The Effects of Lesbian Parenting on the

Psychological Development of their Children

Claire McCoy

CHLD 353

Abstract

The focus of this research will be to examine the relationship between the quality of lesbian parents’ nurturing ability and how it will relate to the psychological development of their children. Past research has found that children in planned lesbian families experience forms of stigmatization and social criticism. Certain protective factors such as a healthy relationship with parents, can positively affect the psychological adjustment of the children (Bos & Balen, 2008). A correlational research design will be used because the variables cannot be manipulated. Two measures will be used to obtain information regarding lesbian parenting quality and psychological well-being and happiness of their children. The type of statistical test that will be appropriate is the Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient. It will be appropriate for a correlational design because it will focus on the relationship between two naturally occurring variables.

Introduction

The important relationship between parenting quality and a child’s psychological development is significantly positive and the two variables are in direct concerted relation with one another (Gartrell et al. 2005, 2006). Gay and lesbian parents, specifically, are highly scrutinized for their potentially negative quality of parenting due to their sexual orientation and society’s perspective on their morality. A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in November 2010 found that 43% of Americans support the statement that gay and lesbian people raising children is damaging to society (Gartrell et al. 2005, 2006). A commonly held perception is that a child needs a role model that has the same gender as them in order to have healthy psychological development (Gartrell et al. 2005, 2006). Research is beginning to state that the importance level of a same gender role model is minimal in comparison to the quality and commitment to parenting (Gartrell et al. 2005, 2006).

The focus of this research is to examine the connection between the quality of lesbian parents’ nurturing ability and how that relates to the psychological development of their children. The study’s purpose is to examine how parental sexual orientation can potentially affect parenting quality and how parenting by homosexuals can affect children’s psychological development. The quality of parenting is primarily composed of varying aspects such as the levels of support, involvement and affection. The factor of psychological development is divided into cognitive, emotional and social aspects as well as intellectual or academic skills. The key variables included in the study are lesbian parenting quality, which will stand as the predictor variable, while children’s psychological development will stand as the outcome variable in the study.

Extensive research supports the tenet that children in planned lesbian families, between the ages of 8 and 12, experience stigmatization and social criticism. There are many protective factors that can stand against these potential forms of stigmatization. Research by Bos and Balen (2008) focuses on the influence of protective factors on children’s psychological adjustment (Bos & Balen, 2008). The research also focuses on how certain protective factors such as a healthy relationship with parents, can positively affect the psychological adjustment of these children in planned lesbian families. Increasing the quality of these protective factors would help reduce rates of stigmatization among these children. This would then lead to higher self-esteem and self-worth among children in lesbian families. It would also create a socially accepting environment in which every child deserves to feel comfortable and accepted.

Results from the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study in the United States helps support current research regarding the amount of stigmatization that children experienced at the age of 10. Forty three percent of children reported to have experienced stigmatization regarding their mother’s sexual orientation. Five years earlier, that percentage was only 34% (Gartrell et al. 2005, 2006). The question is that, how can five years increase the percentage by 9%? A higher rate of problem behavior regarding these children is now being associated with their potential experience of stigmatization (Gartrell et al. 2005, 2006).

These potential behavior issues can be controlled and prevented by certain protective factors such as warm, supportive relationships with parents (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan 1999, Golombok 2000, Frosch and Mangelsdorf 2001). When children have a healthy nurturing relationship with parents, this can help prevent negative attitudes on potential stigmatization that these children may experience. Having this relationship with their parents can help children develop positive self-esteem in order to develop more positive peer relationships. This positive parent to child relationship can also help minimize negative psychological outcomes within children in planned lesbian families.

Meeting children from other gay or lesbian families can also be beneficial for children of lesbian parents (Brewaeys et al. 1997). Formal and informal socialization with other non-traditional families can promote a better sense of self-worth in children and can also prove to be a protective factor. It can give children, in a planned lesbian family, a better understanding of their own parenting dynamic and help them come to terms with their familial structure. Having friends that have the same home experience is a great resource and can promote healthy self-esteem. These friends also have the ability to act as a strong support system to ward off potential social stigmatization.

There has been an increasing number of children whom are raised by lesbian or gay parents, and even though factors such as support and protective factors can stand against potential stigmatization, there are still many “concerns” from society regarding the way these children are raised (Paige, 2005). In 2000, the U.S. Census conclude that 33% of lesbian couple households and 22% of gay male couple households have at least one child, under the age of 18 living in their home (Paige, 2005). Even though there are an average 163, 879 households in the United States that are led by gay or lesbian parents, society still has major concern over non-traditional families. Many people are concerned about the quality of parenting that lesbian parents provide and how it may affect their child’s psychological development.

