

## **Lesbian Mothers and Their Children: A Comparison with Solo Parent Heterosexual Mothers and Their Children**

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*Two types of single-parent households and their effects on children ages 3–11 years were compared. One type comprised 50 homosexual mothers and their 56 children, and the other was a group of 40 heterosexual mothers and their 48 children. There were 30 daughters and 26 sons of homosexual mothers and 28 daughters and 20 sons of heterosexual mothers. The sexual identity and social relationships of the children were assessed in relation to the sexual orientation of the mothers. The samples consisted of families from rural and urban areas in 10 American states. All have lived without adult males (18 years or older) in the household for a minimum of 2 years (average 4). Families with heterosexual mothers were matched to families with homosexual mothers on age and race of mother; length of mother and child separation from father; educational level and income of mother; and number, age, and sex of children. Data are reported from childrens' tests designed to provide information on*

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*general intelligence, core-morphologic sexual identity, gender-role preferences, family and peer group relationships, and adjustment to the single-parent family. No significant differences were found between the two types of households for boys and few significant differences for girls. Concerns that being raised by a homosexual mother might produce sexual identity conflict and peer group stigmatization were not supported by the research findings. Data also revealed more similarities than differences in parenting experiences, marital history, and present living situations of the two groups of mothers. The postulated compromised parental fitness of lesbian mothers, commonly asserted in child custody cases, is not supported by these data.*

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**KEY WORDS:** sexual identity; lesbian; father absence; homosexuality; child custody.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper reports results of a study designed to assess aspects of the psychosexual and psychosocial development of prepubescent children living with their mothers, with the independent variable being the mother's sexual orientation. Data from a group of 50 currently homosexual women and their 56 children, ages 3 to 11, were compared with data from a matched group of 40 heterosexual women and their 48 children. There were 30 daughters and 26 sons of homosexual mothers and 28 daughters and 20 sons of heterosexual mothers.

The study is built around a model of sexual identity that has evolved through the work of Stoller (1968), Money and Ehrhardt (1972), and Green (1974). Stated briefly, sexual identity is viewed as having three components: core-morphologic identity, gender-role behaviors, and sexual partner preference (Green, 1974). Core-morphologic identity is the individual's sense of being either male or female. Gender-role behavior is the individual's conduct that is culturally described as masculine or feminine. The third component, sexual partner preference, probably develops after core-morphologic identity and gender-role behaviors. As preadolescent children are the focus of this study, data were gathered on the first two components.

This research project assessed the effects on children's sexual identity development of living in a father-absent household with either a heterosexual or a homosexual mother. Heterosexual mothers, also divorced, and without adult males living in the home, were selected as a control group for the homosexual mother households so that the effects on children of divorce and/or father absence could be balanced between the two family groups.

## SUBJECT DESCRIPTION AND METHODOLOGY

The samples were two matched groups of currently unmarried women living with at least one child between the ages of 3 and 11 years. The homosexual sample was recruited from volunteers who contacted the research team after learning about the study from national and local women's groups or through friendship networks. Research efforts were concentrated in 10 states within reasonable traveling distance for the researchers (Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin). All volunteers within a geographic area were accepted if they met the study criteria. The criteria were (1) currently unmarried, (2) legal custodian of at least one child between 3 and 11 years, (3) currently self-identified as a lesbian, and (4) no adult male living in the household for at least 2 years.

The heterosexual sample was collected from approximately 900 responses to requests for single-mother subjects. This group is matched to the lesbian mother families on mothers' age ( $\pm 5$  years), race, children's sex and age ( $\pm 12$  months), length of time separated from the husband/father ( $\pm 1$  year), mother's current marital status, current family income, mother's educational level, and the absence of an adult male living in the household for at least 2 years. Statistical analysis comparing families in the two groups on the demographic variables revealed no significant differences on any of the match criteria. The children in both groups had a mean age of 8 years, with a range of 3-11. Mothers were white women between ages 25 and 46. They had been living as single parents for at least 2 years with a mean of 4.0 years. While the majority (82% of homosexuals and 90% of heterosexuals) were separated or divorced, three homosexual women were widowed and 10% of both samples had never married. Income and occupation ranged from unemployed on welfare to professionals earning over \$2,000 a month (median \$850 a month). The majority of women worked 20-40 hr per week. Education ranged from grade school to graduate degrees with most subjects (85%) having completed at least 2 years of college. When asked to describe their present sexual orientation, all women in one group labeled themselves lesbian, while none in the other group were so identified.

