like heterosexual men, gay men have been socialized in a patriarchal culture that pressures boys and men to adhere to rigid masculine ideals (Martin, 1990; Newman &

Muzzonigro, 1993; Sanchez et al., 2009), often accomplishing this through shaming and bullying of boys/men who violate dominant masculine gender norms (Kimmel, 1997; Pascoe, 2005).

Finally, we must acknowledge that there is a great diversity of masculinities and male sexualities, and that even hegemonic models of masculinity may vary by factors such as class, ethnicity, and culture (Connell, 1995, 2005; Messner, 1997; Plummer, 2005; Thompson & Pleck, 1995).

The Present Study

To date, the majority of psychological research on processes of parental socialization of gender and sexuality has been conducted with heterosexual-parented families and has focused mainly on socialization of gender roles. The research that has examined parental impact on children's gender and sexual orientation in lesbian-/gay-parented families has consisted mainly of comparative research, which has viewed sexual orientation and gender expressions either as outcomes for children or factors affecting parental socialization. Additionally, the bulk of published research on lesbian-/gay-parented families focuses mainly on lesbian-parented families. Few published studies have explored the lives and experiences gay father-parented families with respect to socialization/teaching of gender and sexuality with children.

The present study attempted to fill some of these gaps in the literature by exploring how and what LGB parents construct, socialize, and teach about gender and sexuality in their parenting of their children. This study approached gender and sexuality, not merely as outcomes or factors of identity, but as identities/expressions that are constructed and socialized in the everyday interactions between LGB parents and their children. Additionally, the present study attempted to explore the diverse ways in which LGB parents and their families accommodate to and challenge traditional norms and practices regarding gender and sexual orientation in their parenting.

I used Parke et al.'s (1994) model of three roles that parents are said to play in the socialization of their children: (1) parents as interactors with children, (2) parents as direct instructors or educators, and (3) parents as providers of opportunity. In this study, each role was explored as a separate research question. Within each question/role, I examined the contents of the messages parents provided to children about gender and sexuality and how LGB parents described their own experiences of simultaneously reinforcing and challenging normative constructions of gender and sexual orientation. The types of parental opportunities I focused on included toys/books, bedroom décor, clothing, recreational activities, and allocation of household chores to children. The types of parent-child interactions I focused on included displays of affection, and setting of privileges and restrictions around aspects of dress/appearance, and dating/sexual behaviours. Finally, I focused on conversations (deliberate and non-deliberate) between parents and children as a form of direct education/instruction about gender and sexuality. I also examined the meanings that parents attributed to the influences of socio-cultural factors on their children's learning of gender and sexuality, as well as parents' perceptions of their own strengths/resiliencies in their parenting around gender and sexuality.

Research questions. The research questions that guided my exploration and analyses included:

1. How do LGB parents think the kinds of opportunities they provide to their children (e.g., toys, clothing, recreational activities, bedroom decor, and allocation of household chores) influence their children's beliefs and expressions of gender and sexual orientation? What are the contents of the messages that LGB parents give to children about gender and sexual orientation through provision of opportunities? How do LGB parents view these processes and contents as reinforcing and/or challenging established norms for gender and sexuality?

2. How do LGB parents think the kinds of interactions they have with their children (e.g., degree of privileges and restrictions, displays of affection) influence their children's beliefs and expressions of gender and sexual orientation? What are the contents of the messages that LGB parents give to children about gender and sexual orientation through parent-child interactions? How do LGB parents view these processes and contents as reinforcing and/or challenging established norms for gender and sexuality?
3. How do LGB parents think the direct education/instruction they provide to their children (e.g., through conversations) influences their children's beliefs and expressions of gender and sexual orientation? What are the contents of the messages that LGB parents give to children about gender and sexual orientation through conversations? How do LGB parents view these processes and contents as reinforcing and/or challenging established norms for gender and sexuality?
4. How do LGB parents view the roles of other socio-cultural systems (family networks, peers, schools, religion/spirituality, media, neighbourhood/national cultures, and LGBTQ communities/cultures) in influencing their children's beliefs about and expressions of gender and sexual orientation? How do LGB parents think these systems place constraints (or not), and conflict (or not) with their parenting messages or practices? How do LGB parents manage and negotiate possible conflicts and constraints and how do their ultimate decisions and actions support and/or challenge established norms for gender and sexuality?
5. What are some other messages LGB parents convey to their children about gender and sexual orientation (e.g., messages about gendered models, relatedness of gender and sexuality, and constructions of gender and sexuality as essential/biological concepts)? How do LGB parents

view these messages as reinforcing and/or challenging established norms for gender and sexuality?

6. What strengths/resiliencies do LGB parents show in their parenting around issues of gender and sexuality and how might these strengths position them as models for challenging normative constructions of parenting/family, gender, and sexuality? What do LGB parents recommend to other LGB parents and heterosexual parents regarding the socialization and teaching of gender and sexuality with children?

CHAPTER II

Method

Participants

Participants were 21 women/mothers between the ages of 31 and 65 ($M = 44.04$, $SD = 8.32$) and 13 men/fathers between the ages of 32 and 61 ($M = 45.75$, $SD = 14.84$). The majority of women and men were lesbian- or gay-identified, highly educated, and employed with middle to high household income level (see details in Table 1, p. 50). All participants identified as Caucasian. At the time of participation, 19 women (90.5%) and 8 men (61.5%) were in relationships, 2 women (9.5%) and 4 men (30.8%) were single, and 1 man (7.7%) was widowed. All the women who identified as bisexual were in same-sex relationships at the time of participation, and as a group were not distinguishable from the lesbian-identified group of women on demographic or background characteristics. The partners and/or co-parents of the participants were generally not interviewed, with the exception of two participants who were in a common-law relationship with each other (Elizabeth & Victoria), and two women who had been separated from each other and who shared children (Alyssa & Monica) at the time of the interviews.

The majority of the sample resided in Canada - all of the women and 6 men (46%) lived in Ontario; 4 men (30.8%) lived in Alberta; and 1 man (7.7%) lived in Eastern Canada. The remaining 2 men in the sample (15.4%) lived in Michigan, and as a group these men were not distinguishable from the group of Canadian men (or women) on demographic or background characteristics apart from gender and nationality. At the time of the interviews, 3 women (14.3%) and 2 men (15.4%) lived alone, 4 women (19.0%) and 2 men (15.4%) lived only with their partners, 3 women (14.3%) and 4 men (30.8%) lived only with their children, and 10

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	Women (<i>N</i> = 21)		Men (<i>N</i> = 13)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Sexual Orientation				
Lesbian/Gay	17	85.7	12	92.3
Bisexual	4	19.0	0	0
Queer	0	0	1	7.7
Ethnicity/Race				
Caucasian	21	100	13	100
Religious/Spiritual Identification				
None	9	42.8	3	23.1
Catholic/Other Christian	3	14.3	9	69.2
Jewish	2	9.5	1	7.7
Protestant	2	9.5	0	0
Atheist	2	9.5	0	0
Native/Earth-based/Pagan	2	9.5	0	0
Level of Education				
High School	2	9.5	1	7.7
Community College	5	23.8	4	30.8
Bachelor's	2	9.5	3	23.1
Master's	9	42.8	0	0
Ph.D.	1	4.8	1	7.7

Table 1. (Continued)

Characteristic	Women (<i>N</i> = 21)		Men (<i>N</i> = 13)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Some university	1	4.8	1	7.7
Some graduate school	0	0	1	7.7
Other	1	4.8	2	15.4
Employment Status				
Employed	18	85.7	12	92.3
Student	2	9.5	0	0
Unemployed	0	0	1	7.7
Retired	1	4.8	0	0
Annual Household Income				
Less than 10,000	0	0	1	7.7
10,000 – 39,000	4	19.0	0	0
40,000 – 69,000	3	14.3	5	38.5
70,000 – 99,000	5	23.8	2	15.4
100,000 and over	9	42.8	5	38.5
Relationship Status				
	<i>(n</i> = 19)		<i>(n</i> = 8)	
Legal Marriage	8	42.1	1	12.5
Common-Law	7	36.9	3	37.5
Living together less than one year	1	5.3	3	37.5
Other (dating, living separately)	3	15.8	1	12.5
Recruitment Source				

Table 1. (Continued)

Characteristic	Women (<i>N</i> = 21)		Men (<i>N</i> = 13)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Snowballing	1	4.8	3	23
Group/Organization List-Serves	13	62.0	10	77.0
In-Person Recruitment Booth	6	28.6	0	0
Not Known	1	4.8	0	0

(47.6%) women and 5 men (38.5%) reported living with their partners and their children. It is important to note that some of the living situations that involved children were joint/shared custody situations, where children often lived in more than one parental home or lived in one parental home and visited other parents for shorter periods of time.

Regarding the number of children reported by participants, 8 women (38.1%) and 4 men (30.8%) reported having one child, 7 women (33.3%) and 5 men (38.5%) reported having two children, 2 women (9.5%) and 4 men (30.8%) reported having three children, 3 women (14.3%) reported having four children, and 1 woman (4.8%) reported having six children. In many cases, parents reported having some combination of biological, adopted, and step-children. Detailed demographic information for the children has been listed in Table 2 (see p. 53). Appendix A (see p. 210) also contains a table of brief profile summaries for each participant in the study, including information on age, gender, sexual orientation, background and family context.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through a variety of methods such as snowballing, flyers/notices posted on social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) (see Appendix B), emails to LGBTQ list-serves and groups/organizations (see Appendix C), and an in-person recruitment booth at the

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Participants' Children

Characteristic	Children of Mothers (<i>N</i> = 44)		Children of Fathers (<i>N</i> = 26)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Age Groups				
1-4	6	13.6	0	0
5-12	10	22.7	8	30.8
13-18	12	27.3	15	57.7
19-25	8	18.2	1	3.8
25 & over	9	20.4	2	7.7
Sex				
F	19	43.2	13	50
M	25	56.8	13	50
Ethnicity/Race				
Caucasian	36	81.8	24	92.3
Aboriginal	2	4.5	0	0
Mixed	6	13.6	2	7.7
Relationship to Participant				
Biological	28	63.6	25	96.1
Step-Child	7	15.9	0	0
Legally Adopted (donor insemination families not included)	3	6.8	1	3.8

Table 2. (Continued)

Characteristic	Children of Mothers		Children of Fathers	
	(N = 44)		(N = 26)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Partner bore child, participant legally adopted	4	9.1	0	0
Partner bore child, participant didn't legally adopt	2	4.5	0	0
Relationship of Origin				
Previous Heterosexual Relationship/ Marriage (Participant's or Partner's)	31	70.4	24	92.3
Previous Same-Sex Relationship/ Marriage (Participant's or Partner's)	3	6.8	2	7.7
Current Same-Sex Relationship	9	20.4	0	0
Single Parent (Donor Insemination)	1	2.3	0	0
Current Custody/Living Situation				
Live(d) primarily with participant	30		10	
Live(d) primarily with other heterosexual parent	6		9	
Live(d) primarily with other gay or lesbian parent	0		2	
Live(d) equally with both parents	5		5	

Table 2. (Continued)

Characteristic	Children of Mothers (<i>N</i> = 44)		Children of Fathers (<i>N</i> = 26)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Live Independently ²	13		2	

Windsor LGBTQ Pride festival (see Appendix D for Main Letter of Information handed out at Windsor Pride booth). Table 1 shows the numbers of participants recruited from each source. Snowballing methods consisted of requesting participants to notify their eligible friends and acquaintances about the study. The acquaintances of the researcher, her supervisor, and her committee members, who were not familiar with the goals of the study, were also requested to participate or to notify others about the study.

Participants who were notified about the study through flyers and emails to list-serves and groups were asked to contact the researcher if they were interested in the study. Participants who were recruited in-person at the Pride festival were contacted subsequently by the researcher. The researcher contacted interested participants by phone (see Appendix E for Phone Contact Script) and/or email (see Appendix F for Email Contact Scripts) to schedule the interviews. In many cases, it was not possible for the researcher and participants to meet with each other to conduct the interviews in person so phone interviews were scheduled. Of the interviews with women, seven were conducted by phone and fourteen were conducted in-person. Of the interviews with men, eleven were conducted by phone and two were conducted in-person. All phone interviews

² Includes children who previously lived either primarily with one parent, or with both parents, therefore not mutually exclusive with other categories of living situations.

were conducted from the researcher's home in a private office space. Some of the in-person interviews were conducted in a private meeting room in the psychology department at the University of Windsor, and other in-person interviews were conducted in the participants' homes or work offices for convenience. All interviews were conducted individually and in privacy.

Prior to the in-person interviews, participants were asked to sign the consent for participation form (see Appendix G for Consent Form For Participation), the consent for audio-taping form (see Appendix H for Consent Form For Audio-Taping), and to complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix I for Parent Demographic Information Questionnaire). All participants were given a copy of both consent forms to keep. Prior to the telephone interviews, participants were mailed a letter of information (see Appendix J for Letter of Information for Phone Participants), two copies of the consent for participation form, two copies of the audio-taping consent form, the demographic information questionnaire, an entry for a \$100 CDN/US draw, and a pre-paid, pre-addressed envelope. Participants were asked to complete the forms and return them to the researcher by mail prior to the interviews. In cases where the researcher had not obtained the completed forms prior to the interview, verbal consent for participation and audio-taping was obtained and these participants were asked to return the completed forms as soon as possible.

At the arranged date and time of the phone interviews the researcher initiated the phone-call. For both in-person and phone interviews, participants were first informed about the interview process and asked to provide some demographic information for each of their children (see Appendix K for Child Demographic Information Questionnaire). The interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 3 hours. All phone and in-person interviews were audio-taped using an electronic tape recorder. Following the interviews, participants were debriefed about the purposes of the study

and were asked whether they had any concerns about or experienced any distress as a result of the interview. None of the participants indicated feelings of distress as a result of the interview, and few had concerns about the content of the interview. Many participants were intrigued about the write-up of the results of the study and asked questions about how feedback would be provided. All raised concerns and questions were addressed between the researcher and the participants before ending the in-person and phone meetings.

After the verbal debriefing, all in-person interview participants were provided with a copy of the debriefing form (see Appendix L for Debriefing Form), a list of community/internet resources for LGBTQ individuals, parents and/or families (see Appendix M for List of Community/Internet Resources), a \$20 Chapters/Indigo gift card (or a \$20 Amazon.com gift certificate for the American participants), and an entry for the \$100 CDN/US draw. Participants who were interviewed by phone were mailed copies of the debriefing form, the community/internet resources form, and the gift card following completion of the interviews. Unlike the in-person interview participants the phone interview participants were asked to mail their completed draw entries to the researcher prior to the interview in order to minimize mailing hassles for the participants. These entries were placed into the draw after the phone interviews were completed.

In the Fall of 2010 an update about the progress of the study was posted on the website (participants were provided with the address of the website at the time of the interviews). Participants were provided with full feedback about the results of the study in the Fall of 2011. Participants were also given the option of having a feedback sheet mailed to them. For the purposes of the draw and feedback, contact information was obtained for each of the participants. The draw was completed in the Fall of 2010 and the winner was mailed a bank draft for \$100.

All draw entries were subsequently destroyed. All other contact information (such as email addresses) were deleted/destroyed following the completion of the study and provision of final feedback to participants.

The majority of the audio files were transcribed by a paid transcriptionist (see Appendix N for Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement) and a few were transcribed by the researcher. The researcher provided the paid transcriptionist with a list of pseudonyms to use in the transcriptions. All other person and place names (and any other identifying information) were disguised by the researcher subsequent to receiving the transcriptions from the transcriptionist and prior to analyzing the data and writing up the study.

Measures

The interviews followed a semi-structured format in which participants were first asked about their own beliefs/values about gender and sexual orientation, as well as their political and religious beliefs/values/involvements. Following this, participants were asked about division of household chores in the home, provision of opportunities to children (e.g., toys, clothing, bedroom decorations, recreational activities), and parent-child interactions (e.g., establishing privileges and restrictions, displays of affection, discipline styles, and conversations). Furthermore, parents were asked about the impact of other systems of socialization on their children's notions of gender and sexual orientation. Finally, parents were asked about recommendations to other gay/lesbian and heterosexual parents. A detailed list of questions and/or topics covered in the interview is included in Appendix O. Self and child demographic information questionnaires were also administered to participants.

Analytical Approach

The qualitative approach used for analysis of the interview data was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith, 1996), which focuses on understanding the quality of participants' experiences from their individual perspectives. IPA was chosen as the method of analysis because it aims to express participants' experiences on their own terms and allows researchers to situate and discuss participants' experiences in the context of already existing psychological concepts and theories (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). With the use of the computer software program, MaxQDA, I began my analyses/coding by identifying themes in the interviews that corresponded to my research questions. As more themes were identified across interviews, I integrated those themes with shared meanings or references into clusters and organized them hierarchically into master and constituent themes (Willig, 2001). Additional rounds of coding were completed to check new themes that had emerged later in the coding process against transcripts that were coded earlier in the process (Willig, 2001).

This study used a large sample of participants (for an IPA study). Smith et al. (2009) suggested that writing narratives for a large-sample IPA study is akin to a group-level analysis, which is about "summarizing, condensing, and illustrating" the main themes (p.114). Thus, I followed a series of steps which these authors proposed for analysing and writing of the data. Using MaxQDA, I created files of compiled extracts for the main themes I wished to present. After reading the files, I wrote narratives attempting to address what my participants were experiencing and discussing in relation to the research questions (Smith et al., 2009). During this process, I chose a limited number of extracts to represent each theme. Extracts were selected to represent a range of views, with some extracts being chosen because they were more representative of theme in question, and others being chosen because they represented a different

nuance of the theme, either through illustration of contradiction or addition of complexity (Smith et al., 2009). Some accounts were chosen if they were rich with emotion and/or metaphor or if they made good linkages between themes/narratives (Smith et al., 2009). In general, I selected one to three excerpts to represent each theme. In cases where a participant was not represented in a particular section of the Results, I ensured that he/she was represented in other sections of the Results, so that ultimately all participants were represented in the write-up of the study. Adhering to the philosophy of the phenomenological approach, I included idiographic detail in order to add depth to my discussion of the findings or to present a participant's particular context (Smith et al., 2009). I also discussed possible meanings and implications of "silences" in participants' accounts around a particular theme when these were deemed relevant or especially meaningful.

CHAPTER III

Results

The following sections of the Results have been organized by research question resulting in six separate sections pertaining to (a) parental provision of opportunities to children, (b) parent-child interactions, (c) direct education/instruction via conversations, (d) parental perceptions and negotiation of the influence of external systems, (e) other parental messages about gender and sexual orientation, and (f) resiliencies and recommendations of LGB parents.

Within each section, I have described the major themes and findings pertaining to the specific research question. As qualitative researchers sometimes do, I have integrated the presentation of the findings with interpretations, explanations, and contextualization of the findings. Thus, each section is a combined results and discussion section of its own. At the end of all but one of the Results sections, I have included a Summary and Conclusions section, which briefly summarizes and draws conclusions about the findings *within* each section. In the final Discussion section of the study, I have summarized and connected the major themes and findings *across* all sections of the Results and have discussed their implications.

A. Parental Provision of Opportunities to Children

The types of opportunities parents provide for their children is one way in which researchers have postulated that parents influence their children's beliefs about and expressions of gender (Parke & Buriel, 1998; Parke et al., 1994). In their role as providers of opportunities, parents are seen as socializing their children through the ways in which they organize their children's home environment, manage their children's social lives, and regulate opportunities for social contacts and cognitive experiences (Parke & Buriel, 1998; Parke et al., 1994). Some of the parental processes that have been found to impact children's gender development include the toys

children are given to play with (Fisher-Thompson, 1993), the ways in which bedrooms are decorated (Rheingold & Cook, 1975), and the allocation of household chores (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). In this study, these and other types of parental opportunities (e.g., clothing, recreational activities, books, TV/media) were examined in their impact on children's socialization around gender and sexuality.

Perceptions of parental influence. Consistent with what has been found in the literature on lesbian parenting (e.g., Fulcher et al., 2008; Golding, 2006, Martin, 2009; Sutfin et al., 2008), the majority of mothers and fathers in the sample regarded themselves as open-minded and endorsed liberal views of parenting, in which they placed emphasis on respecting the personal choices and interests of their children (especially adolescent children). Regarding toys, clothing, recreational activities, and bedroom décor most parents in the sample reported allowing their children to select or gravitate toward their own types of interests/opportunities. This was the case even when parents directly provided opportunities for their children, through the buying of clothing or toys, or the renovation of bedrooms. As Harry said out about his son's clothing:

Harry: he does this all on his own...I don't pick out his clothes even when he was...a lot younger...fashion comes, and a sense of what matches and what doesn't match comes later ...and that to me was more important than me picking out his clothes...

While endorsing liberal notions of respecting the personal choices of their children, many parents simultaneously described experiences of purposefully attempting to exert their influence on children's interests/choices. For some of these parents, this exertion of influence was seen as necessary even when discordant with the child's choices or interests. In such cases, factors such as the perceived age or mental level of the child, or parents' beliefs about the benefits that specific opportunities could bring to the child were constructed as important reasons for parental decision-making. Harry was one parent who, after describing that he let his son make his own

decisions about clothing, went on to assert later in the interview that because he himself had been an avid Scouts leader he encouraged his son to attend a Beavers group against his son's personal desires. Additionally, Cassandra, a mother of three young boys, explained:

Cassandra: ...they don't get a lot of choice at this point- we buy their clothes, and we are big believers in looking nice so...they mostly have little...golf shirts and...a pair of khaki shorts...and...we'll go "handsome dude!" so that we're emphasizing...that...how you look is important in the world.

Two other areas of opportunities in which parents openly acknowledged their attempts to exert some influence over their children's beliefs about and expressions of gender and sexuality were regarding what Cassandra labelled as "hyper-masculine" (e.g., guns) and "hyper-feminine" (e.g., Barbie dolls) toys and books. These were specific opportunities/interests that some parents saw as having the power to shape their children's notions about and expressions of gender and sexuality. Guns were viewed as condoning violence and Barbie dolls were viewed as promoting negative ideals of female body image and attractiveness. Altogether, there were seven parents who expressed concerns about their children being introduced to or playing with such toys. In most cases, concerns were in line with gender norms such that parents expressed concerns about sons playing with guns and daughters playing with Barbie/Bratz dolls. Some parents spoke about attempts to ban guns and Barbie/Bratz dolls from the home. For some of these parents, these attempts were unsuccessful as children had been given these toys by other parents or family members. Interestingly, the problematic nature of guns seemed to be more openly discussed with and known to children, whereas the problematic nature of Barbie/Bratz dolls was not as openly discussed with children, and parents seemed to "give up" when the dolls were introduced by another family member. Some accounts are presented below:

Abbey:Bratz Dolls...those dolls are so disgusting...the amount of make-up they had on...the...shapes of their body, the size of their head...and the eyes and the lips...they're worse than Barbie (laughs) in my mind...all her Barbies came from my brother...but I

actually said to him...could you not buy her like the blond hair...blue-eyed...so we actually made an effort to go out one year and buy...a Barbie...and she's Black.

Audrey: ...I was adamant I wasn't gonna have a Barbie...I always felt like Barbie was a bad thing to give to little girls...because [of]...the body image stuff...but, my mother-in-law at the time bought her a Barbie when she was three...and...I was not gonna take it away.

Grace: ...I wouldn't let them play with any kinds of guns...I wanted a really clear message that violence is not ok.

Some parents in the sample also saw books/magazines as having significant power to shape children's notions about gender and sexual orientation. These parents were especially attuned to gender-stereotypical, heteronormative models portrayed and assumptions inherent in books/magazines and some of their accounts reflected the novel ways in which they attempted to challenge such messages with their children:

Dan: ...when...they were small and I would read them stories...I always changed the ending...I always...said "Cinderella realized that it was pretty shallow to pick a guy who wanted someone based on the size of her foot, so she told him to get lost, she went to university, got a job and found someone who loved her for who she was ...and when they would watch...the movie I hate more than anything, Beauty and the Beast...I said "if any person, any man who treats you bad once, will treat you again always, they will not change because you love them".

Nicole: ...if I'm reading a book about a construction worker or a doctor and...a male pronoun...gets used I change it to a female pronoun...or if it's a dancer we might...make it a male pronoun...she was once given a gift of five of the Berenstein Bears books, and I found them utterly appalling...it's horribly, horribly sexist...we didn't want...to take them away...so we had this idea that we would just turn the dad character into a butch...so we've always said the dad character as a mama...it's just kind of if she was exposed to two women...who take on different roles in the household.

The findings of parents, on the one hand, downplaying their influence on children's understandings/expressions of gender, but on the other hand, acknowledging their influence by imposing restrictions on toys or re-constructing messages that children received from books, may

be attributed to the very nature of the parenting experience in which parents are constantly having to negotiate how much control they exert over their children's lives and choices, and in what areas it is more or less important to assert their own preferences and desires. In her writings on maternal thinking and practices, Sara Ruddick (1983) has suggested that mothers (as primary caregivers but this could apply to fathers and other engaged caregivers as well) are expected to raise children who are, at once, free from oppressive conventions/beliefs *and safe and* "acceptable" in the eyes of society. Because these interests are "unavoidably in conflict" (p. 216), mothers/parents are placed in a difficult position of having to sometimes impose restrictions on children's freedom of choice and expression in order to preserve children from societal judgment and harm (Ruddick, 1983).

Although parents were willing to acknowledge their influence over certain aspects of their children's interests/opportunities, they were less willing to acknowledge that their provision of certain types of opportunities had an influence on children's beliefs about and (especially) expressions of gender or sexuality. Rather, they described their provision of opportunities as being influenced by children's own preferences (based on gender), which they in turn perceived as a function of children's biological sex. Such essentialist constructions of gender are reflective of mainstream psychological and scientific discourses that construct children's gender expressions as the "natural unfolding" of innately determined, biological and/or cognitive characteristics (Lev, 2010; Messner, 2000). Moreover, these findings are consistent with research showing that parents (lesbian, gay, and heterosexual) tend to favour essentialist explanations when describing children's interests in toys and clothing (e.g., Kane, 2006), despite evidence for the social construction of gender (Messner, 2000) and for the contribution of parental socialization to children's gendered expressions (through provision of toys (Etaugh & Liss

1992; Fisher-Thompson, 1993; Pomerleau, et al., 1990), clothing (Cahill 1989), bedroom décor (Martin, 2009; Pomerleau et al. 1990; Rheingold & Cook, 1975), and allocation of household chores to children (Cunningham, 2001; McHale et al., 2003; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981)).

Parental provision of and children’s engagement with gender normative and gender variant opportunities. The majority of parents in the sample described their children as engaging in a combination of gender normative and gender variant interests/opportunities, whether opportunities were provided directly by parents or children were reported to select interests of their own accord. Parents defined gender variant behaviours/interests not only as the behaviours/interests that children actively pursued, but also as the lack of engagement with gender normative behaviours or activities. Most parents supported and many encouraged gender normative clothing, toys, recreational activities, and bedroom decor for their children. The following excerpt by Jonathan typified this theme:

Jonathan: (daughter) played with girl toys and (son) played with boy-type toys...there was no...cross gendering there at all...(daughter) was the first girl so everything was Barbie...everything was pink and purple...and my son is...all boy...he wants jeans, and anything to do with skating.

Many parents also indicated being open to and supportive of their children’s interest/engagement in gender variant opportunities and described these interests as being initiated by children themselves. About a third of the sample of parents (13 parents) reported experiences of more actively encouraging/supporting gender variant opportunities for their children through provision of and active exposure to gender variant clothing (for girls), toys, or recreational activities.

Daughters. Of the 22 parents with daughters in the sample, 14 parents (approximately 63% of parents with daughters) explicitly described experiences of their daughters engaging with gender variant opportunities. Some of these were parents with school-age and adolescent

daughters who reported daughters as continuing to engage in gender variant opportunities throughout middle childhood and adolescence. In most of these accounts, daughters were described as choosing gender variant interests/behaviours/expressions due to “intrinsic” interest or wanting to reject gender-typical expressions (e.g., wearing dresses). For example, Aidan said of his eldest daughter:

Aidan: ...she absolutely hates make-up...she goes, I don't know why I need this stuff on my face, I'm fine just the way I am...she does not wear skirts, she does not believe in nylons...she likes jeans, t-shirts...she has short hair...she doesn't want bangs...she is not...typical.

No parent in the sample expressed discomfort with the idea or the reality of their daughters engaging with gender variant interests/opportunities. In fact, most mothers and fathers seemed to welcome the idea of their daughters having gender variant interests, and some parents expressed disdain for particular aspects of stereotypically feminine behaviours/opportunities such as clothing and toys. For instance, one mother, Nicole, said:

Nicole: ...it was kind of...like a discovery for me after being a parent and going to those places...how horrendously gendered boys and girls clothes were...I find it maddening and appalling, and depressing to be honest as a feminist...so...we almost always dressed (daughter 1) in what would be seen as boys clothes and that's what (daughter 2) wears right now...I found little girls clothes sexualized, or princess-ized...or completely impractical...she just started asking for like skirts, and pink...we've tried to...let her have access to that...but like some things we've said no to, like I don't want anything with Barbie on it...or princesses.

These findings are consistent with previous research that has found gay and lesbian parents (and heterosexual parents) to celebrate gender nonconformity in their daughters and to sometimes devalue traditionally feminine pursuits and qualities (Kane, 2006). Since the feminist revolution of the 1960's, North American cultures have evolved to be more approving of women/girls assuming roles and behaviours that would have once typically been defined as more “masculine”. In this sense, many of these roles and behaviours have come to be constructed as

“gender neutral”. However, because male-centered and misogynist biases still dominate our cultural understandings of gender and power, femininity is still typically devalued as being inferior to masculinity (Connell, 1995).

Despite the changes that have taken place with regard to girls’/women’s gender roles, the power still lies with the privileged and dominant groups in society to define not only what is gender normative for a particular era, but also what types and degrees of gender deviations are “acceptable” and “unacceptable”. Thus, although North American cultures have become increasingly accepting of women/girls taking on male-typical roles or behaviours, our cultures and societies continue to discipline girls/women who deviate from gender norms in socially defined unacceptable ways, which very much still include aspects of dress and bodily appearance. The accounts of two mothers in the study spoke clearly to this kind of disciplining. Like Nicole, these were two mothers who expressed having feminist or more left-wing political beliefs about gender and sexuality. Tina’s account, in particular, speaks to how early in childhood such disciplining can be imposed, particularly when children start attending school:

Audrey: When our daughter was about 10, we were invited to attend the wedding of her friend's parents...(daughter) did not want to wear a dress...(daughter) wore pants and a boy's dress shirt...later in the evening, it was time for the bride to throw her bouquet...of course, (daughter) went out to join the fun. The DJ called out to her, “hey, little dude! This is for girls”...this went back and forth several times. At one point, the DJ came out onto the dance floor and spoke to (daughter). She told him she was a girl, and the bride verified it. He turned very red and returned to the microphone...(daughter) came back to the table saying that “people are stupid”. This was very painful for us to watch. I didn't know what to do. A part of me wanted to say, “okay kiddo, you should wear a dress”...it was just sad and painful.

Tina: I used to buy boy’s clothes and girl’s clothes...boy’s clothes are actually warmer ...and when she was a baby...sometimes people would think she was a boy but I didn’t really care...but...what happened when she went to pre-school...is that the teachers started to make comments...one teacher typified her as a tomboy, which upset me a little bit because I don’t want her stigmatized because her life is already quite unusual...so...I don’t bring in the little boy underwear anymore, and I don’t buy her little boy clothes

anymore ...and...I think they treat her more nicely when she wears pink...and dresses...that's important to me that she has a positive experience of preschool and...not...thought of by the teachers as odd...it's more important that people treat her well.

Both accounts convey the anguish that these mothers felt in response to their daughters being criticized for gender deviations, and the difficult position they held between wanting to teach their daughters to have flexible gender roles and behaviours and feeling the need to conform to gender normative standards so that daughters would not be ridiculed or harmed. These findings are again resonant of Ruddick's (1983) assertions about the difficult position in which mothers are often placed between wanting to raise children who are free from oppressive norms and having to collude with dominant societal notions in order to protect children from negative judgment and harm by society.

What was also interesting about some parental accounts concerning the gender non-conformity of daughters was that some parents reported taking this gender non-conformity as an indication that their daughters might be lesbian or bisexual and/or might come to question their assumed heterosexual orientation in the future. Because of experiences such as the one described above, Audrey was one of these parents who, at times, claimed to question both her daughter's sexual orientation and gender identity. A couple of such excerpts from other parents follow, and this finding has also been discussed in the section on *Other Parental Messages about Gender and Sexual Orientation – Connections between gender and sexual orientation* (see p. 133):

Jane: I've always kind of wondered if my daughter will be gay... my daughter was three or four...my grandmother lived in a retirement home and they went on trips, so they came on a trip to the ice cream place...while we were there this other older gentleman dropped his change and my daughter helped him pick it up, and he says to her, oh, look at you, you're so cute, you're so little any day now you'll be grown up...you'll get a boyfriend, you'll get married, and she goes, "nah, I like girls better"...and...like she went to the gym with me a couple weeks ago and we're in the change room and she's got on a pair of boxer shorts, and she says, "um, sometimes I wear boys underwear" ...

