

**Child Outcomes Associated with Lesbian Parenting:
Comments on Biblarz and Stacey's 2010 Report**

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Abstract

Biblarz and Stacey (2010a), as well as Biblarz and Savci (2010), recently reviewed the literature on lesbian parenting and concluded that lesbian parents were probably more effective parents than heterosexual parents. They went so far as to question the need for fathers as parents. That literature has been reexamined in this paper.

It appears that parental role modeling is important for children of lesbian as well as heterosexual parents. It appears that lesbian parents do tend to divide household labor more equally than do heterosexual parents, which appears to carry over to encouraging their children to adopt less traditional gender roles compared to heterosexual parents.

Furthermore, it appears that sons of lesbians tend to be more feminine than sons of heterosexual parents, while daughters of lesbian mothers tend to be more masculine than daughters of heterosexual parents. Thus, parental influence seems important for gender modeling, though complete role reversal is rare.

Likewise, lesbian parents appear to be more open to their children at the very least expressing a nontraditional sexual orientation when compared to heterosexual parents. Again, parental influence seems to be an influence, since increasing evidence suggests that children of lesbian mothers, perhaps especially their daughters, are more likely to adopt a nonheterosexual sexual orientation. Some research also suggests that children of lesbian parents are more likely to adopt sexually permissive attitudes, even if they have a heterosexual orientation. Since the children of lesbian parents appear to have much higher exposure to nonheterosexual role models in terms of adult contacts other than their parents, there may be additional modeling from those other adults with respect to nontraditional gender roles and nontraditional sexual orientations, if not sexual permissiveness.

It remains challenging to sort out the effects of sexual orientation on a child's psychological adjustment. First, virtually all studies and outcomes that have yielded adverse results for lesbians' children have been marginalized in the literature; published

research has shown that outcomes favorable toward gay or lesbian parenting are more likely to be cited academically than those that are unfavorable, in spite of greater methodological limitations. Second, any significant effects of gay or lesbian parenting most likely operate over long periods of time through intervening variables such as parental goals for their children. In addition, such effects would most likely be tied to gender role or sexual orientation/sexual permissiveness outcomes rather than other variables. The extent to which parents model and encourage delayed gratification choices—especially those involving sex—may be important intervening variables for understanding children’s psychological outcomes as a function of parental gender and sexual orientation.

Consequently, it appears that recent conclusions about the consequences of lesbian parenting (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Biblarz & Stacey, 2010a, 2010b) are far from scientifically correct. Parental modeling does appear to play an important role in child socialization for both lesbian and heterosexual parents. However, what is modeled does appear to differ substantially between lesbian and heterosexual parents, with significant consequences for children in terms of a variety of outcomes, most often keyed to gender role orientations or expressions of sexuality. Recent claims that lesbians make better parents than heterosexuals are not warranted scientifically.

Introduction

Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) desired “to revive conversation among scholars about research on gender differences in parenting and child development,” even at the risk of inviting charges of “Lunacy 201” (p. 4). This author wishes to continue that conversation. It is common to claim that “scholars have achieved a rare degree of consensus that unmarried lesbian parents are raising children who develop at least as well as their counterparts with married heterosexual parents” (p. 5). As Biblarz and Stacey (2010b) reiterated, “social science research does not and cannot support the claim that

children need both a mother and a father parenting together” (p. 42). Moreover, as Peggy Drexler and Linden Gross (2005) quoted Dr. Michael Lamb, “It’s become clear that the absence of a male figure is really not important” (p. 20), reflecting an apparent scholarly consensus (Gartrell & Bos, 2010) that fathers are no longer necessary for average, much less optimum, child development.

Mallon (2000, p. 4) clearly stated that research was unequivocal in concluding that not a single study had found even one disadvantage for children of lesbian or gay parents. Articles on lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered (LGBT) families from the recent decade state that lesbian mothers “tended to equal or surpass heterosexual married couples on time spent with children, parenting skill, and warmth and affection” (Biblarz & Savci, 2010, p. 482). History has proven, however, that scholarly consensus has sometimes been incorrect. This author hopes to demonstrate that the achieved consensus may be more political than factual and that quite possibly the “overwhelming public consensus” (p. 6) that children need a father and a mother may be more valid than would appear from recent reviews (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Biblarz & Stacey, 2010a).

Furthermore, as noted by Hoenig and Heisey (2001), “In matters of public health and regulation, it is often more important to be protected against erroneously concluding no difference exists when one does” (p. 23). If we conclude that fathers are not important per se and we turn out to be wrong, we may be granting permission to even more fathers to abandon their parenting responsibilities—they might well feel “entitled” to do so on the basis of “best evidence” science, such as that presented by Biblarz and Stacey (2010a, 2010b) and, more recently, by Gartrell and Bos (2010) and Biblarz and Savci (2010).

The focus here will be on research articles discussed by Biblarz and Stacey, but other research that complements those articles will also be considered. Others (Goldberg, 2010b; Strohschein, 2010; Tasker, 2010) have already commented on Biblarz and Stacey (2010a), so their concerns will not be a focus of this report. The intention is not necessarily to prove their findings to be incorrect, but rather to present evidence that might bear in a different direction and to encourage more in-depth discussion of the issues.

There is always the risk that others may *distort* research findings to the *unfair* disadvantage of gay and lesbian parents (Goldberg, 2010b), but allowing incomplete or erroneous research to stand without comment would be a distortion of *science* itself (Schumm, 2010e). The distortion of science is a serious concern because, among other reasons, there is clear evidence that when it comes to gay or lesbian parenting, favorable research outcomes are more frequently cited in the literature than unfavorable outcomes, even when the latter are based on methodologically superior research (Schumm, 2008, 2010d).

A related concern is the infrequent discussion of effect sizes, generally the difference in two mean scores divided by an average of the standard deviations of the two groups being compared. Here Cohen's *d* will be used to assess effect size (*ES*), with effect sizes being considered as small ($ES = .20$), medium ($ES = .50$), or large ($ES = .80$) (Cohen, 1992). Just because an effect size may be small, however, does not mean that it is unimportant. Cohen (1988) has noted, "Many effects sought in personality, social, and clinical-psychological research are likely to be small effects as here defined, both because of the attenuation in validity of the measures employed and the subtlety of the issues frequently involved" (p. 13). Effect sizes will be reported here to allow readers to understand the relative magnitudes of apparent effects.

Parental Division of Labor

One of the strongest overall results noted by Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) and by Goldberg (2010a) is that lesbian and gay couples tend to share household labor and child care more equally than heterosexual parents. For example, Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall, and Golombok (1997) found an effect size (*ES*) of 2.56 in terms of partner's help with child care. However, 58% of the lesbian biological mothers had full-time jobs compared to 24% or fewer of the heterosexual mothers (p. 1354, $p < .001$). In their research with both gay and lesbian parents, Johnson and O'Connor (2002) found relatively egalitarian divisions of household tasks and of child care. Rothblum, Balsam,

Solomon, and Factor (2005) found similar results in their research with gay and lesbian couples.

While the evidence appears strong that division of labor is more equitable within lesbian families, the implications should be considered carefully. The other side of the coin, figuratively, is that heterosexual parents accept greater differential risks (Schumm, 2004a, 2005) by accepting complementary divisions of labor and may put their own relationships at risk by doing so. That is, by entering into a mixed-gender relationship, heterosexual couples may assume a much higher risk of experiencing conflict over division of labor and difficulty in establishing genuine equity, both of which may increase their risk of relationship dissatisfaction.

