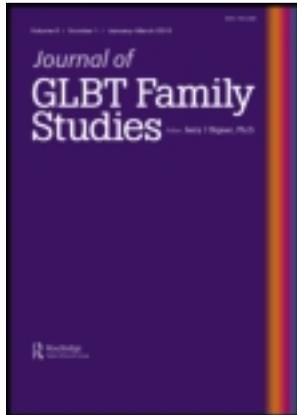


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Growing Up in a Lesbian Family: The Life Experiences of the Adult Daughters and Sons of Lesbian Mothers

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This qualitative study aims to explore the experience of being raised in a lesbian home from the perspective of the daughters and sons of lesbian families. Adult offspring of lesbian families participated in an online questionnaire that examined five themes: (1) positive aspects of being raised in a lesbian home, (2) opinions about discrimination towards lesbians in society, (3) reactions of peers towards their mothers' lesbianism, (4) experiences with stigma due to their mothers' lesbianism, and (5) the subsequent coping mechanisms employed. Findings indicate that offspring of lesbian families value an environment of acceptance and love fostered within their immediate family, as well as a strong sense of community among other lesbian families. Many individuals in this study expressed their belief that heterosexism is ingrained into the politics and social constructs of society as a whole. However, participants also noted their opinion that homophobic discrimination happens in varying degrees based on regional, religious, and cultural differences. Although participants received largely positive reactions from peers in regards to their mothers' lesbianism, they also experienced stigma at some point in their lives due to their mothers' lesbianism. A range of coping mechanisms were employed, including confrontation, secrecy, and seeking outside support.

KEYWORDS *lesbian families, same-sex parents, stigmatization, resilience, young adults*

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a long history of controversy, debate, and discrimination surrounding lesbian and gay families. Throughout the United States there are laws that restrict same-sex couples from marrying and adopting or fostering children (Wald, 2006). Despite studies showing otherwise (Golombok & Badger, 2010; Gartrell & Bos, 2010; Golombok et al., 2003; Patterson, 2000; Golombok, Tasker, & Murray, 1997; Brewaeys, Panjaert, Van Halle, & Golombok, 1997), prospective lesbian mothers and gay fathers face discrimination based on the erroneous assumption that their children will be psychologically damaged growing up in a household with two parents of the same sex (Wald, 2006). Opponents of lesbian and gay families are hesitant to place children in the custody of people whose sexual orientation increases their children's vulnerability to discrimination and bullying (Clarke, Kitzinger, & Potter, 2004). However, relatively few studies have explored the prevalence of homophobic discrimination according to the children's own reports, whether they internalize it when it does occur, and what tools they use to overcome these obstacles.

Over the past 40 years, researchers have examined the experiences and outcomes of growing up in a same-sex household. In the most recent report from the U.S. National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study, Gartrell and Bos (2010) measured the psychological adjustment of 17-year-old adolescents who were conceived through donor insemination by lesbian mothers. Their findings revealed that adolescents raised in lesbian families demonstrated higher levels of social, school/academic, and total competence than teenagers from traditional heterosexual families (Gartrell & Bos, 2010). Furthermore, adolescents in this study experienced lower levels of social problems, rule breaking, aggressive, and externalizing problem behavior than their age-matched counterparts (Gartrell & Bos, 2010).

In the United Kingdom, Golombok and colleagues (Golombok & Badger, 2010; Golombok et al., 1997; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004) have been conducting a longitudinal study of children raised in mother-headed families from infancy. In this study, children raised in lesbian families and families headed by a single heterosexual mother were compared to children raised in traditional families (i.e., two-parent heterosexual families). In the third phase of their longitudinal study, Golombok and Badger (2010) measured the quality of parent-child relationship and the psychological adjustment of the children, now in early adulthood. Differences between the family types emerged in measurements of family relationships and psychological well-being. Young adults raised in female-headed homes had more positive family relationships and greater psychological well-being than their counterparts raised in traditional families.

In addition to measuring the psychological adjustment and social development of the offspring of lesbian families, researchers have looked at

the coping mechanisms employed by the offspring to deal with homophobic discrimination. Crocker (1999) outlines a wide range of coping mechanisms that have helped people deal with stigmatization. Stigmatization is defined as a situation, threat, or predicament resulting from awareness that in a certain context one's identity could influence how one is treated and judged in that situation, affecting both self-esteem and performance. Avoidance, concealment, vigilance, and withdrawal are the four most common coping methods employed by those who are stigmatized. Active coping strategies such as confronting others, seeking outside support, and engaging in social change are associated with greater resilience (Crocker, 1999). These types of mechanisms may be helpful to offspring in lesbian families who have experienced homophobic stigmatization.