Interviewer: ...you said you both think that (step-daughter) might turn out to be a lesbian, so is there something that has you thinking that way....

Leah: ...she's very much a tomboy, she very much more enjoys more the masculine the sports-related, hunting-related activities...even just the way that she walks is more masculine...I wear a bandana generally all summer she'll do that too...she expresses a lot of things like the last time she got off the plane...she...goes "God, mom that plane was full of men!"...she doesn't like the way boys smell, and (partner) will be like- yeah, if they've been running around and they're sweaty, and she goes "no, even after they shower they stink!"...she doesn't even realize that she's showing...she doesn't really like boys.

These findings are consistent with mainstream psychological discourses that have long made essentialist/biological connections between gender non-conformity and a gay/lesbian/bisexual orientation for both men and women (e.g., Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Ellis, 1928; Green, 1987; Kraft-Ebbing, 1950; Money & Russo, 1979). However, they were inconsistent with Kane's (2006) study in which heterosexual and gay/lesbian parents did not draw explicit connections between gender non-conformity and sexual orientation for their daughters; rather this connection was drawn only for sons. It might be that some parents in the current study drew these connections because, as indicated above in the case of Leah, they were sometimes explicitly asked about their perceptions of their children's sexual orientation. Also, it should be pointed out that in the above and other parental accounts, parents based their judgments about their children's sexual orientation on factors other than gender non-conformity, such as children's casual statements about disliking boys/men (Leah's account above) or children having an "open-minded" personality or attitude (e.g., Monica).

Sons. In general, sons were described as engaging with more gender normative interests/opportunities than daughters, and more gender normative than gender variant opportunities. Sons seemed to be viewed as expressing greater "interest" in gender normative opportunities relative to daughters, and seemed to be less encouraged to engage with stereotypically feminine interests, especially during middle childhood and adolescence. These

findings are consistent with research suggesting that, relative to girls, boys express more gender-typed behavior and are more encouraged to be gender typed (Bos & Sandfort, 2010; Egan & Perry, 2001).

Of the 26 parents with sons in the sample, 10 parents (approximately 38% of parents with sons) explicitly described experiences of their sons engaging with gender variant opportunities at one time or another. In contrast to daughters, the majority of sons who were described as wanting to and actually engaging with feminine interests/opportunities were around the pre-school age. One mother reported an exceptionally supportive and accepting response to her young son's interest in feminine apparel:

Donna: ...he's a very very colourful boy and it shows in his clothes...he doesn't fit a lot of the male stuff...he likes to wear lipstick sometimes...he wanted me to buy him lipstick one day, so I bought him lipstick. He paints his toenails and he likes to play with girls.

A few of the parents in this sub-group were mothers who reported actively attempting to expose their young sons to stereotypically feminine toys such as baby dolls, in order to “teach him about what it would be like to have a baby” (Monica). Again, however, occurrences of active encouragement of gender variant toys for boys were restricted to the infant/toddler/pre-school ages. These mothers seemed to encourage a gentle exposure to such toys, where as Monica indicated, if sons did not show an interest in playing with the dolls mothers did not impose the dolls on them. Whereas mothers like Monica and Sydney encouraged this gender variance for their sons in the context of a lesbian relationship, other mothers such as Christine did this in the context of a previous heterosexual marriage in which fathers tended to object to this type of socialization:

Christine: ...when he was...2...I got him a baby-doll...and his father was not at all sure about this and I said...if he's going to be a dad he needs to know how to have a baby-doll...he...played with it...for probably a year...I wouldn't say it upset his father but I think it surprised him that (son) really did like having the baby...to carry around and

...and have in his...stroller and I think some of the other parents were a little bit freaked out too...but I thought it was great.

A couple of the 10 parents were parents with older sons (at the time of the interview) who described their sons as having minimal engagement with feminine-typed clothing or toys, again, only during the toddler/pre-school age range:

Adam: ...we got him all the classic Disney...films, and one of them was Cinderella...this is when he was really, really young, like 3 or maybe 2...when we bought the video a Cinderella doll came along with it...and he would hold it next to him while he was watching the movie and he would just twirl her hair constantly...that was the only time I saw him you know, have any sort of gender indifference about him.

One father reported actively encouraging his older son to engage with stereotypically feminine interests such as cooking and sewing:

Harry: ...I've tried to instill upon him that he can do anything he wants...he's picking his electives for...junior high...and...he was so concerned about sewing, and I'm going well, (son), knowing how to repair a seam, or sew on a button, those are life skills...you don't have to go in and become...a fashion designer...but it's basic life skills.

Another father (Christopher) reported supporting his son's interest in chocolate-making, which Christopher regarded as a typically feminine activity. Interestingly, accounts such as Harry's seemed to convey a need to separate out the feminine element from activities such as sewing by constructing it as a "basic life skill". In this way, perhaps, parents like Harry might have felt he could help his son to escape negative judgement for participating in a sewing class. Similarly, when Christine talked about encouraging her son to play with a baby doll she constructed this as a need to foster "nurturing" qualities from a young age. Such attempts to separate the feminine element from certain activities in which sons participated implies a likely concern about accountability to society, which is discussed further below.

Of the one-third of parents who reported actively encouraging/supporting gender variant opportunities for their children through provision of and active exposure to gender variant

opportunities, 10 were mothers (about 48% of all mothers) and 3 were fathers (about 23% of all fathers, one of whom was born and raised as female). Thus, proportionally, many more mothers than fathers seemed to be encouraging of gender variance in their children. Research has found that lesbian parents tend to have more flexible attitudes about gender and are less likely to create gender-stereotyped environments for their children (Fulcher et al., 2008; Golding, 2006; Martin, 2009; Sutfin et al., 2008). Unfortunately, there has been little research on how lesbian mothers compare to gay fathers in the area of gender socialization of children. However, studies have found that fathers tend to be more rigid socializing agents than mothers (Fisher-Thompson, 1993; Langlois & Downs, 1980), and Kane (2006) has found that some gay fathers report feeling accountable to others for ensuring their sons conformity to hegemonic masculinity, and in this way, were similar to lesbian mothers. This accountability to society to which gay fathers and lesbian mothers feel obliged may be attributed to the close monitoring that the more conservative elements of society impose on lesbian/gay parents (Kane, 2006). Both gay fathers and lesbian mothers are often subjected to the homophobic criticism that they will “make” their children gay. Although this notion has not been empirically supported in the research on children of gay/lesbian parents, it is still widely endorsed by society.

The impact of homophobia and heteronormativity on parents was reflected in the accounts of some mothers who spoke about their sons engaging with typically feminine interests. For example, after Donna describes her son’s interest in wearing lipstick and nail polish (see p. 71) she laments that “other people...have implied...they think that I’m making him gay”. Furthermore, one mother in the study, Tina, who had only one daughter, spoke to the pressures that hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity can impose on mothers who raise sons when she speculated that if she did have a son and were to encourage co-sleeping (which she did with

her daughter) she would feel worried about being seen as “sissifying” him. The fact that mothers’ concerns about children being seen as gay or viewed as being influenced by parents to “become” gay arose more often in the context of sons’ gender variant interests than daughters’ gender variant interests is consistent with previous research and speaks to “how closely gender conformity and heterosexuality are linked to masculinity” (Kane, 2006, p. 163).

Even when mothers could label these notions as being inherently homophobic or heterosexist, they still communicated fears about being seen by society as unfit mothers, or about having their sons ridiculed for engaging in feminine behaviours. Thus, a few mothers in the sample described experiences of actively discouraging their young sons from engaging with female-typical interests:

Cassandra: ...we went shopping for running shoes and he wanted...pink Dora shoes, and...as open-minded and wonderful as I think of myself...I actually...encouraged him to get the brown Dora shoes...just because I didn't want him to be hurt...and then I was totally ashamed of myself that I had done that...but I...saw it as a compromise on his safety as opposed to...his feelings being hurt.

Jane: ...when my son was three, he wanted to be Sailor Moon for Halloween, and I didn't want him to get beat up...so I tried to gently steer him toward something else...how do you explain that to a three-year-old?

Again, these accounts are poignantly reflective of what much of the literature on mothering (heterosexual and lesbian) and maternal thinking has suggested about the dilemmas which mothers as primary caregivers experience in their parenting (e.g., Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Ruddick, 1983). Ruddick (1983) has argued that mothers must often adopt a position of “inauthenticity” (p. 221), in which they sometimes act against their own desires for their children and collude with the values of the dominant (patriarchal) culture in order to keep children safe from harm and be accountable to society as “good” mothers. Biblarz and Savci (2010) have suggested that this conflict may be especially prevalent for lesbian mothers who raise sons. Any

desire to teach sons to reject dominant definitions of masculinity may potentially place sons at risk for ridicule in their social networks, and so in wanting social success for their sons lesbian mothers may feel they have to collude with cultural ideas of hegemonic masculinity (Biblarz & Savci, 2010).

The extent to which both mothers and fathers encouraged their sons to engage with socially-defined feminine interests seemed to be determined by parental perceptions of the gendered nature of the interest/opportunity. Different types of opportunities were imbued with different meanings in the ways they were perceived to symbolize and influence children's gender expressions. These differences in meaning were the factors on which parents based their notions (and indeed on which larger society constructs its notions) about what is "acceptable" and "unacceptable" gendered behaviour for children. Books/magazines were constructed by parents as having the most significant power to influence children's notions about and expressions of gender and sexuality, and clothing/clothing accessories were seen as being the most powerful symbols of gender identity. Recreational activities and hobbies, on the other hand, were constructed as having less to do with gender, and so held the most potential for flexibility in and transgressions of gender roles. Thus, whereas some mothers in the study encouraged their sons to play with baby dolls, some fathers encouraged their sons to learn cooking and sewing, and some parents expressed to sons that it was acceptable for them to wear pink and purple, no parents reported encouraging sons to play with Barbie dolls, or to wear typically-defined feminine clothing such as dresses or skirts. Such findings have been supported in other studies where both heterosexual and gay/lesbian parents (mothers more than fathers) have been found to accept and encourage sons' learning of nurturance through playing with traditionally feminine toys (e.g., baby dolls, doll houses, and kitchen centers), but have expressed greater caution about sons

engaging with activities that are considered “icons of femininity” such as playing with Barbie dolls, or wearing nail polish, make-up, and feminine apparel (Kane, 2006).

Allocation of household chores to children. Differences in the acceptability status among various types of opportunities were perhaps no more striking than in the area of household chores and how these were allocated by parents to children. Most parents explicitly recognized societal gendering of household labour, and often endorsed labelling of cooking, dishes, and laundry as feminine-typed chores; and garbage, lawn-mowing, snow shovelling, and yard work as masculine-typed chores. Nevertheless, all parents endorsed liberal beliefs about sharing and division of household labour, specifically that household labour should not be divided along gender lines. Furthermore, no parent reported actually allocating chores to children on the basis of gender. This was the case even when parents themselves may have held stereotypical divisions of labour in their current and/or previous relationships, and/or when children were reported to have performed gender-typical chores. Furthermore, of all the types of opportunities examined in this study, parental allocation of household chores to children was the area in which the most gender variance seemed to be reported for both sons and daughters. Thus, in contrast with other types of opportunities, such as feminine toys and feminine clothing, parents did not regard boys’ performance of feminine-typed chores as unacceptable. In fact, one mother (Donna) went further to construct it as “essential” for her son.

These findings were generally supportive of previous research that has found that White, middle-class, lesbian mothers, in particular, tend to hold strong egalitarian attitudes about the division of domestic labour (Chan et al., 1998a; Fulcher et al., 2006; Gartrell et al., 1999; Johnson & O’Connor, 2002; Mitchell, 1996; Nelson, 1996; Patterson, 1996; Tasker & Golombok, 1998) and encourage high levels of sharing and negotiation in their decision-making

and family work (Ben-Ari & Livni, 2006; Dunne, 2000; Fulcher et al., 2008; Patterson et al., 2004; Vanfraussen et al., 2003). These findings were also consistent with some recent studies that have found some parents to not differentially allocate chores to children on the basis of gender (e.g., Tucker et al., 2003).

Instead, parents reported allocating chores to children on the basis of a number of other factors such as availability of opportunities, formal lists and charts, negotiation with children, experiences in their own families of origin, and wanting to teach the value of shared labour. Parents who claimed to allocate chores to children on the basis of availability of opportunities most often described this as “whatever needed to be done” at a particular moment. Thus, none of these parents spoke to having a formal division of chores to which everyone adhered continually. As Andrew said, “I actually don't even think about it...whatever needs to be done they do...whether it's dishes or laundry or...putting some electrics in the wall, it's whatever is needed”. These parents’ experiences of allocating chores to children were in direct contrast to another group of parents who reported allocating chores in a more formal way, such as through lists and charts, because their children did not willingly participate in household labour. For example, Alyssa said, “(partner) was getting mad because they...weren't doing anything, I was doing it all...so we just made up a list...” Another smaller group of parents described allocating of chores through negotiation with children, and this seemed to be constructed as a middle ground between the more, laid-back “whatever needed to be done” approach, and the more formal “list” approach. One of the mothers in this group, Samantha said of her method, “I sat down with the boys...and I said...what do you guys think you can do?...so...this is what they came up with...”

Consistent with the findings of some previous research (e.g., Thrall, 1978) some parents in the sample (mostly fathers) used their experiences of performing housework as children in their

own families as a basis for deciding what and how many chores were appropriate for their own children. For example, Nathan, a father of three children asserted, “when I was growing up, we all had to do laundry and we had to do household chores so basically I went from there”. Finally, a small group of mothers with pre-school children (who were primary lesbian-parented families) emphasized the value of having their children learn to participate in household work from a young age:

Sydney: ...I think, for us, all the more reason to just normalize all aspects of helping...we do everything, you do everything...we don't get to choose 'cause we're two women...we have to figure it out, so...you get to do everything too...I think the important thing is that he sees that it's all fluid and...that you can have all kinds of different arrangements.

Some patterns of chore divisions based on an intersection of age, birth order, and gender constellation of siblings seemed to emerge from the data. These findings are consistent with research that has found factors such as age, gender, and sibling order to interact with parental attitudes and modeling of gender roles in their impact on children's involvement in gender-typed household chores in heterosexual-parented families (Crouter et al., 1995; Cunningham, 2001; McHale et al., 1999; McHale et al., 2003; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). In the current study, in homes with only sons or only daughters (one or more), children were reported to perform a combination of masculine-typed and feminine-typed chores. In families with mixed gender children however, masculine-typed chores such as garbage, lawn-mowing, and snow shovelling were reported to be asked of and performed more often by sons than daughters. In families where a daughter was the eldest child, these daughters seemed to perform a greater amount of household chores and a greater mix of gender normative and gender variant chores than their younger siblings. In families where a son was the eldest child living in the home, these sons were either not asked to participate in household labour or performed a minimal amount of mostly masculine-typed chores (such as taking out the garbage). Across all participants, only sons were

described as being too young to participate in chores (such as dishwashing) and only a few fathers and mothers in the sample described their children (boys and girls) as rarely or never engaging in the performance of household chores.

These findings suggest that although no parent in the study reported allocating chores to their children on the basis of gender, gendered patterns in children's performance of household chores still occurred. This might be explained in a few ways. It is possible that some parents did allocate chores based on the gender of their children but were reluctant to admit this to the researcher. It is also possible that some parents did not intend to divide chores along gender lines but inadvertently reinforced such patterns. Finally, it is likely that, regardless of how parents allocated chores, in cases where there were no strict or formal divisions, children fell into or chose gendered patterns. As Monica said:

Monica: ...there's definitely gender-specific...stuff in our house around what the boys like to do and what the girls like to do...it's interesting, because we've really tried to not do that, and I don't know if ...it's kind of innately, because that's how we were brought up.

In general, these results speak to the complexity of the patterns of household labour that can exist in families due to the transactional and reciprocal nature of parent-child socialization processes. These results also suggest that parents may not always be attuned to the actual patterns of labour that occur in their homes and when asked about these patterns may respond based on what they believe about these dynamics rather than what actually occurs.

A final theme that parents spoke to in their accounts of gender and domestic labour was in reference to their own modelling of gender roles in the home. Previous research has found significant effects for parental modelling of household labour on children's attitudes about gender roles and performance of household chores in heterosexual-parented families (Crouter et al., 1995; Cunningham, 2001; Gervai et al., 1995; McHale et al., 2003; Turner & Gervai, 1995),

and lesbian-parented families (Fulcher et al., 2008; Sutfin et al., 2008). Studies on lesbian-parented families, in particular, have found that the majority of White, middle-class, lesbian mothers tend to value and model egalitarian divisions and sharing of domestic labour (Chan et al., 1998a; Fulcher et al., 2006; Fulcher et al., 2008; Gartrell et al., 1999; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Mitchell, 1996; Nelson, 1996; Patterson, 1996; Sutfin et al., 2008; Tasker & Golombok, 1998). Similarly, in the current study, by far, the majority of mothers and fathers in the sample (29 of 34 parents) explicitly reported that they had taught or modelled flexibility in gender roles to their children both through their own performance of household labour and allocation of chores to children. Furthermore, the issue of modelling of flexible gender roles in division of household labour was one of the few ways in which the majority of parents seemed to openly acknowledge playing a role in influencing or socializing their children's beliefs about and expressions of gender. A few parents explained having a non-stereotypical and flexible division of labour even in their previous heterosexual relationships, so that their children did not grow up ever seeing rigid or typical gender divisions in household labour:

Simone: ...the dynamics in my marriage were so flip-flopped...he stayed home was supposedly sort of the house maker if you will, and I went to work every day...

About five parents openly suggested that their children might have learned to endorse rigid gender role distinctions regarding household labour. Three of these were mothers who admitted to modelling stereotypical gender roles in their previous heterosexual relationships or in their current single-parent households. Interestingly, these mothers were some of the older parents in the sample with adult children, which suggests a possible generational effect where these mothers would have been more heavily influenced by traditional gender norms around the performance of household labour compared to younger parents, who endorsed more liberal norms around divisions of domestic labour. As Chloe put it:

Chloe: I don't know if I did that part really well....with four kids there was a lot of resistance to doing the work...and it had been a very traditional life for my kids until I left...my husband's view was that the woman stayed at home and did the work...and I went along with that, just because that was what it looked like...in every other family that I knew...with my kids sometimes the line of least resistance for me would take over.

The other two parents were the only parents to explicitly state that children might be learning stereotypical messages about gender role divisions in household labour from other family members, despite seeing and receiving more liberal modelling and messages in their own homes.

For instance, Kyle said:

Kyle: ...I think she very clearly identifies...this is what women and females do and men don't do this...this is something she witnesses at my ex's mom's for sure...his mom...cooks and bakes and does all sorts of things...and the men don't generally do any sorts of those things.

Summary and Conclusions

Most parents in the sample described their children as engaging in a combination of gender normative and gender variant interests/opportunities. In general, parents endorsed liberal views about provision of opportunities for their children. The majority of parents reported not wanting to impose their own beliefs about or control the types of toys, clothing, bedroom décor, and recreational interests with which their children engaged. Instead, they emphasized the value of allowing their children to choose their own interests. Parents also often attributed children's interests to essentialist explanations such as biological sex (e.g., "he was a typical boy") and personality. All of these values contributed to a tendency of parents to downplay their own parental influence on children's gender and sexuality as socialized through provision of opportunities.

Some parents described making attempts to teach children more flexible beliefs and expressions of gender through their provision of opportunities such as allocation of household

chores, recreational activities, and to a lesser extent toys and clothing. Mothers seemed especially aware that their encouragement of particular feminine-typed activities for sons (e.g., feminine clothing and make-up) could be perceived by society as “making” their sons gay. Whereas some of these mothers were able to challenge normative constructions of masculinity and heterosexuality in their parenting of their sons, especially when sons were younger, homophobic and heteronormative pressures imposed constraints on their willingness to challenge normative and oppressive constructions of gender and sexuality. Indeed, parents in general, described being driven by a need to protect their children (especially sons) from the possibility of being ridiculed, stigmatized, or harmed by forces in mainstream society for gender atypical behaviour. Thus, in general, parents were observed to engage in a simultaneous reinforcing and transgression of normative constructions of gender and sexuality in their socialization through provision of opportunities.

B. Parent-Child Interactions

The types, degree, and frequency of interactions parents have with their children are another way in which researchers have suggested that parents influence their children’s beliefs about and expressions of gender (Parke & Buriel, 1998; Parke et al., 1994). Although many different types of parent-child interactions have been highlighted in the research, the current study has focused on three main types: displays of affection, setting of restrictions, and endowment of privileges. In general, although parents spoke to the ways in which their displays of affection and setting of privileges/restrictions were affected by children’s gender they did not often speak about their interactions with children as having an impact on children’s understandings and expressions of gender and sexuality. In the following sections, displays of affection, endowment of privileges, and setting of restrictions/limitations are discussed separately.

Displays of affection. Overall, the results for parental displays of affection with children were consistent with previous research in which both lesbian mothers and gay fathers have been found to desire and have high levels of closeness, warmth/nurturance, and emotional/physical affection with their children (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Bos et al., 2003, 2007; Folgero, 2008; Golding, 2006; Golombok et al., 2003; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Mitchell, 1996; Patterson, 2000). By far, the majority of fathers and mothers in the sample reflected liberal values regarding the expression of affection and love with children. Parents often described themselves as wanting to be close and affectionate with both daughters and sons, and valuing this as a core aspect of their parenting ideology. Nicole's account typified this theme:

Nicole: I would kind of consider myself typically Latin American around affection...I come from a family...we always hug and kiss when we see each other...and...that's something we've brought into our family...we always like hugs and kisses in the morning when we first see each other, and hugs and kisses at night.

Some parents in the study (mostly fathers) described making deliberate attempts at being physically affectionate with their children:

Max: ...I actually have made a very deliberate decision to be...expressive in terms of...saying I love you, and...still a term of endearment I will use with (son) will be sweetheart...that's an expression we've always used...also...when he was younger kissing him...putting my arm around him...holding him by the hand when we walk.

Tina: ...I try to touch her a lot...I raised her with attachment parenting...like the co-sleeping...I really emphasize physical affection.

Many of the fathers who expressed being deliberate in their affection with children described this as being based on their childhood experiences of not having affectionate relationships with their own parents, particularly their fathers. These experiences with their own fathers seemed to contribute to their construction of affection with children as meaningful and powerful:

Liam: ...I remember my parents that way...I was always hesitant, because I always thought my dad was...straight-laced...you barely didn't want to give him a hug and...

I'm not comfortable...not giving them a hug...so as soon as I came out I said...those kind of things are gone...you just show your...affection.

It was perhaps not surprising to find that more fathers than mothers related having experiences of restricted affection with their own fathers. In North America, dominant norms for masculinity have typically mandated that men avoid and devalue emotional expressiveness and displays of affection (especially with other males), because these are typically regarded as “feminine” characteristics (Balswick & Peek, 1971; Dossier, Balswick, & Halverson, 1986; O’Neil, 1981a, 1981b, 2008; Sanchez et al., 2010). Particularly in the 1940’s and 1950’s, such norms led men to be generally uninvolved in childcare and non-expressive in their roles as fathers (Franklin, 1984). However, since the 1960’s, typical perceptions of fathers’ roles in families have changed, such that fathers are increasingly expected to participate more actively and equally (relative to mothers) in parenting (Franklin, 1984; Marsiglio & Pleck, 2005). Indeed, many fathers in this study extolled the value of being actively involved in parenting, thus, perhaps reflecting some of these shifting norms for fatherhood.

The findings that many fathers in this study also emphasized values of being close and affectionate with their own children and made deliberate attempts to show affection are consistent with past research. Studies have found that some gay fathers (particularly those in primary gay-father families) experience a re-framing of their identities as gay men when they become fathers such that parenting becomes a primary focus of their daily lives, and they develop a more relational and expressive orientation, thus, challenging hegemonic masculinity norms (Armesto & Shapiro, 2011; Schacher et al., 2005; Silverstein et al., 2002). Sometimes attributed to having to “de-gender” their parenting, and at the same time, assume a “mother” role, gay fathers have been found to be highly nurturing, expressive, and affectionate in their parenting (Bigner, 1996; Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Bozett, 1987; Folgero, 2008; Patterson,

2000; Scallen, 1981; Schacher et al., 2005); to have strong emotional bonds with their children (Schacher et al., 2005); and to emphasize values of intimacy, having plenty of time for children, and being caring and compassionate with children (Folgero, 2008). Bigner (1996) has also explained some of these findings by suggesting that gay fathers may feel more freedom to be nurturing and expressive with children because, in identifying as gay, they challenge masculinity norms. This explanation may support Liam's experience (see p. 83), in which he implies that "coming out" as a gay man/father helped him to feel more comfortable about expressing affection with his children.

Affection with sons. As was found in the area of provision of opportunities and consistent with findings of previous studies for heterosexual parents (e.g., Dunn & Munn, 1986; McHale et al., 1995; Tucker et al., 2003), parents in this study reported their displays of affection with children as being governed by age/developmental level and gender norms. Although, in general, this was the case in the accounts of both fathers and mothers, this theme seemed especially prominent in some mothers' reports of displays of affection with their sons. There was a general sense among the accounts of some mothers that it was more acceptable to be close to sons when sons were younger than older. Indeed, some mothers' accounts (e.g., Donna, Sydney, Cassandra) of their relationships with their young sons, particularly sons around the pre-school age range, revealed that these relationships can be quite close, and sons often initiate and reciprocate overt, physical and verbal displays of affection at a young age. However, mothers with adolescent and adult sons almost always described displays of affection with their sons as becoming less overt and frequent as sons grew older. These mothers attributed changes in their relationships with sons to increased withdrawal on the part of sons who felt a need to conform to dominant notions of masculinity. These mothers all described the feeling or pressure of having to relent their close

relationships with their sons because sons “needed to separate” (Chloe) or “set those boundaries” (Victoria) as they grew older. These experiences resonated with what some mothers had discussed in the section on Provision of Opportunities concerning their fears of being seen as “feminizing” or “sissifying” their sons:

Victoria: ...he doesn't want me to hug him and kiss him anymore...if I say (son) give me a hug, he will...but...he's sixteen and...he's embarrassed...because he's a boy, and because he needs to be able to set those boundaries, and...I think I probably respond ...immediately...to back off...I don't know if I would...be different if he was a girl.

These notions expressed by some mothers may reflect psychoanalytic and object-relations discourses that postulate that boys must develop their masculinity (and heterosexuality) through differentiation, separation, and dis-identification from their mothers (e.g., Fairbairn, 1954; Greenson, 1968; Winnicott, 1965). The popularity of such psychological discourses in society has led to the problematizing of close mother-son relationships, especially as sons grow older, because such relationships are believed to impair the masculine development of sons “making” them effeminate and/or gay (Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994). Such concerns reflect the ways in which hegemonic masculinity is essentially tied to heteronormativity (Connell, 1995; Kane, 2006), and the dilemmas in which lesbian mothers are placed when they want to raise sons who are not oppressed by homophobic or misogynist norms, but must sometimes comply with these norms in order to shape sons who are “acceptable” to society (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Ruddick, 1983).

What was also interesting about the accounts of these mothers with adolescent and adult sons is that few of them spoke to the possibility of creating a different kind of relationship with or constructing a different kind of socialization for their sons. These mothers all seemed to feel powerless in the face of their sons' conformity to masculinity norms. It was almost as if sons were perceived as having increasing levels of power as they grew older, and as a result, having

greater influence over their mothers. Thus, as Victoria said, when sons withdraw from their relationships with mothers, some mothers “immediately back off”. Only one mother in the sample, Gabrielle, described being able to maintain a close and affectionate relationship with her adolescent son despite the fact that this was regarded as unusual by her son’s friends:

Gabrielle: ...my son would always...come up to me and hug me and tell me he loved me in front of his friends...there was some DVDs that were on sale...and I got them for him...and he popped out of his chair...and...he said “I love you Mommy!” and he picked me up and hugged me...and they're all like, oh, you don't love your mom, why would you say that? And he says, of course I love my mom! Just because I love mine enough to say it and you're too afraid to say it in front of your friends...he's always been like that, it doesn't matter where we're at.

In the above account, Gabrielle described her son as himself taking pride in and wanting to maintain a loving relationship with her, which was strikingly different from the accounts of the other mothers with adolescent and adult sons. This may suggest that Gabrielle has raised her son to be different from the norm in terms of valuing an affectionate relationship with his mother. However, it may also suggest that Gabrielle was able to maintain a close relationship with her adolescent son only because he wished it to be as such. These dynamics may speak to the active roles that children are said to play in their own gender socialization and development (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998; Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000).

Affection with daughters. Whereas it was regarded as “natural” for boys to “back off” from displays of affection as they grew older it was seen as acceptable for girls to maintain affectionate relationships with their parents as they grew older. This finding is consistent with studies that have found parents to treat sons and daughters differently in the area of displays of affection (e.g., Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980; Dunn et al., 1990; Tucker et al., 2003). Moreover, it is again reflective of psychoanalytic discourses of gender socialization/development which suggest that, unlike boys, girls do not need to sever their close relationships with their mothers in

order to develop into mature women; that girls experience continuity with their mothers as less threatening than boys do, and femininity develops in relation to and identification with the mother (Chodorow, 1978). An excerpt by Simone speaks clearly to the ways in which society constructs and reinforces this differential socialization for girls and boys regarding displays of affection:

Simone: I do find it interesting in our society...I've watched this as they grew through their teenage years, boys still don't touch...they don't hug...maybe they slap high-fives...but my daughter...and her friends would hold hands, walk down the hallway with their arms around each other...it's become...okay for girls to be that affectionate, at least in North American society, but...I felt that as my kids grew older also, my son took on the gender role of it's not okay to be affectionate with your mom...

Because of differences in societal norms and expectations for boys and girls regarding displays of affection, when parents did describe changes in their displays of affection with daughters, these experiences were constructed quite differently from those of sons. Only one father (Jonathan) and one mother (Abbey) in the sample alluded to a decrease in displays of affection with daughters as daughters grew older. Moreover, unlike with sons, none of these accounts of reductions in displays of affection with daughters called on gender norms as an influential factor. Instead, changes were attributed to age or developmental stage. Similarly, there was a difference in use of terms of endearment with daughters versus sons. In general, parents seemed to use more diminutive or infantilizing terms of endearment (e.g., baby) with daughters than with sons and did not often describe "having to" stop using such terms of endearment when daughters became adolescents (although some parents did). Finally, two mothers (Audrey, Jane) even described their daughters as increasing their displays of affection with mothers as they grew older, which no parent of a son described.

Setting of restrictions. Setting of restrictions with children occurred in a number of different contexts such as dating and sex, dress/appearance, activities with friends, and use of

computers/internet/cell-phones. Many parents did not see their setting of restrictions as having an influence on their children's beliefs or expressions of gender or sexuality. Some parents who were asked about the impact of their children's gender/sexuality on setting of restrictions downplayed the impact of gender, in particular, insisting that they "did not think the rules were different based on gender" (Chloe).

Other parents who were asked about or discussed the impact of their children's gender on setting of restrictions admitted that sons and daughters were treated differently based on gender, and openly ascribed this differential treatment to societal notions about differences in gender privilege and vulnerability. The following account by Grace highlights these concerns:

Grace: ...when the boys would bring a girl home...I would never tell them, "don't hurt the boys" when the boys would come home with my daughter...I'd take them by the scruff of the neck...put them up against the wall and say "if you ever hurt her, I'll kill you"...so I guess I did do things differently...because...men are bigger and stronger...and...the power difference...they take advantage more likely than a woman would take advantage.

As might be expected, parents saw their daughters as being more vulnerable than sons to sexual/physical victimization by boys/men and at risk for problems due to early youth pregnancy. Thus, parents expressed more concerns about ensuring the emotional and physical safety of their daughters than their sons and reported placing more (and different) restrictions on daughters' behaviours in the areas of dating/sex. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that parents tend to engage in more guarding of daughters than sons in the areas of dating/sexual behaviours (Perilloux, Fleischman, & Buss, 2008). Restrictions around dating/sex for girls generally consisted of preventing daughters from dating altogether (particularly pre-teen daughters), expressing disapproval of particular relationships with boys, or restricting daughters' whereabouts with boyfriends. Restrictions around dating/sex for boys typically consisted of

warning against engaging in unprotected sexual activity or engaging in sexual activity at too young of an age and/or providing sons with condoms:

Christine: ...I have certainly had several conversations with him...and...my position was...I'd rather that you... wait until you are older to have sex than fourteen or fifteen ...and my...overriding thing was...be safe...if you need me to go out and buy condoms for you...cause we're not talking just about...pregnancy or STD's, we've got AIDS, we've got HIV.

