

24. Family Function in Lesbian-headed Families Created by Donor Insemination: Mother-Child Relationship Quality, Parental Involvement, and Parental Authority

Vanfraussen, K., Ponjaert-Kristoffersen, I., & Brewaeys, A. (2003). Family functioning in lesbian families created by donor insemination. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 73, 78-90.

This study of family functioning took place in Belgium.¹ There were 48 families: 24 headed by lesbian couples who had used donor insemination and 24 headed by heterosexual couples who had naturally conceived. Findings reveal that the quality of children's relationships with each mother (biological and social) in lesbian-headed families is comparable. Additionally, both mothers are equally involved in child activities. This is unlike fathers in heterosexual parenting couples, who are less involved than mothers. However, lesbian social mothers are similar to heterosexual fathers in level of authority in families.

Overall, families with lesbian parents and families with heterosexual parents are more alike than different. Parent-child interactions and the quality of parent-child relationships are similar between families. Children in both types of families experience comparable levels of acceptance and authority. In all families, daughters and parents of daughters rate parent-child relationship quality more positively than sons and parents of sons. One difference between the groups of families regards division of labor—lesbian couples tend to be more egalitarian than heterosexual couples.

Data came from individual interviews with parents and children. All parents were Caucasian. In each family group, 18 parents were coupled and 6 were split up. No significant demographic differences existed between parents. Families were matched on size and had children of the same age and gender. The average age of children was 10 years. There were 37 children with lesbian parents and 37 with heterosexual parents. The number of girls and boys were approximately equal, with slightly more boys in each group.

¹ The authors point out that in Belgium at the time of this study, the lesbian social mother has no legal or social status nor is fully acknowledged as a parent.