### Testing Procedures

Each mother was given test materials which she completed and returned by mail. The mothers' questionnaire addressed child raising, parenting experiences, and marital and romantic relationships. Attitude

assessments covered divorce, sex roles, sex education of children, and child discipline. Personality scales included the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974), the Adjective Checklist (Gough and Heilbrun, 1965), and the Jackson PRF-E, (Jackson, 1974). These tests were selected to provide both an assessment of general personality variables and a measure of psychological sex-typing. Mothers also completed a Son and/or Daughter Questionnaire about each child which covered sexual identity, peer group popularity, and preferred play activities. An audiotaped interview with each mother was made, usually in the home.

Children were tested for intelligence level using the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI) or Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WIRC-R) and were administered several tests of sexual identity and family relationships. Each child was interviewed about play preferences, friendships, television preferences, and thoughts about life as an adult. Children were not asked to discuss their mother's sexual identity or their reactions to their mother's marital status. Because the children were preadolescent, they were not questioned about sexual fantasies or expected sexual partner preferences.

### **Statistical Methods**

To compare quantitative variables (e.g., scales, test scores), paired tests were used. For dichotomous responses, McNemar's chi-square test comparing binomial proportions for paired data was used. Since the scales and tests either have finite ranges or have been designed to give approximately a Gaussian distribution of responses, normal theory tests should be valid. Wilcoxon tests (Mann-Whitney Signed Rank) were used to verify significance. When ordered categories existed, Kendall's tau beta was used. Degrees of freedom varied from one analysis to another in that many categorical response variables were ordered.

Three groups of measures of sexual identity development were considered: results of psychological tests, children's responses from interview, and mother's responses on the Son-Daughter Questionnaire.

### **Regression Analyses**

Table I shows the predictors considered for regression analyses. Two variables summarize the mothers' sexual preference: a dichotomous indicator of heterosexuality or homosexuality, and a scale measuring frequency of participation in lesbian activist groups. Since age at separation from husband and age when last adult male was present in the household

**Table I.** Predictors Considered in Regression Analyses

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Child's age
Child's age at separation from father
Child's age when last adult male was living in house
Mother's education
Mother's feminist activities
Group (lesbian or heterosexual control)
Mother's lesbian political activities

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are correlated with current age of the child, these predictors were considered only when effect of current age had been removed. Preliminary analysis showed that the mothers' attitude scales had little correlation with the variables of interest so that these scales were not included in further regressions.

An exploratory stepwise regression analysis on those children with complete data for the variables considered was used to reduce the number of regressors considered. Variables were included in the final regression only when the  $F$  to enter exceeded the 0.05 significance level or the variable was colinear with another variable and needed to be accounted for first (primarily age of child). Scatterplots and cross-tabulations were used to ensure that significant regressions did not depend on isolated cases. Boys were analyzed separately from girls. When there were several children from the same family, all siblings were included in the regressions.

## RESULTS

### Mothers' Questionnaire

#### *Current Life-Style*

In many respects the two groups of mothers were similar in their experiences as single parents. The formerly married had married at an average age of 21, and their marriages had lasted 6 to 8 years. Although homosexual feelings were an issue leading to divorce for 42% of the lesbian mothers, other reasons for divorce were similar: tension over the division of labor and sex roles in the marriage, sexual dissatisfaction, extramarital relationships, and husband's alcoholism, compulsive gambling, or physical abuse. Income levels after divorce decreased for almost half the sample. Approximately 65% of both groups were receiving no child support, and

50% felt that child support money was an angry issue between them and their ex-husbands.