About six parents described placing restrictions on their daughters' clothing due to their beliefs about certain types of feminine clothing as being inappropriate for certain contexts (e.g., school) or for the age of the child, or as placing their pre-adolescent and adolescent daughters at greater risk for sexual activity and sexual assault:

Audrey: ...over the years I have taught her... you don't wear a sleeveless shirt to school...you don't show cleavage, you don't wear mini-skirts, you don't wear short-shorts...she bought a pair of...leather stiletto boots...and she's not allowed to wear those to school...

Kyle: ...for the most part she dresses...fairly modest...with layers of clothing...she knows...I don't like her to go out with just like a tank top...not covering her chest...I just think age-appropriate...when she says she wants to wear something because it's sexy...I kinda don't think that twelve-year olds should be sexy.

Lucas: ...the way she dresses would be a restriction...the skanky whore thing isn't working for me so...she's gonna have to cover up a bit...she's a very pretty girl and...the last thing I wanna see is...for her to get into trouble...with boys or, to be...sexually active as a...youngster...that terrifies me...yeah...her safety...in all respects...her physical safety and...her mental safety.

These findings may be interpreted in the context of research on violence against women/girls, parental/family socialization of attitudes about sexual aggression, and mothering. Although feminist research has attempted to debunk myths that women's clothing/appearance cause or lead to the sexual crimes that are perpetrated against them, these beliefs continue to dominate and be reinforced by popular/mainstream cultural attitudes (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Moreover, studies have found that attitudes about rape and sexual aggression are communicated through verbal and non-verbal means within family environments, particularly between parents and adolescent daughters (Cowan & Campbell, 1995; Quinones, Phares, Bryant, & Stenmark, 1999). In particular, some research has found that parents exercise greater control over their daughters' clothing than sons' clothing because of perceptions that girls' clothing/appearance places them at risk for sexual activity and victimization (Perilloux et al., 2008). Furthermore, Ruddick (1983) has argued that, in order to fulfill societal expectations, mothers (as typical primary caregivers) sometimes impose restrictions on children that are consistent with dominant norms, in order that they are not judged negatively by society and their children are not harmed by others. Hence, because girls/women are considered to be especially at risk in society for sexual and violence victimization (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Minister of Industry, 2011), parents may sometimes feel they have to collude with dominant (though false) ideas about girls'/women's dress/behaviour in an effort to protect their daughters from harm.

Unlike in the areas of dating/sex and dress/appearance, restrictions on activities with friends, internet/phone use, television viewing, and curfews seemed to be described as being set more equally with sons and daughters. Again, safety and vulnerability were constructed as the motivating factors for placing restrictions in these areas. Some mothers such as Monica and Gabrielle expressed as much concern about their son's sexual safety in contexts such as bars and sleepovers with friends as they did about their daughters'. For example, Monica stated about both her elder son and daughter: "what I was really strict about when they were little is who...slept over at whose house, anybody could sleep over at our house but you weren't going sleeping over unless I knew the parents..."

Endowment of privileges. Parents described their endowment of privileges to children in two ways. One way consisted of direct offering of a privilege (e.g., a personal car, or independence), and the other consisted of the indirect endowment of privileges through not placing restrictions on behaviours. The direct offering of privileges was not often discussed by parents and not seen as being impacted by or affecting children's gender. Only one mother, Simone, reported that as she was talking during the interview she realized she gave her son a choice about buying his own car as an adolescent, but did not offer this choice to her daughter because she assumed her daughter would borrow her (the mother's) car. Thus, she came to realize during the interview how she had inadvertently reinforced stereotypically gendered notions of independence and dependence in her children.

The imposing of lesser restrictions on the dating/sex and dress/appearance of sons than daughters suggests that sons were given greater privileges of freedom, independence, and personal choice than daughters regarding decisions about their bodies and sexuality. This finding is consistent with research indicating that parents tend to allow more freedom and independence to sons than daughters (Bulcroft, Carmody, & Bulcroft, 1998; Perilloux et al., 2008). Whereas daughters were perceived negatively when they dressed in ways to make themselves more sexually/physically attractive and were imposed with restrictions on their dress/appearance, some accounts indicated that when adolescent sons dressed in ways to make themselves more physically attractive this was construed as a positive change:

Adam: ...he changed his wardrobe because I think he's finally realizing that women are recognizing him...so...Levi brand new jeans...instead of tennis shoes, he's wearing dress shoes...nice belt and really nice shirts...he's changed his whole wardrobe in order to make his appearance look...handsome.

Some mothers attributed their indirect offering of privileges of independence and personal decision-making to sons to their perceptions that sons were trustworthy, responsible and accountable:

Christine: ...I think (ex-husband) and I were a little bit more laissez-faire about knowing (son)'s basic good sense...he basically was a good kid and...in some ways, hyper-responsible...so...I don't think we worried as much about him doing something stupid for reasons of peer pressure or something like that.

Monica: ...(son) is really the only one that goes out much to do something...and I haven't had too much curfew issue...because he says "I'm going across to Buddy's house across the street, we're going to be watching the hockey game, or watching a movie, can I come home at eleven, or ten...and he comes home.

Six fathers in the sample indicated seeing their pre-adolescent and adolescent daughters as responsible and trusting them with privileges of personal decision-making around dating/sexual behaviour and dress/appearance. As in the accounts of the mothers of sons, these accounts of fathers were not constructed in the language of *privilege* per se, but more so in terms of lesser imposing of restrictions:

Nathan: ...I'm pretty open with my children and...I trust my...girls...they're older now and...they can do a lot and...they're not afraid to come and ask me if there's something going on...I don't have any problems...they wanna go to parties and they wanna stay out late or something like that, I'll allow them to do it...they know that if there's a problem, I'm only a phone call away.

Some parents with only sons described basing their privileges of freedom and independence on their own parenting style and values. For example, Max stated, "since [son] was able to rationalize...we've discussed things, and...we've negotiated something that...he's comfortable with and that gives him the freedom to express himself". Samantha, a mother of three younger boys, talked about her struggle of attempting to balance setting of rules and allowance of privileges based on age and maturity level. She said, "I don't let them go too far...they can't be getting into

too much trouble, but at the same time...I have to leave it open so that they maybe tend to get into a little bit of trouble...cause...I mean that's how I learnt"

A few mothers in the sample explained that the privileges they allowed their sons might have been or were based on social differences in gender privilege. One of these mothers was Simone who openly acknowledged how she had inadvertently encouraged her son to be independent and her daughter to be dependent when she recognized this during the interview. The second mother, Donna, identified the possibility but attributed it to other factors:

Donna: I think he might have the privilege of some independence...I don't know if that per se has to do with him being a boy, maybe it does...but I think it from where I stand...as single mother, and as an only child...it's kind of essential for things to get done.

The third mother in this sub-group, Victoria, openly labelled it as "male privilege" and admitted that she would have been "much more protective" if she had had a daughter:

Victoria: ...if he was a girl...I would be much more protective...we live in a society where...girls...experience sexual violence at a rate that's astronomical ...so...I think...he has male privilege...in terms of his safety around his body and what he can expect when he goes out onto the street...more or less, to be safer than a girl.

Finally, some parents described children's age as an important basis (more important than gender for some) for decisions about privileges and restrictions. Age seemed to influence not only the types of privileges and restrictions parents set for their children, but also the extent to which parents exerted their influence or control over their children's actions. Thus, decision-making about privileges and restrictions based on age resulted in differences between sons and daughters and differences between same-gender siblings. In general, these parents reported that children were given more privileges and lesser restrictions as they grew older, and within families, older children had more privileges and lesser restrictions than their younger siblings:

Christopher: (youngest son)'s in bed at eight o'clock, (eldest son) is in bed between nine-thirty and ten-thirty...(eldest son) was allowed three hours of game time...a day...the big

privileges for (eldest son) are...video games, computer games, and...going to Yu-Gi-Oh tournaments.

Kyle: ...(first daughter) has more access to the internet...and that's mostly because...I think...she's a little bit more internet savvy.

These findings are supportive of previous research suggesting that parents tend to allocate more privileges to first-born or older children than later-born or younger children (Tucker et al., 2003).

However, research also suggests that, at the same time that first-born children are endowed with greater privileges than later-born children, they are also assigned greater responsibilities by parents due to parental beliefs about the greater maturity of first-born children (Tucker et al., 2003). This may explain Dan's experience of the differential treatment of his children as perceived by his older daughters:

Dan: I think...the girls think...he gets away with murder...because he's the youngest...I think...in fairness...you learn as you go and I think...I was stricter on (eldest daughter), she was the first one, and then I realized a lot of stuff doesn't matter that much...so I've kind of relaxed and I try to only discipline things that actually matter.

Dan's attribution of differential treatment of his children to birth order and accumulated parenting experience is consistent with a small body of research suggesting that parents' experiences with earlier-born children may have important implications for how they approach childrearing with second- or later-born children (e.g., Buchanan, Eccles, Flanagan, Midgely, Feldhauser, & Harold, 1990; Eisenman, 1992; Whiteman & Buchanan, 2002; Sputa & Paulson, 1995; Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2003). Specifically, some of these studies have found that parents may learn from their earlier experiences in child-rearing (especially in raising adolescents), thus showing more effective parenting strategies (Eisenman, 1992; Sputa & Paulson, 1995; Whiteman et al., 2003) and achieving more harmonious parent-child relationships (Whiteman et al., 2003) with later-born children.

There were some messages of difference in parental accounts of setting of restrictions and endowment of privileges with children. A couple of mothers in the sample, Abbey and Leah, related experiences of finding certain aspects of their daughter's dress/appearance problematic but not placing restrictions on them due to recognizing their own biases in making such judgments and valuing the self-expression of their daughters. As Leah said:

Leah: (partner) and I had these discussions because...they both want to dye their hair, and ...they both want to wear make-up, she thinks it's fine, I don't. So we're...starting to have a lot more discussions around like allowing them to express themselves...when it's framed in that way for me, I'm like ok, if they want to wear make-up and that's an expression and I need to let them do it kind of thing.

Additionally, Aidan and Tina stated:

Aidan: ...I don't want to keep my kids in a bubble...I don't want them to grow up naive...I almost want them to be a little bit fearful of the world...just so they're socially aware...I know I can't protect them, the only thing I can do, is...cross my fingers, that I've given them the tools that they can make proper, good decisions themselves.

Tina: ...I want her to have the belief that her body is in her control...I don't really care if she has premarital sex or sex as a teenager, I just want her to be, under her own terms, not anyone else's...I want it to be coming out a good emotional place not out of insecurity.

Finally, one other mother in the sample, Grace, reported teaching her sons to be respectful and careful with their male power and privilege, which may reflect a positive departure from the messages that boys/men typically receive from society about their sexuality and social privilege:

Grace: ...I always try to make my boys sensitive to that...that girls can be more vulnerable and that they need to be respectful of that.

Summary and Conclusions

Unlike provision of opportunities, when discussing parent-child interactions such as displays of affection, setting of restrictions, and endowment of privileges with children, parents more openly acknowledged the influence of their parental role on children's behaviours, and more openly admitted to imposing their own values and beliefs on children for the sake of ensuring

their children's (especially daughters) safety. In general, parents were observed to make attempts to parent both sons and daughters in open-minded and progressive ways in their setting of restrictions and privileges, but in some ways also reinforced traditional/normative beliefs and practices around gender and sexuality. Analyses suggested that children's gender did play a typical role in determining the nature of parent-child interactions and that whereas some parents were aware of their differential treatment based on their children's gender, others did not explicitly acknowledge it. Furthermore, even when some parents could speak to the ways in which their children's gender impacted their interactions with children, they did not often speak to the ways in which their own gender, gender beliefs, or their decisions (based on children's gender) may have played a role in reproducing normative constructions of masculinity and femininity in their children.

C. Direct Education/Instruction via Conversations

There is currently little research on what the mechanisms of direct instruction as a form of parental socialization may be in families (McHale et al., 2003). Parent-child conversations are one mechanism that has been illuminated in relation to how the children of lesbian mothers, in particular, learn about sexuality (e.g., Gabb, 2004a; Mitchell, 1998). No published research has, to date, examined how parent-child conversations may be used as a direct instructional tool in gay-father led families. Hence, this study sought to explore whether and how LGB parents used conversations to teach or socialize children about issues pertaining to gender and sexuality, what the contents of these conversations were, and what the contexts were in which conversations occurred.

Parental accounts revealed a vast diversity of beliefs and values around issues of whether or not to have conversations with children, the contexts in which conversations occurred, and what

kinds of issues parents were willing to discuss with children. Parents described having conversations with children about a variety of issues including sexual orientation, gender identity, gender roles, religious values, political values, dating and sex, drugs, and career choices. For the purposes of this thesis, only conversations about sexual orientation and gender identity/roles are explicitly discussed. Conversations about other issues are discussed as they occurred in the context of or as they related to issues of gender and sexual orientation.

This section is divided into two general parts/themes: parental reports of having conversations with children, and parental reports of *not* having conversations with children. It should be noted that this organization is not meant to imply that these two sets of experiences are mutually exclusive. In other words, a parent who did not report having a conversation with their children about a particular issue may have had conversations about other relevant issues with their children, or vice versa. Additionally, parents were sometimes unable to recall conversations about a particular issue, when asked explicitly, but this should not imply that they did not ever or were not willing to discuss the particular issue with their children.

Having conversations about gender and sexual orientation. The majority of mothers and fathers in the sample reported highly valuing open communication with their children. Many parents described wanting their children to feel comfortable approaching them with questions or issues of any kind. A small sub-group of parents, mostly fathers, seemed to especially value being able to have conversations with children (both daughters and sons) about issues pertaining to gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation. As Christopher stated, “we've long...wanted to try and keep as open...communication channel as we can...and...sexuality and gender identity are a part of that...”

Many parents described their conversations about gender and sexuality with children as occurring within the context of other events, such as watching a television program, children expressing curiosity about a specific issue, children expressing negative or derogatory attitudes about gender or sexual orientation, or in the context of contemporary political/social issues (e.g., LGBTQ Pride events, same-sex marriage and LGBTQ families, human rights issues). The specific context of a child asking a question was one that was often named as a trigger for conversations about gender or sexuality. Parents rarely reported shying away from answering their children's questions, but interestingly, most parents reported having conversations about gender and/or sexual orientation only when children asked questions or issues arose in the context of daily life both within and outside of the home/family. These parents seemed to think it more natural to have conversations about gender and sexuality as these issues "came up" rather than for them to have initiated conversations with children when it might have seemed "out of context" to do so:

Grace: ...I don't think...you sat anybody down, it was always as things came up and as questions were raised.

Research analysing dominant discourses and expert advice on sexuality education has found that parents are typically instructed to talk to their children about sexuality only when a child asks a question and that many parents tend to follow such advice (Frankham, 2006; Martin, 2009). This could explain this finding in the current study. Nevertheless, although many parents did not report deliberately initiating discussions about gender and sexuality, they did convey the impression of deliberately "using" conversations in these contexts to educate children about matters related to sexual and gender diversity, or to correct biased assumptions or prejudice which children had expressed. Two accounts reflecting these kinds of conversations in different contexts are presented below:

Andrew: ...when we do talk about it, it's mostly in the context of something that has happened...in the world...say...gay marriage...we discuss...what gay marriage could mean or does mean...to put it in context of the whole spectrum of how people view other people.

Liam: ...stuff comes up is more because I think society uses phrases...and labels...that I disagree with...

Interviewer: can you give me an example?

Liam: ...you're so gay...or that's so gay...so what do you mean, it's so gay? Well it's dumb. I says, so you're telling me I'm dumb...or stupid...no! I says, well why do you say then, you're so gay? Because...that is me....they don't know the difference, because...it's so ingrained in society...you really gotta...point it out to them...I even say to the friends when they're in my car and I can hear it...there's people that commit suicide because of that...be careful when choosing your words.

Other parents reported deliberately using conversations to teach their children about the importance of being accepting and open-minded to sexual and gender diversity and difference in others:

Gabrielle: When I had the whole sex talk with them...I explained to them...some people are oriented...to the opposite sex, some people are more attracted to the same sex...we've had talks from when they were little, about...seeing two men walk down the street holding hands...and I just tried to tell them...it doesn't matter what form love comes in, it's never wrong unless someone's been taken advantage of.

Kyle: ...we were talking about...that they don't really know why somebody's gay or lesbian, but there's some theories out there that say this and some theories that say that. And so I said to both of the girls on separate occasions, so how would you feel if you chose to have children one day and one of them was gay or lesbian or transgendered ...because at the end of the day, for me, it's more important that if they ever have a child who's gay or lesbian, that they accept that child...and have a good relationship and realize that it's possible that they may have a child who is gay or lesbian or transgendered or any of those things.

A small group of mothers who had their children in their primary lesbian relationships described some unique experiences of conversations with children relative to parents who had children in previous heterosexual relationships. Consistent with what previous research has found (e.g., Gabb, 2004a; Mitchell, 1998), these mothers reported having deliberate

conversations with their children for the purposes of “normalizing” queer identities and families and reducing children’s feelings (actual and potential) of being stigmatized for having lesbian mothers. Interestingly, all of these mothers reported starting to have such conversations with their children while children were quite young (ranging in age from 2 to 7 years) and conversations were most often constructed around having “different kinds of families”. For these mothers, having such conversations may have been a way of preparing their children, from a young age, to deal with inevitable homophobic and heterosexist encounters in their lives even before these had occurred. As Tina said of her toddler-aged daughter, “I don’t think she feels ostracized yet but I’m trying to lay the groundwork to have her feel strong....so, that’s why I...emphasize the different kinds of families”. Furthermore, Nicole stated:

Nicole: ... we haven't kind of talked about ourselves as different from the norm...we have purposefully played with gender and stories that we've told her...we also have created a bit of a world view for her...where in fact queers are the majority...in her own family, that's been reflected to her...talking has been such a great opportunity for us to give her I think a sense of maturity and confidence...about herself and her family.

Moreover, what parents such as Sydney and Cassandra suggested in this study is that discussion of different types of families is seen as the most “age-appropriate” way of talking about these issues and preparing children for encountering prejudice when children are too young to understand notions of sexuality or social/political prejudice around sexual orientation and gender. Altogether, these findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that some LGB parents attempt to prepare their children for encountering homophobia/heterosexism in their external environments such as schools by discussing different types of families and emphasizing the importance of appreciating diversity (Gartrell et al., 2000; Goldberg, 2010).

The research also suggests that some LGB parents attempt to prepare their children for encountering homophobia and heterosexism by warning them about these possibilities (Litovich

& Langhout, 2004) and helping them to role-play and practice appropriate responses (Gartrell et al., 2000; Goldberg, 2010). Similarly, some parents in this study spoke about using conversations to help children contextualize and cope with their experiences of victimization or stigmatization by peers for their own expression of gender and/or sexual orientation, or for the fact of having gay/lesbian parents:

Alyssa: ...he's had probably...the most difficult time...he gets upset when (sister) tells everyone they have two moms...because I think he's embarrassed and he's a boy and...we try to talk to him... we've always had...books...we read them those...we took them to therapy and we talked about it.

Audrey: ...we talked a lot about the clothing stuff, and about the hair and...every time she had an incident, she used to call them the recess wasters, these kids would...waste her entire recess, cornering her and asking her if she was a boy or a girl...and they were older and bigger and intimidating...so it was a difficult thing for her.

A couple of parents in the sample described experiences of having conversations with children in the context of questioning a child's gender identity or sexual orientation. These were parents who used conversations to intentionally communicate approval and acceptance to children for being and expressing "who they are":

Christopher: ... all I've said to him so far is...if you're straight, or if you're gay...it doesn't matter...and he heard that, and I said...when you get...to a certain age, if you start to figure out what you are or who you are...I want you to feel comfortable to tell mommy and mom and I if you want to.

Leah: ...we both believe that (step-daughter) is a lesbian...so...whenever she's up here we...work it into conversation...like we want you to be yourself and if you're being told down there that you can't be yourself, that's not right...we just try to hammer home the point that we want them to be themselves.

Finally, many parents described experiences of deliberately approaching children with the intention of coming out to them and wanting to discuss implications for separation/divorce from previous heterosexual partners. This was one of the contexts which many parents constructed as

most important for having conversations about sexual orientation with children. Chloe's account typified this theme:

Chloe: we've had...a lot of conversations actually about that...when they were first...just coming to understand...about my sexual orientation, it was hugely challenging because they had a lot of fears...about it...and so.....a lot of it...was just again trying to be honest about...what happens inside of me, like what are the things that I felt as a kid...how did I...first come to realize...when did I first come to realize, like there were...some of those conversations.

Silences/not having conversations. Some parents in the sample spoke clearly to not having discussions about gender and/or sexuality with their children. Reporting of such silences emerged in two contexts. The first was when parents were asked whether they had conversations with their children about issues pertaining to gender or sexuality. The second was when parents were asked whether they had ever made the deliberate decision to not talk about aspects of gender or sexuality with their children.

In the first context, parents who indicated not having conversations with children about issues pertaining to gender or sexuality explicated a variety of reasons for this. One mother, Christine, described not having such conversations with her son because these issues “didn't come up...there was just no impetus”. She and other parents who described not having conversations with children for similar reasons were thus very much like those parents who had described having conversations about gender or sexuality only when these issues did arise. This former sub-group of parents did not seem opposed to having such discussions with their children however, and their presentation in other parts of the interview implied that had these issues explicitly arisen they would have had conversations/discussions.

Another group of parents seemed to think that when the researcher asked about conversations about gender or sexual orientation with children she meant conversations about “problems” with sexual orientation and/or gender (either their own or their parents’) as opposed to any aspect of

sexuality or gender (which was the intended nature of the question). Thus, perhaps due to a miscommunication or misunderstanding of the question, many parents in this category reported not having conversations about sexuality or gender with their children because they had not perceived these to be “issues” for their children in that they did not question their children’s gender identity or sexual orientation, or they did not perceive their children to be questioning their own gender identity or sexual orientation. As Elizabeth said,

Elizabeth: At some point he had said something about that’s all good mom, but I like girls...there’s never been any real discussion...(my daughter)...never been a question, she’s always had her boyfriends, and that’s who she kind of is.

Other parents explained not talking to their children about aspects of gender or sexuality because they had raised their children to be open-minded and children had not expressed problematic attitudes about gender. The parents in this sub-group referred mainly to one area of gender, specifically children’s attitudes about gender roles and domestic labour:

Brad: No, not that I can...remember...I think because...they were raised to think that anybody can do anything...that they don’t really...assign roles to people.

Leah: ...like talking about...masculinity or femininity I don't really think that comes up ...just I mean like I said because everybody kind of does everything at our house and you know, it's like not an issue we just are who we are and we don't really discuss it in terms of the activities.

A final set of parents described not having conversations with children about sexual orientation, in particular, because of the fact that children had always been raised by gay/lesbian parents. These parents saw no need to have conversations about sexual orientation because their children had accepted the fact of having gay/lesbian parents as “normal” and had “never known anything different” (therefore were not perceived as having any problems with having same-sex parents):

Donna: I think because he was so young...he's just always known...I did everything in my power to normalize it for him...if I was going to kiss my partner I was going to kiss her in front of him...so we haven't officially had the conversation, but only because it was normal for him.

Monica: ...I think...they accept it...and I don't think I've ever had any specific conversations with [daughter] about sexuality...they've never known anything different.

Silences around issues of gender and/or sexuality also emerged in a second context - when parents were asked about issues they deliberately did not discuss with children. A few parents (e.g., Andrew, Julia, Monica) described holding off on disclosing their own sexual orientation, and/or that of another parent's to children. For example, Julia described not wanting to disclose her own sexual orientation to her young adult son and not wanting to "tip him off about his dad". Interestingly, a few other parents, fathers in particular, described choosing not to have specific conversations with children in the context of questioning their children's sexual orientation. As opposed to parents who were described earlier as taking such questioning as an opportunity to explicitly convey acceptance of the child (without overtly asking the child if she/he was lesbian/gay/bisexual), these fathers described being afraid to "push" their children into talking for fear of alienating or placing pressure on them to be "one way or another". All three fathers explained their reasons for not having these conversations with their children as being connected to their own past experiences as adolescents with their own parents. Jonathan's account exemplified this theme:

Jonathan: ...if she wants to talk about it, she can come to me...I feel that if...I asked ...about the issues, that I'm pushing the issues...and I'm definitely not raising my children to be gay...I'm gonna support her no matter what she does... I don't wanna her to deny...it to me...like my mother did to me...you know you're gonna question me about it but you don't want to hear the answers...I feel that if I start questioning her, she's gonna start denying it to me...and I don't want her to have to deny it...so let her bring it to me.

The fact that some participants reported not having specific conversations about gender or sexuality with their children showed that parents did not always think it important, necessary, or even appropriate to have such discussions with children, and that these were parents who perhaps were more likely to wait for things to come up or for questions to be asked in order to have conversations. Again, this would be consistent with the finding that many parents tend to subscribe to dominant discourses on age-appropriate parenting, in which they are advised to talk to their children about sexuality, in particular, only when children ask questions or raise issues themselves (Frankham, 2006). The accounts of some of these parents might also be consistent with studies in which parents have been found to believe that their children learn about gender and sexual diversity through the experience of living in a queer family, or being indirectly influenced by their parents' political beliefs rather than through formal discussions (e.g., Gabb, 2004a). However, it is also likely that some of these parents did have conversations with children at one time or another about aspects of gender and/or sexual orientation, and perhaps did not recall them at the time of the interview or see them as "conversations" per se, because all but one of these parents had described experiences of disclosing their sexual orientation to their children.

Summary and Conclusions

Altogether, analyses suggested that the majority of parents in the sample placed a high value on keeping the lines of communication open with their children. These findings are consistent with what has been reported in previous research. Lesbian mothers, in particular have been found to strongly value open communication in their relationships with partners and children (Bos et al., 2003, 2007; Golding, 2006; Golombok et al., 2003). There is currently no published research on the values that gay fathers hold about communicating with their children in which to contextualize the present study's findings. However, the findings that many of the fathers in this

study also highly valued open communication with their children may be seen as consistent with research that has found gay fathers to be highly expressive and responsive in their parenting skills (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Patterson, 2000).

In general, the present study's findings provide support for considering parent-child conversations as a mechanism of direct education/instruction in Parke et al.'s (1994) tripartite model of parental socialization. Although parents did not always explicitly talk about it, they seemed to believe that the conversations they had with their children had an impact on, at least, their children's beliefs about gender and sexual orientation, if not their expressions of gender and sexual orientation. Thus, this was an area in which parents were often aware and acknowledging of their own role in and power to socialize/influence their children's beliefs about and expressions of gender and sexuality. Interestingly, unlike with other forms of parental socialization discussed so far, there were no reported or observed patterns of differences in gender dynamics among parents and children for discussions about gender or sexual orientation.

D. Parental Perceptions and Negotiation of the Influence of External Systems

This section highlights parental perceptions of the roles of systems and forces external to the parent-child system in influencing children's beliefs and expressions of gender and sexual orientation. The external systems that have been examined include the family system (immediate and external family members), peers, schools, media, religion/spirituality, neighbourhood/national cultures, and LGBTQ friends/family/community. In particular, I explored parents' perceptions of the ways in which these systems did or did not conflict with the messages they attempted to convey to their children about sexuality and gender. Additionally, I explored the strategies that parents used to manage and negotiate these conflicts when they did arise.

Family networks. Parents described experiences of their children receiving both positive and negative messages about gender and/or sexual orientation from family members. About a third of the sample of parents related experiences in which they felt children had received positive messages about sexual orientation and progressive role modelling of gender roles from other family members. However, over half the sample of parents perceived their children to have received negative, stereotypical, or harmful messages about gender and/or sexual orientation from some members of their extended and blended families. In many cases, children's other biological parent was blamed for telling children that being gay is "wrong" and for providing other homophobic messages, especially in the context of difficult separations/divorces and custody arrangements. Some family members were also criticized for using religion as a basis for their negative messages about homosexuality. A few mothers stood out among the participants for the extent to which they described struggling with ex-husbands who communicated negative messages about homosexuality to their children directly or indirectly. One of these mothers, Gabrielle, identified her ex-husband as also being gay, and never having come to terms with his own sexual orientation:

Gabrielle: ...my ex-husband...he didn't want to deal with the fact that...they were mad at him for all the stuff that he had tried to plant in their heads...about me...and before he and I decided to get divorced, he was pretty disconnected from them...and he was just basically miserable person...and I can understand why...he didn't tell me about him being gay...until after we had children...and I tried to be very understanding...I said if that's what you want to do, then do it, like I'll never tell the kids anything bad about you...I'll be as supportive as I can but, that's the one thing I can't give you...so even though he was miserable, I always played up who he was in their minds and ...he tried to do the opposite.

Some parents also perceived their children to have received negative messages about gender identity/roles from ex-spouses, siblings, and close family friends, which parents saw as being communicated through encouragement of normative gender performance (e.g., in dress and

appearance), and through modelling of stereotypical/normative gender roles. These parents often considered the messages that children received from other family members and family friends about gender roles as conflicting with what parents were trying/had tried to teach their children about gender roles. For example, Jane and Kyle described:

Jane: ...when I left him, she was a tomboy, wearing Osh Kosh overalls and pants mostly and then...when he got married to this woman...and moved down there, she got pushed to be a lot more feminine...when (partner) and I got married, we had the kids stand up, and I wanted them both to wear tuxes, and (daughter) seemed really excited about this...my ex-husband called me up and said, “you know, I think (daughter) would really rather wear a dress”...so I asked her...and she said “no, I don't know where dad's getting that from, I want to wear the tux”.

Kyle: I think she very clearly identifies...this is what women and females do and men don't do this, and I mean this is something she witnesses at my ex's mom's for sure...his mom...cooks and bakes and does all sorts of things...and the men don't generally do any sorts of those things.

Peers. In general, parents saw the messages that children received from peers about sexual orientation and gender as being mostly negative and stereotypical and as having a crucial influence on children's beliefs about and expressions of gender and sexual orientation. Some parents described their children as learning derogatory, homophobic terms from peers. Additionally, consistent with what previous research has found (Bos & van Balen, 2008; Bozett, 1989; Mitchell, 1998; Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Vanfraussen et al., 2002) some parents related experiences of their children being hurt by the homophobic behaviour of peers and being victimized by peers for their parents' sexual orientation:

Dan: Well, I know from (daughter) that she has heard people like use gay as a euphemism for stupid or bad...and that has...bothered her a lot and she's talked to me about it...I've said to her that that these people don't even understand and they may not even think they know a person and so they're...not saying gay people are stupid...I said there are people that don't like people because they're gay, and...I said that people like that are usually insecure about something in themselves and they're trying to hide something there.

Samantha: ... the kids in the neighbourhood will say, your mom's gay... and my youngest one will come home bawling his eyes out...he gets so upset...mom they called you gay, and I'm like dude...you can't get upset, I am...it's okay...if they want to call me that.

Some parents of younger children (around pre-school to early school-age), in particular, described their children as receiving overtly stereotypical and oppressive messages from peers about gender expression, particularly regarding the colour and characteristics of clothing and outward appearance. This is consistent with past research suggesting that peers are an especially powerful source of gender normative socialization when children are young (Katz & Walsh, 1991; Witt, 2000), and that pre-school children, in particular, often use characteristics of hair, clothing, and outward appearance to read and understand the gender of others (Martin & Ruble, 2004). The following excerpts reflect some parental experiences of the strong socialization children receive from peers at a young age about aspects of colour, clothing, and physical appearance:

Cassandra: ...pink was his favourite colour until the boys at school told him that he can't have pink...so he switched over to purple and he's ok with that now.

Christopher: ...when (son) was in grade one, two, three, somewhere around there...he was sort of saying that...pink was a girl's colour...and I said... "no, pink's not a girl colour, guys wear pink. Pink used to be a girl's colour and before that it was a boy's colour, it changed" and I said "now it's changing again" and we try and talk to him about how things evolve and how things are sort of evening out.

Consistent with findings that children punish other children who deviate from gender normative behaviours through bullying and/or stigmatization (Beal, 1994; McAuliffe, 1994; Witt, 2000), some parents in the current study described their older children as being marginalized and bullied by peers for not conforming to gender normative appearance and behaviours. For example, Audrey explained:

Audrey: well I think she's gotten a lot of messages about that she is not an appropriate girl...she still cuts her hair short...at one point it was shorter than her boyfriend's...and this was one of the issues...his friends...would say things like well (daughter)'s the man in your relationship... and like you should be telling her what to do...so he'd try...and...she's not one of those like little submissive little girls...when they broke up, a lot of his friends and some of her former friends said...well you're just a ball bashing lesbian...you didn't know your place in your relationship with him...I think she gets lots of messages that she's an inadequate woman.

