

Outcomes for children with lesbian or gay parents. A review of studies from 1978 to 2000

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Twenty-three empirical studies published between 1978 and 2000 on nonclinical children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers were reviewed (one Belgian/Dutch, one Danish, three British, and 18 North American). Twenty reported on offspring of lesbian mothers, and three on offspring of gay fathers. The studies encompassed a total of 615 offspring (age range 1.5–44 years) of lesbian mothers or gay fathers and 387 controls, who were assessed by psychological tests, questionnaires or interviews. Seven types of outcomes were found to be typical: emotional functioning, sexual preference, stigmatization, gender role behavior, behavioral adjustment, gender identity, and cognitive functioning. Children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers did not systematically differ from other children on any of the outcomes. The studies indicate that children raised by lesbian women do not experience adverse outcomes compared with other children. The same holds for children raised by gay men, but more studies should be done.

Key words: Children, lesbians, gays, psychological outcomes, review.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Scandinavian (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) and other Western industrialized countries more and more children live in families where the mother or the father or both openly identify themselves as lesbian or gay. A body of research has now assessed the outcomes for these children, and the present paper reviews empirical works on children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers published between 1978 and 2000.

The prevalence of children living with a lesbian or gay parent, whether openly lesbian/gay or not, runs into several thousands in each Scandinavian country, however it is estimated (see Strommen, 1989, and Bozett, 1987, for examples of estimates in the USA). In a survey of 2983 lesbian women and gay men in Norway, 10% reported having children, and 5% reported living with their children now (Hegna, Kristiansen & Moseng, 1999).

The Scandinavian courts do not have any history of ruling against lesbian mothers and gay fathers in custody cases. However, the legal recognition of lesbian or gay couples in these countries does not include the right to be assessed as suitable for adopting children, which is available to heterosexual couples. Therefore, in the current debates of family policy, including adoption of children by lesbian women or gay men, evidence of the psychological outcome for children raised by lesbian women and gay men is needed.

The outcomes for children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers are of specific interest to psychologists for practical and theoretical reasons. Practically, psychologists administer and promote specific knowledge through institutionalized practices such as teaching, writing textbooks,

counseling, and providing therapy, and it is important that this knowledge be valid. Further, a sound knowledge base in this area is warranted given the increasing demand for counseling regarding custody questions, adoption, and foster care issues. Theoretically, research on outcomes for children raised by their lesbian or gay parents may shed light on prominent theories of individual differences in personal and social development, for example concerning various aspects of gender development and the development of sexual preferences (see Golombok, 1999, for a review). The importance of having both mother and father as role figures (social learning theory) or identification figures (psychodynamic perspectives) may be explored by looking at children who do not have both a mother and a father (Patterson, 1992).

Systematic research on children of lesbian and gay parents began to appear in major professional journals in 1978 (Patterson, 1992). But the total body of empirical evidence is difficult to review because of the variety of outcome themes and research methods, and because there is often more than one published report from the same study. Further, there have been various interpretations of specific studies and of the studies in general. Some reviews on the topic concluded that there is no harm done to these children. Patterson concluded from her review from the early 1990s that “There is no evidence to suggest that psychosocial development among children of gay men or lesbians is compromised in any respect relative to that among offspring of heterosexual parents” (1992, p. 1036). Goodman, Emery and Haugaard (1998) stated in the authoritative *Handbook of child psychology* that “the results of social science research raise no concerns about the development of children raised in

lesbian-headed households" (p. 849). Allen and Burrell (1996) found in their metaanalysis no statistically significant differences between children of lesbian and gay parents on the topics they analyzed: emotional well-being and sexual orientation of the child. Brewaeys and Hall (1997) found no investigations that could identify adverse effects of lesbian motherhood on child development, and reviews published in Scandinavia conclude similarly (Ernulf & Innala, 1991; Halvorsen & Joner, 1999). However, other reviewers concluded that there is evidence to believe that there is harm, or not enough evidence to reach any conclusion. Belcastro, Gramlich, Nicholson, Price and Wilson (1993) concluded in their review that the research database (as of 1993) did not contain data of sufficient quality to be able to conclude whether children raised by lesbian mothers differ significantly from children raised by heterosexual mothers. In their review Cameron and Cameron (1997) held that the available empirical evidence regarding sexual orientation and interpersonal relations in offspring of lesbian mothers or gay fathers is far from conclusive. Baumrind (1995) stated that "Studies to date show few differences among children of lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples. Research findings to date are not definitive" (p. 134).

In sum, there is a need to provide an overview of the outcome themes and research methods in this literature. The reviews referred to above cited English-language publications, and the studies typically originate in the USA and to a lesser extent in Britain. Our review therefore intended to include research from the French and Scandinavian literature on the subject as well.

The purpose of the present review, thus, was:

- (1) to describe, categorize, and interpret empirical studies on children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers;
- (2) to provide an overview of the existing studies (excluding multiple reports from the same database).

METHOD

Deciding on the outcomes to review

The most common research questions in the field relate to the types of outcomes that have been the focus of concern in child custody cases in the USA and England (Patterson & Redding, 1996; Tasker & Golombok, 1997): those labeled as sexual identity issues (gender identity, gender role behavior, and sexual orientation), personal characteristics other than sexual identity (e.g. psychiatric status, self-concept, and intelligence), and social relationships (e.g. peer relations) (see the review by Patterson, 1992). Here, we organize the review according to a modified scheme of these outcomes, regardless of the motivational base, paradigmatic approach, or origin of the research questions. We hold that these research questions center around the following seven outcomes for children, listed according to number of studies which assess the outcomes: "emotional functioning", "sexual preference", "stigmatization", "gender role behavior", "behavioral adjustment", "gender identity", and "cognitive functioning". Definitions of the concepts are presented within each of the themes below.

Selection criteria

To be included in the review, the material had to be published in an available journal or book and based on empirical data collected from nonclinical samples of children raised by one or two lesbian or gay parents, with or without proxy information from parents and teachers, with or without control groups, with or without children born in a setting of heterosexual marriage or cohabitation (with later change in parental lifestyles), and recruited through self-identified lesbian or gay parents. Excluded from the review were reports with limited circulation, such as master and doctoral theses and conference proceedings.

