

42. Children of Lesbian Mothers Conceived By Donor Insemination: Openness Regarding Parental Sexual Orientation and the Children's Conception

Stevens, M., Perry, B., Burston, A., Golombok, S., & Golding, J. (2003). Openness in lesbian-mother families regarding mother's sexual orientation and child's conception by donor insemination. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology, 21*, 347-362.

This study is an investigation of the openness of 38 lesbian mothers with their 5-to-9 year old children regarding their sexual orientation and their children's conception. Children were also interviewed about their understanding of these topics. Ten children had been conceived by donor insemination (DI), and 28 had been conceived in the context of a heterosexual relationship prior to their mother's coming out as lesbian. Only two of the children were not aware of their mother's sexual orientation, while half of the children were fully aware. Most children developed this awareness gradually, rather than being told outright. No child reacted negatively to this discovery. All mothers who conceived children by DI had told their children about their conception (n=9) or planned to tell them (n=1). These findings suggest that the children in this sample have a greater awareness of their DI conception than their counterparts from earlier decades. Moreover, the children do not have any serious difficulties in coming to terms with having lesbian mothers or being conceived by DI when they have been consistently informed from an early age.

Participants were drawn from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), which comprises a community sample of 14,000 mothers and their children in England and has been among the most representative of lesbian-led families to date. Of the 38 lesbian-headed families, 20 were single-mother families and 18 were two-mother families. Half of the DI mothers in the sample had chosen known donors, while the others had chosen unknown donors.