Some of the above parental accounts of the negative messages children received from peers about sexual orientation and gender suggest that one way in which parents sometimes manage the feelings of conflict or hurt that such messages produce for children and their parents was to talk with children. Through talking, parents not only attempted to assuage their children's feelings of hurt and confusion, but also to correct the misunderstandings, biases, and assumptions about gender and sexual orientation that children learned and internalized from peers.

Conversations therefore, typically, carried themes of "being yourself" (Monica), not being afraid of the reactions of others because "their reactions belong to them" (Gabrielle), and that "people who tease people about those kinds of things are insecure" (Monica). These parents also used these opportunities to teach their children about accepting and appreciating diversity in others. Use of conversations to negotiate the negative messages that children received from peers about gender and/or sexuality connects with that of using conversations as a mechanism of direct education/instruction discussed in the previous section of the Results.

Parental accounts also revealed another significant way in which parents attempted to manage the homophobic/heterosexist encounters that their children had with peers. Consistent with findings of previous research (e.g., Bos et al., 2005; O'Connell, 1993; Pollack & Vaughn, 1987; Tasker & Golombok, 1995), many parents expressed concerns about their children being stigmatized and bullied by peers for parental sexual orientation. These parents saw it as more important to put the safety and well-being of their children over their own need to disclose and

be open about their sexuality. As Elizabeth said, “you can...take on whatever in society but...you’ve got to shelter your kids...it was for us very much imperative that they not have to go through any kind of verbal or physical bashing...because of who we were.”

Some parents attempted to protect their children by giving their children a choice about coming out to peers and letting children have control over how and when this was done. Thus these parents described being willing to hide their sexuality from their children’s friends, or to not engage in overt verbal or physical displays of affection in the presence of their children’s friends. In this way, these parents perhaps recognized that children also experience a coming out process when parental sexual orientation is disclosed, and need their own time to become comfortable with telling peers/friends. However, parents such as Andrew and Leah described the intense difficulties that can result for both children and parents from making decisions about whether and how to hide parental sexual orientation from children’s peers. Andrew was one parent who particularly struggled with this at the time of the interview as he had only recently come out:

Andrew: ...my biggest concern, challenge with my kids is how they're going to be treated by the other kids, how they're going to be treated by their friends, how they can be supported...I mean the bullying that can happen, the incredible personal drama that...kids can have to go through...that's crushing...they don't feel safe being able to be open about the relationship (partner) and...I have, or their living arrangements or any of this context.

Leah: I would say the biggest way that like our sexuality impacts her is that we really don't have like friends sleep over and at like birthday parties...she's restricted in terms of having friends over...it hasn't been like intentional...I feel really kind of caught because she's embarrassed to a certain degree...she does have a few friends at school that know but she doesn't want like a mass knowing about her having two moms.

Some parents reported experiences in which children, who were initially afraid to disclose their parental sexual orientation to peers/friends, eventually did and received either neutral or positive reactions from friends. These were mostly parents of children who were adolescents or

adults at the time of the interviews, which suggests that these children became more comfortable disclosing to peers as they grew older. In the following account, Victoria spoke to the initial difficulties that resulted when she decided to hide her sexuality from her son's friends, but went on to describe her experience of becoming more open:

Victoria: ...I would have disagreements with...some people in my...social circle...who were lesbian about the fact that I respected (son)'s decision about who to let in to that part of his world, and who not to...I was very cognizant about not...being...publicly out...I just felt he would tell his friends when he was ready... and then, by the time he got to about...Grade 9...and there were kids that were coming to the house regularly...I started to become more open about who I was...a couple of summers ago...I took (son) and one of his friends camping for a week...I was in the tent and I could hear the kid telling (son)...no worries about the fact that your mom is gay, that's cool, it's not a problem, and you shouldn't be worried about that...so I knew...that sort of gave him a boost and from that time on...his friends know...

A few mothers with children (Tina, Cassandra, Jane) who had expressed interest in gender variant clothing at one time or another also described attempting to protect their children from being victimized by peers, despite wanting to let their children choose the ways in which they would like to dress and shape their appearance. These accounts were presented and discussed in the section on Provision of Opportunities (see p. 68 and 74). Sydney's account below further reflects this dilemma especially for the mothers with young sons. Hers and the other accounts communicated an array of negative feelings (e.g., "ashamed", "hypocritical", "not able to resolve") that these mothers experienced as a result of imposing restrictions on their children's gender expression due to fear of societal reactions:

Sydney: Then you know in the morning I'll dress him as a boy and I feel like on some level I'm being hypocritical... 'cause...I'm not letting him go into the store and pick what he wants to wear...from the girls' department or the boys' department or whatever.

Finally, a few parents in the sample with young adult children described their children as having peers/friends who were accepting of parental sexual orientation, either because children chose to associate only with friends who were accepting (e.g., Simone's daughter) or because

friends possessed egalitarian and positive attitudes toward same-sex sexuality. Some of these peers/friends were themselves LGBTQ-identified, and others were heterosexual-identified. As

Max stated:

Max: ...(son)'s been really lucky since...he was in junior high...the group of kids...he went through with, some of them are still his friends now and...they come from the same neighbourhood...it's a very egalitarian group...so it's not even an issue with them, any kind of stereotype with regard to gender or orientation...when my partner died we had the funeral, every single one of my son's friends showed up at the funeral...because...they knew my partner and they liked him and...that was a way of showing respect to me.

Schools³. Many parents viewed school environments as also playing a significant role in influencing children's beliefs around gender and sexual orientation. This was a context in which messages from peers often intersected as a factor contributing to children's beliefs and expressions about gender and sexual orientation. However, unlike with peers, when discussing the influence of or encounters with school administrations parents described a greater range of responses and messages from schools especially regarding sexual orientation. Altogether, this range of responses was consistent with previous research suggesting that attitudes of schools toward the presence of gay-/lesbian-parented families can range from overtly homophobic, to neutral and assimilationist, to openly supportive and accepting (Lindsay et al., 2006).

On one end, some parents perceived their children to have received overtly homophobic and heterosexist messages through encounters and interactions with teachers and aspects of school policies and curricula. For instance, Audrey lamented:

Audrey: ...when initially when we started to realize that she was having problems in school...in grade two...we wanted to get her tested and evaluated, and...it was at that time they discovered we were a lesbian family and they thought that maybe her learning disability was caused by her lesbian parents, so she had to go to a year and a half of counselling to work out the fact that her parents were lesbian...before they would even test her for the learning disability, so after that 18 months then she was sent to another facility...and then once they found out that we were lesbian parents they wanted to make

³ All participant excerpts about schools refer to Canadian schools.

sure that it wasn't something psychological, so they continued to counsel her for another six months before they would test her.

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Goldberg, 2010; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008) a few of these parents spoke to feeling excluded from the school community either through overt attempts by the schools at exclusion or secrecy or through heterosexism in the school curriculum. Both Kyle and Leah related especially harrowing experiences of exclusion from their daughters' schools in rural Alberta and a mid-sized Ontario city, respectively:

Kyle: ...she wanted to make two father's day cards and she was told she was not allowed to...a teacher from the English program...freaked out and she got called to the principals' office and got told she wasn't allowed to talk about me at the school, and my other daughter was told by her grade one teacher that she disagreed with my transition and felt that it was wrong...which...caused a lot of trouble...they asked me not to meet with all the other parents...and if I came to school functions, they wanted me to come after the lights were out and things like that...all of my daughter's class boycotted her birthday party the year that I tried to organize...

Leah: (daughter)'s school last year I think she did a social studies unit and it was on families...and I was like so...did they talk about gay families? Nothing, they didn't even talk about divorced families...and when she brings home even the forms from schools I'm like scratching things out and writing (partner)'s name in there...it's very heterosexist ...how it's played out on the posters on the walls and the forms that they give out and they're just socialized to...not even think about anything else as an option and that to me is just infuriating.

On the other end, some parents reported positive opinions of their children's school administration, environment, and curricula regarding their understanding and support of LGBTQ issues and their policies against discrimination based on sexual orientation. For example, Nathan who lived in Nova Scotia with his children, explained:

Nathan: ...in the schools, a lot of...gay groups now and...the...gay coalition...they send people to the schools to do...talks...schools here are all public...there's no Catholic schools....no private schools...so everything is well out there and talked about...my daughter's friend, who's...graduating this year...they did up a book about...two male penguins...and an egg...and they're talking about doing it for the primaries.

A third set of parents reported having very few, minor issues with their children's schools, even when schools were not overtly supportive of or knowledgeable about LGBTQ issues and diversity. For example, Alyssa stated:

Alyssa: ...my partner and I we go to school as parents, not as lesbians...we...do...the um, parent-teacher thing...and at the beginning of the year we identify each other as both (daughter)'s parents and (son)'s and...only once through these...13 years have we ever had trouble. But in fact the teacher that was having trouble with us turned out to be a wonderful mentor to both my kids.

Regarding messages about gender from schools many parents described these messages as being mostly stereotypical and normative and, in some cases, overtly oppressive. Parents with children who had recently entered pre-school at the time of the interviews spoke to seeing their children's notions about gender change from being flexible to becoming more gender normative and restrictive upon entry to school institutions:

Donna: ...he didn't really say much about gender roles until he was in school...and then he talked about girls having long hair and boys having short hair, and wearing pink and blue.

Nicole: I think the big message she's brought home is...Barbie and princesses, and...pink is what girls are interested in, and what girls play with...boys...blue and sports and cars and trucks...that's been from school for sure...I have seen a dramatic impact on her...in... the last year...

As previous research has suggested the ways in which parents decide to respond to the homophobic and heterosexist encounters and messages from their children's schools depends on a number of factors only some of which include parents' level of outness in their communities, the nature of the situation, and how responses might affect children's feelings of safety (Chabot & Ames, 2004; Gartrell et al., 2000; Goldberg, 2010). Some parents, such as Nicole, reported feeling comfortable and safe enough to address issues of homophobia or heterosexism directly with schools and teachers and to even make attempts to "queer the school". Nicole was the only parent in the sample to talk about making "a point" of being open about her sexuality and her

daughter's family structure at the school. However, Nicole also acknowledged the position of economic and social privilege that allowed her and her family to be out in their community and at their daughter's school, and to feel empowered in taking steps to combat issues such as homophobia, heterosexism, and gender-stereotyping with her daughter's school. This also provides a context for other experiences of Nicole's in which she described parenting her daughter in more openly progressive and feminist ways:

Nicole: ...I just want to acknowledge that ...the way that (partner) and I raise our kids ...is...imbued with a lot of privilege, and the reason we can parent the way we do is because we feel a lot of safety in the place that we live in...we know [daughter's]...in a place of relative safety...and...because we have a very loving and caring and large family that is very supportive...we know lots of people have our back...and also economic privilege...(partner) and I are both professionals with university education...there's almost a class privilege in that we...have the right and...we're entitled to demand particular things of (daughter)'s schooling and have particular expectations of her teacher.

Nicole's experience is quite consistent with past research suggesting that families with more educational, social, and economic privilege are more able to seek out schools and communities that are politically progressive and diverse (Goldberg, 2010), and that younger, lesbian mothers with younger children who were born/adopted into the relationship are more likely to attempt to shape their children's school environments into being more accepting and supportive by talking directly to teachers about their family structure and suggesting ways to integrate awareness of diversity into classroom curricula (Lindsay et al., 2006).

Other parents in the study also described confronting teachers and schools about homophobic and heterosexist messages that were being conveyed to their children, but having much more difficulty in doing so than parents like Nicole because of schools/teachers not being responsive, or open-minded. Audrey's account reflected the difficulties she experienced in having to constantly address issues with and "educate" teachers/schools. Her experience of the teacher's

reaction is consistent with previous research that has found that teachers often confuse issues of sexual orientation with sexual behaviour, thinking that talking about gay-/lesbian-parented families and talking about homophobia means talking about private sexual behaviours (Ryan & Martin, 2000):

Audrey: ...I wish I could get the schools to...realize that gay and lesbian people have kids and that those kids and those parents are just like every other kid and parent...I mean I found that...I've had to teach parents...I've had to teach teachers...principals...and it wears you out...I remember in grade three...a bunch of girls...surrounded a boy on the playground and pushed him down and were calling him gay and this was very disturbing to (daughter) and...she...found it very upsetting and I talked to the teacher about it, but she's a very religious woman and she did not want to talk about sex with...a grade three class...and...I just said to her...but this is bullying...and they need to know that this is not appropriate...she didn't have an answer but she never dealt with it either.

Media. Aspects of the media - television and popular magazines, in particular - were also perceived by parents as being a significant socializing force of children's understandings and expressions of gender and sexuality. For the most part, parents viewed these types of media as promoting mainly gender stereotypical and heteronormative messages to children. Regarding images of non-heterosexuality, many parents spoke about the fact that there are more LGBTQ models on television today than ever before, but some of these parents lamented the "void" in the media of representation of positive models of gay-/lesbian-parented families:

Victoria:...it's like finding a needle in a haystack...we don't exist...and that's the crime of it...to live in a family...and not see yourself reflected anywhere and the images and messages that you do get about yourself and your family are ones about condemnation, damnation.

Many parents also felt that, even though television has improved in the number of LGBTQ models that are portrayed on-screen, LGBTQ peoples are still often depicted in stereotypical and limited ways on television and are often targeted objects of negative humour. Parental accounts of stereotypical images of, especially, gay men in the media mostly involved references to the

television show *Will & Grace*. Aidan gave a particularly scathing opinion of the messages that he thought this and other “queer” television series have communicated about the lives of gay men:

Aidan: ...I have a huge problem with the ways that gays and lesbians are portrayed in the media. I think it's absolutely appalling...I hate shows like *The L Word* or *Queer as Folk* because they always portray it as...life is one big disco ball, glitter- caped, high-heeled party doing drugs...every gay character on TV is kind of the butt of every joke...or he walks funny, or he talks about boys and says, "oh, girl" and goes shopping with his girlfriend and is in debt...you don't hear about people like myself who is a single dad who works nine to five, who doesn't go and do circuit parties and drinks and has multiple boyfriends and cheats.

A handful of parents with adolescent daughters expressed concerns about messages about body image communicated to girls through television shows, advertisements, and magazines and these parents reported talking to their daughters about this issue. Some of these parents did not “see a lot that needs to be re-corrected on the boy side” (Abigail) meaning that they did not perceive similar harmful messages about body image and masculinity being communicated to young boys. Only one mother, Victoria, spoke about the impact of media representations of masculinity on her son, but did not report talking to her son about it. Although parents often critiqued the messages that girls received from the media about their bodies and femininity and reported talking to daughters about this, no parents recognized that boys were also receiving similar messages about female body image from the media, and thus no parents reported talking to their sons about the expectations that such images/messages may convey to boys/men about women’s bodies and femininity.

Despite the predominance of parental accounts critiquing the media for its negative influence on children’s notions about gender and sexual orientation, a handful of parents saw the media as having a more positive influence on children in terms of raising awareness of the existence and lives of LGBTQ peoples:

Dan: I think they pick up positive messages, I think they pick up that it's ok to be who you are. They enjoy watching the show Will and Grace with me...and when there's anything in the news about...gay rights...I talk to them about...what it means and how things have changed.

Additionally, some parents described their children as not being easily influenced by normative media messages because of their ability to critique and see beyond these messages. For instance, Abbey referred to her adolescent daughter as being “very aware of...beauty standards being geared to...male values...” in the media.

A couple of mothers with very young children (in primary families) reported attempting to manage the harmful messages that television, in particular, communicated to children by restricting their children’s television-watching. These mothers spoke especially about the ways in which toys (and thus normative expectations about gender) are marketed to children from a young age through children’s television programming. One mother, Nicole also spoke about not wanting to expose her daughter to the “mainstream...or violent stories that get told” in the media.

Religion/spirituality. All of the accounts of the impact of religious beliefs/institutions were in reference to Judeo-Christian religions, mainly Christianity and to a lesser extent, Judaism. A few parents spoke about their churches/church officials communicating negative messages about same-sex sexuality to children and/or their parents. Some of these parents with adult children described coming out to children as being especially difficult for both the parent and child when such religious influences were strongly internalized by children:

Chloe: ...my...second son...became...a born-again Christian when he was quite young ...and...when I came out to him he had no idea and he was devastated, and our life around our home at that time...(son) was very bad with [partner]...we all went through a really hard time...and...ultimately, he came to me...probably about three years after I had come out to him and he told me that he was going to let God and I figure out our relationship, but he just wanted me to be his mom.

Whereas, no parents related experiences of their children receiving overtly positive messages about same-sex sexuality from religious institutions/officials, some parents described their children as having experiences with religious faiths and institutions that were not openly hostile or negative in their attitudes toward homosexuality. Some of these parents talked about practicing their religious beliefs in a less traditional manner that showed awareness and acceptance of LGBTQ peoples. For them, this may have been a way of negotiating a middle ground between their traditional religious beliefs and their need to feel recognized and validated in their religious traditions and communities. For example, Kyle explained:

Kyle: ...I don't do the traditional Haggadah...I use the humanist one...in traditional Judaism...the Seder plate does not have an orange on it, and...in my tradition we put an orange on the Seder plate to represent that gays and lesbians have a place in Judaism...the humanist Haggadah allows to add...personal...interpretations of it...and we talk about ...different values in Judaism...the concept of social justice and Tikkun Olam...healing the world.

The impact of non-North American cultural beliefs and practices was less often spoken to because there were only a few participants in the sample with such cultural affiliations. Two fathers spoke to thinking that European countries/cultures were more open in their attitudes toward same-sex sexuality. A few mothers identified with Aboriginal, Latin American, and/or Jewish cultures, and spoke of these as being positive influences on their children. For example, Sydney described her desire to raise her son with the cultural traditions and practices of both his mothers' heritages and explained how she saw this as being separate from raising him with religion:

Sydney: ...before he was born...the idea would be that we would raise him Jewish, because I'm Jewish...I am not a practising...religious Jew...I don't even believe in God, but I believe in tradition and...culture...my partner... that's ...very...important for her...her culture and all the traditions...she's grown up with...so...he's exposed from day one to ...Mexican traditions and holidays and celebrations and ideas and the same with Jewish background...we want him to learn about everything, so he can figure it out for himself when he's older...we're not indoctrinating him...but we want that to carry on in him.

Also, Cassandra described the influence of some Aboriginal cultural practices as being positive in their messages to boys about masculinity and femininity:

Cassandra: ...the dress that Native men wear is very elaborate and so...if anything they would be getting a positive message about...masculinity...we've talked [about] (son)'s wanting to grow his hair out this summer to give to cancer, and so we've talked about having long hair as a symbol in Native community as the celebration of the femininity, and that we can braid it and then that's a celebration of...Mother Earth.

Another mother, Abbey, whose daughter was of mixed Caucasian and Black race spoke about the positive impact of Black cultural values on her daughter's gender and sexual orientation expression:

Abbey: ...when she goes to track and field...she meets more Black girls...feminine gender roles for a woman who's Black are different...and I think she is aware of that...if you're more athletic...you're not gonna be like the sporty, dyke, jock. You can get away with it...and if you look at...women...like Jackie Joyner-Kersey who has...long finger nails and a full face of make-up and her hair done in weaves when she goes out for a run...you just don't see that with the White girls...I think there are certain things that are more acceptable in terms of gender roles if your skin's a certain colour...so...being half-Black...she has more flexibility in a sense.

Community/national/provincial/state political and cultural contexts. Nine participants explicitly spoke about the impact of their communities of residence/neighbourhoods on their and their children's ability to be open about their family structure. Some of these parents described their neighbourhoods/communities as open and, at least, not overtly homophobic, relative to other areas of the city, or relative to other cities/towns in the province or country. These consisted mostly of larger cities within Ontario. As Max stated:

Max: I think if it was in another neighbourhood it would be quite a different issue...(Canadian City) has very large gay community...almost everybody...at least knows or has a friend who is gay...so I think there's a lot more openness...I'm talking about middle-class areas and perhaps in other areas of the city it might be a little bit harder for people...

One mother, Sydney, described her urban Ontario neighbourhood/community as being so open, despite being a predominantly “straight” community that she thought her family was almost too easily “assimilated” and her son was not adequately exposed to LGBTQ people/communities:

Sydney: ...I feel...it’s almost like it’s so easy we could almost be assimilated...we live in a very straight community here...it’s been very easy and so...my reaction to that, and my partner’s reaction to that is kinda like whoa....we need to...queer ourselves a little bit more or something...we’ve realized that we...actually need to start looking at...how we can spend more time within the queer community, the queer parenting community....so that (son) sees that more...because his world is pretty straight.

Other parents described their neighbourhoods as being more conservative or closed-off communities in which more blatant acts of homophobia have been a concern. These consisted of mostly smaller or rural Ontario towns with strong religious communities. For example, Victoria, described her son as having been “targeted” by homophobic bullying and violence when he was younger and they lived in a “Mennonite town”. Also, Kyle, one of the fathers in the sample who lives in a small town in Alberta, described the obstacles he faced with his daughters’ school due to homophobic reactions to his sex transition and sexual orientation. This account was presented on p. 115.

Neither of the American participants (Jonathan, Adam) directly referred to the impact of the American political/legal climate (regarding matters of equality for LGBTQ peoples and their families) on their parenting, their families of creation, or their ability to be open about their sexual orientation and family context. Adam, in particular, had a highly positive opinion of his Michigan neighbourhood/community in terms of its class orientation and the friends that his son were exposed to, but went on to explain that his son was not “out” to his friends about his father’s sexual orientation:

Adam: ... he's [son] going to a real special school here...a school that not everyone can get into...we live in a very...exclusive rich area...this is probably...the second richest county... per capita income...in the nation, outside of...Orange county...so he got to know a lot of...friends over the years...

Interviewer: ...And do his friends know about your sexual orientation?

Adam: They do not...he would be embarrassed...

In contrast, Leah, a mother who lived in Ontario with her partner and biological daughter, but who had a step-daughter (her partner's biological daughter) living in a southern American community expressed concerns about the strong racist, sexist, and patriarchal forces she perceived to be evident in this community:

Leah: ...I hate it even more now that I've experienced this southern in (US State)...in such a deep way where it is all about men, and men rule it, and white men. And it's just infuriating to me...they're right in the bible belt and...they have an active Klu Klux Klan, like it's horrible...(partner)'s mom...every other word out of her mouth is 'nigger' and I'm like STOP! And she'll go "I'm not a racist..."...I think we've had it bad enough and like they're the next generation, they need their mind open, not closed. And I think it is happening...like even in the States there's overwhelming support for gay marriage...but there's the pockets of ignorance and just closed-mindedness...

LGBTQ family/friends/communities. A final systemic impact that some parents alluded to was networks of LGBTQ friends/family/community. Some children were described as being exposed to or having close relationships with immediate or extended family members who were gay/lesbian, such as biological mothers (Christopher), donor fathers (Alyssa, Monica, Sydney), aunts (Nicole), or uncles (Victoria). Other children were described as being exposed to the LGBTQ friends of their parents and LGBTQ models in the community through annual Pride events. For example, Donna stated:

Donna: ...he is involved...highly in my community of friends...he doesn't know that that's a political move...for him to make friends with other gay and lesbian couples' children ...so...I am involving him in my politics, but it's sort of a politics of community versus placards and marches, although we're going to have one of those coming up soon too...I'm the president of the local Gay Pride Association, so for our pride week we're going to be doing a march and he'll be there for sure.

What was most striking about parental accounts in this domain was that parents always spoke about the influence of LGBTQ friends, family, and community as being positive because children were perceived to be receiving positive and “different” messages about sexual and gender diversity.

Summary and Conclusions

In general, parents seemed highly cognizant of the messages communicated to children through their engagement with external systems such as peers, school, and the media. This awareness seemed to surpass awareness of their own role in influencing children’s beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality, as discussed in the sections on Provision of Opportunities and Parent-Child Interactions. Parents were highly attuned to the homophobic and heterosexist messages children received particularly from peers and schools. Apart from the media, parents viewed these systems as having the most significant socializing influence on children’s notions and expressions of gender and sexuality. Perhaps, not surprisingly, peers and schools have been the most researched external systems in the literature in their impact on and interactions with lesbian-/gay-parented families. There is currently little research on the positive and negative socializing impact of other external systems such as family members, the media, religion/spirituality, communities of residence, and LGBTQ support networks on children’s (of LGB parents) understandings and expressions of gender and sexuality. In this way, the findings of the present study may be considered both an addition to and an extension of the current body of research in this area.

Many parents in this study expressed a strong willingness and capacity to challenge the homophobic, heterosexist, and gender stereotypical messages that children received from other sources in their lives. Much of this challenging occurred in the form of talking to children about

the inappropriate or biased messages that had been conveyed to them or confronting the sources of these messages when these consisted of schools/teachers. As the research suggests (Goldberg, 2010; Lindsay et al., 2006) parents who were economically and socially privileged, who were out and felt safe in their communities, who had young children born/adopted into the relationship, and who held strong progressive political values seemed especially able to perform this challenging and confrontation. Overall however, parents did not report as much willingness or ability to confront the sources of negative messages when these consisted of other family members, peers, or religious institutions.

Many parents in the study spoke about a need to ensure the safety and well-being of their children. For parents who were less socially privileged, this sometimes meant compromising their own need to be open about their sexuality and family structure, or to confront homophobia/heterosexism in the external world. As a result, there were often situations that arose for parents in which they thought they needed to conform to normative practices around gender and sexuality in order to protect children from possible victimization. For these parents, it did not seem to matter whether victimization was real, perceived or over-estimated. As long as there was even a remote possibility that children could be victimized or stigmatized parents were concerned and eager to do anything possible to protect their children.

E. Other Parental Messages about Gender and Sexual Orientation

Throughout the Results sections thus far, I have described and discussed the contents of messages about gender and sexuality that parents and other systems have communicated to children through various processes of socialization. In this section, I have discussed some of these and other messages in further detail, specifically around two major themes: 1) the ways in which parents constructed and described sexual orientation and gender with children, and 2)

parental perceptions of and practices around the issue of having male/female role models. Each topic has been presented and discussed separately.

Parental constructions of sexual orientation. About half the sample of fathers and a few mothers explicitly endorsed the notion that sexual orientation is biologically determined. Some fathers emphatically rejected the argument that sexual orientation could ever be a preference or a choice claiming to teach their children that gay people are “born that way” (Harry) and that “nobody would obviously...choose to be gay or lesbian” (Nathan). Essentialist constructions of sexual orientation were sometimes used to “normalize” homosexuality, especially in comparison to heterosexuality, and as a basis for arguing against the notion that people (especially LGBTQ people) can “change” their sexual orientation. For example, Brad said:

Brad: We can't change who we are...we can try... but it's as normal for a gay person to be gay as it is for a straight person to be straight...I believe that it's just our genetics and you know we have no way of controlling that.

Additionally, some parents in this sub-group went on to clarify the part of sexual orientation that they considered a choice – that is, the choice to “live” in concordance with or in contradiction to one’s “innate” sexual orientation. As Abigail says:

Abigail: They were wondering why (partner) was gay later in life...and I was gay early in life...I told them very clearly that anyone can behave in any old way...I could behave as heterosexual as anybody if I wanted to, so in that regard, you choose to...live gay...you are what you are, but how you...want to experience the world and how you want to present yourself...that's the choice.

Only a couple of parents spoke to the ways in sexual orientation can be socially constructed, socialized or socially imposed. For instance, Jonathan's description of his experience of being “raised a straight boy” speaks to the ways in which heterosexuality and heteronormative lifestyle is often imposed on individuals from a young age in both direct and indirect ways. One mother, Audrey, described a conversation with her daughter in which she alluded to the possibility of

sexual orientation being, at least in part, socially constructed, but differentiates this from “choice”. In her account, Audrey talks about sexual attraction as having a biological or physiological component but dismisses the importance of knowing or debating the origins of sexual orientation, and instead emphasizes the importance of being “who you are” no matter one’s sexual orientation:

Audrey: I can’t even remember the question now that (daughter) asked, but...it was something about sexual orientation...whether it was like biological or whether you choose it, and...(partner) and I both feel kinda strongly it is who you are...whether it’s...socially constructed somehow or it’s genetic, it doesn’t really matter the experience of it is...that this is who I am, and this is who I have been from a very young age...you don’t choose ...who you get a crush on.

As other researchers have found (e.g., Gabb, 2004a; Mitchell, 1998) some parents’ discussions of the ways in which they educated or communicated messages about sexuality to their children revealed some conventional types of constructions that were governed by the age/developmental level of children. Parents with younger children (pre-school to middle childhood age) tended to frame their teaching about sexual orientation using terms such as *families, love, and/or marriage*. For very young children, such terms (especially *families, two moms, two dads*) were seen as more developmentally appropriate because children were thought to understand these terms better than terms such as *sexual orientation* or *gay* or *lesbian*. For example, Donna and Lucas said:

Donna: ...I approach it like...there's different kinds of families...and I list off various ...types of families, which includes...two dads, two moms, mom and a dad, or grandma and papa.

Lucas: ...we had a little bit of discussion there...when people love each other, they sometimes get married...and...she always understood as a kid that...when people got married it was always either a girl and a boy or a mom and a dad right...I made it very clear to her that...it’s okay for you know, a mom and a mom to love each other and get married, or ...men.

Additionally, there seemed to be a general silence around sexual matters when explaining sexual orientation or sexuality to younger children. Parents were more likely to report talking to their children about sexual matters when children were pre-teens or adolescents, and most parents reported talking to children only about aspects of heterosexual sex. Although, a few parents did describe talking to their children about some aspects of same-sex sexuality, these conversations were generally observed to be around aspects of same-sex sexuality that were the “same as” aspects of sexuality between heterosexual couples. Parents did not generally indicate talking to their children about any “different” aspects of dating, relationships, or sexual behaviours between same-sex partners. For example, Aidan said:

Aidan: ...(daughter 1)...she questions everything...she's like “well, you know, when boys love each other, what do you mean?” “Well, they kiss and they hug, and they'll lay on the couch together and they'll sleep in the same bed, same as any home, mommies and daddies.”

Parental constructions of gender. Research often differentiates between gender identity and gender roles, such that gender identity is seen as a “core” sense of self (and therefore more biologically/cognitively determined), whereas gender role is viewed as the adaptation of socially constructed markers (clothing, mannerism, behaviors) typically defined as masculine or feminine (Diamond, 2002; Lev, 2010; Newman, 2000). Parental accounts in the present study were largely consistent with this differential view of gender identity and gender roles. Many parents in the sample endorsed essentialist constructions of gender identity and saw gender roles as being socially constructed and/or socialized. Interestingly, however, unlike Lev’s (2010) distinction, many parents seemed to view children’s preferences for particular clothing and toys as being more reflective of an “innate” gender identity than of socially constructed or socialized gender expressions. In general, when discussing the notion of gender roles as being socially constructed or influenced, parents tended to refer only to domestic labour and career roles.

Gender identity. Many parents constructed their children's gender identity as being a "natural" reflection of their biological/natal sex, and explained their children's gender normative interests in toys, clothing, bedroom decor, and recreational activities as manifestations of an "innately determined" gender identity. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have found groups of gay fathers, lesbian mothers, and heterosexual parents to invoke biology when explaining children's gendered interests and to see children's normative performances of gender as a natural unfolding of innate sex differences (e.g., Kane, 2006; Messner, 2000). Essentialist constructions of gender identity were especially prominent in the accounts of parents who perceived a strong concordance between their child's biological sex and outward gender expressions. These parents constructed their children's gender using terms such as "real", and "typical":

Liam: ...the boys are real boys...they played hockey all their life, from when they were very little...they loved to play outside in the dirt, the rougher the better...they're definitely boy's boys, they're rough and tough.

Simone: (son) was not really into playing with the girls' stuff, he was definitely an all boy.

The implication of seeing gender identity as biologically based and seeing toys, clothing, and activities as reflective of an innate gender identity was that children's gender orientations and expressions were sometimes seen as unchangeable. This was most evident in the descriptions of parents who reported attempting to encourage gender neutral play for their sons and being "unsuccessful":

Monica: ...the first one being a boy, and then we were pregnant for (daughter), and we're trying to teach him about what it would be like to have a baby, so we got him a doll, and we tried to do all that stuff...to prepare him. He was a typical boy, he didn't hold the doll and cuddle the doll...he banged it around, put it in with his soldier and his trucks and there was no girlifying him, seriously...it didn't work.

Sydney: ...we've bent over backwards to like have everything really gender neutral in his first year...we just let him be who he was and he always gravitated towards the trucks or the mud or the dirt or the shovels or the...the very sort of male identified things.