Current relationships and living situations differed for the two groups. Thirty-nine lesbian mothers and four heterosexual mothers indicated that other adults were living in their household besides themselves and their children. For 28 of the lesbians, these were partners with whom they had a sexual relationship. For 11 other lesbians these were female roommates who were not sexual partners. One of the heterosexual mothers had a female roommate and three had a relative, usually a sister or mother.

Mothers' plans for the future differed in the two groups. Of the homosexual women, 75% said they did not plan to remarry, whereas over 72% of the heterosexual women would at least consider remarriage. Among the homosexual women who would consider another marriage, reasons most often cited were concern for the children, financial security, and the concealment of homosexuality. Heterosexuals most commonly listed emotional and sexual needs and companionship as reasons for desiring remarriage.

Plans to have more children also differed between the two groups. Although only one lesbian and one heterosexual mother planned to have more children, 81% of lesbian mothers vs. 56% of heterosexual mothers did not plan to have more children,  $\chi^2 = 6.54$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ . The remaining mothers were unsure.

Questions to the mothers about their political activity differentiated between general feminist groups joined by both heterosexual and homosexual members (e.g., NOW, ERA coalitions) and lesbian feminist organizations (Daughters of Bilitis, Dykes and Tikes). Homosexual mothers were significantly more active in general feminist organizations than were heterosexual mothers; 70% were participating in a feminist group more than once a month as compared to 21% of the heterosexuals. Forty-one percent of the homosexual sample had never participated in lesbian-feminist organizations.

The heterosexual mothers were more actively religious than the lesbian mothers (Kendall's tau beta =  $-0.08$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ ) as measured by frequency of attendance at religious services. More than half (56%) of the lesbians as compared to 15% of the heterosexual mothers reported never attending religious services, ( $\chi^2 = 17.23$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ).

A number of factors related to the stress of being a single parent were assessed. These included change of residence, relationship with relatives and friends, arguments with child's father, disagreements about money, and habit changes including smoking, drinking, sleep, and work. None of these factors differentiated the two groups.

Some of the lesbian mothers had divorced prior to acknowledging a homosexual preference. In eight of the lesbian mothers' divorce proceedings sexual preference was an issue, and for seven of the lesbian mothers it was an issue in establishing child custody.

### Mothers' Psychosexual Development

When asked about their own childhood interests, the groups of mothers reported significant differences in play with toys and participation in activities more usually associated with the other sex. Four percent of the lesbian mothers and 24% of the heterosexual mothers had never played with boys' toys; 69% of lesbian mothers and 18% of heterosexual mothers had frequently or usually played with typically masculine toys, Kendall's tau beta =  $-0.38$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ . In childhood, 63% of heterosexuals had never dressed in boys' clothes, compared to only 33% of the lesbians, Kendall's tau beta =  $-0.31$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ . In adolescence, the difference continued: only 38% of lesbians reported never dressing in male-type clothes as compared to 72% of the heterosexuals, Kendall's tau beta =  $-0.33$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

When asked about being called a "tomboy," 68% of lesbians and 38% of heterosexuals said they had been called by this label,  $\chi^2 = 6.33$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ . Tomboyism was more prolonged for lesbian mothers. While one heterosexual reported she was called a tomboy in adulthood, all remaining heterosexuals had ceased being labeled tomboy by age 14. Eight lesbian mothers were called tomboys past age 14 and into adulthood, Kendall's tau beta =  $-0.24$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

In terms of stereotyped patterns of dress, some differences between the two groups were found. Most (92%) lesbians usually dressed in slacks compared to 23% of the heterosexuals, Kendall's tau beta =  $0.43$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ . The use of makeup also distinguished the groups, with 54% of lesbian mothers indicating that they never wore makeup compared to only 10% of the heterosexual mothers, Kendall's tau beta =  $0.43$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ .

### Psychological Tests

Score on the Adjective Checklist revealed lesbian mothers scoring higher on self-confidence, dominance (seeking leadership roles), and exhibition (eliciting attention from others) and heterosexual mothers scoring higher on abasement (expressing feelings of inferiority) and deference (seeking subordinate roles in relation to others), paired  $t$  test  $p \leq 0.05$ .

Scores on the attitude scales and the Bem Sex-Role Inventory did not differentiate the two groups.

### **Children's Results**

#### *Intelligence Quotient*

Full-scale mean scores on the WISC-R or WPPSI for each group were in the average range and no significant differences were found on full-scale or subscale scores.

#### *Early Development*

Most of the children were born into a two-parent family with the family living in the home. Because of the ensuing legal separation and divorce, the children experienced periods of separation from one or the other parent. Separations were defined as a period of 3 months or more of continuous separation from a parent. Sons of heterosexual mothers were more likely to have experienced more than one period of separation from father, whereas sons of lesbian mothers typically had experienced a single separation, Kendall's tau beta = 0.23,  $p \leq 0.05$ . Two daughters of lesbians and seven daughters of heterosexuals experienced one or more separations from their mother, Kendall's tau beta = 0.33,  $p \leq 0.05$ . There was a significant difference for the gender of the person who substituted for the father during the separation. Although less than half the total number of mothers used a substitute person to help with parenting during a separation, lesbian mothers more often utilized women as parent substitutes whereas heterosexual mothers utilized men.

For the first year of life, the majority of lesbian mothers reported having spent fewer daytime hours holding or touching their infant sons than did heterosexual mothers,  $\chi^2 = 17.83$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ . Fifty percent of heterosexual mothers reported holding their daughters 7 hr or more per day in the first year whereas only 17% of lesbian mothers reported holding their daughters this many hours, Kendall's tau beta = 0.25,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

### **Children's Sexual Identity**

#### *Draw-A-Person Test*

Children were administered the Draw-A-Person Test (DAP). The DAP was administered by asking each child to draw a person, sex



unspecified, using a pencil and one sheet of paper. In response to questions from the child, it was explained that the person could be either male or female but not a cartoon figure. Children were not prompted if they failed to draw a whole person. The first-drawn figure by each child was scored using the Koppitz System (1968) to assess the presence of emotional problems. This system uses 30 emotional indicators (e.g., drawing characteristics, shading, slanted figure, omissions of body parts) that meet criteria of clinical validity for differentiating between children with and without emotional problems. These indicators occur infrequently (i.e., less than 16% of the time) in drawings done by nonclinical subjects and have been shown to be unrelated to maturation.

No significant differences were found between groups of children on DAP scores, with approximately 50% of the children having two or more Koppitz indicators. Our data on sex of first-drawn figures shows that one son of a lesbian mother and none of heterosexual mothers drew the other sex first. Five daughters of lesbian mothers and seven daughters of heterosexual mothers drew the other sex first.

The It-Scale for Children, developed by Brown (1956) to test aspects of gender identity, was also given to both groups. In this test children utilize a neuter stick figure "It" to select from a series of sex-typed toys, games, and activity preferences. No significant differences were found for scores of the groups of sons or daughters. Both groups of boys scored within the masculine range (lesbians' sons = 69; heterosexuals' sons = 70). Girls' mean scores in both group were within the feminine range (lesbians' daughters = 36; heterosexuals' daughters = 29).