We searched the most common databases within psychology and related disciplines as of 1 February 2000 with no time limitations backwards. The searches were based on the following terms in English: "lesbian", "gay", "homosexual(-ity)", "parents", "mother(s)", "father(s)", "children", "families", and "couples" in the English language databases Psychlit, Medline, Eric, Article-first, Isi, PapersFirst, and Proceedings. The literature databases in the other languages were Danske tidsskrift- og avisartikler and Dansk nationalbibliografi (Danish), Bibliographie National Francais (French), Norart: Norske tidsskriftartikler and Bibsys (Norwegian), and Libris (Swedish). In the non-English searches we utilized fewer and wider terms (e.g. "lesbiske" and "bøsser" in Danish).

Assessments of the literature

The selected studies were assessed and categorized according to sample and design, measures and assessments, and findings (see Table 1). Categorizations will inevitably simplify and leave out information from each study. However, the most important studies are described in the text. Only offsprings' and controls' age, and the type of study (cross-sectional or not) were easy to categorize. To avoid too many "Not reported" in Table 1 we have exercised our best judgment where the information was not clear but was deducible (e.g. blind participation).

Sample and design categories. The parents of the children in the reviewed studies belong to several categories according to various histories of marriage and divorce, cohabitation and living arrangements (single or not). This is indicated in Table 1 and partly in the text to the degree that the information is provided in the reports. Several parts of a research process may be blinded to avoid having researchers, research assistants, or participants consciously or unconsciously bias the data in any direction. In Table 1 we chose to categorize the studies according to blinding during three phases of a research project:

- (1) data collection blind to researcher – whether the researcher who collected data knew the status (heterosexual, lesbian, gay) of the person from whom he/she collected data;
- (2) data scoring blind to researcher – whether the researcher who coded the information knew the status of the person who had provided the data;
- (3) aim of study blind to participants – whether the participant knew the objectives of the study.

In categorizing the measures and assessments in each study we tried to stay close to the concepts provided in each study.

Findings categories. The seven findings categories represent to a large degree what is reported in the studies. "Norms" may mean population norms (as with the Child Behavior Checklist, used for example by Patterson, 1994) or more limited sample norms (as with the Harter scale, used by Gershon, Tschann & Jemerin, 1999). In other works norms may be based on a trained observer's experience (e.g. Green, 1978).

Table 1. Overview of empirical works on nonclinical offspring raised by lesbian or gay parents, organized alphabetically by authors¹

Work	Sample and design					Aim of study blind to participants ⁵	Data collection blind to researcher	Data scoring blind to researcher ⁶	Measures and assessments	Findings ⁷
	Number of offspring of lesbian mothers or gay fathers ^{2,3}	Number of controls ^{2,3}	Ages (years)	Sample type	Study type ⁴					
Bailey <i>et al.</i> , 1995	43 s of gay fa (all fa earlier mar, 91% sep or div today)	0	17–43	Convenience	Cross-sectional	Yes	Yes	Yes	Mailed questionnaires	<i>Sexual preference:</i> 37 reported to have het preferences
Bozett, 1988	19 s and d of gay fa (various family histories)	0	14–35	Convenience	Cross-sectional	No	No	No	Unstructured in-depth interviews (grounded theory)	<i>Sexual preference:</i> 16 reported to have het preferences
Brewaeys <i>et al.</i> , 1997	30 s and d of lesbian couples (from birth) (donor ⁸)	52 s and d of het couples (from birth) (26 donor and 26 traditionally conceived)	4–8	Register samples (donor insemination) and convenience	Cross-sectional	Not reported	Yes	Yes	Questionnaires to parents: Child Behavior Checklist, Preschool Activities Inventory	<i>Behavioral adjustment:</i> No group differences for sons. Fewer problems among daughters of lesbian and het (nondonor) couples <i>Gender role behavior:</i> No group differences
Chan <i>et al.</i> , 1998	55 s and d of lesbian couples (from birth) and lesbian single mo (some earlier mar) (all donor)	25 s and d of het couples (from birth) and het single mo (some earlier mar) (all donor)	5– (mean: 7)	Register sample (clients of sperm bank)	Cross-sectional	No	Yes	Yes	Mailed standardized questionnaires to parents and teachers, including: Child Behavior Checklist, Teacher's Report Form	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> No group differences <i>Behavioral adjustment:</i> No group differences
Flaks <i>et al.</i> , 1995	15 s and d of lesbian couples (from birth) (donor)	15 s and d of het couples (from birth) (traditionally conceived)	3–8	Convenience	Cross-sectional	No	Partly	Yes	Standardized questionnaires to parents and teachers, including: Child Behavior Checklist, Teacher's Report Form, testing of offspring with WPPSI-R or WISC-R	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> No group differences <i>Behavioral adjustment:</i> No group differences <i>Cognitive functioning:</i> No group differences
Gershon <i>et al.</i> , 1999	76 s and d of lesbian mo (67% of mo in het marriage at time of birth)	0	11–18	Convenience	Cross-sectional	No	No	Yes	Standardized questionnaires (interview), including: Harter Self Perception Profile for Adolescents	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> No differences from norms by Harter

Table 1. *Continued*

Work	Sample and design					Aim of study blind to participants ⁵	Data collection blind to researcher	Data scoring blind to researcher ⁶	Measures and assessments	Findings ⁷
	Number of offspring of lesbian mothers or gay fathers ^{2,3}	Number of controls ^{2,3}	Ages (years)	Sample type	Study type ⁴					
Golombok <i>et al.</i> , 1983 ⁹	37 s and d of lesbian single and nonsingle mo (23/27 mo earlier mar or cohabiting with a man)	38 s and d of het single mo (23/27 mo earlier mar)	5–17	Convenience	Cross-sectional	No	Partly	Yes	Structured interviews with mo and with offspring (separately); sexual preference assessment only for the older part of sample; standardized questionnaires to mo and teachers about offspring	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> More children with het mo had psychiatric symptoms <i>Sexual preference:</i> No group differences <i>Stigmatization:</i> No group differences <i>Gender role behavior:</i> No group differences <i>Behavioral adjustment:</i> No group differences <i>Gender identity:</i> No group differences
Golombok <i>et al.</i> , 1997	30 s and d of lesbian mo (from birth) (15 single at time of data collection)	42 s and d of het single mo (single since child's first year of life)	3–9	Convenience	Cross-sectional	Partly	Partly	Partly	Structured interviews and questionnaires for mo; ratings from school teachers; testing of offspring, including adaptation of Separation Anxiety Test	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> No group differences <i>Stigmatization:</i> No group differences <i>Behavioral adjustment:</i> No group differences
Gottman, 1990	35 d of lesbian div mo (cohabiting with another women at least some point in time)	70 d of het div mo (35 single, 35 remarried)	18–44	Not reported	Cross-sectional	Not reported	Yes	Yes	Standardized questionnaires (returned by mail), including: Personal Attribute Questionnaire, Sexual Orientation Method, California Psychological Inventory (18 scales)	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> No group differences on 17 of 18 scales. On well-being scale d of div single mo indicated more problems <i>Sexual preference:</i> No group differences <i>Gender role behavior:</i> No group differences <i>Gender identity:</i> No group differences
Green, 1978	21 s and d lesbian nonsingle mo (all or most div)	0	5–14	Not reported	Cross-sectional	Not reported	No	No	Structured interviews and standardized tests, including: Draw-a-Person test (sexual preference assessment only for the older part of sample)	<i>Sexual preference:</i> 4 of 4 adolescents reported het preferences <i>Stigmatization:</i> Minor incidents of teasing for 3 children <i>Gender role behavior:</i> No atypical variation <i>Gender identity:</i> No atypical variation