Time Spent with Children

Even though parental division of labor may be equally divided, there remains some question about how much time is spent by gay/lesbian/bisexual (GLB) parents with their children. Although Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) claimed that “we do not yet have research that compares the children of married same-sex couples and different-sex couples” (p. 5), Henehan, Rothblum, Solomon, and Balsam (2007) surveyed gay and lesbian couples who had obtained civil unions in Vermont. They also surveyed referred gay and lesbian friends not in civil unions and married heterosexual siblings of the gay couples who had obtained civil unions. They found that only 18% of the children of gay male couples (78% of whom were in a civil union) lived with their parents full time compared to 62% of the children of heterosexual parents. In fact, 39% of the children of gay male parents never visited them compared to only 11% of the children of heterosexual parents.

Likewise, only 39% of the children of lesbian parents (59% of whom were in a civil union) lived with their parents full time compared to 71% of the children of heterosexual parents. In addition, 41% of the children of lesbian parents never or only occasionally visited compared to 26% of the children of heterosexual parents.

Such results warn us of the risk of comparing parents on sexual orientation without taking into account part-time versus full-time parenting status, a factor seldom considered as a control variable.

Parents' Preference for Childrens' Gender Roles

Bos and Sandfort (2010) recently reported that among children from 63 lesbian and 68 heterosexual families, children of heterosexual parents reported significantly greater parental pressure to conform to stereotypical gender roles ($ES = 0.39, p < .05$). Patterson, Sutfin, and Fulcher (2004) compared 33 lesbian couples with 33 heterosexual couples; they found that the lesbian parents held less traditional gender role expectations for their children ($ES = 0.92, 0.97$). Sutfin, Fulcher, Bowles, and Patterson (2008) found that lesbian mothers held significantly less traditional gender role attitudes than heterosexual parents ($ES = 0.75$) and that parental attitudes predicted children's gender role attitudes.

Fulcher, Sutfin, and Patterson (2008) found similar results, with lesbian parents reporting less traditional gender role attitudes ($ES = 0.80$ and 0.94 for parents of daughters; $ES = 0.58$ and 1.08 for parents of sons). They found that parental attitudes also predicted children's gender role attitudes.

Hoeffler (1981) studied heterosexual mothers and lesbian mothers to see which group would prefer more traditional gender roles for children's play with toys. She found that heterosexual mothers preferred more masculine toys for sons ($ES = 1.78, p < .05$) and more feminine toys for daughters ($ES = 1.69, p < .05$). However, effects were smaller ($ES = .70$ and $.58$, respectively) and not significant statistically for lesbian mothers. While Harris and Turner (1985/86) found that gay fathers were more likely to encourage their children to play with gender-typed toys than were lesbian mothers ($p < .05$), they found no significant differences with reported gender-typed toy play and parental sexual orientation. Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray, and Smith (1986) found that lesbian mothers were more likely (60% versus 29%, $p < .001$) to encourage truck play by daughters than

were heterosexual mothers; the reverse was true for boys (30% of lesbian mothers versus 73% of heterosexual mothers, $p < .01$).

Thus, there is some evidence that lesbian mothers prefer less traditional gender role-play for their children. In context, could this mean that lesbian mothers are simply more “progressive,” or could there be more to it? At least two studies have found that lesbian mothers often hold indifferent to negative attitudes towards men in general, a background factor that might explain some of their gender role preferences. Miller, Mucklow, Jacobsen, and Bigner (1980) reported in a comparison of 34 lesbians and 31 heterosexual women that the lesbians tended to hold “negative, to the point of being repulsive” (p. 1130) feelings about men compared to predominately positive feelings about men among the heterosexual women. It is reasonable to assume that the hate that some lesbians—and other women—have for men may lead them also to dislike boys or men displaying male gender roles, particularly their own male children engaging in such roles. (The converse also may be expected for lesbians and other women when it comes to female gender roles and their daughters).

Summarizing all these studies, it appears that lesbian mothers tend to encourage less traditional gender roles for their children, with medium to large effect sizes.

Parental Preference for Childrens’ Sexual Orientation

As far as preference is concerned, Golombok, Spencer, and Rutter (1983) found that only 27% of lesbian mothers in their study preferred that their children grow up to be heterosexual. Flaks (1993, p. 136) noted that of the 30 lesbian mothers in his study, 67% said they had no preference for the sexual orientation of their child, while 33% said they would prefer their child to be heterosexual. Among the 30 heterosexual parents in the study, only 27% said they had no preference, while 73% said they would prefer their child to be heterosexual (two-sided Fisher’s Exact Test, $p < .005$). Gartrell, Banks, Reed, Hamilton, Rodas, and Deck (2000) reported that only 21% of lesbian mothers in their study hoped their five-year-old child would become heterosexual.

Looking at prediction instead of preference, Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, Peyser, and Banks (2005) found that 10% of the lesbian mothers in their study thought that their 10-year-old child would become nonheterosexual. In the same study, only 37% of the lesbian mothers expected their child to become heterosexual.

Examining the issue from the childrens' point of view, Tasker and Golombok (1997, p.124) assessed young adults' perceptions of their mother's preferred sexual orientation for them. They found that 43% of children of lesbian mothers versus none of the children of heterosexual mothers ($p < .0001$) thought their parent would prefer them to be gay or lesbian, an effect that was stronger for daughters of lesbians (56%, $p < .001$) than for sons of lesbians (14%). Javaid (1993) found that lesbian mothers were more likely to accept their children becoming gay or lesbian than were heterosexual mothers (54% versus none, $p < .05$). Thus, it appears that lesbian mothers are far more inclined to accept, if not encourage, nonheterosexual orientation among their children, especially their daughters.

Children's Exposure to GLB, Opposite-Gender, and Nonkin Adults

Golombok, Spencer, and Rutter (1983) reported that of lesbian mothers' friends with whom children had contact, 79% were either mainly lesbian or a mix of lesbians and heterosexuals. Patterson, Hurt, and Mason (1998) found that 33% to 42% of adult contacts with children of lesbians were GLB, suggesting a high concentration of GLB role models for such children relative to children of heterosexual parents.

Harris and Turner (1985/86, p. 110) conducted a small study of predominately single parents. They found that heterosexual single parents appeared to make more of an effort to provide for their children a role model of the opposite gender than did gay or lesbian parents ($p < .01$). Drexler (1998) found that heterosexual parents were more likely than lesbian parents to report that their sons had adult male role models ($ES = 1.40$, $p < .05$), even though the latter reported that they actively recruited male role models for their sons (Schumm, 2008). Of 46 adult children of gay and lesbian parents in one study, 15%

specifically mentioned not having adequate role models of heterosexual interaction while growing up (Goldberg, 2007).

Fulcher, Chan, Raboy, and Patterson (2002) found that children of lesbians were more likely to have female nonkin as adult contacts than children of heterosexuals (nearly 50% versus 25% of all adult monthly contacts, $ES = 0.65$, $p < .01$). They also reported having more nonkin contacts in general (65% versus 43% of all adult monthly contacts, $ES = 0.48$, $p < .05$). Although the results were not significant, children of heterosexuals had more contact with men ($ES = 0.20$), relatives ($ES = 0.38$), male relatives ($ES = 0.27$), and female relatives ($ES = 0.31$), but less contact with women ($ES = 0.25$).