Earlier work (Green, 1974) showed that highly "feminine" boys were in part distinguished by their continually reasserted wish to wear articles of women's clothing and to role-play as females. In the present study, mothers were questioned about their children's cross-dressing and fantasy play. No differences were found between the groups of boys. Girls in both groups were reported consistently as having more latitude in dress than were boys, and some significant differences were found. Parents indicated the frequency with which their daughters dressed in clothes considered to be traditionally boyish. At the extreme end of "frequent cross-dressing," the rate for the lesbian mother daughters was 21%, whereas it was only 11% for the daughters of heterosexual mothers. For the full range of frequency, daughters of lesbian mothers reported more "cross-dressing," Kendall's tau  $\beta = -0.23$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

### **Wish to be the Other Sex**

Earlier work (Green, 1974) noted that a wish to be a person of the opposite sex is a diagnostic variable used to determine a significant cross-sex

identity. This feature is now pivotal in the diagnosis of the gender identity disorder of childhood (APA, 1980). In a semistructured interview, each child was asked, if he or she could be born again, which sex he or she would choose. No differences were found for the wishes of either group of boys or girls. Most children chose the same sex as themselves.

### *Preference for Adult Roles*

Interest in marriage and parenting was also questioned. No significant differences were found. When asked about their preferences for adult roles ("What would you like to be when you grow up?"), children's responses were coded as gender neutral, traditionally masculine, or traditionally feminine. Daughters of lesbians chose traditionally masculine jobs significantly more often than heterosexuals' daughters, Kendall's tau beta = 0.27,  $p \leq 0.05$ . Fifty-two percent of lesbians' daughters, compared to 21% of heterosexuals' daughters, chose jobs such as doctor, lawyer, engineer, and astronaut. Ninety-five percent of all boys chose traditionally masculine jobs.

Children were given a Child-Parent Role Interview in which they were asked a series of questions about activities that may occur within the home and which parent would assume responsibility for the task. Only two items discriminated the group. Heterosexuals' daughters were more likely than lesbians' daughters to say that "Dad is the person who knows how to get into the locked house,"  $\chi^2 = 11.54$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ . Sons and daughters of heterosexual mothers were more likely to say that "Dad fixes broken toys" (sons,  $\chi^2 = 9.59$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ; daughters  $\chi^2 = 11.42$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). On the remaining items describing family decisions and tasks, children's answers were not differentiated and tended to be quite traditional.

### *Toy and Activity Choice*

Both children and mothers were asked about each child's favorite games, toys, and activities at home and at school. Generally, boys in both groups made similar choices and were typically masculine, while girls exhibited a wider range of choices. No significant differences were found between the groups of children on favorite type of television program, sex of their favorite television character, or favorite games or toys. However, girls' choices were more spread between neutral and feminine toys and games than were those of boys who chose, in the majority, masculine toys and games.

The two groups of mothers did not report a difference in the amount of participation in sports for either their sons or daughters. A majority of

the children were rated average in their sports participation. Regarding rough-and-tumble play, 23% of daughters of lesbian mothers were described as "above average" in participation compared to other girls their age, while none of the heterosexual group was "above average," ( $\chi^2 = 7.45$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). Sons were not differentiated on this variable, with the majority ranked average.

Interest in playing house did not differentiate the two groups of daughters. More than 50% of both groups reported playing house "frequently." The groups of boys were also not differentiated on their level of interest, with over 75% of each group playing house "occasionally." More children of lesbian mothers showed a "considerable" interest in playacting and role-taking than did children of heterosexual mothers (daughters: Kendall's tau beta =  $-0.27$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ; sons: Kendall's tau beta =  $-0.24$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). The roles chosen in house play did not differentiate sons in the groups or daughters in the two groups.

With regard to specific sex-typed toys, 36% of the daughters of heterosexual mothers were reported as never playing with trucks compared to only 7% of lesbian-mother daughters, Kendall's tau beta =  $-0.39$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ . Sons did not differ on this variable, the majority in both samples reporting frequent truck play. Almost twice as many heterosexuals' daughters (68%) as lesbians' daughters (37%) were reported as never playing with guns, Kendall's tau beta =  $-0.31$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ . Boys were not differentiated on this type of play, the majority reporting occasional gun play. Daughters were not differentiated by reports of doll play, with 75% of both groups reporting frequent or occasional doll play. Sons were not differentiated, with the majority reporting occasional doll play. Mothers' attitudes toward doll play were not distinguishable.