Green <i>et al.</i> , 1986 ¹⁰	56 s and d of lesbian single and nonsingle mo (10% never mar)	48 s and d of nonlesbian, single mo (10% never mar)	3–11	Convenience	Cross-sectional	Not reported	Partly	Partly	Standardized questionnaires to mo (returned by mail). Interviews with offspring and with mo (separately). Testing of offspring, including: WPPSI or WISC-R, sexual identity tests (Draw-a-Person, It-Scale for Children), family relations tests, self-reported and mother-reported peer popularity	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> No group differences <i>Stigmatization:</i> No group differences <i>Gender role behavior:</i> No differences for boys, more girls of lesbian mo preferring some boy-typical activities, clothes and future adult roles <i>Gender identity:</i> No group differences <i>Cognitive functioning:</i> No group differences
Haack-Møller & Møhl, 1984	13 s and d of lesbian mo (all in couples before, some now)	0	14–31	Convenience	Cross-sectional ¹¹	No	No	No	Interviews	<i>Sexual preference:</i> 1 of 13 reported homosexual preference <i>Stigmatization:</i> The children worried about reactions from peers, specific incidents reported
Hoeffler, 1981	20 s and d of lesbian single mo (a majority sep/div)	20 s and d of het, single mo (a majority sep/div)	6–9	Not reported	Cross-sectional	Not reported	No	Not reported	Structured interviews with offspring. Testing of offspring, including modified version of Block's Toy Preference Test	<i>Gender role behavior:</i> No group differences
Huggins, 1989	18 s and d of lesbian div mo	18 s and d of het div mo	13–19	Convenience	Cross-sectional	Not reported	Yes	Yes	Structured interviews. Standardized questionnaire: Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> No group differences
Javaid, 1993 ¹²	26 s and d of lesbian nonsingle div mo	28 s and d of het, single div mo	6–25	Convenience	Cross-sectional	Not reported	No	Not reported	Nonstructured clinical psychiatric interviews with offspring and mo (probably separately)	<i>Gender role behavior:</i> No group differences

Table 1. *Continued*

Work	Sample and design					Aim of study blind to participants ⁵	Data collection blind to researcher	Data scoring blind to researcher ⁶	Measures and assessments	Findings ⁷
	Number of offspring of lesbian mothers or gay fathers ^{2,3}	Number of controls ^{2,3}	Ages (years)	Sample type	Study type ⁴					
Kirkpatrick <i>et al.</i> , 1981	20 s and d of lesbian div mo	20 s and d of het div, single mo	5–12	Convenience	Cross-sectional	Not reported	Yes	Yes	Semistructured interview with offspring and with mo (separately). Observation and testing of offspring, including: Play-room observation, WISC, Human Figure Drawing	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> No group differences <i>Gender identity:</i> No group differences <i>Cognitive functioning:</i> No group differences
Lewis, 1980	21 s and d of lesbian nonsingle mo	0	9–26	Convenience	Cross-sectional	No	No	No	In-depth interviews with children (psychodynamically oriented)	<i>Stigmatization:</i> Children at all ages worried about potential reactions from peers, no report of specific incidents
McCandlish, 1987	7 s and d of lesbian couples (from birth) (donor)	0	1.5–7	Convenience	Cross-sectional	No	No	No	Structured interviews with offspring and mo together. Observations of children during the interviews (object-relations perspective)	<i>Behavioral adjustment:</i> No specific problems <i>Gender identity:</i> No specific problems
Miller, 1979	14 s and d of gay fa (various family histories)	0	14–33	Convenience	Cross-sectional	No	No	No	In-depth interviews	<i>Sexual preference:</i> 2 of 14 reported to be lesbian/gay <i>Stigmatization:</i> No specific incidents reported
O'Connell, 1993	11 s and d of lesbian div mo	0	16–23	Convenience	Cross-sectional	No	No	No	Semistructured interviews	<i>Sexual preference:</i> 1 identified as homosexual <i>Stigmatization:</i> Children at all ages worried about potential reactions from peers, no report of specific incidents

Patterson, 1994 ¹³	37 s and d of lesbian mo (26 couples, 7 singles, 4 in joint custody between two mo) (from birth)	0	4-9	Convenience	Cross-sectional	No	Partly	Partly	Standardized questionnaires for mo, including Child Behavior Checklist. Standardized questionnaires for children, including Children's Self-View Questionnaire. Standard open-ended interview of children	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> No differences on Child Behavior Checklist. No differences from norms on self-concepts related to aggression, social closeness, social potency, but more stress reactions and higher well-being <i>Gender role behavior:</i> No remarkable pattern <i>Behavioral adjustment:</i> No differences from norms
Steckel, 1987	11 s and d of lesbian couples	11 s and d of het couples	3-4	Not reported	Cross-sectional	Not reported	No	No	Structured interview with parents; Q-sort administered to teachers and parents; Projective Structured Doll Technique interview with offspring	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> No group differences in degree of psychopathology or difficulties in separation-individuation processes
Tasker & Golombok, 1997 ^{9,14} follow-up of Golombok <i>et al.</i> , 1983 (baseline details above)	25 s and d of lesbian mo (22/25 by lesbian couples)	21 s and d of het mo (19/21 by het couples, these mo no longer single)	17-35	Convenience	Longitudinal (14 years)	Not reported	Partly	Partly	<i>Baseline details:</i> see Golombok <i>et al.</i> (1983) above <i>Follow-up:</i> Semistructured interviews. Standardized questionnaires, including: Trait Anxiety Inventory, Beck Depression Inventory	<i>Emotional functioning:</i> No group differences <i>Sexual preference:</i> No group differences, but more variation in offspring of lesbian mo <i>Stigmatization:</i> No group differences, but a tendency for children with lesbian mo to have been teased more about own sexuality