Society’s negative perspective on gay individuals translates also to their pessimistic viewpoint of gay parent’s potential to be quality parents. For example, some of the many concerns that society has are that gay or lesbian individuals are “mentally ill” and are not capable of being loving parents (Paige, 2005). Also, segments of society hold the belief that lesbian women are less maternal than heterosexual women and that gay relationships are transient and leave little time to be involved in children’s lives. In general, research has not found evidence to support that these concerns are true due to the fact that being gay is not a psychological disorder and it does not cause psychological impairment. It is supported, through research, that lesbian women and heterosexual women’s approaches to child rearing do not differ (Paige, 2005). Gay and lesbian families divide up childcare responsibilities evenly to ensure a positive relationship between the two parents and a healthy, balanced family structure. The results of some studies have shown that in comparison to heterosexual parents, gay and lesbian parents may even rate more superior regarding a balance between control and warmth (Paige, 2005).

One of the main concerns, mentioned previously is the influence that gay and lesbian parents have on the psychological development of their children (Paige, 2005). Society’s concerns derive from the increasing amount of “social visibility and legal status” (Paige, 2005). The first concern is that children of lesbian and gay parents will experience a harder time with aspects such as sexual orientation, gender identity and gender role behavior in comparison with children of heterosexual parents. The second concern regards the personal development of children in gay and lesbian families rather than their sexual identity (Paige, 2005). Some observers have expressed their opinions regarding this by saying that children of gay and lesbian parents are more prone to mental breakdown and are essentially more psychologically maladjusted or have an unhealthy psychological development (Paige, 2005).

The third concern relates to the children of lesbian and gay parents’ ability to develop and hold healthy social relationships with peers and others (Paige, 2005). Evidence suggests that children of gay and lesbian parents have normal and healthy social relationships. Regarding all of the previous concerns, overall research suggests that the well-being and psychological development of children in gay and lesbian families does not differ from children of heterosexual parents.

The purpose of this study was to examine how parental sexual orientation can potentially affect parenting quality and how parenting by homosexuals can affect children’s psychological development. The two main variables being examined are lesbian parenting quality and children’s psychological development. This area of research is important for apparent reasons such as the importance and significance of the psychological development of children. However, it is also important to consider the differences in family structure and parenting due to our society and culture’s altering image. The relationship between lesbian parenting quality and the psychological development of their children is important due to society’s negative perspective of gay culture. The hypothesis for this study is that there will be a positive relationship between lesbian parenting quality and the psychological development of their children.

**Method**

**Overview**

The study’s purpose will be how to examine how parental sexual orientation can potentially affect parenting quality and how parenting by homosexuals can affect children’s psychological development. The focus of this research will be how to examine the relationship between the quality of lesbian parents’ nurturing ability and how that will relate to the psychological development of their children. A correlational research design will be used because the variables cannot be manipulated. The predictor variable will be the quality of lesbian parenting and the outcome variable will be psychological development. Regarding the predictor variable, factors such as setting limits and rules, supporting and rewarding for good parenting and proactive parenting will be measured.

Regarding the outcome variable, factors such as positive outlook, positive emotional state and social desirability will be measured. The factors for each variable, predictor and outcome, will be measured through a measure representative to a scale. These scales will measure frequency of occurrence for certain aspects relating to parenting quality and psychological wellbeing. The level of measurement for both variables, predictor and outcome, will be ordinal.

**Participants**

The sample for the study will be drawn from a large urban city in Northern California through given permission from the superintendent of a school district. The sampling technique that will be used for this study is nonprobability. The rational, for using this type of sampling technique, will be that children from lesbian families are essential for this specific study. The total number participants for the study will be 80 families. The number for each gender, regarding children, will be 59 males and 51 females between the ages of 6-14. The ethnicities expected in the sample will be a majority of white families, smaller number of Latino families, and an even smaller number of African American families. The income levels in the sample will be expected to range from $40,000 to $90,000. Regarding the parents, the study will include 160 female, lesbian mothers that will range in age from 38-46.