As their accounts suggest, these parents constructed their experiences as a sign of some innate inclination in their sons toward masculine interests. In fact, essentialist constructions seemed to be more heavily emphasized in the cases of sons' gender normative interests than in the cases of daughters' gender normative interests. It was almost as if a tendency toward masculine expressions for boys (or a tendency to be less flexible in gendered expressions) was viewed as being more biologically innate than a tendency toward feminine expressions for girls. Thus, girls were constructed as being more willing recipients of gender neutral socialization than boys. The idea that masculine identity/expressions may be more innately fixed in or determined by biology (and thus more resistant to change) than feminine identity/expressions may be a societal notion necessary for preserving and perpetuating hegemonic masculinity, and may explain why boys experience more pressure than girls to conform to normative gender expressions (Bos & Sandfort, 2010; Egan & Perry, 2001).

Interestingly, just as some parents used essentialist constructions to explain the "naturalness" of a concordance between biological sex and gender identity, other parents used essentialist constructions to explain the "abnormality" of discordance between biological/natal sex and gender identity. For instance, Kyle related his experience of explaining to his daughter his reason for undergoing sexual re-assignment surgery:

Kyle: ... when she was five I said "well, my brain is the same brain as a boy, but my body doesn't match my brain, so I'm just going to have surgery to make my body match my brain".

Moreover, just as some parents used essentialist constructions to explain their children's gender normative interests, other parents used essentialist constructions to downplay the impact

of gender on children's preferences for toys and activities. This seemed to especially emerge in cases where parents had two children of the same gender with very different gendered orientations (that is, one being more gender normative and the other being more gender variant). These parents were likely to attribute interests to personality rather than gender, thereby perhaps overlooking the possibility of personality and gender as being interrelated. Moreover, their accounts seemed to indicate an implicit assumption of personality as being (only) innately determined, thereby downplaying the impact that parental and societal socialization have on children's personalities. For example, Cassandra said about her sons:

Cassandra: ...I think each one of them is unique...(eldest son) is very artsy-fartsy...he really wants to go to tap-dancing lessons...he's done theatre and music stuff...at the end of the day I would anticipate that he might like sort of more female-oriented things...but then (youngest son) at three and a half is...this little football player...tough, rough little powerhouse...I think over time it will change, but I don't relate that to their gender, I just relate that to individual beings.

Although, when asked, many parents indicated that they would not have a problem if their children expressed a desire to be another gender/sex, most parents did not report overtly communicating to children that children had choices regarding how they performed or identified their gender, particularly in the case of sons and regarding certain aspects of gender expression such as dress/clothing. Only one mother in the sample, Nicole, reported communicating a message of "choice" to her daughter, and in this sense did not endorse essentialist or normative constructions of gender identity:

Nicole: My mom was a bit horrified one day, she had this conversation with (daughter) and she said to her if she wanted to be a boy one day that she'd be able to get a penis ...and I actually felt pretty proud of (daughter) because she was just telling my mom ...that people can make choices...about their gender...and about their sex...and about their sexuality in some way...lots of moments in her life where she said I want to be a boy, or I am a boy...and we'd say- "that's great, and it's your choice".

Gender roles. Whereas many parents tended to see gender identity as a biologically determined and largely unchangeable construct, they viewed gender roles as being socially constructed and socialized, and therefore having the capacity to be unlearned or changed. In fact, whereas the relatedness of biological sex and gender identity was seen as natural or typical by many parents, the idea that a person's biological sex determined or "had to be" in concordance with the gender roles society expected of them was viewed by some of these same parents (and others) as limiting, oppressive, and out-dated:

Aidan: ...I think it's kind of old-hat...I want my kids to...think a little bit more...not you can't do this because you're a girl, or you have to do this because you're a boy...I hope that we're getting past that...I don't see it changing much, but that doesn't mean that I can't...thrust change into their personal lives...all I can do is positively reinforce what they are doing and...maybe just let them know that...just because you're a girl doesn't mean that you have to stay home and do laundry and sort socks and hem.

Jane: ...I was very conscious and uncomfortable of being forced into a gender role when I was a kid, so I very consciously tried not to do that with my kids.

Connections between gender and sexual orientation. There is much debate in the psychological literature as to whether the constructs of gender and sexuality are connected (e.g., Gottschalk, 2003). Popular societal notions about these constructs certainly do often suggest a strong connection between the two and this belief was largely reflected in the present study. Many participants implicitly and/or explicitly endorsed stereotypical connections between gender and sexual orientation - the idea that normative gender expression is linked to heterosexuality and that atypical/variant gender expression is linked to homosexuality - when discussing their own gender and sexual identities and those of their children. Moreover, some parents reported communicating this message to their children in both direct and indirect ways. Previous researchers (e.g., Kane, 2006; Martin, 2005) have also observed similar findings for both gay/lesbian and heterosexual parents, suggesting that such constructions of gender and

sexuality are built on essentialist assumptions and are often conveyed to children from an early age forming part of their larger sexual socialization (Martin & Luke, 2010).

Over half the sample of fathers, in particular, explicitly and implicitly endorsed stereotypical connections between gender expression and sexual orientation with respect to their own identities:

Kyle: ... my girls pretty much just figured that I liked boys and I had sat down and explain that to them, that gender and sexual orientation aren't separate things.

Nathan: ...I don't consider myself to be feminine by any means but...like the gay man...a little bit of feminine qualities at times...I work with mostly women in my profession...we just carry on a lot...I'm not big into sports but...I like...Royal Doultons and...I like ...artwork.

One mother in the sample, Sydney, also drew connections between her own gender expression and sexuality in talking about her experience of coming out and entering a lesbian relationship. Interestingly, however, Sydney seems to contradict stereotypical connections between gender expression and sexual orientation for lesbians, and in this sense, she may be seen as questioning not only the issue of “whether” gender and sexuality are related identities, but perhaps more importantly, “how” these identities may or may not be related and how these relationships might present differently across individuals. Sydney says:

Sydney: ...I was very much...just a tomboy....and then when I came out...I felt like my identity changed....I just switched and...the way I presented myself to the world was much less as a tomboy....it was all about makeup and...exploring with dresses and femininity...there was something incredibly liberating about it...it was like this thing I had been looking for....for twenty four, five years...my partner she's ...more of...what you would call a butchy kind of girl...so I don't know if that had something to do with me....going the other way and becoming...more feminine in my appearance.

Some parents also described how the lack of a stereotypical connection between their gender expression and sexual identity was sometimes experienced as negative if they were often assumed to be heterosexual:

Max: ...but I have to say there are certainly very strong ways in which...people would say I'm probably a very heterosexual male...in my look, in my dress, in my walk...and know this has come as a surprise to a number of people...who I tell I'm actually gay and in a gay relationship...there must be something that I'm sort of, either consciously or unconsciously trained at one level...that sort of allows people to fit me into the male heterosexual role.

Samantha: ...I always get pegged as the straight one...it's funny cause I'm like, what do I have to do, do I have to cut my hair?...it kind of bothers me.

Many parents also endorsed stereotypical connections between gender expression and sexual orientation in reference to their perceptions of their children's sexual orientation. Tina endorsed this view explicitly when she said about her pre-school aged daughter, "somehow I think she's straight...cause she's such a girly girl...I guess gender and sexual identity can kinda....map onto each other". Other parents endorsed these stereotypical connections when describing their experiences of questioning their children's sexual orientation in the context of children's gender atypical interests/behaviours. In some of these cases, parents talked about the child having a same gender sibling with gender normative interests, whose sexual orientation was assumed to be heterosexual, and who seemed to be used as a comparison point for discerning or questioning the sexual orientation of the child with the more gender atypical interests/behaviours:

Aidan: ...sometimes I think that maybe she [daughter 1] is a lesbian...there's just...too many things that have kind of tweaked it for me...the no make-up, and don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to generalize...like (daughter 2) is such a girl, like where (daughter 1) is just like "I'm going to wear jeans, t-shirt, I'm going to wear what I like" like screw you all attitude...she is in tune with herself...she doesn't like...dresses and boys.

Some parents, such as Christopher, also endorsed stereotypical connections between gender and sexuality when they made comparisons between their own gender and sexual identities and those of their children. Interestingly, in these cases, the closer the child was to the parent in degree and kind of gender variance the more they were thought of as possibly being gay or lesbian:

Christopher: ...I certainly have thought about whether [eldest son]'s going to turn out to be gay or not...he looks like me, and in terms of the one to ten masculine feminine thing, I would say he's pretty much close...if I'm a six and a half, he's a six point six, kind of thing... he's a little bit more of a boy than I ever was, but not a lot.

Interestingly however, very few parents questioned the gender identities of their children based on gender variant interests. The ones who had, at one time or another, were parents of children who were seen as more frequently gender atypical across a wide variety of contexts, and/or who were seen as being more atypical in aspects of their biology than other children, such as Audrey's daughter.

Summary and conclusions. The tendency of many parents in the sample to endorse essentialist explanations of sexual orientation and gender identity, and to view these as interrelated identities was not surprising given the popularity of essentialist constructions of sexuality and gender in society. Societal and scientific bias toward essentialism is rooted in the belief that what is biological/genetic/physiological is “natural” and therefore such explanations are used to determine what is “normal” and morally appropriate behaviour in society. Interestingly, although some have argued that essentialist explanations of sexual orientation, homosexuality in particular, have contributed to the pathologization of same-sex sexuality and gender non-conformity (Gottschalk, 2003; Kitzinger, 1987) such explanations are popularly used by LGBTQ people in an attempt to have homosexuality be seen as “normal” as heterosexuality. However, some such as Kitzinger (1987) have critiqued the use of essentialist constructions to normalize homosexuality especially relative to heterosexuality, because it denies differences between heterosexual and lesbian/gay peoples, and as such promotes an assimilationist agenda, which is considered to benefit gay men more than lesbians (because they are assimilating into a largely male-dominated/patriarchal culture). This may explain why more gay fathers than lesbian mothers in the present study seemed to explicitly endorse essentialist constructions of sexual

orientation. The major implication of parents viewing their children's gender identities and expressions as being internally or biologically determined was that they downplayed the impact of their own socializing role and, consistent with theoretical work and previous research (e.g., Kane, 2006; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1999; Messner, 2000; Rhode, 1997) did not often recognize the socially constructed origins of identities and concepts related to gender.

Necessity of and exposure to gendered role models. No parent in the sample expressed the view that it was important or necessary for their children to have models of both female and male *live-in* caregivers. However, consistent with what has been found in previous research (e.g., Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005; Folgero, 2008; Goldberg & Allen, 2007; Lewin, 1993), many parents (slightly over half the sample of mothers, and one father) extolled what they saw as the benefits of children being exposed to and having social relationships with both men and women in their lives.

Some mothers explained that through having contact with both men and women, children gained a "better balanced picture of what humanity is and the types of people...that are out there" (Donna). Mothers, such as Chloe, also endorsed the importance of having children be exposed to people who modelled other forms of gender and sexual diversity:

Chloe: ...in my estimation my kids needed...to see straight women, they needed to see straight men, gay women, gay men. And so we...have a lot of men friends...that are partnered with women, some are partnered with men...both of my brothers are awesome ...we never had any trans people in our lives until recently.

This reason for wanting to expose children to human diversity is consistent with reasons given by lesbian mothers in previous studies as well (e.g., Goldberg & Allen, 2007). Folgero (2008) suggests that such views might be based on essentialist assumptions that men and women are inherently different and thus, it is important for children to experience this fundamental difference if they are going to develop as healthy individuals.

Some mothers with daughters saw their daughters as benefitting from having positive relationships with adult men because “women need men in their life just to learn about what it's like for men and women to relate...whether they're going to be straight or not” (Monica), and because “it's important for her sense of self...to get positive attention from men” (Tina). Abbey saw her daughter's lack of an “intimate” relationship with an adult male figure as contributing to an unrealistic view of men, which Abbey thought might be harmful for her daughter if she were to have romantic relationships with men in the future:

Abbey: ...I think the one thing that I worry about is...because there's not...men that play a daily role in her life, in terms of intimate family relationships...I don't want her to romanticize what she doesn't know about men...I think the images that she gets of men are like watching like Gossip Girls...like these beautiful boys...and they're glamorous and ...we raise girls to think the knight in shining armour rides in on the horse and...I don't want her idealizing them and thinking that they're these mannequins that don't burp and fart...just because they've been absent.

A few other mothers with sons, who had close male figures in their lives, saw their sons as benefitting from having relationships with adult male figures (especially father figures), because these male figures could teach sons about aspects of male sexuality, masculine health/hygiene issues, and masculine play (e.g., rough and tumble play) that mothers thought they could not teach. These accounts are consistent with previous studies in which lesbian mothers have sometimes expressed a desire for their children (mainly sons) to be involved with adult male figures for modeling of practical and stereotypical behaviours (e.g., Goldberg & Allen, 2007):

Gabrielle: ...I asked my dad, I said look, (ex-husband) doesn't want to do this...can you show (son) how...and my Dad had an electric razor because he was paraplegic so he couldn't get up at the sink and shave, and my Dad...took (son) in the bathroom and showed him how to use the foam...I take for granted that the girls have me...for shaving their legs or...talking about their periods...but boys...they deserve to have their father tell them this stuff...I think...it's awkward enough talking to your kids about sex, but when you're crossing genders too...I'm sure that there might have been questions that my son might have asked my ex-husband that he would refuse to talk to about with me.

Samantha: ...I do think it's necessary...to have that male role in their life...their dad gives them that for the most part... but I've got...a few...male friends...and... the boys just absorb...their attention...I've got one that'll come over that'll wrestle in the middle of the front lawn, or one that'll play catch with them...I think that if they didn't have that male role in their life...they would [be] confused...they would only know how females act ...there's just certain things...I feel that I couldn't give to my kids that maybe my husband can.

What was striking about the accounts of these mothers was that, in addition to seeing men as being able to provide boys with knowledge about masculinity, these women seemed to devalue or downplay the importance of their own knowledge and ability to contribute to their sons' "masculine" development. These findings are especially interesting when contrasted with the fact that none of the fathers in the sample claimed that their daughters needed female figures in order to learn how to be girls/women or how to do "feminine" activities. In fact, some fathers in the sample communicated feelings of pride in being able to have open conversations with their daughters about matters such as menstruation, dating, sex, and pregnancy.

Another group of parents entirely dismissed the belief that it was necessary for children to have gendered role models at all. These parents were likely to downplay the gender of the model, and instead emphasize the importance of "good people role models" (Jonathan). As Harry said, "...as long as you're a good parent, it really shouldn't make any difference". These parents more overtly challenged the notions on which arguments for the necessity of gendered role models are constructed, such as that only men can do masculinity and only women can do femininity, and that gendered role modelling is important or necessary at all. These parents also went a step further to describe what they saw as the benefits of children having same-sex parents, mainly that children do not see rigid gender divisions and therefore do not perpetuate normative and stereotypical gender roles. For instance, Nicole and Leah asserted:

Nicole: ...personally I think it's ridiculous, I don't think that kids need male or female role models...I think that lesbians are perfectly equipped to raise sons and I think gay men

are perfectly equipped to raise daughters...I know...lesbians in my community who have boys...who...feel more aware of the fact that they're women raising sons, but...that hasn't been my experience. I have two daughters so I actually feel...really...fantastic about the fact that as girls they're being raised with such an open and unrestricted idea...of girlhood and of womanhood.

Leah: ...I think...in a gay or lesbian household those gender roles are less defined...I don't think it's a bad thing to not have such a divide there...and have the kids see you do both sides of everything...I really don't buy into that whole society divide of a man should do this and a woman should do that...I think that would happen if we had a boy too...it's not about learning to be a man or a woman, it's about learning to be who you are.

It should be noted that the parents who endorsed these beliefs only spoke about the idea of having two genders represented *in the home*. They did not explicitly speak out against the idea of children being exposed to male and female models in their extended/blended families or in society, and so it cannot be assumed they opposed this part of the idea. Nevertheless, one might think, based on how strongly they opposed the general notion of children having gendered role models, that they would similarly challenge the idea that children “need” to be exposed to both men and women at all.

Interestingly, although both Nicole and Leah had only daughters, they alluded to the pressures that mainstream society often imposes on lesbian mothers with sons to provide a male model for sons. Cassandra’s experience of raising her sons with her female partner and without a “father figure” spoke clearly to this familial and societal pressure, and to her belief that the notion of “having” to provide a male role model for her sons just because of the gender modelling factor without consideration of the “quality” of the male model could possibly be harmful to her sons:

Cassandra: [my mother] still makes stupid comments...it would be advantageous for the boys if they had more...contact with a man, so that they could have good role models ...and then we have to remind her...just having a man doesn't make for good parenting ...lots of men abuse their children...I think that men...certainly can contribute to the growth of young men, but...we don't need to sign them up to...have a male role model

...they see my father...and...they've got lots of uncles...there is no right way to be a man, there's lots of different ways.

The fact that Cassandra asserted not actively seeking out male role models or father figures for her children, but then went on to discuss the male relatives who were involved in her sons' lives (without discussion of the quality of these male figures) is consistent with the accounts of many other parents in this study, as well as with the findings of previous research (e.g., Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005; Goldberg & Allen, 2007). A number of parents in the sample responded to the notion of children needing gendered role modelling by discussing their actual family context rather than responding to it as a theoretical notion. Thus, these parents dismissed the idea of *their* children needing to have both male and female adult models *in the home* because their children were already exposed to men and women through their blended and extended family networks and through their interactions with the larger society. These were parents who were likely to say that it “was never an issue” (Christine) or that “it was never something [they] had to think about much” (Jane), and so they never actively attempted to seek out other gender models for their children. As Kyle said:

Kyle: ...I think that they...certainly can be exposed to...opposite or same-gender role models, without having those in the home...they see it on TV and pretty much everywhere else they get that...my friend, who (daughter) has confided in about her interest in this girl and whatever else...is a really strong queer woman... and so, in that sense...(daughter) does have other female role-models...she has her grandmothers...we don't live in a plastic bubble.

Although these parents challenged the notion that children needed both female and male models in the home, unlike the group of parents just discussed (Nicole, Jonathan, Leah, Harry), they did not respond to the theoretical notion, and thus did not challenge the idea that children need gendered role models at all. In this sense, these parental accounts are consistent with other studies that have found some lesbian mothers to emphasize the presence of men in the extended

family or in society (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005; Goldberg & Allen, 2007) instead of actively challenging the notion that gendered role models are necessary for children at all (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005). The present study's findings that some gay fathers do this as well, with respect to female figures, may add to this body of literature.

A few mothers expressed conflicted/ambivalent/contradictory attitudes about the "necessity" of gendered role models for children. These mothers could be placed between the two groups of parents discussed above on the continuum of attitudes about the necessity for gendered role models. These were mothers who were likely to sometimes assert that the gender of the model per se did not matter but who, at other times, also spoke to the importance of having male models for their children:

Grace: ...I think that I wasn't necessarily...a credible role model...because he was a ...young man growing, and I was all about...no violence and...I don't have a penis, and I didn't have his feelings in his male body...on the one hand...I think for the most part, responsible adults are what you need to be...but...for the...credibility of the...role model ...being in a male body...experiencing all those...sensations and all the emotions that...come from that ...I don't know.

Elizabeth: ...I'm not even sure I consciously did it...but...looking back now I can see that on some level I was aware that I had to create these father and daughter moments ...that brought the two of them together...I think...if a child doesn't...see either parent being active in a relationship, whether it's mother or father, it's not good because...it can influence how they respond in their future relationships.

Furthermore, there were some parents in the study who, when lauding the importance of their children having connections with men, talked about the importance of "father" involvement. Most of these parents were mothers who had children in the context of previous heterosexual relationships and whose accounts have already been presented and discussed (see Gabrielle, Monica, Donna, Samantha, Elizabeth). One of these parents was Sydney, who had her son with a known and involved donor, and another of these parents was Dan, who asserted the belief that

“kids are going to be damaged...without their fathers”. Therefore, all the children of these parents had relationships with their biological fathers.

These findings are quite consistent with previous research suggesting that lesbian mothers tend to use the word “father” more in contexts where they have had children with known donors, and want these donors to have “father-like” relationships with their children (Goldberg, 2010), and where they have had children in previous heterosexual relationships and express a need to maintain children’s involvement with their fathers (Goldberg, 2010; Kirkpatrick et al., 1981; Lewin, 1993). These findings may also be seen as consistent with previous research that has found that some lesbian/gay parents believed that children’s social development is compromised when they do not have close contact with a father figure (Folgero, 2008).

Sydney conveyed the importance of her son having a “dad” who presents an alternative image of masculinity. Her account is also consistent with previous research findings that some lesbian mothers identify heterosexual and gay men with whom they want their children to be involved in order to get what they perceive as a “balanced” picture of masculinity (e.g., Goldberg & Allen, 2007). Goldberg and Allen (2007) have suggested that such views may reflect a true valuing of diversity, as well as the conflicts that many lesbian mothers, in particular, “face in trying to create families that will not be targeted with criticism, while also honouring their own values and ideals” (p. 362):

Sydney: ... [son’s] own Dad is a strong role model... because he’s gay, just in terms of that whole, gay male, straight male thing...I see him struggle a little bit with it...his own insecurities of how can I be a father to this kid when all he wants to do is just dig in the mud...I am very aware of that male thing...I think it has to do with the fact that he has two moms...a Dad on the periphery and I just...want to make sure that we are balancing that for him.

Dan, the one father in the group of parents discussed above, explained that he had changed his view about the need for his children to have a relationship with a female figure, because “having

seen my kids...they seem to really crave the attention of both...there's times the girls just really want to be with me...and just other times that it has to be their mother". What is interesting about Dan's account is that he begins by talking about both his daughters and son as "crav[ing] the attention of" their mother and father, but then proceeds to talk only about his daughters expressing a need for their mother.

This account points to some interesting patterns of silences and variations in the findings around the issue of gendered role models. First, Dan was the only father in the sample to have exalted the importance of daughters having female models/figures in their lives (and as he explained he did not believe in this prior to having children). Second, many of the accounts already presented and discussed in this section suggest that whereas some parents talked about the benefits of daughters having male and female models, many parents talked about the benefits of sons having only male models. Leah was the only mother (of two daughters) to have indirectly alluded to any benefits for sons of having close relationships with adult female figures, when following her account on p. 140, she went on to say that boys raised in female-dominated households "are way more...emotional and respectful of women..."

On the contrary, a couple of mothers in the study seemed to communicate that it was "problematic" for sons/boys to be "always surrounded by women" (Alyssa). For example, Abigail asserts:

Abigail: ...I often say (youngest son) [is] trapped in estrogen world...because now (eldest son)'s not there...so the only poor small boy in the whole house.

The general silence around sons' relationships with female figures/role models may be explained by the fact that all sons had relationships with their mothers. Therefore, participants may not have seen it as necessary to talk about the benefits that adult female models could bring to sons because these relationships and benefits were assumed to be already present. The fact that

all daughters also had mothers might also explain why only a couple of parents asserted the benefits of daughters having relationships with mothers/female models. However, societal bias may also be implicated in these findings, specifically the tendency of society to construct male status as being more important than female status (Connell, 1995); to see boys as needing fathers/men (mainly heterosexual) to shape their masculinity, thus maintaining hegemonic constructions of masculinity (Kane, 2006; Martin, 2009); and to see mothers as a negative, “emasculating” presence in their sons’ lives (Silverstein & Raushbaum, 1994). These biases imply that the qualities that mothers/female figures bring to their relationships with children (especially sons) are not as “important” and even problematic relative to the qualities that fathers/male figures bring to their children (especially sons). This might thus explain why some mothers in the sample devalued their own abilities to teach their sons about their maleness/masculinity and other mothers considered it unfortunate for boys to be constantly in the presence of women without men.

The greater importance of male status over female status in society may also explain why, as other researchers have also found (e.g., Folgero, 2008), participants in this study constructed men as having the potential to be “fathers” and/or “male role models” whereas female models were constructed only as “mothers”. It was as if women were not seen as being able to teach the things that men could teach to children, especially boys, and that they were only capable of caregiving. Folgero (2008) found a similar pattern in his study and suggested that because “fathers are looked upon as ‘role models’ and mothers simply were mothers ...informants did not consider it necessary to argue that mothers are needed to ensure that children have ‘female role models’” and that “for this reason, there are plenty of discussions of fatherhood in the interviews while the gender specificity of being a mother was either absent or implicit...” (p. 136).

Summary and conclusions. In general, the range of views on the necessity of gendered role models for children were consistent with the findings of previous research (e.g., Bozett, 1987; Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005; Folgero, 2008; Goldberg & Allen, 2007; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Lewin, 1993). The finding that more mothers than fathers endorsed the importance of having gendered models for children (10% of fathers and 48% of mothers who responded to the question) might be explained by the fact that lesbian mothers experience greater pressure from society than gay fathers to provide other gender models for their children (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005; Goldberg & Allen, 2007; Lewin, 2003). Indeed, some mothers in the current study spoke explicitly about this societal pressure (e.g. Abigail, Cassandra). The finding that most fathers, when asked about the issue of gendered role modelling either strongly criticized the notion or claimed that “it was never an issue” because children had mothers, grandmothers, or aunts, has not been spoken about in the literature on gay fathers to date. This finding points to an important difference within samples of gay fathers that must be taken into consideration. In the current study, all gay fathers had their children in the context of previous heterosexual relationships. In situations where gay fathers have children in planned families through adoption or surrogate parenting concerns about providing female models/figures may be more prominent and more explicitly considered by fathers or society.

F. Strengths/Resiliencies of Lesbian/Gay Parenting

In this section, I discussed the general and specific ways in which the LGB parents in this study were perceived to show strengths and resiliencies in their parenting of children around issues of gender and sexuality, and how some of these strengths might position them and their families as models for challenging normative constructions of parenting/family, gender, and sexuality. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Bos et al., 2003, 2007; Bozett, 1987;

Golombok et al., 2003; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Turner et al., 1990) all the mothers and fathers in this study reported being highly committed to their parenting, and the majority of parents described having close, warm, positive relationships with their children, despite occurrences and periods of family conflict.

Additionally, consistent with previous studies (e.g., Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Bozett, 1987; Gabb, 2004a; Golding, 2006) the majority of mothers and fathers in the sample regarded themselves as open-minded and liberal in their views of parenting as reflected through their emphases on respecting the personal choices/interests of children, valuing openness in communication about sexuality and gender, and willingness to teach acceptance and appreciation of human diversity. Some parents constructed this openness in their parenting, especially with respect to human diversity, as a result of the struggles they faced as lesbian/gay individuals and parents living in a predominantly heterosexist culture. For example, Simone said:

Simone: ...I think there's a level of tolerance that same-sex couples teach their children ...because of what we face in society...because we are not tolerated, we want to teach tolerance to our children...so I think...that's the difference that a lot of heterosexual couples don't have.

Open communication about issues of gender and sexuality was described as particularly important by many parents, despite the fact that such communications were often found to be governed by conventional norms of parenting and age-appropriateness. Many parents reported using conversations to correct children's misperceptions or biases about sexual orientation and gender, to "normalize" children's experience of having same-sex parents, and to help them cope with homophobia in their social worlds. These findings support previous research showing that lesbian mothers, in particular, make deliberate attempts to talk with children about aspects of sexuality and difference in their everyday lives as a way of educating them about these issues (Gabb, 2004a; Mitchell, 1998), and preparing them for encountering prejudice in their social

lives (Goldberg, 2010; Litovich & Langhout, 2004). The current study's findings for gay fathers using conversations in a similar manner with their children is new and therefore adds to the research on the family lives and experiences of gay-father families.

In addition to, or perhaps instead of talking, one parent emphasized the importance of "living" one's values as a parent and thus modelling this "by example" to children. For instance, Elizabeth said about her progressive political beliefs/values, "when you live in an atmosphere with people that are passionate about things, you don't have to have them sit and address a topic with you, that topic is part of what they eat and breathe and drink...that's what drives you to do the things that you do". Other parents attempted to provide modeling of diversity for children, through exposing children to LGBTQ communities and models of diversity in sexual orientation and gender, while not restricting children from the more conventional elements of society.

Strengths borne from struggles. There was also a tendency for parents in the sample to reframe and reconstruct their experiences of difficulty into experiences of resiliency and strength. For example, some parents talked about how their experiences of "coming out", as difficult and strenuous as they were in their impact on children and families, resulted in a greater capacity to be "better" and "happier" parents. Additionally, some parents described that, as difficult as it was not to have access to positive models for lesbian/gay parenting and families, this was "better" as it forced them to think and talk about things that are either taken for granted, or not experienced in heterosexual relationships and families. This theme was consistent with Brown's (1995) assertion that through being different from the norm and lacking clear rules about how to be lesbian or gay, LGBTQ peoples tend to approach their lives with greater creativity, often making up the rules as they go along:

Jane: ...when you get together in a same-sex relationship...there's no assumptions, it's all wide open, which in a way is better, but in a way it's also I think a bit more difficult

...because there's no assumption of who's going to do what...I think once you work it out it's better, because then you've worked out what you really want to do.

Leah: ...every heterosexual couple I see they're just on autopilot because they don't have to think about these things whereas our family does, which means that our kids do, and I think we're just so much more aware and focussed and...our kids are that much farther ahead because of it, but it comes from all the pain and the struggle.

Thus, although many parents conveyed feelings of guilt for imposing challenges and obstacles on children by disclosure of their sexual orientation, there was a strong sense that children would grow from these challenges, become more aware of the struggles that minority groups face in society, and thus become more accepting of diversity and difference in others. These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that gay and lesbian parents believe their children learn to be more accepting and open to human diversity as a result of growing up in a family that is perceived and often stigmatized as different (Golding, 2006; Hare, 1994; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Patterson, 1992; Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Wright, 1998).

Additionally, some parents suggested that children born into and/or raised in LGB-parented families from a young age might grow up with a greater freedom to be comfortable with, accept, and express difference in themselves. For instance, Grace said of her son:

Grace: ...we actually did...a parenting forum for pride one year where...we had parents and children of lesbians and gays all just talking about the issues and my two older ones attended and...(son) said at the time that my being a lesbian and coming out...allowed him to be who he was...because...he had sort of been a bit of...a misfit...when he was a kid... he was always felt different and I think...he was saying at the time that he felt more free to be who he was...because of how...I am even if it's hard for the world to accept it.

Challenging the mainstream. There were numerous ways in which the LGB parents in this study also expressed strengths/resiliencies in their parenting through attempts to be “different” from heterosexual parents and to challenge normative constructions of gender, sexuality,

parenting, and family. Some parents reported a strong awareness of and willingness to go “left [while] everybody else is going right” (Abigail). Moreover, many parents in the sample reported making active efforts to teach their children more flexible notions about gender and sexuality, through the encouraging and acceptance of gender variant opportunities/interests, the constructing of children’s environments in less gender-typed ways, the confronting of stereotypical and oppressive messages about gender and sexuality, and through parental modelling of flexibility, diversity, and openness in gender attitudes, roles, and behaviours (e.g., sharing and division of household labour).

Nicole, a young mother who described feeling safe and privileged in her community, and empowered in her identity and outness as a lesbian and feminist, was found to be the strongest voice of difference in the sample regarding the socialization of her young daughters around issues of gender and sexuality. In the following excerpt, she sums up the dilemma between conforming to and challenging normative constructions of gender and sexuality that many LGB parents in this and other studies have been described as facing. As well, she offers a recommendation to other LGB parents:

Nicole: I would say not to be afraid...of fully...expressing our gender and our sexual selves to our kids, not afraid of being queer, not afraid of being different because I think it's a really beautiful gift that we can give our children...I think that there's some times a real drive and desire to be seen as...quite the same...because we so much fear rejection and...our kids experiencing rejection and homophobia but I think...that...raising our kids with...a real security...and a real confidence and a real sense that they can make their own choices...is really liberating and really empowering.

Recommendations

It is my view that the experiences that LGB parents have of confronting homophobia and heterosexism in their families, cultures, and societies, and the strengths/resiliencies that grow out of dealing with such challenges may position them as role models for a style of parenting that is

less constrained by dominant norms of gender and sexuality. As a result, near the end of the interviews, I asked all parents what they would recommend to other LGB parents and heterosexual parents regarding the socialization and teaching of issues pertaining to gender and sexual orientation with children. Some parents were hesitant to “give advice”, and others had many recommendations to offer. Some parents offered differing advice for LGB parents and heterosexual parents, whereas others made the same recommendations for both sets of parents. What should be noted is that all parents based their recommendations on their own positive and negative experiences of parenting, and thus the advice and recommendations offered should be considered within their specific contexts and not regarded as “objectively valuable” advice that is suitable or viable for all parents.

Recommendations to both lesbian/gay and heterosexual parents. *Allow freedom of choice and expression.* The parents in the study had many different pieces of advice to offer to both LGB and heterosexual parents. One message that was clearly communicated was the importance of giving children the freedom to be and express themselves in their gender and sexuality, through “keeping options open...offer[ing] them all kinds of different things...and [not] ever clos[ing] the door...” (Monica). These parents emphasized the value of letting children know they have choices and showing children acceptance of their choices and self-expressions. For some parents, this also meant not imposing their own parental values about gender and sexuality on children, if children are not inclined toward these values/interests, no matter how progressive those parental values are perceived to be. Many parents seemed to endorse these beliefs especially in reference to children’s interests in toys, clothing/appearance, and activities.