### **Children's Activity Preference: School and Neighborhood**

Children were asked about their preferred types of activity, both at school and in their neighborhood, and were given a choice between a strong or moderate preference for activities that boys or girls typically do, or an equal preference for both boy- and girl-type activities. Some differences were found. Among girls' activity preferences at school, more than half of both groups of daughters chose the activities of both sexes equally. Of those making other choices, 24% of lesbians' daughters ( $n = 7$ ) chose other-sex activities as compared to only 8% ( $n = 2$ ) of heterosexuals' daughters. Thirty-nine percent ( $n = 11$ ) of heterosexuals' daughters chose same-sex activities as compared to only 18% ( $n = 5$ ) of lesbians' daughters, Kendall's tau beta =  $0.28$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ . In the neighborhood, differences in activity preference were again found for

girls. The majority of daughters of lesbian mothers (77%) liked both traditionally boys' and girls' activities equally, whereas daughters of heterosexual mothers chose same-sex activities more frequently, Kendall's tau beta =  $-0.039$ ;  $p \leq 0.01$ .

At school, 35% of heterosexuals' sons strongly preferred same-sex activities compared to 48% of lesbians' sons. Thirty-two percent of lesbians' sons wanted to play at both sexes' activities equally as opposed to only 10% of heterosexuals' sons, Kendall's tau beta =  $-0.36$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ . No boys, in either group, preferred traditionally feminine activities at school. In their home neighborhood, sons' preferences were similar, with the majority of the groups choosing traditionally boys' activities.

### *Peer Group Relationships*

Children were asked who their best friend was and were asked to rate their popularity with same-sex and other-sex children in school and in their neighborhood. No significant differences were found. Most children reported having same-sex best friends. Eighty percent of the daughters of lesbian mothers and 75% of the heterosexuals' daughters said they were liked "much more," "somewhat more," or "as much" by their same-sex peer group as other girls in their class. More than 80% of the sons of the lesbian mothers and of the heterosexual mothers reported corresponding self-ratings of popularity with their male classmates.

Mothers were asked to rate their son and daughter as "a leader," "a good mixer," "a loner," or "rejected by friends." The lesbian mothers rated 90% of their daughters and 96% of their sons as leaders or good mixers, compared to the heterosexuals' ratings of 92% for their daughters and 85% for their sons.

### **Regression Results: Sexual Identity of the Child**

Multiple regressions were used to assess the extent to which sexual identity of the child could be predicted by the mother's activities, sexual preference, and the family background (see Table I).

#### *Boys*

Younger boys who had been living in a house without a man for a longer period of time were more likely to mention a woman as a person they would

like to be like when grown,  $r^2 = 0.21$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ . However, as noted above, there was no difference between the group for boys wishing to be of the other sex.

No significant associations were found for favorite toy, game, or television character, nor were there differences for an interest in later marriage and childbearing.

Older boys were significantly less confident about their popularity with other boys,  $r^2 = 0.10$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ , but age had no effect on girls' confidence about popularity or on the mother's assessment of the child's social acceptance.

### *Girls*

Girls whose mothers were active in lesbian or feminist organizations were significantly more likely to express an interest in traditionally masculine occupations,  $r^2 = 0.25$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ . Older girls were more likely to mention a man as someone they would like to be like when grown,  $r^2 = 0.09$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ .

## DISCUSSION

None of the children in our study meet the criteria of the gender identity disorder of childhood (APA, 1980). The daughters show a wider range of gender-role behaviors than the sons but are not beyond the normal range. The daughters of lesbian mothers are less traditionally feminine in current dress, interest in rough-and-tumble play, activity preferences at school and in the neighborhood, and anticipated occupation. The dress preferences of daughters of lesbian mothers may be related to their greater participation in rough-and-tumble play and/or the result of a pattern set by their mothers, who also dress more often in pants or jeans. The difference found between the daughters' truck play may reflect differences in the mothers' attitudes: 60% of lesbian mothers compared to 29% of heterosexual mothers encouraged truck play in their daughters,  $\chi^2 = 14.12$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ . However, a finding contradicting parental encouragement as the determining variable is that, for the two boys' groups, 73% of heterosexual mothers encouraged truck play compared to only 30% of lesbian mothers,  $\chi^2 = 9.72$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p \leq 0.01$ . The boys in both groups are similar and quite traditionally masculine.