Researchers have also explored how lesbian mothers deal with stigmatization towards their family. In Australia, Short (2007) interviewed 68 lesbian mothers and prospective mothers about the resources and strategies they plan to utilize to protect their family from the effects of stigmatization. She found that partnered mothers reported having supportive, flexible, and satisfying relationships, which provided a strong basis for well-being within the couple and, ultimately, the family. Furthermore, the mothers reported sharing an "equal" role in caring for children, which allowed both mothers to have the opportunity to form close and supportive relationships with their children. The mothers also reported having rich social networks by intentionally developing relationships with people from diverse family structures and cultural and socioeconomic groups, and frequently choosing to live in areas where a higher-than-average proportion of lesbian-parented families live. The mothers in this study believed these life choices provided their family with a buffer from negative influences, a strong sense of connection and belonging, practical and emotional support, and, ultimately, a rich context in which to live.

The objective of the current study is to explore the experiences of young adults who were raised in lesbian homes by examining the following research questions:

- What do the adult daughters and sons of lesbian mothers perceive as the most positive aspects of being raised in a lesbian family?
- Do they believe that society discriminates against lesbians?
- How did their peers react to learning about their lesbian family?
- Were they stigmatized because of their mothers' lesbianism?
- What mechanisms did they employ to cope with the stigma they faced?

By posing these questions, this study aims to reveal what it is like to be raised in a lesbian home from the perspective of the daughters and sons of lesbian families themselves.

METHOD

Participants

This study consists of an open-ended questionnaire administered via the Internet to individuals 18 years or older ($N = 35$). The final number of participants was 32, as 3 of the participants failed to complete the questionnaire in its entirety and were therefore excluded from the data analysis. All participants had been raised in lesbian households and were between the ages of 18 and 32 years old. No further demographic data were collected to ensure the utmost confidentiality of participant information.

Participants were solicited through advertisements posted on the online networking Web site Facebook (www.facebook.com), and through flyers posted throughout the University of California Berkeley campus. Participants contacted the lead investigator via e-mail to inform her of their interest in the study and to confirm that they were 18 years old or older and that they had been raised in a lesbian household. Qualified participants were then given the password to the online questionnaire. All participants consented to be included in the study and completed an online waiver of consent.

Materials

The questionnaire was designed to measure perceived stigmatization, coping mechanisms, and social adjustment. The questionnaire included five open-ended questions and one yes/no question that assessed three areas: (1) experiences of growing up in a lesbian home, (2) experiences of stigmatization relevant to their mothers' relationship and the feelings that emerged because of these experiences, and (3) coping mechanisms used to deal with these feelings. Under the topic of experiences of growing up in a lesbian home, participants were asked to comment on what they felt was the most positive aspect of being raised in a lesbian home, if they feel society discriminates against lesbians, and how peers have responded when they have learned of the participant's mothers' lesbianism. Regarding stigmatization, participants were also asked if they experienced bullying or teasing because of their mothers' sexual orientation, and if so, how they felt about it. Finally, under the topic of coping mechanisms, participants were asked to identify ways in which they dealt with the feelings that arose as a result of teasing or bullying.

Procedure

After the study was approved by the Office for the Protection of Human Subjects (OPHS) in Berkeley, California, the lead investigator solicited college-aged individuals who grew up in lesbian households. Qualified participants logged on to SurveyMonkey by using the password given to them by the lead investigator. Each participant was assigned a unique ID number by the

online survey Web site for the purposes of randomization and confidentiality. No personal information was linked to this ID number. The first task was to read and complete a consent form, without which the participants would not be able to participate. From the consent form, the SurveyMonkey Web site directed the participants to the questionnaire itself. When the participants completed the questionnaire, they were automatically thanked and were debriefed on the purpose of the study. Contact information for the lead investigator, the two faculty advisers, and the Office of the Committee for Protection of Human Subjects was also provided. Confidentiality of the participants was maintained by the use of the SurveyMonkey Web site, as they did not enter in any personal information (name, sex, etc.) to link them to their responses. To further ensure confidentiality, the lead investigator deleted the e-mail list of names and e-mail addresses upon completion of the study.