The meaning of such differences is not clear, but methodologically, using Bonferroni procedures, Fulcher et al. overlooked one result that was statistically significant ($t_{49,88} = 2.02$ is significant) as well as a number of small to medium effect sizes in their results. Thus, it appears that children of lesbian parents (compared to children of heterosexual parents) receive greater exposure to lesbian and gay role models, less exposure to heterosexual male role models, and relatively more exposure to parental friends compared to parental relatives.

Children's Gender Nonconformity/Flexibility

Biblarz and Stacey note that MacCallum and Golombok (2004) found that 12-year-old boys in mother-only families scored “over a standard deviation higher on femininity scales” (2010a, p. 14), which they interpreted as evidence of gender flexibility. In fact, that effect size was 1.40, much higher than the conventional 0.80 (Cohen, 1992) to indicate a large effect. In other words, the difference in femininity was very large.

Brewaeys et al. (1997) found that sons of lesbians had lower masculine gender role scores than sons of heterosexuals ($ES = 0.78$), while the daughters of lesbians had slightly lower feminine gender role scores than the daughters of heterosexual parents (ES

= 0.21). Sutfin et al. (2008) found that both daughters ($ES = 0.57$) and sons ($ES = 0.66$) of heterosexual parents reported more traditional gender role attitudes than did the children of lesbian parents; notably, the gender role attitudes of sons of lesbians were identical on average to those of daughters of heterosexuals.

Hoeffler (1981) found that sons and daughters of both lesbian and heterosexual mothers preferred toys usually deemed appropriate to their own gender but effect sizes of those preferences were slightly larger for heterosexuals' children (4.57 and 4.50) than for lesbians' children (3.91 and 4.34).

Green et al. (1986) found that daughters of lesbians cross-dressed more often than daughters of heterosexual mothers ($p < .05$) and were also more likely (52% versus 21%, $p < .05$) to express a preference for traditionally masculine jobs. Daughters of heterosexuals were more likely to never play with trucks (36% versus 7%, $p < .001$) or guns (68% versus 37%, $p < .01$) than were daughters of lesbian mothers.

On a test of gender identity, the children of heterosexual mothers had scores slightly more traditional for their gender than did children of lesbian mothers, but the differences were not statistically significant. Golombok et al. (1983, p. 563) compared gender roles of boys and girls from lesbian and heterosexual families as reported by the mother and the child; with respect to daughters, both mothers ($ES = 0.39$) and daughters ($ES = 0.48$) reported higher levels of masculinity in lesbian families, though scores were in the feminine range. With respect to sons, sons reported more masculine scores in lesbian families ($ES = 0.21$) while mothers reported more feminine scores for sons in lesbian families ($ES = 0.26$), though scores were in the masculine range.

Sarantakos (1996) studied 58 children of heterosexual cohabiting couples, 58 children of heterosexual married couples, and 58 children from 47 lesbian and 11 gay couples in Australia. Although he did not report statistics on children's gender role orientations, he indicated that the children's teachers had commented on such, saying that "Girls of gay fathers were reported to demonstrate more 'boyish' attitudes and behavior

than girls of heterosexual parents. Most young boys of lesbian mothers were reported to be more effeminate in their behavior and mannerisms than boys of heterosexual parents,” and that children of homosexual couples were described as “more confused about their gender” than children of heterosexual couples (p. 26).

Fulcher et al. (2008) found that children of heterosexual parents were more upset with gender role transgressions (0.45 , *n.s.* $< ES < 0.59$, $p < .05$) than were children of lesbian parents. Presumably, a child’s upset about gender role “violations” was an indication of an internalized desire within the child to conform to more traditional gender roles.

Overall, it appears that while children’s gender roles are robust with respect to parental sexual orientation, the children of lesbian parents tend to adopt gender roles or attitudes that are more masculine (daughters) or feminine (sons) than are developed by their heterosexually parented peers.

Children’s Sexuality

Many have continued to argue that there has been very little, if any, evidence of intergenerational transmission of sexual orientation (Baetens & Brewaeys, 2001; Ball, 2003; Fisher, Easterly, & Lazear, 2008; Goldberg, 2010a; Mallon, 2000; Millbank, 2003; Murray, 2004; Rimalower & Caty, 2009). However, others have been less sure, leaving the issue “open to debate” (Peplau & Beals, 2004, p. 243) or one in which “the data do not allow unambiguous interpretation” (Patterson, 2004, p. 409).

Citing a variety of studies, Cameron (2006) argued for a hypothesis that sexual orientation would be transmitted from parent to child. Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) cited Bos et al.’s (2006) finding that “daughters of lesbian mothers scored 0.75 *SD* lower on heterosexual identity [identity was defined as orientation] than daughters of heterosexual couples” (p. 15). Biblarz and Stacey interpreted these findings as supporting evidence of greater fluidity in female sexual desires, as observed in longitudinal studies of lesbian and bisexual women (Diamond, 2006, 2008a, 2008b; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). They

overlooked research by a number of authors (Kunin, 1998; Paul, 1986; Sirota, 1997)—summarized by Schumm (2008) and later Cameron (2009)—in which children of gay or lesbian parents were much more likely to identify, behave, or be attracted to the same gender. For example, Sirota found that 34% of the daughters of gay fathers were lesbian or bisexual compared to 3% of the daughters of heterosexual fathers ($p < .001$).

This author analyzed research from Tasker and Golombok (1995) and Golombok and Tasker (1996) to show that at least 20% of the children from lesbian families had considered the possibility of becoming involved in same-sex relationships, even though they had never experienced same-sex sexual attractions (Schumm, 2004b). Furthermore, of those who had experienced same-sex attractions, 67% of the children of lesbian mothers reported actual experience with same-sex relationships compared to none of the children of heterosexual mothers ($p < .05$, one-sided Fisher's Exact Test).

Although Golombok and Tasker (1996) reported that Adult Kinsey ratings of sexual orientation did not differ for the lesbian- and heterosexual-parented adult children, Schumm (2005, p. 443) found that the difference between the two groups of children was, in fact, significant ($p < .05$). Golombok and Tasker (1996) found that 16% of the children of lesbian mothers compared to none of the children of heterosexual mothers scored 2 or higher on the Kinsey Scale ($p < .08$, one-sided Fisher's Exact Test). Golombok and Tasker (1996) also found that the children of lesbian mothers were more likely to express same-sex sexual interest when their mother had been more open to her children becoming homosexual ($r = .38$, $p < .05$, one-tailed), had engaged in a higher number of lesbian relationships during the child's early school years ($r = .60$, $p < .01$), and had been more open in showing physical affection to her female partners ($r = .74$, $p < .001$).

Javaid (1993) found that daughters of lesbians were more likely to admit to homosexual thoughts or fantasies than daughters of heterosexual mothers (73% versus 47%, n.s.). Lewis (1992) interviewed 10 males and 11 females from 8 lesbian families from the Boston area; she reported that “several girls [of 11] thought they might turn to

women if they did not have a satisfying relationship with a man. One added, 'That's what my mother did.' She said, in regard to her dating, if she complained to her mother about boys, 'she would tell me to try girls'" (p. 89). That remark was similar to one made by a lesbian mother in the Tasker and Golombok (1997a) study: "Why don't you try and see if you get on better with women?" (p. 124).