Abbey: I think letting them try on different roles not flipping out if...someone shaves off their...head, or gets an eyebrow piercing...it’s not the end of the world...it’s part and parcel of trying on different identity roles...and finding out who you are, and I think a lot of parents make the mistake of saying you know does this mean their transgendered or

cross-gendered or gay...I think just having more...acceptability of the developmental stuff that goes on...normalizing that stuff.

Audrey: ...I see so many parents that are trying to control their kids to shape them, mould them...just let them become who they are, give them space to do that...I don't think you can sort of set out with a plan for who your kids will be in any way, whether that's career, or...sexual orientation, marriage, having children, whatever...you just gotta...be the best you can be for them with what you've got.

Samantha: ...I think [heterosexual parents] need to let kids know that everything is a choice...and...we all get to...make our own choices, and...if you can be happy with the choice that you made, you're not hurting anybody else...then that's the main thing...[the] only limitations that they have are...the ones they put on themselves.

Communicate with children. Another message offered to other LGB parents and heterosexual parents was that of ensuring that “the conversations are available that the... discussions are had...” (Chloe), and that parents “really...tune into...kids...and listen to them” (Simone). In general, parents expressed the importance of being open, honest, and compassionate with children, talking with children about gender and sexual orientation, and maintaining open lines of communication with children:

Aidan: For heterosexual couples...I would really like to see them...be open-minded...don't be judging...listen to your kids, be respectful of your kids, trust your kids.

Christine: I think we should talk about it a little bit more...that's a big issue with my family anyway...I think it is something that people need to talk about with their kids ...just to let them know that there's other options out there, that what they see isn't necessarily always the way it has to be.

Christopher: ...I mean a lot of parents are not going to want to talk about a lot these issues with their kids, or they're going to want to sort of do what's traditional...but for the families that have any kind of openness at all to gender roles...or to sexual orientation ...just having those little conversations with your kids...about the world...and about ...gender roles and about...people having different sexual orientations, is a good idea not only for the sort of general orientation, but just...in case it applies to any of them, in terms of gender roles and sexual orientation.

Teach love, kindness, respect, acceptance. Some parents emphasized the importance of teaching values of love, kindness, respect, and empathy to children so that children learn to be accepting of others despite situation or background:

Gabrielle: I would just say...from when your kids are really young, to raise them up to accept everybody, and just to accept that a loving relationship is a treasure no matter who it is between...whether it's between a parent and a child or two partners or friends, you know, love is something that should be treasured and valued no matter what.

Grace: ...the biggest thing that comes to mind is really just...for them to keep an open mind and to teach an open mind... everybody's different and there shouldn't be...so much good-bad, right or wrong, it should be about accepting people for who they are in all their differences, whether it be around...sexuality or genders or whatever.

Don't assume heterosexuality. For other parents, it was especially important that both LGB and heterosexual parents not make assumptions about children's gender and sexual identities, that they recognize and allow for the possibility that children could be LGBTQ-identified, and that they let their children know that there are "a variety of gender expressions and sexual orientations" (Victoria).

Donna: ...I don't think it's just lesbian and gay parents, I think it's all parents to not sexualize their kids, let them come to their own identity at their own pace...it drives me nuts when someone asks my son if he has a girlfriend...what if he's gay...because you're telling him...it's not an option for him to have a boyfriend...I want him to come to that on his own terms...like don't push it, they have their entire lives ahead of them and there's enough people and enough pressures in this world to be something that someone else wants you to be.

Elizabeth: Don't presume that your child is heterosexual...be open and say positive things in your household. So that if the day comes that your child is questioning, they feel safety coming to talk to you about it...that's crucial for a child growing up.

Expose children to diversity in the LGBTQ community. Some parents advised both LGB and heterosexual parents to expose children to and involve them in the LGBTQ community. For LGB parents, this was believed to be a way of "normalizing" queer identities and families, and

for heterosexual parents this was thought to be important for teaching children about sexual and gender diversity. For a few parents, exposing children to models of diversity in gender and sexual orientation also meant exposing them to positive models of heterosexual women and men. Other parents also emphasized the value of exposing children to people of different ethnicities and cultures within LGBTQ communities:

Alyssa: ...a lot of people don't...expose their children to stuff...I'm not saying...march them in the dyke parade...but...exposing them to everything...because...they're going to have issues when they grow up anyways so the more they can...see that's out there and if...they do happen to be...gay or...heterosexual...they'll have a little better understanding.

Chloe: ...the thing that I would encourage people to do is to mix together like make sure you have in your life, male and female, that you get to know people and make sure you have straight and gay people in your life...our kids need to know that everybody's welcome...as long as, you're dealing with people that...care about each other.

Dan: Get some gay friends...get as many different kinds of friends as you can...like from different ethnicities, and different...cultures, and like just open them up to as many experiences as you possibly can.

Contrary to these accounts however, one father, Max, downplayed the importance of exposing children to specific models of gender and sexual orientation diversity, and instead emphasized what he saw as the importance of teaching children values of acceptance and equality of all peoples:

Max: ...I...think that if you...imbue basic boundaries in your children in terms of...the real equality of all people regardless of their physical or mental or psychological nature...then ...whenever they do meet gays and lesbians they will just see them as people and...they will talk to them at that level...so I think it's for anybody whether they're heterosexual or gay, I think it's that question of the basic values that...you imbue in your children and I think they're values that Canadians aspire to...the value of the equality of all people...the worth of all people.

Recommendations specific to lesbian/gay parents. *Be yourself, be open and honest.*

Parents also offered a number of recommendations specific to LGB parents. One of the most

common messages was that of being open, honest, and true to oneself about one's sexuality. For some parents this meant not hiding one's sexual orientation from children, for others this meant being open in displays of affection with partners in the presence of children, and yet for others this meant being comfortable with one's sexuality, and knowing oneself well:

Abigail: ...to understand and be comfortable with your own gender [and] sexuality. The more you know about yourself, and what makes you tick...what you're sensitive to, the better you can likely relate to others...know yourself well.

Adam: ...Be up front and open with them...I know a lot of guys that are gay that did not tell their kids and...I can understand not telling your parents...but your kids aren't really going to care...they love you...if you feel this love and you've raised them all these years, it's really not going to matter to them.

Jane: be open and honest as is age-appropriately possible, I know I've heard another lesbian couple say...maybe we shouldn't kiss in front of the two-year old because she might be confused by that...what's she going to be confused by, you love each other"...if you're not open and honest with your kids, how do you expect them to be open and honest with you?

Coming and being out. Some parents offered specific pieces of advice around coming out to children. A couple parents believed that parents should come out to children when children are younger. Other parents advised LGB parents to "prepare [children] for living in a family and a world...that doesn't reflect them" (Victoria):

Andrew: I think the...main thing is to work on the normalizing it...I've touched on that four or five times already...I'm not sure if it's just my kids but I think I remember growing up...it was very important for me to be normal, stable...so...to understand that it is normal...to understand that it's in a context...that's I think the most important thing for kids...as long as it's stable, normal, they can handle many different things...

Brad: I think the earlier you come out the better...I think the younger it's discussed...the easier it is for the kids...that's sort of my experience from the father's group...there's some fathers that their kids were...twenty...before they came out to them...and those kids had a harder time accepting it then.

Victoria, in particular, also spoke to what she saw as the importance of letting children have control of and choice about whether or not to disclose parental sexual orientation to their

friends/peers. This was based on her own experience of not disclosing her sexual orientation to her son's friends until she felt he was comfortable with this step. Victoria advocated for placing a child's safety over a parent's personal or political agendas regarding disclosure of sexual orientation. However, her account also reflects the personal conflict that she felt as a result of holding on to such a position:

Victoria: ...and I think...as much as it's...an ongoing process for LGBTQ people to come out...it's also a process for their own children to come out...and...children need to be in control of that...and that's hard, because sometimes you feel like you're...buying into ...those messages that it's wrong or that it's bad....but...I think it's ultimately about your kids safety...and [I] don't have a right to take that away because I have a different political agenda.

Have social support networks. Some parents in the sample encouraged other LGB parents to have supportive networks of friends and family while raising children, based on their own experiences of either having or not having this in their own lives:

Chloe: ...I think...the more solid people you have around you, the better opportunities your kids will have when they're in trouble to find somebody that they can relate to...I don't care if my kids can't talk...to me...but they've got...four other aunts, they've got (partner), they've got a lot of our other friends that they can talk to about it...making sure you pull people around you that are solid...will pay off huge benefits for your kids.

Leah: I think in terms of gay parents...it's really important to have a support network from the community, which is something (partner) and I have lacked because we haven't been around, we've been going to (U.S.) every other weekend for a couple of years, you know we've only been steadily up here for like seven months...for the longest time (daughter) thought she was the only kid in (city)...that was dealing with this.

Create change and difference. A final message that some parents offered to other LGB parents was that of “counteract[ing] that negativity that comes from society continually” (Victoria) and taking proactive steps to effect change and to parent in more positive ways:

Harry: ...everyone...parents to the best of their own ability...my parenting style is an absolute 180 from the way I was raised...I chose to make the changes because I didn't like the way I was treated or raised as a child...there's a certain amount that you can't change

either...you do what you can...as best as you can....and...if you don't like something, then take steps to change it.

Nathan: Well, there's gotta be a bit of positive influence...to make a difference, whether you're gay or straight or lesbian...I think personally...it's uh how you treat your children, you offer different values and being positive.

Recommendations specific to heterosexual parents. *Do not reproduce homophobia, heterosexism, sexism.* Some additional messages were offered, specifically, to heterosexual parents around being open to diversity and difference in their children and others. Many parents in the study emphasized the need for heterosexual parents to avoid giving children discriminatory messages about homosexuality and LGBTQ people/cultures:

Alyssa: ...half of the fag and queer and all that comes from the straight society anyway, they love using those terms and labels and...they need to stop it.

Nathan: ...the thing I would probably tell heterosexual parents is...not to talk negative about gays and lesbians, they don't know what their own child is gonna grow up to be ...and if you're teaching your children that it's wrong...it's gonna create a lot of mental health issues down the road...there's a lot of suicides, because they're scared to come out to their parents...

Some parents reinforced this message, especially as it pertained to the raising of sons, urging heterosexual parents to allow their sons the freedom to explore gender variant interests and self-expressions:

Leah: ...I think for heterosexual couples...to not put that stereotypical masculine-feminine gender role thing out there so much...but I think it's so engrained in our society...like...my sister with her boys...pushing them into very stereotypical hunting, fishing, sports, hockey.

Tina: ...well with heterosexual parents...I don't like how they raise boys...boys seem to get much more gendered messages...even...the patriarchal father will give his girl...you can grow up to be anything...but he'll give boys...and I've seen it...on the playgrounds, I've heard about it...that...boys have to be little men...they have to be socialized differently from little girls...and it just kind of continues the whole inequity thing.

Parents, such as Nicole, went a step further, suggesting that heterosexual parents “really need to examine...the ways in which they reproduce homophobia and heterosexism in their own families, the way they reproduce sexism...and how suffocating and stifling that can be for kids....”

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

Socialization has been defined as a process through which individuals learn to change their standards, attitudes, and behaviours to conform to those regarded as desirable and appropriate in any particular society (Parke & Buriel, 1998). Martin (2005) postulated that “it is through socialization (and the management, negotiation, and resistance of it) that children learn how to operate in gendered structures (Lorber, 1994), learn the repetitive stylized performances that constitute gender (Butler, 1990), or learn how to do gender in interaction and how to avoid sanctions for doing it wrong (West & Zimmerman, 1987)” (p. 457).

Using Parke et al.’s (1994) tripartite model as a framework for parental socialization roles, this study explored the processes through which LGB parents socialized/influenced their children’s beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality, and the contents of the messages they provided to children about gender and sexuality. Parke et al.’s (1994) model postulates that parents play three roles in the general socialization of their children. These roles consist of being interactors with, direct instructors/educators to, and providers of opportunity to children. For the purposes of this study, the types of opportunities that were examined included toys/books, bedroom décor, clothing/clothing accessories, recreational activities, and allocation of household chores to children. The types of parent-child interactions that were explored included displays of affection, endowment of privileges, and setting of restrictions. The form of direct instruction/education that was examined consisted of conversations between parents and children around issues of gender and sexuality.

This study also examined the meanings that parents attributed to the impact of socio-cultural factors (such as family networks, peers, schools, religion/spirituality, media,

neighbourhood/national cultures, and LGBTQ communities/cultures) on their children's learning of gender and sexuality. Specifically, these socio-cultural forces were examined in relation to how parents perceived the messages they conveyed to children about gender and sexuality, how these messages intersected and/or conflicted with parental messages about gender and sexuality, and how parents managed/negotiated possibly conflicting messages. Finally, this study explored parental perceptions of their own strengths/resiliencies in their parenting around gender and sexuality, and how these strengths might position them as models for challenging heteronormative constructions of parenting/family, gender, and sexuality.

Overall, analyses revealed a shifting in parental accounts between acknowledging and downplaying parental influence, and between reproducing and challenging normative constructions/practices of gender, sexuality, parenting/family. These themes have already been discussed within each section of the Results. In this Discussion section, these themes have been discussed as they have emerged across and connected the various Results sections.

Acknowledging and Downplaying Parental Influence

Both within and across cases, analyses revealed a shifting in parental accounts between acknowledging and downplaying parental influence on children's beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality. Many parents openly (and sometimes proudly) acknowledged their experiences of having what they saw as a positive impact on children's beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality. Acknowledgement of parental impact was especially prominent in parental accounts of displays of affection, teaching acceptance and appreciation of sexual and gender diversity, setting of privileges and restrictions, and modelling/teaching of flexibility in gender roles/behaviours. A handful of mothers also acknowledged their own role in imposing

restrictions on children's gender variant interests in order to do what they saw as ensuring their children's safety and well-being.

However, in the area of provision of opportunities many parents seemed to downplay their own role in influencing children's expressions of gender. Many parents reported allowing their children to choose their own toys, clothing, bedroom decor, and recreational activities even when children were quite young. These interests and choices were constructed as being reflective of an "innate" sense of gender or "individuality" that was seen to be expressing itself through development. In this way, many parents used essentialist constructions of gender identity, personality characteristics, and age/developmental stage to explain children's engagement with both gender normative and gender variant interests. Essentialist constructions of gender were more often called upon for sons rather than daughters and were especially prominent in the accounts of parents who perceived a strong concordance between their child's biological sex and outward gender expressions.

Altogether, these findings are consistent with those of previous studies that have found some gay fathers, lesbian mothers, and heterosexual parents to call upon biology when explaining children's gendered interests (e.g., Kane, 2006) and to "not seem to read...children's performances of gender as social constructions of gender" (Messner, 2000, p.770). Essentialist constructions of gender, in particular, are reflective of mainstream psychological discourses that link gender identity and expression with biological/natal sex and that construct children's gender development as the "natural unfolding" of innately determined, biological and/or cognitive characteristics (Lev, 2010; Messner, 2000). In psychology, essentialist explanations for gender and sexuality expression tend to be favoured over social constructionist and/or socialization theories, and some researchers have emphasized biological explanations and the role of

children's preferences (which are typically seen as being based on biological sex differences) in the absence of "significant evidence" for parental socialization effects (e.g., Lytton & Romney, 1991). However, both developmental and feminist psychologists have argued that essentialist constructions of gender (and sexuality) serve to obscure the socially constructed and socialized nature of gender performances and thus minimize the role of social and contextual factors in children's learning of gender and sexuality (Bem, 1993; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1999; Rhode, 1997).

Parents who downplayed their own role in shaping their children's expressions of gender and sexuality did not generally speak to there being a time when children would have been too young to make their own choices of toys, clothing, bedroom décor, and recreational interests, and thus when parents would have been one of the predominant forces of influence in providing and determining these opportunities. These may have been parents who were less likely to see their socialization role as having a strong impact, to attempt to shape their children's gender and sexual identities/expressions, or to challenge normative constructions of gender and sexuality in their parenting. Parents who did acknowledge their impact seemed to be parents who made active attempts to be gender neutral or gender variant in their parenting and viewed this positively, or who were comfortable reporting that they encouraged mainly gender normative opportunities for their children.

Additionally, the majority of parents in the sample placed emphasis on respecting the personal choices and interests of their children. Thus, in some contexts this meant respecting children's choices of engaging with gender variant opportunities, and in other contexts this meant respecting children's choices of engaging with gender normative opportunities. Moreover, in some accounts, chronological and/or developmental age was constructed as determining the

amount/kind of influence parents exerted on their children's choices. As might be expected, parents generally reported exerting a greater influence on children's toys, clothing, bedroom décor, and recreational activities when children were younger rather than older. These findings point to the importance of considering and examining the active roles that children have been found to play in their own development and learning of gender and sexuality (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998; Collins et al., 2000).

Downplaying of parental socializing role also occurred in conjunction with emphasizing the roles of forces/institutions/people external to the parent-child subsystem. Other biological parents, peers, schools, and the media were constructed by many parents as having the most influential impact of all the external systems examined on children's beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality - especially a normative and/or negative impact. Whereas some parents described talking to children in attempts to challenge or counter the negative or normative messages children received from external sources about gender and sexuality, other parental accounts conveyed feelings of powerlessness in their capacity to challenge negative or normative messages from other sources. These findings are consistent with contemporary perspectives on gender development in children, such as social-cognitive theory (SCT; Bandura & Bussey, 2004) and ecological systems perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983), which consider the larger social environments in which individuals and families are embedded as integral to understanding the ways in which children are socialized (McHale et al., 2003). SCT integrates the role of internal and external factors in the construction and maintenance of gender-typed behaviours in individuals, and views people as both creators and products of social systems (Bandura & Bussey, 2004). An ecological perspective views the larger social context as exerting an impact

on family dynamics, thereby influencing the ways in which families and parents work to socialize children (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983).

Reproducing and Challenging Norms for Gender, Sexuality, Parenting/Family

As has been found in previous research (e.g., Benkov, 1995; Lewin, 1993; Goldberg, 2010), all parents in this study reported engaging in a shifting between accommodating to and challenging normative constructions of gender and sexuality in their parenting across all areas of processes of socialization and contents of messages. The majority of parents endorsed normative constructions of gender and sexuality as being biologically or innately determined and necessarily interconnected. Many parents reported providing opportunities for children and engaging in parent-child interactions that were in line with societal norms and expectations for gendered performance/expression. Some aspects of opportunities and parent-child interactions, such as children's clothing and bedroom decor; mothers' displays of affection with daughters and older sons; restrictions around dating, sex, and dress/appearance for girls; and provision of male role models for sons were found to be particularly driven by dominant gender and sexuality norms/practices. Moreover, some parents did not explicitly discuss a need to challenge their children's conformity to gender norms for toys, clothing, and bedroom decor, especially when this conformity occurred with sons. Furthermore, many parents reported reinforcing normative gender divisions in the setting of restrictions and privileges for children around dating/sex and dress/appearance. Generally, both within and across cases, parents reported setting more restrictions on pre-teen and adolescent daughters than on sons, and sons (especially adolescent sons) seemed to be given greater freedom to make personal choices and decisions for themselves on matters of dating/sex and dress/appearance. In some cases where parents communicated awareness of their differential treatment of daughters and sons, differences were explained by

essentialist references to sex differences in size and strength, and to socially constructed gender differences in social status, power, and privilege.

In general, findings for differences in the socialization of sons and daughters in this study are consistent with research documenting gender to be one of the factors commonly associated with parental differential treatment of children, especially in families with girls and boys (through provision of toys (Etaugh & Liss 1992; Fisher-Thompson, 1993; Pomerleau et al., 1990), clothing (Cahill 1989), bedroom décor (Martin, 2009; Pomerleau et al. 1990; Rheingold & Cook, 1975), allocation of household chores (Cunningham, 2001; McHale et al., 2003; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981), and displays of warmth/affection (Crouter, Helms- Erikson, Updegraff, & McHale, 1999; McHale et al., 1999; McHale, Updegraff, Jackson-Newsom, Tucker, & Crouter, 2000; Tucker et al., 2003)). In explaining reasons for parents' differential treatment of sons and daughters, authors have suggested that parents may be attempting to achieve preparation of children for what they see (or society sees) as "appropriate" or "acceptable" adult, gender roles (Kimmel, 2000; Ruddick, 1983).

In addition to endorsing normative constructions of gender and sexuality, many parents described a variety of strategies of non-compliance and subversions in their parenting. Some parents described experiences of providing children with gender variant/atypical opportunities, supporting children's choices to not engage in gender normative behaviours/expressions, and taking pride in what they saw as expressions of children's individuality and willingness to be different. Most parents reported modelling flexibility in gender roles to children through their own performance of household labour and not adhering to societal norms for gender roles when allocating household chores to children. Some parents in the sample did not readily conform to the societal expectation of providing other gender role models for their children and a few

parents overtly challenged this notion as being based on a heteronormative family model. Furthermore, many fathers in the sample emphasized the value of being close and affectionate with children and reported making deliberate attempts to engage in overt displays of affection with both sons and daughters.

Parental experiences of challenging normative constructions of gender, sexuality and parenting/family also emerged in accounts of conversations with children and/or of responding to messages that children received from external sources. Some parents reported strongly countering the homophobic, heterosexist, and gender stereotypical messages that children received from other sources in their lives, especially when these messages were communicated by schools/teachers, peers, and media. Consistent with some findings of previous research (e.g., Goldberg, 2010; Lindsay et al., 2006) parents who were younger, more economically and socially privileged, living in accepting communities, had young children born/adopted into the relationship, and/or held strong progressive/feminist political values reported especially being able to perform this challenging and confrontation. These parents were also more likely to report awareness and practice of socializing their children with more flexible and counter-normative beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality.

Analyses also revealed instances of ambivalence, conflict, and contradiction in the accounts of parents between challenging and conforming to normative expectations in parenting around gender and sexuality. For instance, although many parents expressed an awareness of needing to raise children with more flexible, open-minded, and progressive messages about gender and sexuality (especially in their accounts of recommendations to other parents), their accounts in other contexts revealed that they could or did not always practice this in their own parenting. Additionally, many instances of challenging around aspects of children's gendered expressions

were typically in a normative direction (for contemporary North America) such that sons were less encouraged to engage in gender variance than daughters. Particularly for sons, age was seen as determining “acceptable” and “unacceptable” gender deviations. Thus, the majority of sons who were described as being encouraged to engage with feminine interests/opportunities were around the pre-school age range. This was especially the case for those boys who expressed an interest in what are often seen as icons of femininity (e.g., make-up, playing with dolls, feminine clothing) and therefore, as more unacceptable forms of gender deviations for boys (Kane, 2006). In general, there were more accounts of lesbian mothers than gay fathers encouraging gender variant opportunities for sons, which is consistent with research suggesting that lesbian mothers (White, middle class, in particular) show flexible attitudes about gender and are less likely to structure their children’s environments in gender-stereotypical ways (Fulcher et al., 2008; Golding, 2006; Martin, 2009; Sutfin et al., 2008). Although, there has been little research on how these dynamics occur in gay father families, Kane (2006) found some gay fathers to report feeling more accountable to society than lesbian mothers for crafting normative masculinity in their sons.

Despite the finding that many more mothers than fathers in the study encouraged gender variance in their sons, some mothers’ descriptions of their relationships with sons were found to be particularly constrained by notions of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity. Some mothers described experiences of feeling conflicted between wanting to challenge and conform to hegemonic masculinity in their parenting of sons due to feeling accountable to and pressured by other family members and societal forces/systems. These pressures were reported especially in areas of displays of affection with sons, providing male role models or father figures for sons, and providing clothing and toys for sons. These experiences of conflict have been well

documented in the body of literature on mothering in general (e.g., Martin, 2009; Ruddick, 1983), and lesbian and feminist mothering in particular (e.g., Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Lewin, 1993; Ruddick, 1983). Ruddick (1983) has argued that mothers (and other invested parents/caregivers) are governed by three conventional values in their parenting - preservation, growth, and acceptability of the child. In efforts to raise children who are free from oppressive conventions/beliefs, and at the same time keep children safe from negative societal judgment or harm (in order to be seen as “fit”), mothers sometimes have to collude with the values of the dominant culture (with which they may disagree). Because the dominant culture promotes ideals about masculinity that mandate heterosexuality and subordination of femininity (Connell, 1995), mothers may find themselves feeling pressured to reinforce these notions in their parenting of their sons (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Martin, 2009; Ruddick, 1983). Some authors have argued that lesbian mothers, in particular, may experience this conflict (Biblarz & Savci, 2010, Lewin, 1993) because in possibly wanting to teach sons to reject or challenge mainstream notions of masculinity they “risk potentially subjecting sons to ridicule and obstacles in the extrafamily environment” (Biblarz & Savci, 2010, p. 482).

Limitations

As a qualitative study, this study aimed to be descriptive and to place the experiences of its participants at the center of the research. The involvement of the researcher in data collection, coding, and analyses is typical in qualitative research and viewed as “a method of reflexivity...in which the controversial and emotionally salient topic is better explored through the eyes of an ally struggling with the same obstacles” (Golding, 2006, p. 59). Nevertheless, in a qualitative study, this involvement has implications for the interpretations of participants’ experiences as being imbued with a particular subjectivity.

Additionally, the sample of participants was self-selected and voluntary and the data was obtained as a result of self-report. Because lesbian/gay parents are typically discriminated against for their sexual orientation and parenting, and issues of gender and sexuality are typically controversial and sensitive issues in the realm of lesbian/gay parenting, some parents may have been motivated to present a favourable impression of themselves and their families or may have been reluctant to discuss issues/experiences that might be perceived as negative by myself or the public. Attempts were made to minimize these possibilities through my identification in the cover letter and consent forms as a lesbian, through my attempts to stay objective during the interview, and through assuring participants that neither they nor their children would be identified in the results of the study. However, I am not a parent, and some parents claimed to not knowing that I was a lesbian. Also, participants were aware that this research might be published and presented in public domains. Finally, my role as interviewer may have inadvertently influenced participants' responses through verbal and non-verbal gestures and reactions and through the ways in which I framed and posed questions to participants.

Additionally, despite my attempts to recruit participants of different backgrounds, the sample was relatively homogeneous – mainly well educated, upper middle-class, gay or lesbian-identified, Caucasian, Canadian individuals - and greater ethnic/class/sexual orientation diversity among participants might have produced more variation in the parenting experiences reported. However, as indicated in Table 2 (see p. 53) there were children of participants in the sample who were of Aboriginal or mixed race and specific themes or differences related to the intersection of these races/cultures with parental socialization and children's learning of gender and sexuality have been discussed in the Results section on Parental Perceptions and Negotiation of the Influence of External Systems (see p. 107). Moreover, there were four bisexual-identified

women and two American men in the sample. However, as a group, these participants were not found to be distinguishable in other demographic characteristics or reported experiences of parenting practices/challenges from their lesbian and Canadian counterparts respectively.

Some researchers have critiqued studies on lesbian-/gay-parented families as being based mainly on middle class, well-educated, Caucasian, urban dwelling parents and for not including class-based analyses (Gabb, 2004b). These authors have asserted that such practices not only obscure the diversity of lesbian/gay family forms, but they also result in a “privileged” version of lesbian/gay families dominating the research (Clarke, 2008; Gabb, 2004b). This issue of class and race bias has interesting implications for the findings of this study in terms of the ways in which the lesbian/gay parents reproduced and challenged normative constructions of gender, sexuality, and parenting/family. Boggis (2001) has argued that White, middle class lesbian/gay parents are often more *assimilationist* in their values and thus place more emphasis on being the “same” as heterosexual parents. Thus, we might wonder whether there might have been more instances of “difference” if the sample was more varied in its cultural and class demographics.

A final issue was that the sample of mothers was larger than the sample of fathers and there were more parents with children born/adopted and raised (at least partially) in a previous heterosexual relationship than parents with children born/adopted and raised solely within a same-sex relationship. Although having unequal numbers of participants or representative samples are not typically concerns in qualitative research, it might be speculated that some findings/interpretations may have differed if there was greater proportional representations on these demographics.

Contribution to the Literature and Directions for Future Research

There are many ways in which the current study both extends and adds to the existing body of literature on lesbian-/gay-parented families. This study extends the literature (e.g., Benkov, 1995; Goldberg, 2010; Lewin, 1993) with its finding that lesbian/gay parents simultaneously reproduce and challenge normative beliefs, values, and practices in their parenting of children around gender and sexuality. However, the ways in which this study explored these experiences of lesbian/gay parents, particularly with gay fathers, is relatively new. Previous research (mainly quantitative studies) has tended to examine gender and sexuality in lesbian-/gay-parented families either as developmental outcomes for children or as parental/family factors contributing to children's development. This study, however, presents an in-depth exploration of gender and sexuality as identities/expressions that are constructed, socialized, reinforced, and challenged through everyday interactions between lesbian/gay parents and their children. Parke et al.'s (1994) model of the roles that parents play in the socialization of their children as providers of opportunity, interactors with children, and direct instructors/educators has not previously been explored in relation to lesbian/gay parents and their children. Thus, this study not only validates the use of this parental socialization framework with lesbian-/gay-parented families, but adds to existing research and provides some new findings (or nuances of findings) on some processes of parental socialization such as provision of toys/books, parent-child conversations, displays of affection, and setting of restrictions/privileges.

The findings of this study also support previous research on the experiences of lesbian-/gay-parented families with schools/teachers (e.g., Chabot & Ames, 2004; Chesir-Teran, 2003; Gartrell et al., 2000; Goldberg, 2010; Kranz & Daniluk, 2006; Lassiter et al., 2006; Lindsay et al., 2006; Litovich & Langhout, 2004; Ryan & Martin, 2000; Schacher et al., 2005) and peers

(Bos & van Balen, 2008; Bos et al., 2005; Goldberg, 2010; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; O'Connell, 1993; Pollack & Vaughn, 1987; Tasker & Golombok, 1995, 1997; van Dam, 2004; Vanfraussen et al., 2002). However, this study adds to the literature by providing new findings on parental perceptions of and experiences with other external sources of socialization such as extended/blended family members, religious/cultural institutions, and the media, regarding the messages these sources provide to children about gender and sexuality, in particular. Finally, this study extends the existing literature (e.g., Bos et al., 2003, 2007; Golding, 2006; Golombok et al., 2003; Hare, 1994; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Lynch & Murray, 2000; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Patterson, 1992; Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Wright, 1998) with some of its findings on the strengths/resiliencies that lesbian/gay parents show in their parenting around gender and sexuality (e.g., having more flexible beliefs and practices around gender and sexuality, teaching children to accept diversity in others).

Future research might attempt to improve on some of the limitations discussed, such as exploring the experiences of lesbian/gay parents of different ethnic, racial and class backgrounds in socializing children around gender and sexuality. Additionally, other researchers might examine these processes and contents of socialization in other “queer” family forms such as those led by transgender-identified parents. Future research should also continue to explore questions about how parents “do” gender and sexuality in gay father families (particularly, primary gay father families) given the scarcity of research on the lives and parenting experiences of gay fathers in general.

There are some important factors and processes in the socialization of gender and sexuality that were not examined in this study and that might also pose avenues for future research such as the role of siblings and the role of children in their own learning of gender and sexuality. During

middle childhood, especially, siblings are considered to be children's most common companions outside of the school environment (McHale & Crouter, 1996). They are said to serve as models, friends, and adversaries, and they provide one another with opportunities for new social experiences and activities (Dunn, 1998). Studies have found evidence, in heterosexual-parented families, for the gender of siblings being influential on a child's gender development (Rust, Golombok, Hines, Johnston, Golding, & ALSPAC Study Team, 2000), specifically the influence of older siblings' gendered qualities and behaviour on younger siblings (McHale, Updegraff, Helms-Erikson, & Crouter, 2001). Thus, future research might explore the role of siblings in socializing and constructing children's beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality in lesbian-/gay-parented families. Furthermore, Tasker (2010) has urged researchers to be mindful that children's interests may influence parental interpretation and provision for their children. Thus, future research might examine the roles that children play in their own gender and sexuality socialization, specifically in influencing their parents' beliefs about and practices around gender and sexuality.

Finally, future research may need to more explicitly speak to the impact of parental biases and of homophobia/discrimination on research that is as sensitive and controversial as parental socialization of children's gender and sexuality. As already mentioned, bias or impression management concerns could have contributed to the tendency of some parents in this study to downplay (or perhaps overestimate) their parental influence on children's learning of gender and sexuality. However, it is possible, that much of the literature that already exists on parental/family socialization processes in lesbian-/gay- and heterosexual-parented families, and that rely mainly on parental self-report contains similar biases or issues. Therefore, just as this

study did, it would be beneficial for other researchers to explicitly examine or, at least, speak to the impact of parental perceptions/bias in this area of research.