Several researchers have interpreted the sex of the figure drawn first on the DAP as an indication of gender identity. For example, Jolles (1952) established that 80% of boys and 82% of girls draw their own sex first, whereas Green (1974) found that boys with the gender identity disorder of childhood were more likely to draw a female first. Koppitz (1968) states that the first person drawn is the person who is "of greatest concern and impor-

tance to the child at the time of the drawing" (p. 76). Thus, children most often draw themselves. No conflict in gender identity was found in any of our groups on the DAP. Our study revealed no psychopathology (as defined by the Koppitz scoring of the DAP) related to the mothers' sexual orientation. Kirkpatrick, Smith, and Roy (1981) found that 20% of the children of both lesbian and heterosexual mothers had emotional disturbances. The children in our study, similar to those of Kirkpatrick *et al.*, are characterized as having reactions typical of children who had experienced parental separation and divorce. The majority of our families were approximately 2 years postdivorce and may still be within the period of maximal stress following family reorganization.

The "best interests of the child" with a lesbian mother is a controversial judicial issue (Green, 1982). Courts are concerned with both the short-term and the long-term consequences of a son or daughter living with its homosexual mother. Short-term concerns include social stigmatization of the child and confusion in the child regarding its sexual identity. Long-term concerns include the possibility of a homosexual orientation in the child.

Our data demonstrate no distinctions between the groups of male or female children of homosexual or heterosexual mothers regarding popularity or social adjustment. Our data demonstrate no differences regarding the first component of sexual identity—the self-concept as male or female. Some differences are found for the second component—gender-role behaviors. For female children, while there is less adherence to traditionally sex-typed standards, they are still similar to many other same-age girls. The children are too young for the reporting of sexual orientation.

Why should there be no major demonstrable effect on sexual identity development of children being raised by currently homosexual mothers? (Green, 1978; Golombok, Spence, and Rutter, 1983). If homosexual behavior reflects a fundamental conflict or confusion over anatomic maleness and femaleness, and/or reflects disorder in gender-role sexual expression by children, why do our groups of children look so similar?

First, consider Component 1 of sexual identity: core-morphologic identity. The clues children utilize to categorize themselves as male or female include comparisons of genital configuration, patterns of dress, and word labels such as "what a lovely girl (or boy)." It would require the absence of persons of the two comparison sexes (perhaps, more importantly, a person of the other sex) in the child's early environment, clothed or nude, and the absence of any sex-typing language for confusion to occur. Both groups of our children appear to have had equal (and ample) opportunity to learn from these cues (if the process is one of learning).

Second, consider Component 2 of sexual identity: gender-role behavior. Our previous work on father-absence and masculine gender-role behavior in

sons suggests that father absence for the boys in the present study commenced later than the critical developmental period when its impact is seen. Our previous work demonstrated that the amount of father-son shared time in the first 5 years is a key variable associated with the development of extensively feminine or conventionally masculine behavior in sons (Green, 1986). A substantial number of boys in both of our present groups shared time with their fathers during these years. With girls, the impact of father-absence may be less on the expression of childhood gender-role behavior than on some aspects of later romantic and social relationships with men (Billler, 1974).

Third, consider Component 3 of sexual identity: sexual orientation. There are few, if any, data pointing to a role-modeling influence of a parent's homosexual orientation on the sexual orientation of a child. It may appear facile, but nevertheless is accurate, to state that nearly all homosexuals had heterosexual parents. Indeed, theories of the development of homosexuality highlight problem areas in the relationship of heterosexual parents with each other and with their children (e.g., Bieber *et al.*, 1962).