Table 1. *Continued*

Work	Sample and design				Study type ⁴	Aim of study blind to participants ⁵	Data collection blind to researcher	Data scoring blind to researcher ⁶	Measures and assessments	Findings ⁷
	Number of offspring of lesbian mothers or gay fathers ^{2,3}	Number of controls ^{2,3}	Ages (years)	Sample type						
<i>Totals</i> ¹⁵	615 ¹⁶	387 ¹⁶	1.5–44	Convenience or not reported, 21; register sample, 2	Cross-sectional, 22; longitudinal, 1	Yes 1; no, 11; partly, 1; not reported, 10	Yes, 6; no, 11; partly, 6; not reported, 0	Yes, 9; no, 8; partly, 4; not reported, 2	Interviews: 16 Questionnaires: 11 Tests: 7 Observation: 2	Emotional functioning: 12 studies Sexual preference: 9 studies Stigmatization: 9 studies Gender role behavior: 8 studies Behavioral adjustment: 7 studies Gender identity: 6 studies Cognitive functioning: 3 studies

Notes: Abbreviations: s = sons; d = daughters; fa = fathers; mo = mothers; het=heterosexual; mar = married; sep = separated; div = divorced.

¹ Only sample sizes, design, measures, and assessments that are relevant and meeting the inclusion criteria for the present review are presented, not necessarily the total array of participants or methods in the study referred to.

² The family histories vary considerably. If provided in the study, the table includes information about divorce or not, single status or not, whether lived in lesbian or gay households since birth or not.

³ The number of children is reported (not of parents).

⁴ By cross-sectional design we mean studies where information is collected at one time point even though the information collected covers a time span (e.g. in studies where persons are asked to give information of childhood experiences).

⁵ By participants we mean those who provided information, whether it is offspring, parents, or teachers.

⁶ Classification in this column is done under the assumption that scoring of questionnaires followed prewritten rules, and accordingly questionnaires are classified as blind to researcher.

⁷ For purposes of clarity, phrases for the assessed outcomes correspond to the categorization scheme outlined in the present text. Phrases in the original works are not necessarily used.

⁸ Donor means that the children are conceived through donor insemination.

⁹ British Longitudinal Study of Lesbian Mother Families.

¹⁰ Earlier reports from this study (with fewer subjects and no specific measures reported) seem to be Mandel and Hotvedt (1980) and Hotvedt and Mandel (1982). These two reports are thus not included in the review.

¹¹ This study is a follow-up of a sample of 15 offspring of lesbian mothers who were interviewed and assessed in 1973, published as a psychology thesis at University of Copenhagen (Leick and Nielsen, 1974). The thesis was not included in this review because of the limited circulation (theses were not included in the review).

¹² This study explored stigmatization and sexual preferences as well, but these themes were not included in the review because of imprecise procedures and results descriptions.

¹³ Bay Area Families Study.

¹⁴ These results are also published in journals, see Golombok and Tasker (1996) and Tasker and Golombok (1995). For purposes of simplicity, we chose to put the full report published in their book in the table. In the text only the book is referred to.

¹⁵ The sums may be higher than total number of studies because several studies utilized combined types of samples, measures, and outcomes.

¹⁶ Not included Tasker and Golombok (1997) since this is a follow-up of Golombok *et al.* (1983).

FINDINGS

We found 23 different works described in a large number of journal articles and books. In these works, 615 offspring of lesbian mothers or gay fathers were assessed with 387 controls (only baseline numbers are counted in the longitudinal study of Tasker & Golombok, 1997) (see Table 1). The offsprings' ages varied from 1.5 to 44 years of age.

We found only one empirical study on children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers in non-English databases as of February 2000 (Danish). Seventeen of the empirical works reviewed originated in USA, one partly in USA and partly Canada (Miller, 1979), three in England, one in Denmark (Haack-Møller & Møhl, 1984), and one in Belgium and The Netherlands (Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Hall & Golombok, 1997).

Of the 23 studies, 20 assessed the offspring of lesbian mothers, while only three assessed the offspring of gay fathers; 13 had control groups. Two studies drew participants from registers, while all others were either convenience samples or did not report recruitment procedures. Fourteen studies reported on adoption status. In these studies 2% of children of lesbian mothers or gay fathers were adopted (8/438) while none were in the control groups (0/259).

With our use of blinding criteria (see above), we see from Table 1 that the study aim was blind for probably only one study (may be two), six studies were blinded for the researcher (and six partly blinded), and nine were blinded in coding procedures (and four partly).

Interviews (more or less structured) were used in 16 studies, self-administered questionnaires were used in 11 studies, and testing of offspring in at least seven studies (that is, exposing offspring to some standardized material other than questionnaires to record responses). Observation was used in two studies.

Emotional functioning was the most often studied outcome (12 studies), followed by sexual preference (nine studies), stigmatization (nine studies), gender role behavior (eight studies), behavioral adjustment (seven studies), gender identity (six studies), and cognitive functioning (three studies). The findings and details from the studies are reviewed below. A majority of the studies (15) assessed more than one outcome.

(1) Emotional functioning

"Emotional functioning" covers in the present context a range of phenomena which most generally may be referred to as the inner life of the participants other than aspects related to sexuality, gender, and cognitive capacities. No indications were reported in the 12 studies that the children with lesbian mothers had more emotional difficulties than other children. None of the studies were of offspring of gay fathers.

Golombok, Spencer and Rutter (1983) conducted a study in Britain where lesbian women and single heterosexual women were contacted through gay and single-parent news-

papers and personal networks. Thirty-seven children aged 5–17 years with lesbian mothers were thus assessed and compared with 38 children in the same age range of single heterosexual women. The assessments consisted of adaptations of standardized and validated interviews of the mothers and the children (separately), assessing various aspects of personal and family functioning, the child's history of gender-related activities and interests, and friendships. Based on transcripts from the interviews, the child's psychiatric state was rated by an experienced child psychiatrist (blinded to the mother's sexual preference). Further, validated questionnaires about the child (devised for the Isle of Wight epidemiological studies) were completed separately by mothers and teachers assessing the child's emotions, behavior, and friendships. Several outcomes were compared for the two groups of children based on the collected information: emotional functioning, behavioral adjustment, sexual preference (with the pubertal and post-pubertal adolescents), gender role behavior, gender identity, and stigmatization. Emotional functioning as assessed in the questionnaires showed no differences between the offspring groups, whereas the assessments based on the mother's interviews indicated more psychiatric symptoms in the children of the heterosexual mothers (statistically significant).