Conclusion

According to Folgero (2008), by their very existence, lesbian-/gay-parented families transgress traditional family structures and discourses on which normative family values have been built, such as genetic parenthood and heterosexual reproduction. Lesbian/gay parents, in particular, may be expected to challenge normative constructions of gender and sexuality in their parenting because they are themselves “different” from the norm in aspects of their sexuality and gender and the marginalization/discrimination they experience as a result of these differences. However, as the findings of this and other studies suggest, lesbian/gay parents often feel caught between wanting to educate their children to be open to sexual orientation and gender diversity in themselves and others, and wanting their children to navigate mainstream society in safety and without the stigmatization that parents themselves have experienced.

This fear in which some lesbian/gay parents may live regarding how they will be evaluated by society and, even worse, of potentially losing their children may obstruct their ability to recognize and challenge the homophobic and heterosexist biases inherent in the notions that, conformity to the heteronormative mainstream is more “appropriate” than non-conformity, that difference signifies deficits, and that having/raising a child to be non-heterosexual or non-gender-conforming makes them “unfit” as parents. Thus, many lesbian/gay parents may find themselves stuck in a defensive position, unable to develop their awareness, assert their differences, mobilize their strengths, and actualize the kind of change that is needed to challenge and eliminate the hegemony of heteronormative and androcentric notions of gender, sexuality, and parenting/family.

Nevertheless, despite the fears, judgment, and constraints often imposed on lesbian/gay parents, all parents in this study reported having positive experiences of parenting. Many of them managed to work through and overcome the obstacles that were thrown at them as they attempted to achieve the fine balance between allowing their children to choose their own paths in life and exerting their own parental control, so that children were safe and protected. Strengths were borne out of struggles as “coming out” enabled parents to be happier in their lives/parenting, and as children were taught greater appreciation and acceptance of sexual and gender diversity in their families and others. Challenging of normative constructions of gender, sexuality, and parenting/family emerged in diverse forms as parents attempted to raise their children with positive values, beliefs, and expressions of gender and sexuality.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participant Profile Summaries

Name	Age	Sex/Gender	Sexual Orientation	Background Information
Abbey	39	Female	Bisexual	In common-law relationship; lives with partner and children; 1 biological daughter from previous heterosexual relationship; partner has 1 biological son from previous heterosexual relationship.
Abigail	48	Female	Lesbian	In common-law relationship; lives with partner and children; 3 children (son, daughter, son), 2 of whom live in the household; eldest son lives independently and is biological son of Abigail's partner; other 2 children were born into the relationship with an anonymous sperm donor (daughter was borne by participant and son was borne by her partner).
Adam	52	Male	Gay	Single; 1 biological son from previous heterosexual relationship; lives with ex-wife and son.
Aidan	35	Male	Gay	Single; lives alone; 2 biological daughters from previous heterosexual marriage; children live with biological mother and her common-law husband; shared custody of children.

Name	Age	Sex/Gender	Sexual Orientation	Background Information
Alyssa	50	Female	Gay	In common-law relationship; lives with partner and children; 1 son and 1 daughter from previous relationship with Monica, who has joint custody; both children were conceived through known donor insemination (Alyssa's brother who is also considered a co-parent); children were born by Monica.
Andrew	50	Male	Gay	Common-law relationship; lives with partner and children; 3 biological children (daughter, daughter, son) from previous heterosexual marriage; ex-wife and current partner are co-parents; daughters live primarily with ex-wife, son lives primarily with Andrew.
Audrey	43	Female	Lesbian	Married; lives with partner and daughter; 1 daughter from previous heterosexual marriage; current partner and ex-husband identified as co-parents
Brad	61	Male	Gay	In non-monogamous relationship; lives separately from partner; 1 biological and 1 adopted son from previous heterosexual marriage; sons lived primarily with mother but live independently now.

Name	Age	Sex/Gender	Sexual Orientation	Background Information
Cassandra	36	Female	Bisexual	Married; lives with partner and children; 3 sons - first child was conceived through anonymous donor insemination, borne by Cassandra, and adopted by partner; other two children are adopted biological siblings.
Chloe	65	Female	Lesbian/Bisexual	Married; lives with partner; four biological children (daughter, son, son, son) from previous heterosexual marriage; all children live independently; current partner and ex-husband involved as co-parents.
Christine	48	Female	Bisexual	In relationship; lives alone; 1 biological son from previous heterosexual marriage; ex-husband is involved as co-parent.
Christopher	49	Male	Gay	Single; 2 sons with lesbian couple; previous same-sex partner deceased; children live with mothers, but visit Christopher every other weekend and holidays.
Dan	42	Male	Gay	In relationship for less than 1 year; lives with partner; 3 biological children (daughter, daughter, son) from previous heterosexual marriage; children's biological mother involved as co-parent; participant has joint custody.

Name	Age	Sex/Gender	Sexual Orientation	Background Information
Donna	32	Female	Lesbian	In dating relationship; lives with son; 1 biological son from previous heterosexual relationship; joint custody with child's father.
Elizabeth	59	Female	Lesbian	In relationship with Victoria; lives alone; 1 biological daughter from previous heterosexual marriage; has been involved in caregiving of Victoria's biological son.
Gabrielle	44	Female	Lesbian	Single; lives with children; 4 biological children (daughter, son, daughter, son) from previous heterosexual marriage; ex-husband involved as co-parent.
Grace	50	Female	Lesbian	Common-law relationship; lives with partner; 3 biological children (daughter, son, son) from previous heterosexual marriage; partner has 3 biological children from previous heterosexual marriage (son, daughter, daughter); same-sex partner, ex-husband and recent wife are co-parents.
Harry	46	Male	Gay	Single; 1 biological son from previous heterosexual marriage; joint custody with ex-wife.

Name	Age	Sex/Gender	Sexual Orientation	Background Information
Jane	43	Female	Lesbian	Married; lives with partner; 2 biological children (son, daughter) from previous heterosexual marriage; joint custody; father, his wife, and Jane's current same-sex partner are involved as co-parents.
Jonathan	43	Male	Gay	Common-law relationship; 1 biological daughter and 1 biological son from previous heterosexual marriage; joint custody with ex-wife; same-sex partner involved in caregiving.
Julia	48	Female	Bisexual	In relationship; lives alone; 1 adopted son from previous heterosexual marriage; son lived primarily with ex-husband but lives independently now.
Kyle	32	Male (transitioned)	Gay	Fully transitioned; identifies as gay male/man; married; lives with partner; 2 biological daughters from previous heterosexual relationship (while biologically female); joint custody with ex-husband, but used to be primary parent.
Leah	36	Female	Lesbian	Married; lives with partner and daughter; 1 biological daughter from previous heterosexual relationship; partner has 1 biological daughter who lives with partner's ex-husband, and visits Leah's family; biological fathers of both daughters involved as co-parents.

Name	Age	Sex/Gender	Sexual Orientation	Background Information
Liam	40	Male	Gay	In common-law relationship; lives with partner and children; 3 biological children (daughter, son, son) from previous heterosexual marriage; daughter and one son live with Liam; other son lives with Liam's ex-wife; both current partner and ex-wife involved as co-parents.
Lucas	46	Male	Gay	In relationship for less than one year; lives with partner and children; 1 biological daughter from previous heterosexual relationship; ex-wife and current partner involved as co-parents; daughter lives with participant.
Max	53	Male	Gay/Bisexual	In relationship; lives with partner (less than 1 year); 1 biological son from previous heterosexual relationship; son's mother involved in caregiving and has joint custody; Max's previous same-sex partner, who is now deceased, was also involved in son's caregiving.
Monica	46	Female	Lesbian	Married; lives with partner and 4 children; 1 son and 1 daughter from previous relationship with Alyssa; other two children (son, daughter) are current partner's biological children from previous heterosexual relationship; all biological and donor fathers are gay and involved.

Name	Age	Sex/Gender	Sexual Orientation	Background Information
Nathan	Unknown	Male	Gay	Single; lives with children; 3 biological children (daughter, daughter, son) from previous heterosexual marriage; shared custody of eldest and youngest; full custody of middle child; ex-wife identified involved as co-parent.
Nicole	34	Female	Lesbian	In common-law relationship; lives with partner and children; 2 daughters with same-sex partner (who bore children) with anonymous sperm donor.
Samantha	31	Female	Gay	In relationship for less than 1 year; lives with partner, children, and lesbian couple roommates; both children from previous heterosexual relationship; partner and roommates involved in caregiving.
Simone	47	Female	Lesbian	Married; lives with partner; 2 biological children (son, daughter) from previous heterosexual marriage; both children live independently; current partner and ex-husband are co-parents.
Sydney	41	Female	Lesbian	Married; lives with partner and child; 1 biological son with partner, conceived through known donor insemination; donor is gay and plays social role.

Name	Age	Sex/Gender	Sexual Orientation	Background Information
Tina	41	Female	Lesbian	Single; lives with daughter; 1 biological daughter from anonymous donor insemination; child has no other caregivers.
Victoria	44	Female	Lesbian	In relationship with Elizabeth; lives with son; 1 biological son from previous heterosexual marriage; Elizabeth and biological father involved as co-parents.

APPENDIX B
Flyer Advertisement



Date

I Want You

My name is Salma Ackbar and I am a lesbian graduate student pursuing my Ph.D. in psychology at the University of Windsor, Ontario. I am conducting an exciting study on gay/lesbian family relationships. You have the chance to win \$100, and you will automatically receive a \$20 gift card as a token of my appreciation.

If you are 18 years or older

AND

You identify as gay or lesbian

AND

You have one or more children who are 2 years or older

YOU CAN PARTICIPATE

I am especially looking for **gay fathers** and **gay/lesbian parents of colour** who fit the above criteria. Your experiences are important to me!

Please contact me at **(519) 253-3000 ext. 4703**, OR email me at **<LGBparents@uwindsor.ca>**. Please leave a message with your FULL NAME and a PHONE NUMBER or EMAIL ADDRESS.

THANK YOU for the time you took to read this. I look forward to hearing from you!

Salma's Family Relationships Study,
(519) 253-3000 ext. 4703,
LGBparents@uwindsor.ca

Salma's Family Relationships Study,
(519) 253-3000 ext. 4703,
LGBparents@uwindsor.ca

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LGBparents@uwindsor.ca

APPENDIX C

Email Advertisement



I Want You

My name is Salma Ackbar and I am a lesbian graduate student pursuing my Ph.D. in psychology at the University of Windsor, Ontario. I am conducting an exciting study on gay/lesbian family relationships. You have the chance to win \$100, and you will automatically receive a \$20 gift card as a token of my appreciation.

If you are 18 years or older

AND

You identify as gay or lesbian

AND

You have one or more children who are 2 years or older

YOU CAN PARTICIPATE

I am especially looking for **gay fathers** and **gay/lesbian parents of colour** who fit the above criteria. Your experiences are important to me!

Please contact me at **(519) 253-3000 ext. 4703**, OR email me at **<LGBparents@uwindsor.ca>**. Please leave a message with your **FULL NAME** and a **PHONE NUMBER** or **EMAIL ADDRESS**.

THANK YOU for reading this. I look forward to hearing from you!

APPENDIX D

Letter of Information (Main)



Gay and Lesbian Family Relationships

This research study is being conducted by Salma Ackbar, a lesbian graduate student, pursuing a doctorate in Psychology at the University of Windsor, under the supervision of Dr. Charlene Senn, a professor at the same institution. The study is being done to fulfill the requirements of a Ph.D. dissertation.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Salma Ackbar at (519) 253-3000 ext. 4703 or <LGBparents@uwindsor.ca>

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study will investigate the ways in which gay and lesbian parents teach their children about gender and sexuality.

PROCEDURES

In order to take part in this study, you need to be a self-identified gay or lesbian parent who is 18 years or older, and have one or more children, aged 2 years or older. If you identify as bisexual you need to currently be in a same-sex relationship in order to participate in this study. You will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher, which should take about 1 ½ - 2 hours. The interview will be conducted either in-person or by phone, at no cost to you. If you agree to be interviewed in person, we will conduct the interview in a mutually agreed upon public setting that is safe, quiet, and convenient. If such a setting cannot be agreed upon, or you do not feel safe or comfortable being interviewed in a public setting, we can conduct the interview in a more private setting, such as your home (if you prefer this). We will contact you ahead of time to arrange a date and time for the interview.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS & RISKS

Although you may not benefit personally from this research, your participation is greatly appreciated. Your answers will contribute to a growing and interesting research literature on gay-and lesbian-headed families. Please be assured that, in this study, our intention is to explore the diverse and unique experiences you may have as gay or lesbian parents. We do not wish to make judgments about the quality of your parenting. We do not expect that you will experience any significant distress as a result of participating in this study. However, at the end of the interview, we will attempt to address any concerns or questions you have. We will also leave you with a list of community and internet resources, should you decide to seek support, as a result of participating in the study.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

If you live in Canada, you will receive a \$20 Indigo/Chapters gift card, or if you live in Michigan, you will receive a \$20 Amazon.com gift card as a small token of our appreciation for the time and effort you spend in helping us. You will also have the opportunity to enter your family's name in a draw for \$100 US/CDN, which will take place after all the interviews have been conducted. If your name is picked, we will mail you the money prize in the form of a bank draft or certified cheque.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Any person or place names you provide during the interview will be replaced with pseudonyms in the transcriptions, the final write-up of the study, and any future publications or conference presentations based on the study. Your interview will be audio-taped, and then transcribed. Although you will not have access to the audio-tapes, you may choose to withdraw any information you have provided. You may do this, by contacting us directly by phone or email. All audio data and transcriptions will be password protected and kept in secure computer files on the University of Windsor server. Copies of these files will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office to which only the researcher and her supervisor will have access. No unauthorized persons will have access to the audio or transcript data. The audio data will be destroyed once the transcriptions are completed and verified. The transcriptions will be kept for 7 years after the final publication based on this study. They will be kept separately from any other identifying information. Any contact information you provide in relation to this study will be kept in a separate electronic file and will be secured through password protection. This contact information will be destroyed once all contact with participants has concluded.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences. If you withdraw whilst the interview is in process or after it has been completed, you will still receive a gift card and a chance to enter the draw as a token of our appreciation for your time. However, if you arrange to be interviewed and withdraw before the interview has taken place we cannot provide you with the gift card or an opportunity to enter the draw.

Some of the questions in the interview are personal questions about your beliefs, values, behaviour, and your relationships with your children. If you feel uncomfortable about answering any of the questions, you may refuse to answer them, and you can choose to end the interview at any point. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

FEEDBACK OF RESULTS OF THIS STUDY

In September 2009, we will provide you with an update of our progress on the study. At this time we will also inform you of the time at which we will post the full feedback report based on the results of the study. We anticipate this to be in September 2010. Both the update and the full feedback will be made available at the following web address:

Web address: ____<www.uwindsor.ca/reb>_____

If you do not have internet access, let us know your mailing address, and we will mail you a copy of the update and the full feedback report at the respective times indicated above.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

The information you provide in the interview may be used in subsequent studies by the same researchers.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Salma Ackbar at (519) 253-3000 ext. 4703 or <LGBparents@uwindsor.ca>, or Dr. Charlene Senn at (519) 253-3000 ext. 2255. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact:

Research Ethics Coordinator,
University of Windsor,
Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4

Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948;
email: ethics@uwindsor.ca

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

Salma Ackbar, M. A.
(Principal Researcher)

Date

APPENDIX E

Phone Contact Script

Hello, is (name of participant) there please? Hi (name of participant). My name is Salma Ackbar and I am a lesbian graduate student pursuing my doctorate/Ph.D. in Psychology at the University of Windsor. I am calling because you contacted me about participating in my research study on the relationships between gay/lesbian parents and their children. Are you interested in learning more about my study?

(If no) Okay, no problem, thanks very much for your time. Have a nice day.

(If yes) Good, thank you very much! First, I need to ask you some questions.

Can you verify that you are 18 years or older?

(If no) I'm sorry, you have to be at least 18 years of age in order to participate in this study. Thank you anyway for your interest. Have a nice day.

(If yes, continue).

How do you define your current sexual orientation?

(If they identify as bisexual) Are you currently in a same-sex relationship, or a single parent?

(If no) I'm sorry, my study focuses on the experiences of gay and lesbian parents, so bisexual parents only qualify if they are in a same-sex relationships. Thank you anyway for your interest. Have a nice day.

(If yes, continue).

(If gay/lesbian, continue).

Is/Are your child/children 2 years or older?

(If no) I'm sorry, my study focuses only on parents with children at least 2 years of age. Thank you anyway for your interest. Have a nice day.

(If yes, continue).

Okay, now I will tell you a bit more about the study. What I would like to do is interview you about your experiences of raising your child/children. Your children do not have to be living with you, and they can be either biological/step-/adopted/foster children. The interview will take approximately 1½ - 2 hours, and I will be audio-taping it for my convenience. I would prefer to interview you in person, so we will try to meet in a public place that is convenient and safe for both of us. If such a setting cannot be agreed upon, or you do not feel safe or comfortable being interviewed in a public setting, we can conduct the interview in a more private setting, such as your home (if you prefer this). Or if we cannot meet in person, we can conduct the interview by phone, at no cost to you.

Are you still interested in being interviewed?

(If no) Do you have a same-sex partner who would be interested in being interviewed?

(If no) Okay, thanks very much for your time. Have a nice day.

(If yes) Okay, great! Could I speak with him/her? (If available, start over at beginning of script, asking only questions that I don't already have information about). (If not available) How may I contact him/her? Or, can you please ask him/her to contact me at (contact information given)?

(If yes, arrange a meeting time and place). Do you have a same-sex partner who would also be interested in being interviewed?

(If no) Ok, no problem, I will call you to remind you of our meeting a few days before. Thanks very much for your interest and your time. Have a great day.

(If yes) Could I speak with him/her? (If available, start over at beginning of script, asking only questions that I don't already have information about). (If not available) How may I contact him/her? Or, can you please ask him/her to contact me at (contact information given)? Ok, great, I will call you to remind you of our meeting a few days before. Thanks very much for your interest and your time. Have a great day.

(If a phone interview is necessary, arrange a date and time, and follow same procedures for recruiting same-sex partner). Can I have your mailing address, so that I can mail you (and your partner) more information about the study, as well as the consent forms?

(When address is obtained) Thank you very much. Once you receive the consent forms you should read and sign them, and then mail them back to me. I will provide you with a pre-paid envelope so you can send them back.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

(If yes) Answer questions.

(If no) Okay, thanks again. I will call you on the (date and time). Have a great day. Bye.

APPENDIX F

Email Contact Scripts

First Email Contact

Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in my study. What I would like to do is interview you about your experiences of raising your child/children. Your children do not have to be living with you, and they can be either biological/step-/adopted/foster children. However, they have to be 2 years of age or older. The interview will take approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours, and I will be audio-taping it for my convenience. Please understand that I can only interview you if you identify as gay/lesbian, or as a bisexual who is currently in a same-sex relationship. We can arrange either an in-person or telephone interview depending on where you live. If we arrange an in-person interview, we can meet in a quiet, public place that is convenient and safe or a more private setting such as your home (if you are comfortable with this).

If you are still interested in participating, we need to arrange a meeting. Please let me know where you live (city), and please indicate some general time blocks that are most convenient for you to meet, either in-person or on the phone (e.g., mornings, afternoons, evenings, weekends). I will reply to you with my available times.

Please contact me at this email address OR leave me a message at (519) 253-3000 ext. 4703. I will get back to address any concerns you have, or to arrange a time and place for the interview.

Thank you!

Second Email Contact Script

In-person Interviews

Dear _____,

Thank you for getting back to me. We have two options for meeting in person. I have arranged to have a private room at the University of Windsor, where we can conduct the interview. However, if this is not preferable or convenient for you, we can conduct the interview in your home. All I would ask is that we have a space and time that is quiet and free of distractions.

Below, are the time blocks I have available so far. Please pick your top three choices, in case there are conflicts with other participants. If you pick any of the times in blue font, then the interview will have to be done in your home (or another quiet, public place), as the university room is not available at these times. If none of the times work for you, give me a sense of what does, and I can work around it (e.g. weekends) or give you some more dates. Also, just be advised that, because I am trying to schedule a few participants at once, if there is a conflict, then I will have to re-schedule, and I will do this on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Thanks so much. I look forward to hearing from you.

Phone Interviews

Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in my study. We will conduct a phone interview, in which I will call you on the scheduled date and time. We should it for about 2 weeks from now, because I have to mail you the consent forms, which you will need to sign and return to me (by mail), before we can start the interview.

Below, are the time blocks I have available so far. Please pick your top three choices, in case there are conflicts with other participants. If none of the times work out, give me a sense of what works for you, and I can work around it (e.g. weekends) or give you some more dates. Also, just be advised that, because I am trying to schedule a few participants at once, if there is a conflict, then I will have to re-schedule, and I will do this on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Once we arrange a date and time for the interview, I will mail out the consent form package with instructions. Once you have received the package, I would appreciate it if you could confirm this with me, either by phone or email.

Thanks so much. I look forward to hearing from you.

APPENDIX G

Consent Form for Participation

**Gay and Lesbian Family Relationships**

This research study is being conducted by Salma Ackbar, a lesbian graduate student, pursuing a doctorate in Psychology at the University of Windsor, under the supervision of Dr. Charlene Senn, a professor at the same institution. The study is being done to fulfill the requirements of a Ph.D. dissertation.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Salma Ackbar at (519) 253-3000 ext. 4703, or <LGBparents@uwindsor.ca>

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study will investigate the ways in which gay and lesbian parents teach their children about gender and sexuality.

PROCEDURES

In order to take part in this study, you need to be a self-identified gay or lesbian parent who is 18 years or older, and have one or more children, aged 2 years or older. If you identify as bisexual you need to currently be in a same-sex relationship in order to participate in this study. You will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher, which should take about 1 ½ - 2 hours. Interviews will be conducted in a mutually agreed upon public setting that is safe, quiet, and convenient. If such a setting cannot be agreed upon, or you do not feel safe or comfortable being interviewed in a public setting, we can conduct the interview in a more private setting, such as your home (if you prefer this).

If you are being interviewed by phone, you should have received a copy of this consent form, beforehand, in the mail, along with a letter of information, a consent for audio-taping form, a demographic questionnaire, a draw entry, and a pre-paid, pre-addressed envelope. **When you complete the background information questionnaire, please place it in the smaller white envelope and then place both it, the signed consent forms, and the draw entry in the postage paid brown envelope, and mail the envelope back to me. When I receive the envelope I will immediately separate the two envelopes. The questionnaire will be kept separately and securely and identified only with your pseudonym.**

POTENTIAL BENEFITS & RISKS

Although you may not benefit personally from this research, your participation is greatly appreciated. Your answers will contribute to a growing and interesting research literature on gay-and lesbian-headed families. Please be assured that, in this study, our intention is to

explore the diverse and unique experiences you may have as gay or lesbian parents. We do not wish to make judgments about the quality of your parenting.

We do not expect that you will experience any significant distress as a result of participating in this study. However, at the end of the interview, we will attempt to address any concerns you have. We will also leave you with a list of community and internet resources, should you decide to seek support, as a result of participating in the study.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

If you live in Canada, you will receive a \$20 Indigo/Chapters gift card, or if you live in Michigan, you will receive a \$20 Amazon.com gift card as a small token of our appreciation for the time and effort you spend in helping us. You will also have the opportunity to enter your family's name in a draw for \$100 US/CDN, which will take place after all the interviews have been conducted. If your name is picked, we will mail you the money prize in the form of a bank draft or certified cheque.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Any person or place names you provide during the interview will be replaced with pseudonyms in the transcriptions, the final write-up of the study, and any future publications or conference presentations based on the study. Your interview will be audio-taped, and then transcribed. Although you will not have access to the audio-tapes, you may choose to withdraw any information you have provided. You may do this, by contacting us directly by phone or email. All audio data and transcriptions will be password protected and kept in secure computer files on the University of Windsor server. Copies of these files will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office to which only the researcher and her supervisor will have access. No unauthorized persons will have access to the audio or transcript data. The audio data will be destroyed once the transcriptions are completed and verified. The transcriptions will be kept for 7 years after the final publication based on this study. They will be kept separately from any other identifying information. Any contact information you provide in relation to this study will be kept in a separate electronic file and will be secured through password protection. This contact information will be destroyed once all contact with participants has concluded.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences. If you withdraw whilst the interview is in process or after it has been completed, you will still receive a gift card and a chance to enter the draw as a token of our appreciation for your time. However, if you arrange to be interviewed and withdraw before the interview has taken place we cannot provide you with the gift card or an opportunity to enter the draw.

Some of the questions in the interview are personal questions about your beliefs, values, behaviour, and your relationships with your children. If you feel uncomfortable about answering any of the questions, you may refuse to answer them, and you can choose to end the interview at any point. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

FEEDBACK OF RESULTS OF THIS STUDY

In September 2009, we will provide you with an update of our progress on the study. At this time we will also inform you of the time at which we will post the full feedback report based on the results of the study. We anticipate this to be in September 2010. Both the update and the full feedback will be made available at the following web address:

Web address: ____<www.uwindsor.ca/reb>_____

If you do not have internet access, let us know your mailing address, and we will mail you a copy of the update and the full feedback report at the respective times indicated above.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

The information you provide in the interview may be used in subsequent studies by the same researchers.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Salma Ackbar at (519) 253-3000 ext. 4703 or <LGBparents@uwindsor.ca>, or Dr. Charlene Senn at (519) 253-3000 ext. 2255. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact:

Research Ethics Coordinator,
University of Windsor,
Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4

Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948;
email: ethics@uwindsor.ca

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I understand the information provided for the study “**Gay and Lesbian Family Relationships**” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

Salma Ackbar, M. A.
(Principal Researcher)

Date

APPENDIX H

Consent Form for Audio-Taping

**Gay and Lesbian Family Relationships**

I consent to the audio-taping of interviews.

I understand these are voluntary procedures and that I am free to withdraw at any time by requesting that the taping be stopped. I also understand that any real names used in the interview will not be revealed to anyone and that taping will be kept confidential. Audio data are filed by number only and stored in secure computer files on the University of Windsor server. Copies of the files will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked office to which only the researcher and her supervisor will have access. No unauthorized persons will have access to the audio or transcript data. The audio data will be destroyed once the transcriptions are completed.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected and their use will be for professional use only.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX I

Parent Demographic Information Questionnaire

**Gay and Lesbian Family Relationships**

The following questionnaire will provide us with more background information about you and your family.

Part I: About You

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: _____
3. Ethnicity/Race: Caucasian/White _____ African/Black _____
 East Asian _____ South Asian _____
 South-East Asian _____ Latin/Hispanic _____
 Aboriginal _____ Arabic/Middle Eastern _____
 West Indian _____ Other (please specify) _____
 Multiracial (please specify) _____
4. Sexual Orientation: _____
5. Place of Residence: City _____ Province/State _____
6. Religious/Spiritual Identification (if any): _____
7. Last completed level of education: _____
8. Current occupation: _____
9. What is your approximate yearly family income level before taxes (give range if preferred)?

10. What is your current living situation?
 Live Alone _____ Live with Partner & Children _____

Live with Partner _____ Live with Other (please specify) _____

Live with Children _____ Other (please specify) _____

11. Are you currently in a same-sex relationship? Yes ___ No _____

12. Status of current relationship:

- Living together less than one year _____ Specify length: _____
- Living together one year or more
(common-law) _____ Specify length: _____
- Legal marriage _____ Specify length: _____
- Other (e.g. civil union) _____ Specify length: _____

13. Is your current relationship a monogamous one? Yes ___ No _____

14. Do you have a co-parent(s)? Yes ___ No _____

15. (If yes to # 14), Is/Are your co-parent(s) your primary sexual partner?

Yes ___ No _____

16. If your co-parent(s) is/are not your primary sexual partner, please specify the relationship you have with them? _____

17. Please tell us how you heard about this study? _____

18. If you would like to tell us any additional information about you and/or your family, please tell us here.

APPENDIX J

Letter of Information for Phone Participants



Gay and Lesbian Family Relationships

This research study is being conducted by Salma Ackbar, a lesbian graduate student pursuing a doctorate in Psychology at the University of Windsor, under the supervision of Dr. Charlene Senn, a professor at the same institution. The study is being done to fulfill the requirements of a Ph.D. dissertation.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Salma Ackbar at (519) 253-3000 ext. 4703 or <LGBparents@uwindsor.ca>

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study will investigate the ways in which gay and lesbian parents teach their children about gender and sexuality.

PROCEDURES

In order to take part in this study, you need to be a self-identified gay or lesbian parent who is 18 years or older, and have one or more children, aged 2 years or older. If you identify as bisexual you need to currently be in a same-sex relationship in order to participate in this study. You are receiving this letter of information because we agreed that you would be interviewed by phone. The interview should take about 1 ½ - 2 hours. In this package, you should also have received a pre-paid, pre-addressed envelope, a demographic questionnaire, and two consent forms: a consent for participation, and a consent to be audio-taped. If you volunteer to participate in this study, please sign the consent forms, complete the demographic questionnaire, and mail them back to us in the pre-paid envelope before the scheduled date of the interview. Please do not mail us back this letter of information, this is yours to keep.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS & RISKS

Although you may not benefit personally from this research, your participation is greatly appreciated. Your answers will contribute to a growing and interesting research literature on gay-and lesbian-headed families. Please be assured that, in this study, our intention is to explore the diverse and unique experiences you may have as gay or lesbian parents. We do not wish to make judgments about the quality of your parenting.

We do not expect that you will experience any significant distress as a result of participating in this study. However, at the end of the interview, we will attempt to address any concerns or questions you have. We will also leave you with a list of community and internet resources, should you decide to seek support, as a result of participating in the study.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

If you live in Canada, you will receive a \$20 Indigo/Chapters gift card, or if you live in Michigan, you will receive a \$20 Amazon.com gift card as a small token of our appreciation for the time and effort you spend in helping us. You will also have the opportunity to enter your family's name in a draw for \$100 US/CDN, which will take place after all the interviews have been conducted. If your name is picked, we will mail you the money prize in the form of a bank draft or certified cheque.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Any person or place names you provide during the interview will be replaced with pseudonyms in the transcriptions, the final write-up of the study, and any future publications or conference presentations based on the study. Your interview will be audio-taped, and then transcribed. Although you will not have access to the audio-tapes, you may choose to withdraw any information you have provided. You may do this, by contacting us directly by phone or email. All audio data and transcriptions will be password protected and kept in secure computer files on the University of Windsor server. Copies of these files will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office to which only the researcher and her supervisor will have access. No unauthorized persons will have access to the audio or transcript data. The audio data will be destroyed once the transcriptions are completed and verified. The transcriptions will be kept for 7 years after the final publication based on this study. They will be kept separately from any other identifying information. Any contact information you provide in relation to this study will be kept in a separate electronic file and will be secured through password protection. This contact information will be destroyed once all contact with participants has concluded.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences. If you withdraw whilst the interview is in process or after it has been completed, you will still receive a gift card and a chance to enter the draw as a token of our appreciation for your time. However, if you arrange to be interviewed and withdraw before the interview has taken place we cannot provide you with the gift card or an opportunity to enter the draw.

Some of the questions in the interview are personal questions about your beliefs, values, behaviour, and your relationships with your children. If you feel uncomfortable about answering any of the questions, you may refuse to answer them, and you can choose to end the interview at any point. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

FEEDBACK OF RESULTS OF THIS STUDY

In September 2009, we will provide you with an update of our progress on the study. At this time we will also inform you of the time at which we will post the full feedback report based on the results of the study. We anticipate this to be in September 2010. Both the update and the full feedback will be made available at the following web address:

Web address: ____<www.uwindsor.ca/reb>_____

If you do not have internet access, let us know your mailing address, and we will mail you a copy of the update and the full feedback report at the respective times indicated above.

SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

The information you provide in the interview may be used in subsequent studies by the same researchers.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Salma Ackbar at (519) 253-3000 ext. 4703 or <LGBparents@uwindsor.ca>, or Dr. Charlene Senn at (519) 253-3000 ext. 2255. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact:

Research Ethics Coordinator,
University of Windsor,
Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4

Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948;
email: ethics@uwindsor.ca

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

Salma Ackbar, M. A.
(Principal Researcher)

Date

APPENDIX K

Child Demographic Information Questionnaire

Part II. About Your Children

Please provide the following information for each of your children. Please note that we have asked you to provide your children’s first names only for ease of identification during the analysis of the data. **All real names will be substituted with pseudonyms in the final write-up of the study. Your children will not be identified in any way.**

First Name & Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Biological/Step/Adopted/Foster/Other	Relationship of Origin (previous heterosexual/previous same-sex/current same-sex/current single (indicate all of child’s involved caregivers)	Ethnicity	Religion/Spirituality	Grade

APPENDIX L

Debriefing Form



Gay and Lesbian Family Relationships

Thank you for your participation in this study. We would now like to tell you more about the purpose of this study, and how you have helped us.