Several of the 17 British adolescents and adults interviewed by Saffron (1998) reported their own perceived greater acceptance of same-sex attractions and behavior. One bisexual daughter said, "I have experimented sexually, and my parents have created a supportive environment for that" (p. 40). Goldberg's (2007) study of 46 adult children of GLB parents found 17% to have adopted nonheterosexual identities, with 28% saying they have developed "fluid" ideas about human sexuality.

In Javaid's (1993) study, daughters of lesbian mothers were significantly ($p < .05$) more likely than daughters of heterosexual mothers to be unsure about or reject heterosexual marriage and children as part of their future. Crowl, Ahn, and Baker (2008) reported an average effect size of 0.20 (not significant) from five studies they reviewed, finding that children of lesbians are more likely to identify with a homosexual orientation. Gartrell, Bos, and Goldberg (2010) reported that in their 17-year longitudinal study of children of lesbian mothers, more than 48% of the daughters and nearly 22% of the sons were not exclusively heterosexual. Schumm (2010b) found that data from qualitative, quantitative, and anthropological sources confirmed the influence of the environment, including the family, on child outcomes in terms of sexual orientation.

Gartrell, Bos, and Goldberg (2010) found that daughters of lesbians were more than three times as likely ($p < .01$) as were daughters of heterosexuals from a national sample to have engaged in sex with other girls by age 17.

Based on the findings of all these studies, what emerges may appear to be contradictory, but it really is not. On the one hand, a majority of the children of lesbian parents will eventually identify as heterosexual, though they represent a smaller

percentage than those from heterosexual parents. On the other hand, a significantly larger percentage of the children of lesbian mothers, compared to those of heterosexual parents, will report same-sex attractions or same-sex sexual behavior, at least in an experimental way. At the very least, among the children of lesbian parents there appears to be a more frequent willingness to consider the legitimate possibility of having same-sex sexual attractions or to experiment with same-sex sexual behavior, even perhaps in the absence of strong same-sex sexual attraction. If both same-sex sexual attractions and behavior are more often considered “legitimate” in lesbian families, it should not be too surprising that a significantly higher percentage of the children of lesbian families—especially daughters—would also experiment with or ultimately embrace a same-sex sexual lifestyle.

Tasker and Golombok (1997a) also studied children’s sexual relationships aside from sexual orientation. They found that 88% of daughters of lesbians versus 56% of daughters of heterosexual mothers had more than one sexual partner after puberty, an effect size of 0.78 ($p < .05$, p. 127). Likewise, they found that 71% of lesbians’ daughters versus 22% of heterosexual mothers’ daughters had unstable or multiple cohabitations with sexual partners (p. 131, $p < .05$). Daughters of lesbians were also more likely (71%) than daughters of heterosexual mothers (17%) to cohabit with a sexual partner after knowing the partner for fewer than six months ($p < .05$, p. 131). This and other evidence suggests that children of lesbian mothers adopt more permissive sexual attitudes and behaviors, regardless of sexual orientation.

Teasing and Bullying of Children

Most children appear to experience teasing or bullying at some point, but scholars have disagreed about whether children of lesbians suffer more because of their parents’ sexual orientation or more in general. However, some research indicates that children of same-sex parents are victimized less than children of two-parent heterosexual families ($ES = 0.28$, Rivers, Poteat, & Noret, 2008; $ES = 0.09$, MacCallum & Golombok, 2004).

Tasker and Golombok (1997a) reported that approximately 75% of the children of both lesbian and heterosexual mothers had been teased or bullied as youth, with about 40% of both groups having encountered prolonged teasing or bullying. The children of lesbian mothers were more likely to have been teased about their own sexuality ($p < .05$), an effect that was stronger for sons, but only children from working-class families were more likely to have been teased about their mother's sexuality ($p < .05$).

Bos and Gartrell (2010) reported that 41% of the children of lesbian mothers had *ever* been discriminated against as a result of their parent's sexual orientation, a *lower* percentage than the *same* children had reported (43%) at age 10 (Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, Peyser, & Banks, 2005). After controlling for family compatibility and other variables, Bos and Gartrell (2010) found that reported discrimination had no significant effect on either internalizing problem behavior, externalizing problem behavior, or total problem behavior. Research needs to separate the role of parental sexual orientation, child sexual orientation, and antisocial behaviors (drug use, delinquency, etc.) that might merit social disapproval regardless of sexual orientation before we draw firm conclusions in this area.

Gay Fathering Outcomes

Most of the research reviewed by Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) and Biblarz and Savci (2010) involved lesbian mothers rather than gay fathers. Tasker (2010, p. 39) agreed with Biblarz and Stacey that research on gay fathers was scarce. First, it must be noted that finding lesbian-mother families is itself no easy task. Golombok, Perry, Burston, Murray, Mooney-Somers, Stevens, and Golding (2003) found only 18 lesbian mothers (0.22%) among approximately 8,200 mothers in their survey of mothers with 7-year-old children in Britain. Julien, Jouvin, Jodoin, L'Archeveque, and Chartrand (2008) used data from a random survey of Quebec residents; of the 9,812 sexually active women (of 11,034 total women), they found only 108 lesbians—and of those, only 51 were

lesbian mothers. In the same survey they found 112 bisexual women, but only as a result of including women whose behavior was predominately heterosexual.

Even so, the challenge of finding gay-father families is substantially more difficult. At least three important attempts to address gay fathering have not succeeded as hoped because gay fathers were such a small percentage of all of the same-sex parents surveyed (Fulcher, Sutfin, & Patterson, 2008, 3/36, 8%; Rivers, Poteat, & Noret, 2008, 3/21, 14%; Wainright & Patterson, 2008, 6/50, 12%). A fourth attempt (Henehan, Rothblum, Solomon, & Balsam, 2007) found only 40 (21%) gay fathers out of 190 same-sex parents surveyed. The scarcity of research on gay fathers has been identified previously: “A comparison on gender development between boys and girls who are growing up in a gay-father family and boys and girls who are growing up in a heterosexual family could be a major step toward unraveling this complex process” (Bos & Sandfort, 2010; Bos, van Balen, Sandfort, & van den Boom, 2006, p. 17).

It seems clear that Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) value secure attachment as an important child outcome for children of both gay- and lesbian-parent families. Biblarz and Stacey cite several studies (Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall, & Golombok, 1997; Golombok, Tasker, & Murray, 1997; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen, & Brewaeys, 2002) in which parenting outcomes, including the security of attachment, were allegedly better among children of lesbians. But Biblarz and Stacey neglected to discuss two important studies—one on child attachment for children of gay fathers and another on child attachment for children of lesbian mothers. The only link between those studies was that researchers found less secure levels of attachment among the children of same-sex parents.

With respect to gay fathers, Biblarz and Stacey overlooked a study by Sirota (1997, 2009; Schumm, 2010a) that compared 68 daughters of gay fathers and 68 daughters of heterosexual fathers on adult attachment styles. Sirota found that 78% of the daughters of gay fathers versus 44% of those of heterosexual fathers ($p < .001$)

reported insecure attachment, while 42% versus 12% were uncomfortable with close relationships ($p < .001$)—results that probably could *not* be explained entirely by the higher divorce history of the gay fathers (Schumm, 2008, 2010a). Effect sizes associated with comparisons of the three attachment dimensions ranged between 0.75 and 1.14 ($p < .001$) in favor of daughters of heterosexual parents (Schumm, 2010a).

But Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) also overlooked Puryear's (1983) research on the children of lesbian mothers, cited in reviews by Crowl, Ahn, and Baker (2008) and Patterson (2005), in which children of lesbians were much less likely to draw pictures of cohesive, cooperating family members than were children of heterosexuals. For example, Puryear found that only 20% of lesbians' children drew pictures of their mother cooperating with them compared to 67% of heterosexuals' children ($p < .01$). Puryear also found a medium effect size of 0.64 favoring the self-esteem of sons of heterosexual mothers.

It is worth noting that such attachment problems may have occurred not only between parents and children but also between lesbian mothers and their own fathers. As Miller, Mucklow, Jacobsen, and Bigner (1980) reported, 38% of lesbians versus 3% of heterosexual women did not respect their own fathers ($p < .001$), a result that is consistent with other studies of lesbians that suggest that poor attachment was present in lesbians' families of origin.

With respect to Biblarz and Stacey's (2010a) claim that there has been only one study of gay fathers and child outcomes, it is clear that Sirota's (2009) statistically significant and substantive research was overlooked in both Biblarz and Stacey's (2010a) and Biblarz and Savci's (2010) reviews, as well as some earlier research by other scholars on attachment outcomes for lesbian families. It is not clear if such oversights were due merely to an incomplete literature review or to hesitance to report adverse results associated with gay or lesbian parenting.

General Children's Adjustment

Brewaeys et al. (1997) found that sons of lesbians had lower behavioral/emotional adjustment than sons of heterosexuals ($ES = 0.48$). Daughters of lesbians also had lower behavioral/emotional adjustment, but the effect size was much smaller. In many cases, mothers' reports yield higher perceived adjustment of children for lesbians but teachers' reports yield opposite results. Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen, and Brewaeys (2002) found that teachers rated the adjustment of lesbians' children lower ($ES = 0.52, p < .03$), even though lesbian mothers and their children themselves rated their adjustment slightly higher (n.s.).

Huggins (1989) found that daughters of lesbian mothers had lower self-esteem than did daughters of heterosexual mothers, regardless of whether the mothers were single ($ES = 0.67$) or were coupled ($ES = 0.96$). Sons of lesbian mothers had higher self-esteem if the mothers were single ($ES = 1.12$) but not if they were coupled ($ES = 0.03$). That finding is notable because it suggests that lesbian mothers may not make better parents for either sons or daughters just because they are coupled. Their report also demonstrates how relatively large effects may not be significant statistically given a small enough sample ($N = 36$).

If we are to find a relationship between parental sexual orientation and psychological adjustment, it will probably be found operating through intervening variables rather than directly. Nevertheless, it is instructive to closely examine the research cited by Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) in which they claim that sexual orientation makes a positive difference in psychological outcomes for children. MacCallum and Golombok (2004) did report three significant differences between child outcomes for two-parent heterosexual families and the combination of single-parent heterosexual and lesbian families, but the differences between the children of single-parent heterosexual families and the children of lesbian single parents were not significant. Surprisingly, the children of single-parent heterosexual mothers reported

better scores than the children of two-parent heterosexual families in terms of shared activities with mother (ES = 0.90), mother's availability (ES = 0.46), and mother's dependability (ES = 0.58), while the single-parent mothers rated their parenting better than did the two-parent-family mothers on five of the eight maternal measures (two of the three remaining measures were virtual ties).

Why would single-parent heterosexual families appear to be scoring better on parenting than two-parent heterosexual families? One possibility is family demographics—the single-parent mothers were younger than the two-parent mothers (ES = 0.61) and had fewer children (ES = 1.91, a *huge* effect size). The meaning of the results are ultimately suspect because there were no controls for per-capita family socioeconomic status. In other words, if the comparison group of two-parent heterosexual families has less income, less education, more children to support, and poorer health or stamina (due to older age), perhaps any comparison group of parents—even single parents (regardless of sexual orientation)—might compare favorably on selected parenting outcomes.

Golombok et al. (1997a) did find significant differences on attachment, maternal warmth, and positive mother-child interaction between children from two-parent heterosexual families and the combination of single-parent heterosexuals' and lesbians' children, but only one outcome was significant comparing the children of lesbians and single-parent heterosexuals. In fact, the children of single-parent heterosexual families scored better on secure attachment than did children from the other types of families. If we accept the logic of the results of those two studies, we would conclude that single parents provide better families for children than do two parents; however, few will argue that we need to reset national policy to encourage single parenting over dual parenting. Perhaps the child attaches more securely to a single mother (lesbian or heterosexual) because she is all the child has for a parent in the home on a regular basis; another possible reason is that two-parent families often have more children and fewer resources per capita, dividing the mother's and father's attentions. Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) cited

Golombok et al. (2003), saying that lesbian mothers provide greater secure attachment for children, but the study did not find any such significant difference.

A study by Vanfraussen et al. (2002) is cited by Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) as evidence that children of lesbians have fewer behavioral problems than children of heterosexuals, but this author could find no statistical results indicating such a difference. Vanfraussen et al. (2002) are also cited for evidence that the children of heterosexuals were more aggressive ($ES = 0.72$), but their result was based on self-report of the youth; in contrast, the teachers rated the children of lesbians as more aggressive ($ES = 0.19$). The statistical power of Vanfraussen et al. (2002) was low because even an effect size of 0.72 was barely significant ($p = 0.05$).

Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) also cited Brewaeys et al. (1997) as evidence that the children of lesbian mothers have fewer behavioral problems than the children of heterosexuals; what was found was that naturally conceived sons and daughters of heterosexual parents had fewer problems than sons and daughters of lesbian parents ($ES = 0.48$, both sons and daughters; $ES = 0.48$, sons; $ES = 0.07$, daughters). The differences that were favorable for lesbian mothers versus heterosexual parents occurred for those children conceived by donor insemination ($ES = 0.47$, both sons and daughters; $ES = 0.09$, sons; $ES = 0.76$, daughters). The results may say more about conception by donor insemination or about the presence of a biological father in the family than about parental sexual orientation per se. Only the families with naturally conceived children included biological fathers.

While results appear to be mixed rather than consistently strong in any one direction, it is probably unrealistic to expect distal outcomes such as psychological adjustment to be directly related to sexual orientation. For example, Bos, van Balen, Sandfort, and van den Boom (2006) found that daughters of lesbians were more likely to aspire to masculine occupations ($ES = 0.53$, $p < .05$) and have a nonheterosexual sexual orientation ($ES = 0.74$, $p < .01$), both of which predicted lower social competence for

daughters. However, parental sexual orientation did not have a statistically significant direct association with social competence, in spite of the apparent indirect effects. Most recently, Gartrell and Bos (2010) have reported higher levels of adjustment among children of lesbian mothers compared to heterosexual parents; however, they did not control for preexisting group differences such as maternal education, geographical location, number of siblings, family per-capita income, or race/ethnicity (Schumm, 2010g). Furthermore, because the lesbian mothers were probably more aware of the purposes of the research than the heterosexual mothers when rating children's adjustment, it is quite possible that demand effects of the research or social desirability bias may have accounted for group differences that were reported above and beyond any effects of the significant demographic differences between the two groups.