While most children of lesbian mothers studied for sexual identity development have not yet established a pattern of sexual orientation, it is likely that a comparable number of predominantly homosexual children will emerge from these groups as in the general population. (This would be about 10% for males; 5% for females: Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin, 1948; Kinsey *et al.*, 1953). Based on our earlier research linking adult homosexual orientation with childhood cross-gender behavior (Green, 1986), these rates of homosexuality should not be greater than in the general population. Indeed, they should be less. Our prospective 15-year study finds that over three-quarters of previously extensively "feminine" boys evolved into bisexual or homosexual young adults (Green, 1985, 1987). This finding is consistent with others' retrospective research where about two-thirds of homosexual men recall significantly more cross-gender boyhood behavior than is recalled by heterosexual men (Bell, Weinberg, and Hammersmith, 1981; Grellert, Newcomb, and Bentler, 1982; Saghir and Robins, 1973). Similarly, the link between adulthood homosexual orientation and girlhood cross-gender behavior is also found, at least with retrospective studies (Bell *et al.*, 1981; Grellert *et al.*, 1982; Saghir and Robins, 1973). However, while lesbians more often report having been tomboys than do heterosexuals, the link between childhood cross-gender behavior and adult homosexual orientation appear stronger for the male. (This is at least mathematically true since extensive cross-gender behavior is more rare in boys, whereas the rate of adult homosexual orientation is double for men). In that the two groups of boys in the present study do not show extensive cross-gender behavior, the pool from which two-thirds of homosexual men appear to derive, the rate of homosexual orientation to be expected from our group should be less than the standard 10%. For our girls, the poorer

fit between the two patterns of sexual identity expression at different phases of the life cycle makes speculation more hazardous about the 5% expected rate of female homosexual orientation.

If parental sexual orientation is a role-modeling influence on the child, it may have been too diluted to have a major impact. The child does not live in a social vacuum with its homosexual parent. There may be contact with the heterosexual parent. There are also the parents of the peer group. Further, the child is bombarded by the conventional family patterns portrayed in mass media (children spend more time watching television than watching parents.)

Alternatively, sexual orientation could be largely a product of a genetic contribution. Recent research finds a higher rate of homosexuality in the male near relatives of male homosexuals (Pillard, Poumadere, and Carretta, 1982). Earlier research demonstrated high rates of concordance of homosexuality in male monozygotic twins (Heston and Shields, 1968; Kallman, 1952). If there is a genetic contribution, a higher rate of homosexuality in the children of lesbian mothers might be expected. However, the genetic transmission could require a recessive contribution from both parents to be visible. Thus, the presence of one homosexual or bisexual parent might not increase the likelihood of homosexual expression in the child. Studies of children born to two homosexual parents could help elucidate whether there is a genetic contribution. A possible source of such data would be children conceived from semen contributed by homosexual men in the donor insemination fertilization of homosexual women. Such a study would be confounded, however, by the fact that these children are raised generally by the lesbian mother alone or with another woman. Thus the genetic influence is contaminated with the social variable of father absence.

Yet another option for explaining our findings is the commonly observed phenomenon that children often, to parents' dismay, rebel against parental values. Conservative parents may have radical children. Profane parents may have religious offspring. Perhaps, children growing up in a homosexual household establish their autonomy from parents, in part, by rejecting the pattern of their parent's sexuality. It is not unknown for homosexuals to describe the evolution of their same-sex preference as a reaction to the heterosexual life-style of their parents.

Enough speculation. It is clear that boys and girls raised from early childhood by a homosexual mother without an adult male in the household for about 4 years do not appear appreciably different on parameters of psychosexual and psychosocial development from children raised by heterosexual mothers, also without an adult male present.

These data are significant for theories of sexual identity development. They also have practical considerations when courts become battlegrounds



for child custody. The data reveal that whatever the considerations that contribute to the best interests of the child (and the parents) in such litigation, the mother's sexual orientation per se should not enter this judicial calculus.

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