As can be seen in Table 1, seven other studies assessed children in the age range 3–12 years regarding emotional functioning (Chan, Raboy & Patterson, 1998; Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua & Joseph, 1995; Golombok, Tasker & Murray, 1997; Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray & Smith, 1986; Kirkpatrick, Smith & Roy, 1981; Patterson, 1994; Steckel, 1987). All were based in North America except Golombok *et al.* (1997), which was British. Six of the studies had control groups, six studies utilized convenience samples, and six had at least some blinding procedures. The measures in these studies varied considerably, encompassing procedures such as play-room observation, projective and nonprojective psychological tests, interviews with children and with mothers, and questionnaires for teachers and mothers (see Table 1 for details). No differences between the children of lesbian mothers and control children were found in any of these studies. Two Californian studies focused specifically on adolescents and self-esteem. Offspring of lesbian mothers were not found to differ from offspring of heterosexual mothers (Huggins, 1989) or from established norms (Gershon *et al.*, 1999).

Long-term emotional functioning outcomes were assessed in two studies where participants were the adult offspring of lesbian mothers (and their controls). The study by Golombok *et al.* (1983) gives baseline measures in the only prospective, longitudinal study in the entire field. In the follow-up study (in our review listed as a separate study), Tasker and Golombok (1997) were able to recruit 25 sons and daughters of lesbian mothers, and 21 sons and daughters of heterosexual mothers, who had all participated in the baseline 14 years earlier (a follow-up rate of 62%). Outcomes

assessed at the follow-up were emotional functioning, as measured by the Trait Anxiety Inventory and Beck Depression Inventory, sexual preferences, and stigmatization (see below). No differences between the two groups of offspring were found on the two inventories. Gottman (1990) conducted a mail survey among 35 adult daughters of lesbian divorced mothers, 35 adult daughters of heterosexual divorced mothers who remained single, and 35 adult daughters of heterosexual divorced mothers who remarried/lived with a man. She reported no differences between the three groups on the measures used (scales from the California Psychological Inventory).

(2) Sexual preference

By "sexual preference" we mean "the individual's physical sexual activity with, interpersonal affection for, and erotic fantasies about members of the same or opposite biological sex" (after De Cecco, 1981, p. 61, in his definition of sexual orientation). Sexual preference is one of the outcomes of most concern in debates about children growing up with a lesbian mother or gay father. We prefer the term "sexual preference" to "sexual orientation", as does Baumrind (1995), to emphasize the nonfixed nature of sexual relations.

Of the nine studies examining this outcome, three studied offspring living or having lived with their gay fathers (i.e. all the studies with gay fathers in the present review). None of the studies reported that sexual preferences in offspring varied with parental sexual preferences.

Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe and Mikach (1995) recruited gay fathers through advertisements in gay publications in several states in the USA. Self-reported sexual preferences from their 43 adult sons aged 17–43 were assessed through questions about sexual orientation (mailed questionnaires blinded for informants as to the researchers' specific interest in sexual orientation). Thirty-seven of the sons (86%) rated themselves as heterosexual and six as nonheterosexual.

In the longitudinal study of Tasker and Golombok (1997, see details above) "sexual orientation" was recorded through semistructured interviews. There were no differences between the two groups (25 offspring with lesbian mothers and 21 with heterosexual mothers) on "same-gender sexual attractions" or "sexual identity". However, more offspring of lesbian mothers reported that they had "considered a lesbian/gay relationship" as a possibility or still did (14 offspring of lesbian mothers as compared with three offspring of heterosexual mothers), and more offspring of lesbian mothers (six) had experienced "same-gender sexual relationships" as compared with none among the others. Tasker and Golombok interpreted these variations as indicating a different degree of openness in their sample due to the specific family experiences, offspring of heterosexual mothers being less likely to think of same-gender relationships in terms of possible sexual relationships. They stated that the offspring of lesbian mothers probably are no more likely than their

peers with heterosexual mothers to identify as lesbian or gay, or to be attracted to someone of their own gender, "however, if they do experience same-gender attraction, they are more likely to pursue a sexual relationship" (p. 132).

In two studies covering adolescent and adult offspring, the groups did not differ on survey measures of sexual orientation (Gottman, 1990) or on interview questions about romantic crushes and erotic fantasies (Green, 1978; Golombok *et al.*, 1983). In the remaining four studies (three in the USA and Canada, one in Denmark) 57 sons and daughters of lesbian mothers and gay fathers were interviewed with no comparison groups (Bozett, 1988; Haack-Møller & Møhl, 1984; Miller, 1979; O'Connell, 1993). Among these, six offspring (11%) said they had homosexual preferences (in Bozett's study, recorded as "nonheterosexual preferences").

(3) Stigmatization

Stigmatization, that is, being teased, harassed, or bullied, is one of the potential outcomes for children of lesbian mothers or gay fathers that worries court judges in the USA most (Rivera, 1987). Goffman (1963) conceptualizes stigma in relational terms and defines the one being stigmatized as possessing an attribute that make him or her "reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (p. 12). According to Goffman, persons who relate to the stigmatized person run the risk of being stigmatized as well. Children with lesbian mothers and gay fathers might run the risk of being stigmatized, since lesbian women and gay men still represent a stigmatized group of persons, as indicated by attitude surveys reporting that a substantial proportion of the adult populations in Norway and the USA hold negative views of homosexuality and of lesbians and gays (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 1997; Herek & Capitano, 1996). King and Black (1999) found that in two samples of college students in the US Mid-West (a total of 615 students) 15–19% indicated that they were not willing to have a spouse whose mother was a lesbian.

We included in this stigmatization category studies that reported on offsprings' social relations with friends and schoolmates. The nine studies that covered the issue of stigmatization of children of lesbian mothers (eight studies) or gay fathers (one study) found generally that the children were not stigmatized, but they tended to be teased more than their peers.

Only one study reported that the children had experienced direct negative actions from others due to their parents' alternative choice of sexual partner. In their report from interviews with 13 Danish offspring of lesbian mothers, Haack-Møller and Møhl (1984) stated that "The relationship to friends have in many instances been problematic, there have often been direct negative reactions towards the children because of their lesbian mother" (p. 317, our translation) (the number of informants with these experiences and the number of instances were not reported). The

authors pointed especially to the age period 10–11 years as difficult. This was the period when the informants tended to realize that their mother was a lesbian, and they experienced tension between being loyal to her while being afraid of sanctions from friends. One boy reported: “I said that they had shared [a house] for reasons of economy, because the house rent was so high” (p. 316, our translation).