Data Analysis

In this study, we utilized qualitative rather than quantitative research methods. Qualitative methods were deemed appropriate because they allow participants to provide a more detailed description of their feelings, thought processes, and emotions, which are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The data were coded by identifying themes and patterns from the participants' responses. Emergent themes were documented as key categories and participant responses were coded accordingly. All categories, with the exception of one, were not mutually exclusive, as participant answers could qualify for more than one category per question. The one question that was mutually exclusive was a yes-or-no question regarding participants' views on homophobic discrimination.

The lead investigator and two colleagues systematically coded the data to ensure sufficient agreement and reliability. In particular, the first three responses for each question were reviewed and coded simultaneously by the lead investigator and her two colleagues. After reaching a satisfactory level of agreement, the remaining responses were coded individually. Fleiss' kappa was calculated for all categories, and all kappas exceeded .60, meaning all raters were in substantial to almost perfect agreement. Coder disagreements were resolved by majority rule.

Once all the responses were coded, the frequency of each category was recorded and plotted onto a table for data analysis. The frequencies are operationally defined in accordance with the recommendations of Sandelowski (2001). The word "few" is used if a theme emerged in 1 to 3 responses, while "some" is used if a theme emerged in 4 to 7 responses. The word "most" refers to a theme that emerged in 8 to 14 responses and "majority" is used if a theme emerged in 15 or more transcripts. These adjectives are

only representative of this study's sample and should not be generalized to a larger population.

FINDINGS

Five research questions were explored:

1. positive aspects of being raised in a lesbian home,
2. opinions about societal discrimination,
3. reactions of peers,
4. experience of stigma, and
5. coping mechanisms.

Results have a strong phenomenological characteristic, as the study aims to analyze and describe the experiences of growing up in a lesbian family to gain a better understanding of those experiences. The themes that emerged from each of these questions are described in the next sections.

Positive Aspects of Being Raised in a Lesbian Home

Three themes were identified as positive aspects of growing up in a lesbian family: (1) environment of acceptance and love, (2) sense of community, and (3) defying social norms. A majority of participants reported that their favorite part of having lesbian parents was that they grew up in an environment of acceptance and love. Those whose answers fell into this category felt that in addition to experiencing "a lot of love" from their mothers, they had a "wider definition of 'family,'" as well as a "larger social justice consciousness," and, consequently, described themselves as "less judgmental and discriminatory" than their peers.

In addition to support at home, some participants enjoyed being part of a supportive and close-knit Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community. One participant explained:

Finding community, friendship, and support in other kids with LGBT parents [is the most positive aspect of being raised in a lesbian family]—it's great to be a part of this small network of people with whom I have this aspect of my life in common.

Another commented,

I've always been grateful for the queer community I was raised in, which provided me with lots of adults to be close to and lots of different models for how to be a person.

A few participants said that they enjoyed growing up in a lesbian family because it allowed them to defy social norms. One participant said that “breaking the gender binary” was one of the most positive aspects of being in a lesbian family, because “there weren’t girl chores and boy chores or girl toys and boy toys, there were just chores and toys, no need for a gender pronoun.”

Opinions about Societal Discrimination

Three mutually exclusive response categories emerged from this question: (1) society does discriminate against lesbians, (2) lesbians experience varying degrees of discrimination, and (3) society does not discriminate against lesbians.

A majority of the participants said that they thought society discriminated against lesbians. Some participants felt that discrimination was prominent in the culture and in politics, particularly in marriage laws. One participant said,

The messages I hear through media coverage of public opinion on homosexual families (including lesbian families) are largely negative and attempt to portray lesbian families as somehow unwholesome or unsafe for children.

Another participant stated,

Lesbians are discriminated against in housing, employment, marriage laws, and adoption laws.

Most participants believed that lesbians experienced discrimination in varying degrees. In particular, participants suggested that the level of discrimination experienced by lesbians was dependent on location. For example, some participants had not experienced discrimination because of their mothers’ sexual identities firsthand, but had heard of it happening in other parts of the country. One participant explained:

I haven’t had much direct feeling of discrimination against me. What I do see is when I come across people who come from different places with more discriminatory values, I hear a lot of negative things about gays and gay families, but I can’t remember being in a situation where I felt like that hate was directed at me or my family . . . I often see horrible mean comments on forums or videos online about gay issues.

