

33. A Comparison of Families Headed by Lesbian and Heterosexual Couples: Parenting Goals and Experiences, Couple Relationships and Social Support

Bos, H. M. W., van Balen, F., & van den Boom, D. C. (2004). Experience of parenthood, couple relationship, social support, and child-rearing goals in planned lesbian mother families. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 45, 755-764.

This study, conducted in the Netherlands¹, investigated parenting experiences and family relationships of 100 families headed by lesbian couples and 100 by heterosexual couples. Data was collected via questionnaires and of activity diaries filled out by parents. Results showed that heterosexual parents are no more competent or less burdened than lesbian parents. However, lesbian parents less strongly endorsed traditional child-rearing goals as compared to heterosexual parents, and lesbian social mothers (non-biological mothers) more strongly defended their position as parent in comparison to heterosexual fathers.

Overall, heterosexual and lesbian couples were more similar than different. All couples experienced similar levels of relationship satisfaction. Both sets of parents considered developing independence in their children important. However, one child-rearing goal that was less important to lesbian mothers was "conformity," meaning the development of qualities deemed important by society.

All families were Caucasian and Dutch and children had been with their families of origin since birth. Children were between the ages of four to eight years, and there were equal proportions of daughters and sons for both types of families. All lesbian-headed families were planned, meaning children were born in the context of the same-sex relationship. All couples had been together approximately 15 years. Lesbian parents were slightly older than heterosexual parents, but the majority of all parents were well-educated and lived in suburban areas. Heterosexual fathers spent more hours in employment than doing family tasks, as compared to lesbian social mothers. However, lesbian biological mothers and heterosexual mothers spent equal amounts of time in employment.

¹ The Netherlands became the first country to allow same-sex marriage in 2001. In general, public opinion in the Netherlands regarding LGBTQ people is relatively positive, but less positive towards parenting by LGBTQ adults.