Adoptive Parenting

Redding (2008, p. 142) recently claimed that "there are no studies specifically of adoptive [gay or lesbian] parents," while Biblarz and Stacey cited only one study (Kindle & Erich, 2005) in which homosexual adopters reported lower family support than heterosexual adopters ($ES = 0.60, p < .02$). Neither reported research by Erich, Leung, and Kindle (2005), who, comparing homosexual and heterosexual adoptive parents, found a small effect size (0.13) in favor of heterosexual parents in terms of family functioning. As part of a regression model, heterosexual sexual orientation predicted family functioning with $\beta = .17 (p < .05, \text{one-tailed } t\text{-test})$. However, education was not entered into that regression model when there was a moderate effect size (0.53) in favor of the gay/lesbian parents (48% with a graduate degree versus 33% of heterosexuals); education could have acted as a suppressor effect. It is remarkable that the homosexual adopted families reported lower functioning even when 59% earned more than \$70,000 a year compared to only 34% of the heterosexual adoptive parents ($p < .05$).

Adoption is not a legal right. Since the state creates this form of parenthood, one might suppose that the state would want to select parents who had the goal of raising children who would become citizens with “qualities that are valued as important in our society” (Bos, 2004, p. 52; Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2004, p. 758; 2007, p. 40). Those “important qualities” were reflected on the 23-item scale those researchers used in the Netherlands as one measure of child-rearing goals in a sample of 100 lesbian and 100 heterosexual families. One of the 23 items they used as an example was “self-control.” Although the families were compared on a number of issues, the largest and most significant differences ($ES = 0.55, p < .001$ for biological mothers; $ES = 0.40, p < .01$ for fathers and social mothers) of the eleven outcomes assessed occurred for that scale of child-rearing goals.

To this author’s knowledge, there have not been any studies showing that if parents do not value “self-control” in their children, the children will develop lower levels of self-control—but such a connection is plausible based on the notion that “if you don’t aim for it, you will probably miss it.” Support for this hypothesis may be found in a recent study by Moffitt, Arseneault, Belsky, et al. (2011) that reported that better self-control in childhood predicted positive outcomes in adulthood in terms of fewer criminal convictions, fewer financial problems, less chance of becoming a single parent, better physical health, and less substance abuse.

If poor parental self-control is associated with the development of poor self-control in adulthood, as well as childhood, it is worth noting that Trocki, Drabble, and Midanik (2009)—although they did not control for presence of children—found that same-sex sexual orientation was associated with greater impulsivity (lack of self-control) and substance abuse among adults. While the perfect set of studies doesn’t yet exist, a plausible hypothesis is that sexual orientation in parents might be related to poor parental self-control or impulsivity (Trocki et al., 2009), which might predict lower expectations for children in terms of self-control (Bos, 2004)—which would also predict lower levels

of self-control in young children and would ultimately predict lower levels of self-control in adulthood and greater adult difficulties (Moffitt et al., 2011).

The Dutch heterosexual parents were also significantly higher on structure and limit-setting in the 2007 report (biological mothers, $ES = 0.46, p < .05$; social mothers versus heterosexual fathers, $ES = 0.37, p < .001$). Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) also cited MacCallum and Golombok (2004) for providing evidence on “disciplinary control”; however, that study found that heterosexual mothers in two-parent families exercised less disciplinary “aggression” than did lesbian mothers ($ES = 0.23$) and that children rated the quality of heterosexual maternal discipline higher ($ES = 0.64$). Thus, some research seems to indicate that heterosexual parents may be doing better than lesbian mothers in areas that may be critical for socializing children to become better citizens as adults.

Adoption and Parental Monogamous Values/Behavior

One concern traditionalists may have with gay adoption is the fact—supported by research—that gay men are less monogamous and sexually exclusive than heterosexuals or lesbians (Byrd, 2010). Up to 40% of gay men in civil unions have agreements to permit nonmonogamy, and more than 50% have had sex outside their civil union within three years (Rothblum et al., 2005). It appears that “nonmonogamy is an accepted part of gay male culture” (Rothblum et al., p. 80), part of the “norms of the gay male community,” with as many as 82% of gay males having engaged in extradyadic sex (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007, pp. 409–410). Peplau, Fingerhut, and Beals (2004) have stated that a “distinctive feature of contemporary gay men’s relationships is the tendency to form sexually open (nonmonogamous) relationships,” that “sexual exclusivity is by no means the norm among contemporary gay couples” (p. 356), and that “sexual openness is the norm for most gay male relationships” (p. 366).

It appears rare for gay couples to maintain a long-term sexually exclusive relationship, as Peplau et al. noted when discussing research on this issue, since “100%

of those couples who had been together 5 years or longer had engaged in extradyadic sexual relations” (p. 357). Blasband and Peplau (1982) found only 10% of their gay male participants had remained sexually monogamous, and all of those had been together fewer than three years. Kurdek (1991) and Bettinger (2006) have highlighted the nonmonogamy or polyamory of gay male couples as well, while Redding (2008) concludes that “there seems to be little dispute in the research literature that the rates of nonmonogamy in gay and lesbian relationships are higher than in heterosexual unmarried partnerships” and “that gay men have on average a substantially greater number of sexual partners over their lifetime than do heterosexuals” (p. 163). Kurdek (1991) concluded: “Perhaps the most salient difference between homosexual and heterosexual couples revealed by previous studies is that homosexual men—especially gay partners—often engage in sex outside of the relationship with each other’s knowledge” (p. 187).

Shernoff (2006, p. 408) cites Johnson and Keren (1996) as stating that “monogamy seems to be hardwired into spoken and culturally sanctioned norms for heterosexual relationships. The gay community’s normative acceptance of casual sex, anonymous sex and nonmonogamy in couple relationships represents a dramatic departure of heterocentric norms and values” (pp. 238–239).

Gartrell, Rodas, Deck, Peyser, and Banks (2006) indicated that among the nearly half of their lesbian mothers who had separated, some children had been exposed to as many as six of their mother’s new sexual partners in fewer than ten years. Patterson et al. (1998) noted that their lesbian mothers’ children’s social networks included “a sizeable number of women who were described as former romantic partners of the children’s mothers. This finding is consistent with many anecdotal reports and commentaries suggesting that, long after the break-up of a romantic relationship, members of lesbian couples may remain close” (p. 397).

Solomon, Rothblum, and Balsam (2004) observed that significantly more lesbian and gay couples in their study reported having former sexual lovers as friends than did

the heterosexual women and men. Tasker and Golombok (1997a) appeared to find that 24% of the lesbian mothers had five or more sexual partners over the 15 years of their longitudinal study. Furthermore, the increased number of a mother's sexual partners was strongly related ($r = -.66, p < .001$) to lower acceptance of the family's lesbian identity when the children were adolescents ($r = -.00, n.s.$, for acceptance when the children were adults) (Tasker & Golombok, 1997b). Of course, not all see problems here; Shernoff (2006) concludes that "therapists need to challenge their cultural biases regarding nonmonogamy" (p. 407). However, despite Shernoff's fears, I suspect that most parents and courts would consider nonmonogamy a poor moral example for adopted children or one's own biological children, for that matter.