Only a few participants were of the opinion that lesbians were not discriminated against.

Reactions of Peers

Five themes emerged from this research question: (1) positive reactions, (2) positive reactions due to discretionary disclosure, (3) interested/surprised, (4) negative, and (5) neutral.

Most participants reported having received positive reactions from their peers at varying stages of their lives, when the participants disclosed that their mothers were lesbian. One participant reported that his or her friends thought it was “cool” that he or she had lesbian parents, while another said that his or her friends confessed that they “wish they had that.”

Some participants received positive reactions from peers due to discretionary disclosure. One participant explained: “When I was young, I only told close friends, and they already knew my mom, so they were fine with it.” Another participant revealed that his or her peers have reacted very positively because he or she “mostly interact[s] in queer and queer-friendly communities.”

Most participants revealed that their peers experienced interest or surprise when they learned of the participants’ lesbian families. For example, one participant stated, “After initial shock or uncomfortability, for the most part people are interested in hearing about my experiences and asking questions about my situation.”

Another participant said, that his or her peers reacted “mostly with curiosity” and they wanted to “know how [he/she] came about and how [his/her] parents got together.”

Some participants experienced negative reactions from their peers in childhood. However, these participants noted that as they grew older, the reactions of peers shifted in a more positive direction. One participant said,

When I was in middle school/high school, people reacted very negatively. I lived in a predominately conservative, Catholic area, and several of my friends stopped talking to me when they found out, others made fun of me. Since then (in college) my peers have reacted well, some of them even think it is pretty cool and interesting.

Another participant revealed,

It has varied throughout the years. Peers were less accepting and affirming when I was younger (elementary and adolescence), but have become more welcoming and positive in adulthood.

Finally, some participants indicated that disclosure about their lesbian families was met with neutral or even “indifferent” reactions by peers.

Experience of Stigma

A majority of participants said that they had been bullied because of their mothers' sexual orientation, while some reported that they had never experienced homophobic teasing or bullying. Four themes emerged regarding the emotions evoked by stigma: (1) embarrassment, (2) anger, (3) hurt, and (4) no effect.

Only a few participants reported feeling embarrassed when they were bullied, while most described feeling hurt. Of the participants who reported feeling hurt, some described feeling "awful," "horrible," and "terrible." One participant revealed the following:

When I was younger I felt rejected, like I had to defend myself, my family. I felt like I had to prove that I was good enough, smart enough, "normal" enough to still fit into my peer group, despite my family situation. When I was in elementary and junior high the feeling that I must somehow prove my normalcy and the normalcy of my family left me feeling inadequate quite often.

Another participant said,

In middle school and elementary school, I was definitely hurt by the teasing from my peers. At that point, I didn't know anyone besides my sisters who had lesbian mothers. I had no peer/support group. I always knew, though, that there was nothing wrong with having lesbian mothers (or with having queer parents in general). I was definitely hurt by people's comments, and I was also hurt to think that even the progressive suburb I grew up in, people were behaving in a hateful and discriminatory way. I never felt bad about having lesbian mothers, which is an important distinction for me to make.

Some participants reported feeling angry or "frustrated" when they were teased or bullied because of their mothers' relationship. One participant reported being "frustrated by the ignorance of others."

Coping Mechanisms

Four response categories emerged from this research question: (1) spoke up, (2) kept it a secret, (3) sought counseling/support groups, and (4) fought back.

Some participants spoke up when they experienced homophobic teasing or bullying. One participant became an "activist" and "stood up for lesbian rights verbally," while another participant "worked to educate, and get resources for teachers and students on inclusive curriculum and anti-homophobia training."

In contrast, some participants coped with the stigma they faced by keeping their mothers' lesbianism a secret. One participant revealed, "I refused to talk about my mom's sexuality . . . I refused to tell anyone, I even started lying about it so that people wouldn't find out." Another participant said, "I closed myself off from others and felt a strong need to closet my family."

Few participants utilized counseling and support groups, or fought back in response to the teasing and bullying they experienced.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined the experiences of stigmatization and the coping mechanisms employed by 32 adult offspring of lesbian families. The experiences of the adult daughters and sons of lesbian mothers were explored through five research areas: (1) positive aspects of being raised in a lesbian home, (2) opinions about societal discrimination, (3) reactions of peers to their mothers' lesbianism, (4) experience of stigma, and (5) coping mechanisms employed. The major themes that emerged from these research questions are discussed in the following sections.