In the 1983 study by Golombok *et al.* in Britain (see details above) “quality of children’s peer relationships” was assessed through structured interviews with mothers, and the interview transcripts were later rated blind to the sexual preference of the mothers. No group differences were reported, and the majority in each group were found to be able to make and maintain relationships with people of their own age. In the follow-up of this study 14 years later, the offspring were thoroughly interviewed about “stigmatization in school”, the extent of teasing and being bullied, and “integration of family and friends”, about telling friends, bringing friends home, and school friends’ response to knowledge of their mother being a lesbian (Tasker & Golombok, 1997). It was found that there was no higher prevalence of peer group hostility reported by the offspring of lesbian mothers. However, more of the male offspring of lesbian mothers did report teasing about being gay themselves compared with the other males. Further, there was a trend for the offspring of lesbian mothers to have been teased more about their mother’s lifestyle than the offspring of heterosexual mothers. The authors speculated that reports of more frequent teasing of the children of lesbian mothers may reflect actual occurrences, or may indicate that these children recognize and remember such teasing more than other children. In the study among children aged 3–9 years (Golombok *et al.*, 1997), “peer acceptance”, a subscale of Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children, did not reveal differences between the children of lesbian and heterosexual mothers in how the children perceived their own relationships with friends. Interviews of children of lesbian and heterosexual mothers about “peer group relationships” (popularity with same-sex and other-sex children in school and in neighborhood) and the mothers’ ratings of relations between offspring and peers indicated that children of lesbian mothers did not differ in peer group relationships (Green *et al.*, 1986).

In an in-depth psychodynamically oriented study of 21 children (aged 9–26) of divorced lesbian mothers in Massachusetts, children were interviewed about their “feelings about their mother’s changed life-style”. The children expressed concern about how others might react if they knew their mother was a lesbian (Lewis, 1980). No specific incidents of rejection or harassment were, however, reported. The same pattern is indicated in the interview studies of the young and adult offspring of gay fathers (Miller, 1979) and lesbian mothers (O’Connell, 1993). In the interview and testing study by Green (1978), three of the 21 children reported minor incidents of teasing.

In sum, the studies reported few or no incidents of serious teasing, harassment, and bullying due to having a lesbian mother or gay father. However, the studies clearly indicate that the children were concerned about the chance of being stigmatized (O’Connell, 1993; Tasker & Golombok, 1997), and the foremost worry was the chance of getting teased about being lesbian or gay oneself. O’Connell reported that several of her 11 informants experienced shame due to the conflict between the loyalty they felt for the mother (lesbian) and the need for self-protection, that is, concealing that the mother was a lesbian.

In a collection of interviews and stories told by sons and daughters of lesbian women (mainly North American), it was evident that the interviewed children had invested energy to deal with the issue of their friends’ knowing or not knowing that they had a lesbian mother (Rafkin, 1990, not a research report). Here are two examples. Carey, aged 21, said: “Friends would come to my house, and I would run ahead to check if my mother was home or if she was with her lover” (p. 157). Carl, aged 12, said: “But it is hard some times. I don’t know what the kids would do if they knew” (p. 50). Javaid (1993) described “a general attitude of secrecy” (p. 243) in her interviews with children of lesbian mothers (see below).

Bozett (1988), who specifically studied how children experienced being a child with a gay father, found that children employed various strategies so that they were perceived by others as they wanted to be perceived. The strategies included setting and controlling the limits for the father’s expression of homosexuality (“boundary control”), keeping it a secret that the father was gay (“nondisclosure”), and disclosure to a larger number of people that the father was gay to prepare them to meet the father (“disclosure”).

The studies reviewed and the stories referred to may be summed up under three points. First, children of lesbian mothers or gay fathers generally developed peer relationships as stable and as good as those of other children. Second, very few were harassed more than other children, although they were teased somewhat more. Third, they invested energy in other people knowing or not knowing.

(4) Gender role behavior

Gender role behavior means behaviors that are culturally associated with men or with women (after Shively & De Cecco, 1977). This definition captures what is meant by the authors of the seven studies assessing to what degree the offspring of lesbian mothers (no studies with gay fathers) deviate from gender role norms. Generally, the studies found that children with lesbian mothers tended to choose gender-typical activities, toys, and games, much as other children.

Again, we start with the study by Golombok *et al.* (1983) (see above). To assess “sex role behavior”, they devised a 14-item sex role scale used in their structured interviews with

mothers. The scale was constructed of items about the frequency with which the child had participated in typical gender-typed activities (according to earlier studies), such as male sports, dressing up, and pretend games like a tea party. A five-item scale was likewise constructed for offspring interviews, consisting of questions about favorite activities/hobbies, toys and collections, books and comics, sport, and television programs. No group differences were found between the offspring of lesbian and heterosexual mothers, for neither boys nor girls, as reported by mothers and as reported by offspring.

Hoeffler (1981) compared 20 6–9-year old children of lesbian, single mothers with 20 children of heterosexual single mothers in the San Francisco area. "Sex role behavior" was assessed by a modified version of Block's Toy Preference Test and through a structured interview in which the child showed and explained eight favorite toys and activities to the investigator (Toy Selection Interview; the interview data were later rated as masculine, feminine, or neutral). No group differences were found. In a study from Belgium and The Netherlands, Brewaeyts *et al.* (1997) compared the gender role behavior of 30 children aged 4–8 years conceived by donor to lesbian couples with 52 children of heterosexual matched couples (donor insemination, 26 children; traditional conception, 26 children). The donor samples were drawn from registers. Gender role behavior was assessed by a validated questionnaire completed by parents (the Preschool Activity Inventory), and no differences between the three groups of children were reported.

Green (1978) interviewed 21 children of lesbian mothers about their toy and game preferences, peer group composition, clothing preference, roles played in fantasy games, and vocational aspiration, and he also conducted the Draw-a-Person test. No specific atypical patterns were identified. (Green assessed gender role behavior and gender identity, but does not specify which of these measures assessed what concept.) Javid (1993) interviewed sons and daughters of lesbian divorced mothers (26 offspring) and heterosexual divorced mothers (28 offspring) about gender role preferences and expectations, for example attitudes toward being married and having children. A χ^2 analysis of her data (p. 242) conducted by the present reviewers showed no statistically significant differences.