Flawed Comparisons of Same-Sex and Heterosexual Parents

Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) found that heterosexual two-parent families reported more frequent conflict than did lesbian families, citing Golombok et al. (1997). However, the heterosexual and lesbian families in Golombok et al. (1997) differed significantly on mother's age ($p < .05$), social class ($p < .001$), and family size ($p < .0001$), suggesting that the heterosexual families had to support more household members with fewer resources—a condition that might well lead to more conflict. Indeed, what may seem remarkable is that compared to lesbian families, the heterosexual families—starting off with fewer resources, more members, and younger mothers, with accompanying lower levels of child peer acceptance, higher levels of maternal stress, lower levels of child's secure attachment, less maternal warmth, and higher levels of maternal depression—nevertheless produced children who described themselves as having significantly greater cognitive competence ($ES = 0.94, p < .001$) and physical competence ($ES = 0.55, p < .01$). A similar result occurred elsewhere (Golombok, Perry, Burston, Murray, Mooney-Somers, Stevens, & Golding, 2003) with children from two-parent heterosexual families reporting greater cognitive competence ($ES = 0.14$) and physical competence ($ES = 0.38$)

than children from two-parent lesbian families in spite of the two-parent lesbian families having higher socioeconomic status, greater maternal acceptance, lower stress, fewer children, and less frequent corporal punishment. Golombok et al. (2003) did not control for significant differences between parents in terms of parental occupation, education, or family size (Schumm, 2008), nor did Gartrell and Bos (2010) more recently.

Patterson, Sutfin, and Fulcher (2004) found that lesbian and heterosexual first parents differed on number of children ($ES = 0.36$), income ($ES = 0.79, p < .001$), occupational prestige ($ES = 0.60, p < .05$), and education ($ES = 0.35$), with the lesbian parents better off in terms of resources per capita. Numerous studies have featured similar advantages for lesbian and gay families (Black, Gates, Sanders, & Taylor, 2000; Schumm, 2005). As Tasker (2010) acknowledged, lesbians “may be relatively affluent and well resourced” (p. 36).

Some studies have found that lesbian mothers tend to have more education than mothers and fathers in heterosexual families (Fulcher, Sutfin, Chan, Scheib, & Patterson, 2006, p. 285; Rothblum & Factor, 2001, p. 64). Sometimes there have been attempts to control for these differences, sometimes not. For example, Gartrell and Bos (2010) provided evidence that lesbian mothers rated their children’s psychological adjustment more favorably than did heterosexual parents; however, statistically significant preexisting differences between the two groups of parents with respect to education ($ES = 0.84$), geographic location ($ES = 1.22$), age of children ($ES = 0.54$), and race/ethnicity ($ES = 0.79$) were not controlled (Schumm, 2010g).

On occasion, it has been stated that socioeconomic differences were not significant statistically when, in fact, they were (Schumm, 2008). However, without controlling for such family differences, especially in terms of per capita family resources or social desirability response sets, one cannot truly test for the direct and unique contributions of parental gender or sexual orientation to child adjustment outcomes. Results under such conditions may primarily reflect the role of parental resources rather than any influence

of parental gender or sexual orientation. Without controls for socioeconomic differences, especially education and per-capita household income, assertions about the effects of parental gender or sexual orientation may be seriously misplaced.

Flawed Approaches for Testing Null Hypotheses

Space precludes a full treatment of this issue, which has been detailed elsewhere (Schumm, 2010f). Numerous studies have claimed to have proven the null hypothesis with respect to comparing same-sex parenting and heterosexual parenting. However, Cohen (1988) argues that such a “conclusion is always strictly invalid, and is functionally invalid as well unless power is high” (p. 16). Without a large sample (greater than 100), it is very unlikely that any study will find statistical significance for small effects, possibly even some medium effects.

The most common approach in research comparisons of different types of parents or their children is to run multiple tests among variables that are correlated among themselves, a situation problematic in its own right (Schumm & Crow, 2010). Another common approach in comparisons of LGBT and heterosexual families is to predict an outcome variable from a host of independent variables, as if there were no scientific theory available to sort out independent and intervening variables from each other; this approach subtly removes visibility of any effects that may be operating indirectly on parenting outcomes. Even so, many studies of LGBT parenting do not control for social desirability, parental education, family size, or per-capita household income even though it is clear that such variables might account for different parental self-reported outcomes for children.

Potential suppressor variables are seldom considered—that is, variables, which if controlled statistically, might change observed results from support for the null hypothesis to rejection of the null hypothesis. Effect sizes have seldom been reported in the literature on lesbian parenting (Schumm, 2010f). Often the statistical methods

used to evaluate null hypotheses are outdated and lack the statistical power of readily available but improved statistical tests; for example, equivalence testing is seldom used (Schumm, 2010f).

Extremely large numbers of independent variables are sometimes used (Rosenfeld, 2010), increasing the chances of “washing out” any statistically significant results. Because there is some evidence that same-sex parents are less stable in terms of relationship longevity than married heterosexual parents (Schumm, 2010c), researchers must be particularly careful to avoid selection effects. For example, Rosenfeld (2010) limited his sample to parents who had lived in the same residence for five consecutive years; however, this restriction selected “out” more same-sex parents than it did married heterosexual parents. Presumably, many of those selected out included those who had unstable couple relationships.

Rosenfeld found that single parents had less favorable outcomes for their children, but his methodological screening “cherry-picked” the most stable of the same-sex parents. If one wanted to see the overall outcomes for same-sex parents versus heterosexual parents, one would start at one time and follow the children to a later point in time and then assess their progress without selecting out those parents who had separated. These methods miss a critical outcome: if parental instability is problematic for children and same-sex parents have less stable relationships, then same-sex parenting will, over time, harm children more than heterosexual parenting, even if comparisons of the child outcomes among those with the most stable parents in both groups yielded few significant differences. Moreover, interpretations of the body of scientific literature in the area of same-sex parenting are challenging, because findings contrary to the politically correct answer—no differences between same-sex and heterosexual parenting—are routinely overlooked or dismissed in reviews of the literature (Schumm, 2008, 2010a, 2010c, 2010d). As a result, such reviews are less helpful at best, or misleading at their worst.

Theoretical Limitations

Traditionally, a standard sociological model would have independent or exogenous variables—often relatively fixed variables such as gender or race, along with intervening variables and dependent or outcome variables. Such a model would have both proximal and distal outcomes where one would not expect to see other than small effects for most distal relationships.

But studying the possible effects of parental sexual orientation presents important challenges. First, the key independent variable is not fixed but fluid, since some parents may not have become either aware or “out” about their sexual orientation until later in life. Additionally, some parents may change back to a bisexual or heterosexual identity (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2006, 2008a, 2008b; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Dickson, Paul, & Herbison, 2003; Kinnish, Strassberg, & Turner, 2005).

Second, some child outcomes, such as the child’s sexual orientation or their own relationship stability, may not be measurable until decades after they are born. In other words, some outcomes are very distal, and effect sizes might be expected to be small merely because of the distance in time as well as the host of other factors influencing a child’s development.