Positive Aspects of Being Raised in a Lesbian Home

The results revealed that an environment of acceptance and love, and a sense of community, were the most positive aspects of growing up in a lesbian family. Not only did participants feel unconditionally accepted and loved by their mothers, but they also felt that being raised in a lesbian family required them to develop a wider definition of family, which ultimately made them more open and tolerant of other individuals. These findings correspond with existing literature on same-sex-parented families, which has found that the adolescents with lesbian mothers report positive familial relationships with high levels of parental warmth and love (Tasker & Golombok, 1995; Golombok & Badger, 2010; Bos & Gartrell, 2010). In addition, Oswald (2002) found that lesbian families adopt a wider definition of family in order to promote resilience. A possible interpretation of our finding is that being raised in a lesbian family has positive influences on child development by encouraging children to be more tolerant and accepting of differences.

The other theme identified in this study was the strong sense of a lesbian community. Participants felt that they had many influential adult role models, as well as strong bonds with other LGBT families. This finding corresponds with previous research, which revealed that lesbian parents form diverse networks of friends and extended family to create a strong sense of community for their children (Oswald, 2002).

Opinions about Societal Discrimination

A majority of participants were of the opinion that society discriminates against lesbian families both culturally and politically. This finding is congruent with the existing literature, which suggests that the adult children of lesbian parents view their mothers' sexual identity as a political matter (Tasker & Golombok, 1995). This could be explained by the established theory that members of lesbian families use politicization as a form of resilience because it allows them to make sense of the discrimination they experience in their private lives by linking it to a larger social context (Oswald, 2002).

Interestingly, most participants in the current study also reported their belief that lesbian families experience varying degrees of discrimination based on regional, religious, or cultural differences. Although some participants stated that they had not personally experienced homophobic discrimination, they were aware of a broad heterosexist mentality in other parts of the country. This finding could be partially explained by the fact that some participants were recruited through flyers posted around the University of California, Berkeley campus. Berkeley and the San Francisco Bay Area as a whole have a reputation for being very open and accepting of different sexualities, and thus, participants from this region may not have been exposed to as much heterosexist discrimination as those who live in more conservative parts of the country.

Reactions of Peers

In congruence with the existing literature, the results of the current study revealed that children raised in lesbian families experienced largely positive reactions from their peers at varying stages of their life, when they revealed their parents' sexual orientation (Fitzgerald, 1999; Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983; Tasker & Golombok, 1995). Although some participants in the present study reported receiving negative reactions, a majority of those participants clarified that they experienced less homophobia from peers as the participants themselves grew older. Perhaps this shift could be attributed to the maturity and acceptance that comes with age.

Experience of Stigma

The majority of participants reported experiencing a form of teasing or bullying at some point in their lives due to their mothers' lesbianism. The participants revealed a wide variety of emotional responses to the teasing and bullying. Although most participants were hurt, a majority of those who felt hurt revealed that with time, they learned to ignore the teasing, and never allowed it to affect the love and respect they had for their mothers. This is

consistent with research by Tasker and Golombok (1995), which revealed that adults raised in lesbian families are initially hurt by teasing and bullying, but with age they become proud of their parents' identity. This finding may be explained by the effect of maturity on an individual's ability to see past disparaging remarks. Alternatively, it could be the result of internalizing a strong sense of community as members of lesbian families.

Some participants became angry and frustrated when they experienced homophobic teasing or bullying. Most of those who reported these responses stated that they were frustrated by the lack of understanding and acceptance of their peers. These responses further support the theory that the offspring of lesbian mothers have a strong sense of pride and respect for their families (Tasker & Golombok, 1995).

Coping Mechanisms

Participants in the present study employed a variety of coping mechanisms in response to stigmatization. The themes that emerged correspond to dominant themes in the literature on coping mechanisms employed by offspring in lesbian families (Crocker, 1999). Crocker (1999) suggests that the most common methods of coping are (1) confronting others by speaking up or fighting, (2) secrecy, and (3) seeking counseling/support groups. Interestingly, the responses in this study indicated that no dominant coping mechanism was preferentially employed. However, a few more participants spoke up or resorted to secrecy than sought counseling or fought back.