**Measures**

Two measures will be used to obtain information regarding lesbian parenting quality and psychological well-being and happiness of their children. The first measure will be The Validation of a Self-Report Parenting Measure (McEachern, 2012). It is comprised of 21 questions on a scale of 1-7 with the range of possible scores being 21-147. This measure will provide quantitative data. It will also provide an ordinal level of measurement. A higher score will represent a higher and more positive quality of parenting and a lower score will represent a less involved and engaged parenting style (McEachern, 2012). No items on the scale will be reverse scored. One sample item of this measure will be “Play with your child in a way that was fun for *both of you*?” (McEachern, 2012). This measure will represent a fixed format state and more importantly a fixed response scale that will range from how often a statement is true (never-always). A parent will respond using the scale and will respond how often this question is true to their lives and children’s lives. The original goal of the analyses of the measure will be to establish the construct validity of The Parenting Young Children measure (PARYC) (McEachern, 2012). As previously mentioned, the PARYC will be made up of three major parenting behaviors: Supporting Positive Behavior, Setting Limits, and Proactive Parenting. [Table 1](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3412343/table/T1/), of the measure, will provide the means and standard deviations of all items included in the PARYC. The correlations between the items for the full sample, in the measure, will be included in [Table 2](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3412343/table/T2/) (McEachern, 2012). The correlational coefficient for validity will be .4. According to the information presented in Table 4, the reliability will represent that of Chronbach’s Alpha (McEachern, 2012). Regarding the three elements of the measure: supporting good behavior, setting limits and proactive parenting, Chronbach’s Alpha will be good at levels ranging from .78-.85 (McEachern, 2012).

The second measure will be the The Stirling Children’s Wellbeing Scale. It will be comprised of 15 questions on a 1-5 scale and the range of possible scores will be 15-75 (Liddle, Carter, 2004). This measure will provide quantitative data. It will also provide an ordinal level of measurement. A higher score will represent a high sense of positive well being and self esteem when a lower score will represent lower self esteem and well being. No items on this scale will be reverse scored (Liddle, Carter, 2004). One sample item of the measure will be “I think good things will happen in my life” (Liddle, Carter, 2004). This measure will represent a fixed format state and more importantly a fixed response scale that will range from how often a statement is true (never-always) (Liddle, Carter, 2004). A child will respond to the above statement by indicating how often this statement applies to be true. Construct validity will be tested by correlating the SCWBS with the DuBois Self- Esteem Scale and the WEMWBS using a Pearson‟s Bivariate correlation (Liddle, Carter, 2004). Good construct validity will be represented with a correlation above the r = 0.7 benchmark between the WEMWBS and the SCWBS and additionally, a strong however weaker correlation between the SCWBS and the DuBois Self-Esteem Scale (Liddle, Carter, 2004). The analysis of the measure will support the reliability in relation to Chronbach’s Alpha. The resulting scale will have good reliability coinciding with Chronbach’s Alpha with a 0.8 benchmark (Liddle, Carter, 2004).

**Procedure**

The IRB approval from California State University at Chico will be obtained prior to the beginning of the study. The steps that will be taken to identify and recruit an appropriate sample for the study will be as follows: permission will be obtained from the superintendent of a school district by phone, contact will be made with principals at individual schools by phone, then teachers and then families of children in the classrooms by phone. Informed consent will be received prior to the beginning of the study at the schools through signed consent forms. Families will be contacted and given information about the study through written form and oral form in order to make sure the goals of the study will be clear. The researcher will explain the measures and details of the study through both oral and written form and verbal assent will be needed from the children participating in the study. Measures will be administered in the homes of all families participating. Each item on both measures will be read aloud and the participants will also be given a hard copy of the measures in order to follow along. Participants, after hearing each measure read, will indicate their response on the hard copy. The data of this study will be kept confidential in a locked filing cabinet in Modoc Hall on the Chico State campus. After data collection will be completed, gift cards for Shubert’s Ice Cream will be given to each family that

participated in the study.

**Statistical Analysis Plan**

There is a positive relationship between the lesbian parents’ quality of parenting and the psychological development of their children. The type of statistical test that will be appropriate for the given hypothesis is the Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient. It will be appropriate for a correlational design because it will focus on the relationship between naturally occurring variables. The Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient will be used because of the ordinal data that will be represented and the relationship factor between the two variables in the research hypothesis. Alpha will represent the likelihood that the population sample parameter lies outside the confidence interval. The level of alpha will be a comparison between the results of the study and alpha to understand if results are significant. Obtained alpha will be smaller in comparison to value of *r*.

References

Bos, H. & Van Balen, F. (2008). Children in planned lesbian families: Stigmatization, psychological adjustment and protective factors. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, *10* (3), 221-236.

Brewaeys, A., Ponjaert. I., Van, H. E. V. and Gombok S. (1997). Donor insemination: Child development and family functioning in lesbian mother families. *Human Reproduction*, 12, 1349-1359.

Gartrell, N., Deck, A., Rodas, C., Peyser, H. and Banks, A. (2005) The National Lesbian Family Study: 4 Interviews with the 10 year old children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 75, 518-524.

Gartrell, N., Rodas, C., Deck, A., Peyser, H. and Banks, A. (2006) The National Lesbian Family Study: Interviews with mothers of the 10 year olds. *Feminism and Psychology*. 16, 175- 192.