Green *et al.* (1986) assessed 56 children of lesbian mothers and 48 children of heterosexual mothers with "tests of sexual identity" (p. 170) and with interviews with children and mothers about the children's favorite games, toys, and activities at home and at school (e.g. children selected between typical sex-typed and neutral activities). It is not clear which of these measures specifically measured gender role behavior, as opposed to gender identity. However, the study reported no differences in the various preferences for boys. While there were no differences for many types of preferences among daughters, more daughters of lesbian mothers than those of heterosexual mothers preferred some boy-typical activities

(playing with trucks, rough-and-tumble play), clothing, and future adult roles (as doctor, lawyer, and astronaut).

Patterson (1994), in her standard open-ended interviews of 37 children of lesbian mothers, found no remarkable pattern in "preferences for sex role behavior" (peer friendships, favorite toys, favorite games, and favorite characters). Gottman (1990), surveying adult daughters of lesbian and heterosexual mothers, reported no difference in "gender role" as assessed by the Personal Attribute Questionnaire, a bipolar masculinity and femininity scale.

(5) Behavioral adjustment

The term "adjustment" signals a foundation in prevailing values, which may be defensible or not. For the present purpose we use the pragmatic approach and refer to studies that assess overt behaviors. Thus, with the phrase "behavioral adjustment" we mean the degree to which children behave according to expectations about social behavior. Of six studies that compared the children of lesbian mothers with other children (no studies with gay fathers), none gave indications of higher prevalence of behavioral problems among children with lesbian mothers.

In the studies Golombok *et al.* (1983) and Golombok *et al.* (1997) the assessments of the children included scores on "unsociability" (1983), "conduct difficulty" (1983), and "behavioral problems" (1997), as reported by both mothers and teachers on the questionnaires. In addition, the child's "behavioral problems" were assessed through standardized interviews with the mother (1997). None of the measures was found to differentiate between children of lesbian mothers and children of heterosexual mothers.

In the studies by Chan *et al.* (1998), Flaks *et al.* (1995), and Patterson (1994), behavioral assessments were based on reports from mothers on the Child Behavior Checklist ("externalizing scale"), and from the corresponding questionnaire completed by teachers, the Teacher's Report Form (though not in the Patterson study). Chan *et al.* and Flaks *et al.* did not find evidence of differences between children with lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers, and Patterson did not find evidence that children with lesbian mothers deviated from norms provided by the authors of the scale. Brewaeyts *et al.* (1997) also assessed the children in their study with Child Behavior Checklist, but without distinguishing between externalizing and internalizing scales in the report. (In the present context the reported score was categorized within "behavioral adjustment" and not "emotional functioning"). There were found no group differences for boys, but fewer problems were reported among daughters of lesbian couples and among traditionally conceived daughters of heterosexual couples (compared with daughters of heterosexually couples with donor insemination).

A seventh study did not make a comparison between groups of children. Nonetheless, from her structured and open-

ended interviews with five lesbian couples who had children 1.5–7 years of age (donor insemination), McCandlish (1987) found that the mothers did not report behavioral problems with the children. Neither were behavioral problems of the children noted during the interviews.

(6) Gender identity

By “gender identity” we mean “an individual’s basic conviction of being male or female” (adapted from Green’s conceptualization, 1974, p. xv). Six studies assessed gender identity, all in children of lesbian and heterosexual mothers. None of the studies reported that children of lesbian mothers had specific problems with gender identity.

The six studies utilized a variety of methods (see Table 1 for details): structured interviews with offspring about feelings about being male or female (Golombok *et al.*, 1983); Personal Attribute Questionnaire masculinity and femininity scales (Gottman, 1990); interview information about toy and game preference, peer group composition, clothing preference, roles played in fantasy games, vocational aspiration, and the Draw-a-Person test (Green, 1978; some of these methods measured gender role behavior); It-Scale for Children, testing aspects of gender identity where the children used a gender-neutral figure to select from a series of sex-typed toys, games, and activity preferences, interview questions about wish to be a person of the opposite sex if born again, and Koppitz system scoring of the first-drawn person on Draw-a-Person (Green *et al.*, 1986, see also some of the measures described above under gender role behavior); historical data, probably from interviews with mothers, including characters chosen in fantasy play, sex of favored playmates, sex play, and reports of cross-dressing, Koppitz system scoring of the Human Figure Drawing test, semi-structured playroom interviews with children concerning sex, current interests, and future roles in life (Kirkpatrick *et al.*, 1981); and interviews with mothers and offspring together and observations during interviews (McCandlish, 1987).

(7) Cognitive functioning

Cognitive functioning means in the present review scores on intelligence as measured by the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-R and WISC) or Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI-R and WPPSI). Three studies included such testing of children (pooled age range 3–12 years), all assessing offspring of lesbian mothers (in sum 91 children) as compared with offspring of heterosexual mothers (in sum 83 children) (Flaks *et al.*, 1995; Green *et al.*, 1986; Kirkpatrick *et al.*, 1981) (see details in Table 1). In Kirkpatrick *et al.*’s study the testing was conducted without knowledge of the mother’s sexual preference. In all three studies no group differences between the children of lesbian mothers and the others were reported.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this review was to describe, categorize, and interpret empirical studies on children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers and to provide an overview of the existing studies (excluding double reports). The studies reported surprisingly similar findings. Children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers did not systematically differ from other children on any outcomes. The typical outcomes in the 23 studies that met the inclusion criteria for the review were emotional adjustment (12 studies), sexual preference (nine studies), stigmatization (nine studies), gender role behavior (eight studies), behavioral adjustment (seven studies), gender identity (six studies), and cognitive functioning (three studies). Of these, only three studies assessed children of gay fathers, and they assessed sexual preference (three) and stigmatization (one).

Among the seven outcomes, emotional functioning, behavioral adjustment, and stigmatization might be seen as indicating to what degree the offspring suffer. The operationalization and measures of these concepts varied considerably across the studies. The fact that none of them indicated that the offspring of lesbian mothers had worse emotional functioning or more behavioral problems than other children supports the notion that the offspring of lesbian mothers do not suffer more than other children. Not surprisingly, the stigmatization measures suggested that children of lesbian mothers or gay fathers may experience the stigma attached to persons choosing a lesbian or gay lifestyle, as some of the offspring of lesbian mothers reported being teased more than others. Also, the offspring of lesbian mothers or gay fathers seemed to invest energy into whether and to whom to reveal that their mother or father was a homosexual. However, this was probably not of a magnitude that hurt the offspring on a long-term basis, as reported by the offspring in the follow-up study by Tasker and Golombok (1997), and as indicated by the fact that the offspring of lesbian mothers did not report different emotional functioning or more behavioral problems than other children. Openness toward offspring, neighborhood, and school from an early age might minimize the issue so that the fear of being stigmatized is reduced. This, however, presupposes a certain degree of acceptance in the specific culture/neighborhood.