The participants who chose to conceal their mothers' lesbianism indicated that they did so to avoid being teased and bullied in school. This finding is consistent with the literature, which suggests that the offspring of lesbian families perceive the need for secrecy for fear of teasing and name calling (Javaid, 1993). Consistent with the report of Tasker and Golombok (1995), most participants in the current study who chose to speak up in the face of stigmatization did so through education and political action.

The findings of the present research must be considered in the context of the study's limitations. First, this study had a very small sample size and is not representative of the population of individuals raised in lesbian families. Second, the answers in this study may be skewed by a self-selection bias. Participants learned about the study through flyers and blog postings on cyber-groups for children with lesbian parents through Facebook, and as such, interested individuals were self-selected. It is possible that these individuals were more involved in lesbian family rights, as some were active in LGBT family organizations.

Furthermore, participants were over 18 years of age and were asked to recall their lifetime experience of stigmatization. This may have skewed the results because some may have had difficulty accurately recalling the level of

stigmatization they experienced during childhood and adolescence, and how it made them feel. While this study examined the overall social adjustment of adults who experienced stigma as children, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study on children to determine how stigmatization influences their self-esteem.

In addition, this study did not look at the influence of demographic data (i.e., gender, area of residence) on the results as a whole. Further research is needed to determine if there is a relationship between various demographic measures and experiences of stigmatization as well as coping mechanisms employed.

Finally, the small sample size limited the researchers' ability to conduct a detailed statistical analysis. It will be important for future researchers to replicate these findings with a larger participant population.

CONCLUSION

This study provides additional insight into the experiences of individuals raised in lesbian households. Results from the current study suggest that the offspring of lesbian families value the environment of acceptance and love fostered within their immediate family, as well as a strong sense of community among other lesbian families. Furthermore, this population believes that heterosexism is ingrained into the politics and social constructs of society as a whole. However, they are also aware that homophobic discrimination happens in varying degrees based on regional, religious, and cultural differences. The findings of the current study also suggest that the offspring of lesbian families received largely positive reactions from peers at varying stages of their lives, when they reveal their mothers' lesbianism. Despite this, the offspring of lesbian families do experience some form of teasing and bullying at some point in their lives due to their mothers' lesbianism. While most are initially hurt, they learn to ignore the teasing, with time, and do not let it affect their love for their mothers. Finally, the results from this study suggest that the offspring of lesbian families employ a variety of coping mechanisms including confrontation, secrecy, and seeking outside support.

These findings are consistent with those of other studies, which suggest that lesbian families have positive familial relationships with high levels of parental warmth and love (Tasker & Golombok, 1995; Golombok & Badger, 2010; Bos & Gartrell, 2010) as well as a strong sense of community among other lesbian families (Oswald, 2002; Short, 2007). Other studies have also found that the offspring of lesbian families view their mothers' sexual identity as a political matter (Tasker & Golombok, 1995). The finding that the offspring of lesbian families experience positive reactions from their peers has also been replicated in other studies (Fitzgerald, 1999; Golombok et al., 1983; Tasker & Golombok, 1995). Other studies have also found that, when

faced with stigma, the offspring of lesbian families are initially hurt, but over time become proud of their parents' identity. The coping mechanisms revealed in this study (confrontation, secrecy, and seeking outside support) have also been highlighted in the existing literature (Crocker, 1999; Javaid, 1993; Tasker & Golombok, 1995).

In 2008, a proposition was passed in California that was designed to prevent legal recognition of lesbian and gay couples and families. Proponents of this proposition claim that by banning gay marriage Californians will "protect [their] children" (Yes on prop 8 campaign, 2008). In particular, they claim that marriage between a man and a woman is necessary to "create a loving environment for children" and to "protect the interests of children" (Yes on Prop 8 campaign, 2008). The results of the current study question the validity of that argument. Even though the majority of the participants in the current study experienced some form of bullying because of their parents' sexual identity, they were able to rise above it. In fact, many participants in this study report numerous benefits of being raised in a lesbian household, such as learning how to be more accepting and understanding of different ways of life, and having the unconditional love and support of same-sex parents. The individuals in this study believe that their lesbian parents are able to provide the same benefits as loving and committed heterosexual parents, if not more.

These findings contradict the notion that the definition of marriage should be constricted to "protect" children. The adult children of lesbian parents in this study not only report having positive peer and familial relationships, but they consider themselves more open-minded and tolerant than many of their peers who were raised in traditional heterosexual families. Perhaps it is time for society at large to accept same-sex couples as legitimate candidates for marriage and parenting.

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