

36. Gay and Heterosexual Fathers: Comparing Parenting Behaviors among Groups of Fathers

Bigner, J. J. & Jacobsen, R. B. (1989b). Parenting behaviors of homosexual and heterosexual fathers. In F. W. Bozett (Ed.), *Homosexuality and the family*, pp. 173-186. New York: Harrington Park Press.

In this study, the responses of 33 gay fathers and 33 heterosexual fathers were compared on the Parent Behavior Inventory, measuring different dimensions of parenting behavior. All fathers were similar regarding involvement and intimacy level with children. However, some differences emerged, including that gay fathers reported being stricter, yet more responsive to children's needs. Overall, both groups of fathers were similar in their parenting skills and abilities, but different in their philosophy, style of and approach to parenting.

Gay fathers were more likely to have an egalitarian parenting approach than heterosexual fathers. Gay fathers reported letting their children actively participate in family decisions, and were more likely to act in a counselor role than heterosexual fathers. Gay fathers encouraged their children to discuss their fears and went to greater lengths to explain rules and regulations to their children than heterosexual fathers. Gay fathers also reported putting more energy into acting as an activities resource for their children than did heterosexual fathers. Gay fathers, however, were less willing to be demonstrative with affection towards their children than were heterosexual fathers.

Participants were all Euro-American and an average age of 40 years. All had at least two children an average age of 11 years. Self-identified gay fathers were recruited through a support group in Denver, Colorado, while heterosexual fathers were randomly selected from another research project's participant pool. Of the 66 fathers, 48 were divorced, 8 separated, 6 married, and 4 never married. The average income level was \$27,000. The average education was high school graduation.