Golombok, S., & Toker, F. (1997). *Growing up in a lesbian family*: Effects on child development. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Hetherington, E. M. and Stanley- Hagan, M. S. (1999) The adjustment of children with divorced parents: A risk and resiliency perspective. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 40, 129-140.

Liddle, I., & Carter, G. (2004). Emotional and psychological wellbeing in children: The standardisation of the stirling children‟s wellbeing scale. *Stirling Council Educational Psychology Service*.

McEachern, A., Dishion, T., Weaver, C., Shaw, D., Wilson, M., & Gardner, F. (2012). Parenting young children (paryc): Validation of a self-report parenting measure. *National Institute of Health* , *21*(3), 498-511.

Paige, R. U. (2005). Proceedings of the American Psychological Association, Incorporated, for the legislative year 2004. Minutes of the meeting of the Council of Representatives July 28 & 30, 2004, Honolulu, HI. Retrieved December 6, 2013, from the World Wide Web http://www.apa.org/governance/. (To be published in Volume 60, Issue Number 5 of the American Psychologist.)

Appendix

Table of Contents

Demographic Questionnaire

The Validation of a Self-Report Parenting Measure

The Stirling Children’s Wellbeing Scale

Demographic Questionnaire

-What is your age?

-What is your child’s age?

-What is your gender?

-What is your child’s gender?

-What is your ethnicity (Caucasian, African American, Asian, Mexican American, other)?

-What is your child’s ethnicity (Caucasian, African American, Asian, Mexican American, other)?

-What is your income level ($10,000-$30,000) ($40,000-$60,000) ($60,000-$80,000) ($80,000-$100,000) ($100,000 or more)?

The Validation of a Self-Report Parenting Measure

Measure one will be The Validation of a Self-Report Parenting Measure (McEachern, 2012). It is comprised of 21 questions on a scale of 1-7 with the range of possible scores being 21-147. This measure will provide quantitative data. It will also provide an ordinal level of measurement. A higher score will represent a higher and more positive quality of parenting and a lower score will represent a less involved and engaged parenting style (McEachern, 2012). No items on the scale will be reverse scored. One sample item of this measure will be “Play with your child in a way that was fun for *both of you*?” (McEachern, 2012). This measure will represent a fixed format state and more importantly a fixed response scale that will range from how often a statement is true (never-always). A parent will respond using the scale and will respond how often this question is true to their lives and children’s lives. The original goal of the analyses of the measure will be to establish the construct validity of the PARYC measure (McEachern, 2012). As previously mentioned, the PARYC will be made up of three major parenting behaviors: Supporting Positive Behavior, Setting Limits, and Proactive Parenting. [Table 1](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3412343/table/T1/), of the measure, will provide the means and standard deviations of all items included in the PARYC. The correlations between the items for the full sample, in the measure, will be included in [Table 2](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3412343/table/T2/) (McEachern, 2012). The correlational coefficient for validity is .4. According to the information presented in Table 4, the reliability will represent that of Chronbach’s Alpha (McEachern, 2012). Regarding the three elements of the measure: supporting good behavior, setting limits and proactive parenting, Chronbach’s Alpha will be good at levels ranging from .78-.85 (McEachern, 2012).

The Stirling Children’s Wellbeing Scale

Measure two will be the The Stirling Children’s Wellbeing Scale. It will be comprised of 15 questions on a 1-5 scale and the range of possible scores will be 15-75 (Liddle, Carter, 2004). This measure will provide quantitative data. It will also provide an ordinal level of measurement. A higher score will represent a high sense of positive well being and self esteem when a lower score will represent lower self esteem and well being. No items on this scale will be reverse scored (Liddle, Carter, 2004). One sample item of the measure will be “I think good things will happen in my life” This measure will represent a fixed format state and more importantly a fixed response scale that will range from how often a statement is true (never-always) (Liddle, Carter, 2004). A child will respond to the above statement by indicating how often this statement applies to be true. Construct validity will be tested by correlating the SCWBS with the DuBois Self- Esteem Scale and the WEMWBS using a Pearson‟s Bivariate correlation (Liddle, Carter, 2004). Good construct validity will be represented with a correlation above the r = 0.7 benchmark between the WEMWBS and the SCWBS and additionally, a strong however weaker correlation between the SCWBS and the DuBois Self-Esteem Scale (Liddle, Carter, 2004). The analysis of the measure will support the reliability in relation to Chronbach’s Alpha. The resulting scale will have good reliability coinciding with Chronbach’s Alpha with a 0.8 benchmark (Liddle, Carter, 2004).