Third, any distal outcomes are probably mediated by intervening factors—if not, as noted previously, by interactions or moderating effects. Some researchers (Davis & Friel, 2001; Demuth & Brown, 2004) conclude that if they predict an outcome C from family form A with significant results and then control for process B, A is unimportant if it becomes nonsignificant after controlling for B. Actually, all they have done is provide evidence that the direct or distal effect of A on C is small. It still might be that A has an indirect effect on C through B, B being an intervening or mediating variable in the model. This is somewhat like saying that handguns are not harmful if you control for the effect of their bullets—technically true, but misleading if the conclusion is that handguns involve no risk. For example, Kveskin and Cook (1982) found that lesbian

mothers were significantly more likely to be masculine or androgynous in sex-role orientation themselves (81% versus 53%, $p < .05$) and that among mothers with either feminine, androgynous, or masculine sex-roles, 75% held that same sex-role as ideal for their child. However, the direct effect of sexual orientation on ideal sex-role was small, $r = .12$. Had the researchers reported all their results, it is not unlikely that there would have been a strong indirect effect of sexual orientation on the mothers' ideal child sex-role. A similar phenomenon may have occurred with the study by Fulcher et al. (2008) with a finding that lesbian mothers were more likely to divide paid and unpaid labor more equitably, resulting in children with less traditional occupational aspirations. Because of small direct effects, the authors concluded that parental sexual orientation was "generally unrelated" to children's gender development (p. 330). However, what is most likely is that division of labor was an intervening variable between parental sexual orientation and child outcomes.

Recently, Bos and Sandfort (2010) published much of the material cited by Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) in Bos, van Balen, Sandfort, and van den Boom (2006). Bos and Sandfort reported a significant ($p < .05$) relationship between parental sexual orientation and sexual questioning, which they had labeled "heterosexual identity" in Bos et al. (2006), with $ES = 0.33$. Bos and Sandfort also reported significant relationships between sexual questioning and both global self-worth ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$) and social competence ($\beta = -.24, p < .01$). There were no significant direct relationships between family type and self-worth or social competence, but there appeared to be an indirect influence through sexual questioning as an intervening or mediating variable.

The presence of *indirect effects* does not mean there are *no effects*, as in "generally unrelated." Until we routinely test more elaborate models that allow for a variety of independent and intervening variables over both shorter and longer time periods, we will not well understand the role of sexual orientation or gender in parenting.

Other Concerns

A separate review is needed—and has been provided (Byrd, 2010)—to detail the higher rates of mental health concerns of gay males, bisexuals, and lesbians (King, Semlyen, Tai, Killaspy, Osborn, Popelyuk, & Nazareth, 2008), but the results of one recent study that attempted to obtain a representative sample of both lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual women highlight the concerns of traditionalists (Wilsnack, Hughes, Johnson, Bostwick, Szalacha, Benson, . . . Kinnison, 2008). Among bisexual and lesbian women, alcohol-dependence rates were as high as nearly 80% (versus 29% for heterosexual women), intoxication in the past year as high as nearly 72% (versus 31%), having experienced child sexual abuse as high as nearly 74% (versus 29%), having started drinking alcohol before age 15 as high as nearly 41% (versus 7%), as well as depression within the past 12 months as high as 87% (versus 27%) (Wilsnack et al.).

The concerns are not only about behavior but with the social norms within much of the gay and lesbian community that promote high-risk behaviors and lifestyles—behaviors and lifestyles that may not represent good role modeling even for biological children, but especially for adoptive youth, who may be at higher risk due to their circumstances even with good role models. Furthermore, the high rates of reported past child sexual abuse along with the risk of repeating a cycle of abuse lend concern to limited results with foster parents that suggest that sexual abuse of foster children is more common than expected on a same-gender basis (Schumm, 2005).

A third concern is that neuroticism—which Kurdek (2009) defines as “a predisposition to experience negative affect” (p. 119)—has been shown to predict lower levels of relationship commitment. Given that homosexuals have been shown to have higher levels of mental health concerns, it is likely that those issues would tend to predict—or perhaps cause—lower levels of commitment, resulting in greater parental relationship instability (Schumm, 2010c).

One area that has not been studied, to this author's knowledge, is the role of learning delayed gratification by children in different family types. Such a factor might prove especially important for adopted children.

Conclusions

The children of lesbian parents appear to be exposed to different kinds of role models through both their parents and through their parents' associates. Such differential role modeling does appear to have effects on children's development.

It appears that lesbian parents do tend to divide household labor more equally than do heterosexual parents. That modeling appears to carry over to encouraging their children to adopt less traditional gender roles compared to heterosexual parents. Furthermore, it appears that sons of lesbians tend to be more feminine than sons of heterosexual parents, while daughters of lesbian mothers tend to be more masculine than daughters of heterosexual parents; thus, parental influence seems important for gender modeling, though complete role reversal is rare. Likewise, lesbian parents appear to be more open, at the very least, to their children expressing a nontraditional sexual orientation as compared to heterosexual parents. Evidence is increasing that children of lesbian mothers, perhaps especially their daughters, are more likely to adopt a nonheterosexual sexual orientation.

Some research suggests that children of lesbian parents are more likely to adopt sexually permissive attitudes, even when they are heterosexual in sexual orientation—a possible further indication of the relative importance of parental socialization compared to genetics. Since the children of lesbian parents appear to have much higher exposure to nonheterosexual role models in terms of adult contacts other than their parents, there may be additional modeling from those other adults with respect to nontraditional gender roles and nontraditional sexual orientation, if not sexual permissiveness.

Evidence on teasing of children of lesbian parents is mixed; most children are teased to some extent if they seem different. Teasing may reflect a reaction to the differential outcomes of lesbian parental and friends' role modeling. The challenge for future research is to "tease out" which sorts of apparent difference are most critical to teasing at different stages of children's development.

It remains challenging to sort out the effects of sexual orientation on children's psychological adjustment. Virtually all studies that have yielded adverse results for lesbians' children have been marginalized in the literature. If there are significant effects, they most likely operate through intervening variables such as parental goals for their children (such as time preference or delayed gratification in general) over long periods of time. In addition, such effects would most likely be tied to gender role or sexual orientation/permissiveness outcomes rather than other variables. The extent to which parents model and encourage delayed gratification choices—especially delayed gratification choices of a sexual nature—may be important intervening variables. If lesbian mothers or gay fathers or their associates model polyamory or high levels of relationship turnover for their children, one might wonder how that would incline children to adopt consistent practices of delaying sexual gratification before marriage relative to heterosexual parents, who model sexual restraint before marriage and sexual fidelity after marriage. Notably, Luntz reported that "two-thirds (66 percent) of nonreligious Americans agree with the statement 'If it feels good, do it,' despite its selfish, dangerous undertones. By comparison, fully 71% of religious Americans disagree with the concept of instant gratification. What we have here is a chasm between the value systems of these two American camps." (p. 261). With $N = 200$, such percentage differences would yield an odds ratio of 4.75 (95% *CI*, 2.61 to 8.64; $r = .37$; effect size, Cohen's $d = 0.79$), a substantial as well as a statistically significant ($p < .001$) difference.

Consequently, it appears in this author's opinion that Biblarz and Stacey's (2010a, 2010b) and Biblarz and Savci's (2010) conclusions about the consequences of lesbian

parenting are not scientifically correct, which highlights the importance of continuing the conversation. Parental modeling does appear to play an important role in child socialization for both lesbian and heterosexual parents. However, what is modeled does appear to differ substantially between lesbian and heterosexual parents, with significant consequences for children in terms of a variety of outcomes most often keyed to gender role orientations or expressions of sexuality. While some effect sizes of the outcomes were greater, some were small; nevertheless, even small effect sizes should not be dismissed as unimportant (Cohen, 1988). Thus, the conclusion that lesbians make better parents than heterosexuals is not warranted from the literature despite that claim by recent reviews (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Biblarz & Stacey, 2010a).

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