Over the past thirty years, there has been a lot of research showing that gay fathers and lesbian mothers are nurturing, warm, and confident parents, and that their children grow up to be as well-adjusted in their personalities and social relationships as children of heterosexual parents. Much of the research has also found that children of gay and lesbian parents are not more likely than children of heterosexual parents to have a problematic gender identity or to be gay/lesbian themselves. You are, perhaps, well aware that this research has had a strong impact on the lives of many divorced/separated gay fathers and lesbian mothers who have fought for custody of and access to their children in courts of law across Canada and the United States.

What we were interested in, in this study, was gaining more information on your experiences of socializing your children's gender identity and sexual orientation so that we may understand these processes better. We know, from the research so far, that gay and lesbian parents try to teach their children to be tolerant and accepting of alternative gender identities and sexual orientations. However, right now, there is not enough research on the ways in which gay and lesbian parents might do this, or other ways in which they might socialize their children's gender and sexuality. When we say "socialize", what we mean is the ways in which parents influence their children's gender identity, gender roles, and sexual orientation. These ways can, sometimes, consist of *indirect* socializing such as through the toys, clothing, play activities, or household chores parents provide for their children. Also, they can consist of *direct* teaching or conversations about gender and sexual orientation. We are also aware that what children learn about gender and sexuality is, to a great extent, influenced by the media, friends, other family members, school environments, and religious institutions. This is why we have asked you the questions that we did, because we wanted to know about your perceptions of these issues.

We know that, sometimes, these issues have been highly controversial ones that have led to negative labeling of lesbian/gay parents and their children. We want to reassure you that, in this study, our intention is NOT to make judgments or interpretations about the quality of your parenting, or to compare your parenting to that of heterosexual parents. We have no doubt that you do your best as a gay/lesbian parent, in the same way that most good heterosexual parents do, to raise your children in a healthy manner. What we want to do is to explore, highlight, and affirm the diversity and uniqueness of your parenting experiences, and perhaps use these as instances in which gay and lesbian parents can serve as role models for heterosexual parents.

We do not take the stance that if your child identifies with an alternative gender identity/role or a gay/lesbian sexual orientation, that this is a negative thing, and means that you are a bad parent

or that your child is psychologically unwell. In fact, we take the view that, if this is the case, then you have a parenting experience that is unique, and you might have influenced your child to think “outside of the box”. That said, we are also quite aware, that as a gay or lesbian parent, you might have been, at times, concerned about your child having a gender identity or sexual orientation that is outside of the norm, because you have been concerned about them being a victim of harassment, peer rejection, and homophobic discrimination. As lesbians ourselves, we are fully aware of the restrictions that our heterosexist society places on our ability to truly be ourselves, both as individuals and as parents. We are excited about hearing your diverse stories and experiences, and we will do our best, in the write-up of the study, to remain true to the diversity of your experiences.

Sometimes, interviews like this can bring up feelings for people that they might want to talk to someone about. Some people remember things they haven't thought of for a long time, some people feel angry or sad, and other people may not feel anything much at all. All of these responses are completely normal. On the next page, you will find a list of services where there are people who are trained to talk to you about these kinds of issues as well as a number of web resources if you would like more information about coming/being out, and gay/lesbian parenting and relationships.

In September 2009, we will provide you with an update of our progress on the study. At this time we will also inform you of the time at which we will post the full feedback report based on the results of the study. We anticipate this to be in September 2010. Both the update and the full feedback will be made available at the following web address:

Web address: ____<www.uwindsor.ca/reb>_____

If you do not have internet access, let us know your mailing address, and we will mail you a copy of the update and the full feedback report at the respective times indicated above.

We thank you very much for your interest in the study. If you have any comments or questions, we invite you to contact Salma Ackbar at (519) 253-3000 ext. 4703 or LGBparents@uwindsor.ca or Dr. Charlene Senn at (519) 253-3000 ext. 2255. Please accept the \$20 gift card as a small token of our appreciation for your participation. We will also enter your family's name in a draw for \$100 US/CDN. If your name is picked, we will mail you the money prize in the form of a bank draft or certified cheque.

APPENDIX M

List of Community/Internet Resources

**Gay and Lesbian Family Relationships Study****LGBT & LGBT FRIENDLY COMMUNITY RESOURCES*****WINDSOR*****PFLAG Canada - Windsor ON****Contact Person:* Jennifer Gouin*Phone:* 519-562-5511*Email:* pflagwindsor@yahoo.ca*Website:* <http://ca.geocities.com/pflagwindsor/>***Sandwich Community Health Centre***

Offers free counselling and variety of other services

Address: Sandwich P/O Box 7391

Windsor, Ontario N9C 4E9

Phone: (519) 258-6002*Email:* schc@wincom.net***Distress Centre of Windsor***

Anonymous, confidential telephone service, providing crisis intervention, emotional support and referrals to people in Windsor and surrounding area.

Phone: (519) 256-5000*Website:* www.dcwindsor.com***Metropolitan Community Church of Windsor***

Open to all, the Metropolitan Community Church of Windsor is a Christian Church with a special and positive ministry to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Searching communities of Windsor and Essex County. Worship: Every Sunday at 1:30 P.M.

Address: 1680 Dougall Ave.

Windsor ON N8X 1S3

Phone: 519-977-6897*Fax:* 519-977-5563*Website:* <http://www.mccwindsor.ca/index.php>***The AIDS Committee of Windsor***

A not-for-profit registered charity mandated to provide education and support services with regard to HIV/AIDS for Windsor-Essex, Chatham-Kent and Lambton counties. The ACW offers

* The information provided in this handout was obtained from the internet. We do not necessarily endorse these resources; we only offer them to you as possibilities for extra help or support.

direct services to over 400 clients and community education programs to more than 6,000 youth and adults annually.

Address: 511 Pelissier St.,
Windsor, Ontario
N9A 4L2

Website: <http://www.aidswindsor.com/index.php>

Phone: 519-973-0222

Fax: 519-973-7389

Email: mhamilton@aidswindsor.org

TORONTO

The 519 Church Street Community Centre

Support groups, social groups, free counselling, community living, legal services, children's services and many more.

Address: 519 Church Street
Toronto, ON
M4Y 2C9

Phone: (416) 392-6874

Email: info@the519.org

Website: www.the519.org

Sherbourne Health Centre

Offers comprehensive health care to gay, lesbian and bisexual communities, including free counselling for individuals, couples and families; support groups, and employment opportunities.

Address: 333 Sherbourne Street
Toronto, ON
M5A 2S5

Phone: (416) 324-4180

Email: info@sherbourne.on.ca

Website: www.sherbourne.on.ca

Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto

MCC Toronto offers a wide range of programs and support groups such as bereavement support, caring for aging parents, relationship break-up support. MCC Toronto offers seminars and workshops on spiritual and personal growth including men's coming out, women's coming out, self esteem, men & women's boundaries, legal issues for lesbian and gay people, and health issues.

Address: 115 Simpson Avenue,
Toronto, ON M4K 1A1

Website: <http://www.mcctoronto.com/>

Gay Fathers of Toronto

A support group that has been helping men on their journey for over 30 years. Many men come to their first meeting with pressing problems, feeling vulnerable, and concerned about why lies ahead.

Address: 42 Charles St. E,
Toronto, ON

Website: <http://www.gayfathers-toronto.com/>

LGBT Parenting Network, David Kelley Services, FSA Toronto

Provides resources, information, and support to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans parents and their families.

Phone: (416) 595-0307 ext. 270

Website: www.fsatoronto.com

David Kelley Lesbian and Gay Community Counselling Program

Provides professional, short-term, individual, couple and family counselling to lesbians, gay men and related communities

Phone: (416) 595-9618 or

Email: dks@fsatoronto.com

Website: <http://www.fsatoronto.com/programs/fsaprograms/davidkelley.html>

PFLAG Canada - Toronto ON

Address: 115 Simpson Avenue - Suite 105,
Toronto ON M4K 1A1

Contact person(s):

Duncan Minnis, Executive Director Phone: 416-406-1727 Email: toronto.office@pflag.ca

Support Line Phone: 416-406-6378 Email: toronto@pflag.ca

Marlene Morais Phone: 905-271-4606 Email: marlene@pflag.ca

Website: <http://www.pflag.ca/Toronto.html>

LONDON**PFLAG Canada - London ON**

Address: #103-1500 Richmond Street North,
London ON N6G 4V1

Phone: Joanne King 519-858-2644
Andrew 519-455-9081

Metropolitan Community Church

A welcoming, diverse Christian community discovering and sharing the reality of God's all-inclusive love.

Address: The Aeolian Performing Arts Centre
795 Dundas St. E. London, Ontario, Canada.

Phone: (519) 645-0744

Email: church@mcclondon.com

Website: <http://www.mcclondon.com/>

London & Area Gay Directory

Website: <http://www.lgd.homestead.com/>

The AIDS Committee of London

Address: 120-388 Dundas St.
London, ON N6B 1V7

Phone: (519) 434-1601

1-866-920-1601

Website: <http://www.aidslondon.com/>

Family Service Thames Valley

Provides short term therapeutic counselling to individuals, couples and families (gay/lesbian positive), specialized services to survivors of childhood trauma, woman abuse, survivors of war trauma/catastrophic stress; group work program; advocacy/social policy issues; community development and consultation services.

Address: 125 Woodward Ave
London, ON N6H 2H1

Phone: 519-433-0183

Teletype: 519-433-0183

Fax: 519-433-4273

Email: fstv@familyservicethamesvalley.com
 Website: <http://www.familyservicethamesvalley.ca/>

SOUTHERN MICHIGAN

GLBT National Hotline

Phone: 1-888-THE-GLNH/1-888-843-4564
 Website: <http://www.glnh.org/index2.html>

Lansing Association of Human Rights

Operates LBGT Hotline: Monday-Friday 7:00-10:00pm, Sunday 2:00-5:00pm (517) 332-3200
 Website: <http://www.lahronline.org/>

The Listening Ear

24 hour Crisis Intervention Center
 Phone: (517) 337-1717
 Website: <http://www.thelisteningear.net/>

PFLAG Lansing

Address: PFLAG Lansing Area
 P.O. Box 35
 Okemos, Michigan
 48805, USA.
 Website: <http://www.geocities.com/pflaglansing/>

Email: pflaglansing@yahoo.com

Triangle Foundation

Detroit Office: Triangle Foundation
 19641 West Seven Mile Road
 Detroit, Michigan 48219-2721
 Report Hate Crimes & Discrimination: 1-877-787-4264
 Email: Website and general questions: info@tri.org
 Website: <http://www.tri.org/>

Phone: 313-537-7000
 Fax: 313-537-3379

The Washtenaw Rainbow Action Project (WRAP)

A resource for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender ("queer"), and allied residents of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and greater Washtenaw County. WRAP is a resource center that exists to provide information, education, social events, and advocacy by and for the Queer and Ally community in the Washtenaw County area. WRAP welcomes all who support its mission to participate in its activities.

Address: 319 Braun Court
 P.O. Box 7951
 Ann Arbor, MI 48107

Phone: 734.995.9867
 Website: <http://www.wrap-up.org/index.php>

Lesbian Moms Network

Lesbian Moms who are interested in networking within our local community of Ann Arbor / Ypsilanti, Washtenaw County in the State of Michigan. We want to share information, resources, and advice. We want our children to know other families like their own. So far, we are over 250 local families strong.

Address: LMNetwork
P.O. Box 2113
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-2113

Website: <http://www.lmnetwork.org/>
Email: LMNmembership@yahoo.com

Affirmations

A nonprofit organization serving people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. We are housed in a state-of-the-art, multi-use facility in the heart of downtown Ferndale, at the Northern border of the City of Detroit. Also an LGBT friendly health provider network. See website for list of LGBT friendly counsellors and other health providers.

Website: <http://www.goaffirmations.org/site/PageServer?pagename=homepage>

ADDITIONAL WEBSITES (AMERICAN & CANADIAN)***Gay, Lesbian, Queer Parenting & Families***

<http://www.alternativefamilies.org/>

<http://www.familieslikeours.org/>

<http://www.gayparentmag.com/index.html>

<http://www.queerparents.org/>

<http://www.2moms2dads.com/>

Transgender

<http://www.gender.org/>

<http://www.transgendermichigan.org/>

<http://www.ifge.org/>

<http://www.tgcrossroads.org/%3E>

General LGBT

<http://www.gayontario.org/>

<http://www.gaycanada.com/>

<http://www.gay.com/>

<http://www.lesbian.org/>

<http://www.gayscape.com/>

<http://www.nglrf.org/>

Political

<http://www.egale.ca/>

<http://www.ffef.ca/>

<http://www.equal-marriage.ca/>

<http://www.samesexmarriage.ca/>

<http://www.ilga.org/>

<http://www.iglhrc.org/>

<http://www.web.net/clgro>

Academic (including Universities & Libraries)

<http://www.lgbtq.utoronto.ca/site4.aspx>

<http://stw.ryerson.ca/~ryepride/>

<http://www.yorku.ca/tblgay/>

<http://athena.uwindsor.ca/units/gay-lesbian/main.nsf/b6176c6e57429a9f8525692100621c8f/1a6ee04540ae29a285256938004a120e!OpenDocument>

<http://www.usc.uwo.ca/win/default.htm>

<http://go.to/qwo>

<http://tri.org/protectourfamilies>

<http://lbgtrc.msu.edu/>

<http://spectrumcenter.umich.edu/>

<http://www.uwo.ca/pridelib/>

<http://www.clga.ca/archives/>

<http://www.si.umich.edu/lila/artifacts/>

<http://www.agq.qc.ca/>

<http://www.glbthistory.org/>

APPENDIX N

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

**Gay and Lesbian Family Relationships Study****CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

I _____ (please print name) understand that all of the information contained in the audio tapes/files that I will be transcribing is strictly confidential, and under no circumstances am I allowed to disclose it to anyone. I understand that all transcriptions and audio data should be kept in a locked cabinet, or if electronic, password protected and stored on a secure computer. No unauthorized persons should have access to the transcription or audio data. I will destroy the audio and transcription data as soon as they have been sent to the researcher and are no longer needed.

(Transcriber)

(Date)

(Principal Researcher/Witness)

(Date)

APPENDIX O

Interview Protocol

Introductory Statement

“Today, I am going to be asking you some questions about your experiences as a gay/lesbian parent. I am mostly interested in your experiences of parenting around gender and sexuality. Please understand that there is no right or wrong answer, or any specific responses that I am looking for. Also, I am not here to judge you or your parenting experiences. We know so little about our community’s ways of parenting that all of your experiences and thoughts are of great interest to me. Finally, I just want to assure you that any person or place names that you use during the interview will be substituted with pseudonyms in the write-up of the study. Do you have any questions before we begin?”

I. Icebreaker/Child Demographics

“Ok, let’s begin by talking about your children.”

- How many children do you have?
- Explain each child’s living situation
 - Has this ever been different?
 - Do you expect this to change in the future?

“Would you feel comfortable telling me their first names so that we can refer to them more easily? Feel free to use their real names while we talk as this will be easier for you to remember, but I will be sure to replace all real names with pseudonyms when I transcribe the interviews.”

“Okay, now I’m going to ask you some basic information for each of your children. This information will help me to understand your child a little better, and will help guide me in the interview.”

For each child:

- 1) How old is (child’s name)?
- 2) How do you identify (child’s name) gender?
- 3) What is (child’s name) ethnicity/race?
- 4) What is (child’s name) religious/spiritual identification, if any?
- 5) What school grade is (child’s name) in?
- 6) Is (child’s name) a biological, step, adopted, or foster child to you?

- 7) When (child's name) came into your family, what kind of relationship were you in at the time, if at all? (e.g., current same-sex, previous same-sex, previous heterosexual, single)
- 8) Who are all of the child's major caregivers?
- 9) In addition to caregivers, who else is closely involved in your children's lives? (e.g. other family members, teachers, friends)

II. Parents' Gender & Sexuality

"Firstly, I'm interested in how you view and have viewed your own gender identity, gender roles, and sexual orientation, now and in the past. Before I begin asking questions about these, let me clarify a few terms. When I use the term gender identity throughout the interview, I'm referring to the social label of gender that a person attaches to himself/herself, for e.g. man, woman, boy, girl. When I use the term gender role throughout the interview, I'm referring to the activities that a person performs or the interests that a person has, which society has traditionally labeled as masculine or feminine, for e.g. being a home-maker is traditionally considered a feminine role, and being a construction worker is traditionally considered a masculine role. Do you have any questions about these terms?"

"Ok, let's begin." **(NB. Where questions ask about more than one issue, probe for each, if not already answered)**

- 1) How do you label yourself in terms of gender and/or sex (man, woman, male, female etc)?
- 2) What do you think about our society's ideas of masculinity and femininity?
 - a. Do you think there are any advantages and/or disadvantages to having these gender labels?
- 3) In what ways do you see yourself as reflecting and/or challenging stereotypically masculine and/or stereotypically feminine qualities? For example:
 - a. Your Appearance/Dress: Manner of dress, hairstyle & hair length, voice, body build
 - b. Your Interests: Hobbies, sports, job/career
 - c. Your Personality Characteristics: being strong/weak; independent/dependent, gentle/aggressive

- 4) While you were growing up, what kinds of beliefs, values, or rules were you taught regarding your gender and/or sexual orientation (*probe for influence of religious/cultural beliefs*) For example, the way you:
- a. Dressed
 - b. Behaved/Carried yourself
 - c. Activities and interests you chose?
- 5) How do these beliefs & values fit with your sense of yourself now (regarding gender and sexual orientation)?
- 6) How would you describe yourself in terms of your political values and beliefs? (e.g. conservative, liberal, radical, feminist, humanist, religious).
- a. Are you involved in any political organizations (e.g. women’s groups, political party groups, feminist groups, men’s groups, social justice organizations, humanist groups)?
 - b. What impact have these values/beliefs/involvements had upon you as a parent?
- 7) (If applicable) When the relationship into which your children were born or adopted was ended, did your children factor into the break-up of the relationship? Explain.

III. Construction & Socialization of Gender & Sexuality in the Family

A. Household Chores & Management in the Parental Unit

“Ok that’s great, now let’s switch gears a bit and talk about the arrangement of household chores in your home.”

(If single or living without partner)

- 1) What household chores do you usually perform?
 - a. Who usually helps you with the household chores that you do not perform yourself?
What chores do they perform? How often do they help you?
 - b. Who pays the bills, and deals with other finances in the home?

- 2) Was there ever a time when you were a parent in a relationship and/or were living with a partner? *(If so, say)* Think about one of these more recent relationships:
- a. For how long did you live with them?
 - b. How did you deal with finances in your relationship?
 - c. Explain the division of household chores at that time.
 - i. Who usually got the groceries?
 - ii. Who usually took out garbage/recycling?
 - iii. Who usually washed the dishes?
 - iv. Who usually made meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner)?
 - v. Who usually did the laundry?
 - vi. Who usually cleaned the bathroom?
 - vii. Who usually vacuumed?
 - viii. Who usually did home repairs?
 - ix. Who usually did childcare duties:
 1. Feeding
 2. Cleaning/Changing diapers
 3. Baths
 4. Driving - to/from school, to/from extracurricular activities
 - x. Who usually maintained the car?
 - xi. Who usually did sewing and mending?
 - xii. Who usually made health appointments? (e.g. doctor's appointments)
 - d. Was the division of chores with this partner ever different than what you just described? Explain.
 - e. Can you tell me about a time when you had a conflict/disagreement or discussion with (a current or past partner) over household chores? How was it resolved, if at all?
 - f. Is/Was this kind of discussion typical in your relationship? Explain.

(If living with partner)

- 1) How do you deal with finances in your relationship?
- 2) I'm going to ask you specifically about how you deal with household chores in your relationship.
 - a. Who gets the groceries?
 - b. Who takes out the garbage/recycling?
 - c. Who washes the dishes?
 - d. Who cooks meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner)?
 - e. Who does the laundry?
 - f. Who cleans the bathroom?
 - g. Who vacuums?
 - h. Who does home repairs?
 - i. Who does childcare duties (only those that are applicable)
 - a. Feeding
 - b. Cleaning/Changing diapers
 - c. Baths
 - d. Driving - to/from school, to/from extracurricular activities
 - j. Who usually maintains the car?
 - k. Who usually does sewing and mending?
 - l. Who usually makes health appointments? (e.g. doctor's appointments)
- 3) Has this division of chores ever been different than what you just explained? Explain.
- 4) Can you tell me about a time when you had a conflict/disagreement or discussion with your partner over household chores? How was it resolved, if at all?
- 5) Is this kind of discussion typical in your relationship?

B. Household Chores & Management with Children

“Ok, now let’s talk about the arrangement of chores with your children”

- 1) What specific chores is each child responsible for?
- 2) Was this division of chores with your children ever different? Explain.
- 3) How did you come up with this division of chores for your children?
- 4) Do you expect it to change in the future? Explain.
- 5) Have any of your children ever wanted to perform chores that are not stereotypical of his/her gender (e.g. for boy – helping with meal prep/laundry/childcare; for girl – garbage/helping with car/home repairs).
 - a. (If so)
 - i. How old were they?
 - ii. Describe what happened.
 - iii. How did you respond? Was there a conflict/difference of opinion between you and (child’s name)?
 - b. (If not)
 - i. How do you imagine you would respond to this? Explain why?
- 6) Do you think the division of chores between you and any of your partners has influenced the chores your children perform? Explain.
- 7) Do your children have the opportunity to see the ways in which other adults negotiate household chores (e.g. other parents, uncles/aunts, grandparents etc)? Explain.
- 8) Do you think these models of division of chores (e.g. between you & partner, other adults) affect their notions about gender roles in the home? Explain.
- 9) Can you tell me about a time when you had a conflict/disagreement or discussion with any of your children over household chores? How was it resolved, if at all?
 - a. Was this kind of conflict/discussion with you children typical? Explain.

C. Provision of Opportunities

- 1) What kinds of toys/games do your children play with? Who buys these toys/games for them?
(ask about other family, and non-family members)?
- 2) What kind of clothing & clothing accessories do your children wear? Who buys these clothing & accessories for them (ask about other family, and non-family members)?
- 3) What colour & style are your children's bedrooms decorated in? Who chose these colours and styles and why (ask about other family, and non-family members)?
- 4) What TV shows/movies does he/she watch?
- 5) What kind of music does he/she listen to?
- 6) What kinds of extracurricular/recreational activities does he/she do?
- 7) Have any of these things ever been different in the past? Explain.
 - a. Leisure activities (examples)
 - b. TV shows/movies
 - c. Music
 - d. Extra-curricular activities
- 8) Has (child's name) ever expressed a desire for toys, clothing, decorations, music, activities, or TV shows that are not stereotypical of his/her gender?
 - a. (If so)
 - i. Describe what happened?
 - ii. How did you respond? Was there a conflict/difference of opinion between you and (child's name)?
 - b. (If not)
 - i. How do you imagine you would respond to this? Explain why?

D. Daily Interactions (for each child):Activities of Daily Living

- 1) What grooming activities (e.g. getting dressed, baths, haircuts) have your children received help with from either you, other family members, or non-family members? Explain:
 - a. Specify who helped with what?
 - b. What led others to assume these responsibilities?
 - c. Have these ever changed? Explain.
 - d. Do you expect them to change in the future? Explain.

- 2) What kind of shopping activities (e.g. grocery, clothing, toy, home shopping) have your children performed with either you, other family members, or non-family members?
 - a. Specify who helped with what?
 - b. What led others to assume these responsibilities?
 - c. Have these ever changed? Explain.
 - d. Do you expect them to change in the future? Explain.

Encouragement of Play & Leisure Activities

- 1) Tell me all of the people (adults and children) that your children play with, and tell me the activities they play with these people (e.g., *board games, sports (playing catch, passing football), video games, watching TV, reading, colouring, doll/teddy bear play, play wrestling, climbing*). Specify play partners (adult and children) and activities (probe for other family, and non-family members).
 - a. Have these ever changed? Explain.
 - b. Do you expect them to change in the future? Explain.

Help & Support

- 1) Who do your children turn to when they need help or support with a task or a problem?
(probe for other family, and non-family members)
 - a. What kinds of things do you or others help them with?
 - b. How often/much do you or others help them with these things?
 - c. Have these things ever changed? Explain.
 - d. Do you expect them to change in the future? Explain.

Displays of Affection

“Some loving families are very expressive & physically affectionate whereas others are more reserved. There is no one right way of showing your kids that you love them. These questions are about your style of showing affection.”

- 1) How do you show your children affection? How do they respond?
- 2) As a sign of affection, sometimes parents use terms of endearment with their children such as “my little man”, “sweetheart”, “baby”, “little prince/princess”, “honey”.
 - a. What terms of endearment do you use with your kids?
 - b. How did you start using such terms with your kids?
- 3) Were these things ever different in the past (e.g. when children were younger)? Explain.
- 4) Do you expect these to change in the future? Explain?
- 5) Are there other people in (child’s name) life that he/she is regularly affectionate with?
 - a. How much affection does (this person) show with your child?
 - b. What kinds of affectionate behaviours do they show? (hugging, kissing etc)
 - c. Terms of endearment?

Privileges, Restrictions, Rules

- 1) What privileges do your children have?
 - a. Who has decided them? (probe for all family, non-family members, school)

- b. How have they been decided?
- 2) What restrictions/rules do your children have?
 - a. Who has decided them? (probe for all family, non-family members, school)
 - b. How have they been decided?
 - 3) Were these things ever different in the past when children were younger? Explain.
 - 4) Do you anticipate these things ever being different at any point in the future? Explain.
 - 5) Has your child ever had any rules, restrictions, or privileges that most other boys/girls of his/her age don't? Explain.

Discipline & Punishment

- 1) Who disciplines your children usually?
 - a. What kind of discipline is used with them (e.g. time-out, sent to room)?
 - b. How much are they disciplined every day or every week?
- 2) Have these things ever been different in the past (e.g. when children were younger)?
Explain.
 - a. Who disciplines?
 - b. Type of discipline
 - c. How much?
- 3) Do you expect these to change in the future? Explain.
 - a. Who disciplines?
 - b. Type of discipline
 - c. How much?

E. Conversations & Messages

“One of the aspects of parent-child relationships that I am very interested in is the conversations that parents and children have with each other. (If children are very young, say) For the next set of questions, I need to know if your children have ever been able to participate in meaningful conversations about gender, sexuality, and other important issues?” If yes, continue with following questions:

- 1) Have you ever tried to talk to your children about your sexual orientation?
 - a. (If not) Explain what/who prevented you from doing this?
 - b. If so, tell me about such a conversation with ONE of your children that you thought was most vivid/important (probe for):
 - i. How old was (child's name) at the time?
 - ii. What events led up to the conversation? Who initiated the conversation?
 - iii. What was said?
 - iv. Was (child's name) concerned about their own sexuality? What did they ask/say?
 - v. How did you respond?
 - vi. Was there anything you wanted to say during that conversation that you didn't?
 - vii. How did you address issues of being different?
- 2) Have you ever talked to your children about gender identity/roles, that is, the behaviours and roles attached to one's sense of being a man or woman?
 - a. (If not) Explain what prevented you from doing this?
 - b. If so, tell me about such a conversation with ONE of your children that you thought was most vivid/important (probe for):
 - i. How old was (child's name) at the time?
 - ii. What led up to the conversation? Who initiated the conversation?
 - iii. What was said?
 - iv. Was (child's name) concerned about their own gender identity? What did they ask/say?
 - v. How did you respond?
 - vi. Was there anything you wanted to say during that conversation that you didn't?

- vii. How did you address issues of being different?
- 3) Has he/she ever expressed a desire to be another gender/sex, or behaved in a way that strongly indicated that he/she wanted to be another sex/gender (e.g. in dress, or actions)
- a. (If so), tell me about one of these times, that you think was most vivid/important (probe for):
 - i. What happened?
 - ii. What did he/she say?
 - iii. How did you respond? What was said? What was not said?
 - iv. What was the outcome?
 - b. (If not), how do you imagine you would respond if he/she expressed this desire?
- 4) What do you think about the issue of your children having male (female) role models? Have you ever talked to your kids about this issue?
- a. (If not) What factors prevented you from doing this?
 - b. If so, tell me about one such conversation with ONE of your children that you think was more vivid/important (probe for):
 - i. How old was (child's name) at the time?
 - ii. What events led up to the conversation? Who initiated the conversation?
 - iii. What was said?
 - iv. How did this relate to the issues of gender and sexual orientation for you or your children?
 - v. Was there anything you wanted to say during that conversation that you didn't?
- 5) (If participant has identified political values) Have you ever talked to (child's name) about your political values (such as being feminist, liberal, conservative etc.)?
- a. (If not) What factors prevented you from doing this?

- b. If so, tell me about one such conversation with ONE of your children that you thought was more important (probe for):
- i. How old was (child's name) at the time?
 - ii. What events led up to the conversation? Who initiated the conversation?
 - iii. What was said?
 - iv. How did this relate to the issues of gender and sexual orientation for you or your children?
 - v. Was there anything you wanted to say during that conversation that you didn't?
- 6) Have you ever talked to your children about their or your religious or cultural beliefs and practices?
- a. (If not) What factors prevented you from doing this?
 - b. If so, tell me about one such conversation with ONE of your children that you thought was more important (probe for):
- i. How old was (child's name) at the time?
 - ii. What events led up to the conversation? Who initiated the conversation?
 - iii. What was said?
 - iv. How did this relate to the issues of gender and sexual orientation for you or your children?
 - v. Was there anything you wanted to say during that conversation that you didn't?
- 7) To your knowledge, has anyone else (e.g. other parent, teacher, aunt, uncle, grandmother/father, sibling) ever tried to talk to your children about sexual orientation, gender identity/roles, male/female role models, political, and religious/cultural values?
- a. (If not) Why do you think this has not happened?
 - i. How would you react if someone did?

- b. (If so) Tell me about one or two of these conversations that were most vivid/important to you (probe for):
- i. Describe what happened.
 - ii. What was said?
 - iii. How did you feel about what (person) said?
 - iv. How did they relate this to issues of gender and sexual orientation?
 - v. How influential is this person in (child's name's) life?
- 8) Sometimes, the things that we don't talk about with our kids are just as important as the things we do talk about.
- a. Tell me about the some of the things you have consciously not talked to your kids about. Explain why?

F. Messages from Other Sources

Friends/Peers of Children (for parents of children aged 5 and older)

"Think about the peers/friends each of your children has. For one or 2 of these friends who are closest to your children, explain:"

- 1) What is the gender of the friend?
- 2) How much time does the friend spend with your children?
- 3) What things do they do together?
- 4) What things do they talk about?
- 5) Does the friend know about your sexuality?
 - a. How have they reacted? (e.g. negatively, positively, didn't care)?
 - b. Has there been any reaction to your gender identity/role?
- 6) What other messages does your child receive from friends about gender identity/roles and/or sexual orientation?
 - a. Were these ever different? Explain.

7) How do their friends influence the kinds of toys/games they play with or clothing they wear?

Explain.

Religion/Culture

1) How do religious/cultural beliefs/practices/institutions influence your children's beliefs about their gender and sexual orientation? Explain in as much detail as possible.

Media

"Children receive many messages (positive, neutral, and negative) through the media (TV shows, movies, commercials, magazines, music, books) about how they should behave, and look as girls, boys, men, and women, and about what is acceptable in terms of sexuality. We have already talked about this somewhat. Now, I want to cover any areas that we may have missed."

1) Do you think that the media can influence (positively & negatively) children's own gender and sexuality, as well as their ideas and beliefs about these concepts? Explain:

a. How do TV & advertising influence/not influence the kinds of toys your children play with or clothing they wear? Explain.

b. Can you name some TV shows, movies, magazines, or songs that you have found especially relevant for giving messages about gender and sexuality, whether positive or negative?

2) (If not) Explain why you believe the media does not influence children's own gender and/or sexuality, as well as their ideas and beliefs about these concepts.

G. Gay/Lesbian Parents as Role Models

"We have talked a lot about the direct and indirect ways in which you teach your children about gender and sexuality, and those ways in which you might influence their own gender identity and sexuality."

1) Is there anything you would recommend to other gay and lesbian parents, with regard to teaching and socializing their children about gender and sexuality?

2) Is there anything you would recommend to heterosexual parents, with regard to teaching and socializing their children gender and sexuality?

VITA AUCTORIS

Salma Ackbar was born in 1978 in Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago. She graduated from St. Joseph's Convent in 1997. From there, she moved to Ontario, Canada to attend Queen's University where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree with honours in Psychology in 2002. In 2005, she earned a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology from the University of Windsor, and hopes to graduate from the University of Windsor with a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology in October 2011.