Gender identity, gender role behavior, and sexual orientation were in the studies typically seen as distinct phenomena, with frequent reference to Money and Erhardt (1972). The empirical studies reported no differences between children of lesbian women or gay men and other children in any of the three realms, despite the great variety of measures employed. Commentators on this research do, however, speculate that the studies indicate a higher proportion of lesbian/gay offspring of lesbian mothers or gay fathers than what is believed to be the case in the population at large (Baumrind, 1995; Wardle, 1997). But again, to the degree that the differences in proportions actually exist, it may reflect that it is

easier to be *openly* lesbian or gay with lesbian mothers or gay fathers rather than more of the offspring developing homosexual preferences as such. It should also be noted that important discussions about the concepts of gender identity and sexual orientation take place within social constructionist and other post modern-oriented psychology (e.g. Bem, 1995; Bohan, 1993; Richardson, 1984), as in related disciplines. Here, the very categories of women and men, heterosexual and homosexual, are questioned. Gender and sexual orientation outcomes are within these perspectives possible to study and understand only in relation to cultural contexts through which the categories are produced and reproduced. The perspectives taken in the reviewed literature seem, however, to be unproblematized and essentialistic.

Intelligence scores were, as expected, not differentiated by the mother's sexual preferences. We know of no theories predicting that intelligence scores are related to parental sexual preferences, although one might speculate that children with emotional problems would score lower on intelligence tests due to investments in maintaining emotional equilibrium.

In sum, none of the reviewed studies reported substantial differences in outcome among groups of children. However, there is a need to discuss the view of Belcastro *et al.* (1993) and Baumrind (1995) that the data in the empirical studies are insufficient to conclude that no differences exist. Two related lines of reasoning must be laid out in discussing this, concerning both the research methods and the reasons why outcomes for children of lesbian mothers or gay fathers are an issue.

Research methods in the studies

The research methods in the studies reviewed are not without weaknesses, as the authors have commented themselves (see also Fitzgerald, 1999; Goodman *et al.*, 1998), as well as certain strengths. We will point out three typical weaknesses.

Samples

The samples were typically selected through snowball techniques or self-selection, which bias the samples toward the more advantaged subjects among children of lesbian mothers or gay fathers. The samples were most often small, increasing the chance to conclude that no differences exist between groups when in fact the differences do exist. This casts doubt on the external validity of the studies, as Belcastro *et al.* (1993) pointed out. Further, parents are often poorly matched. Case-control designs, used in several of the studies, are well suited for comparing groups of small prevalence or groups who are difficult to reach, and it represents one of the standard designs within epidemiology. It requires, however, careful matching between cases (lesbian mother or gay father headed families) and controls (heterosexual headed families). For example, many (but not all) lesbian mothers and gay fathers have had their children within a heterosexual relationship, and it is therefore necessary to

control for experiences believed to be important in children's development that may confound the comparisons of various child groups. Such experiences might be to what degree a male/female adult figure has been present in the children's family life, to what degree the children have experienced a divorce, whether the children have one or two care-givers, and when parents "came out" to their children as lesbian or gay (see Fitzgerald, 1999; Golombok, 1999).

Measures

Some of the measures had uncertain validity. For example, the relationship between toy, activity or peer preferences and gender identity is not clear (Goodman *et al.*, 1998). Self-identification as lesbian or gay most often does not happen until late adolescence or later in life, and thus studies in which sexual preference was measured in younger years was an outcome had methodological difficulties (Patterson, 1992).

Blinding procedures and response bias

Blinding of data collection, coding, and interpretation was not conducted in all studies. Participants or researchers may consciously or unconsciously bias data in one or the other direction, and this bias may become stronger when using self-reported recall data.

Strengths

Some of the above limitations are inherent in doing studies on hidden and stigmatized groups, and we may in fact see the studies as representing unique and valuable evidence from groups that until the last decade have been largely invisible, both in the public and in the psychological literature. Strictly speaking, representative samples of lesbian mothers or gay fathers are unattainable, because many of them will not have "come out"; similarly, adequate sample sizes are difficult to establish. Two of the recently published studies utilized, however, sample sizes that gave more statistical power (Bailey *et al.*, 1995; Chan *et al.*, 1998), and issues of statistical power and effect sizes were discussed (Chan *et al.*, 1998). The meta-analysis by Allen and Burrell (1996), reporting no differences in emotional well-being and sexual preference between children of heterosexual and homosexual parents, was based on analyses of adequate effect size and power considerations. The studies that included matching procedures represent time-consuming and costly efforts at solving the problems with matching according to exposure to various family structures. These problems are of a conceptual and practical nature. For example, single mothers may live with extended families and thus not fall within either "single" or "couple" categories, and single mothers may provide their children with male figures to various degrees.

Although measures of uncertain validity were utilized in some studies, several of the studies utilized measures with known reliability and validity, like the Child Behavior Checklist (Brewaeyns *et al.*, 1997; Chan *et al.*, 1998; Flaks

et al., 1995; Patterson, 1994) and the WISC-R (Flaks *et al.*, 1995; Green *et al.*, 1986) and others have gone far to establish valid and reliable measures (as Golombok *et al.*, 1983).

Blinding in studies where persons are assessed face to face complicates recruitment, data collection, and coding procedures. More than half of the studies did, nevertheless, utilize blinding procedures in one or more phases of the study.

The studies converged on finding no substantial differences between the children groups on the seven outcomes reviewed, despite the variety of samples, ways of defining concepts, measures, and procedures. This strengthens the validity of the data (Goodman *et al.*, 1998). It is unreasonable to believe that we, in the near future, in any satisfactory way, will totally overcome the conceptual and practical problems in comparing children from the various types of families. Therefore we have to make use of the available evidence.

In conclusion, then, although there were methodological weaknesses in the reviewed studies, the data, in our view, were of good enough quality to make use of them.

Comments on the research questions

What are the ideologies underlying the research themes? An answer to this question would require historical and discursive analyses, as the research questions originate in prevailing values and ideologies, and we will only briefly raise the issue here. We suspect that the research questions in the reviewed works originate in negative views about homosexual expressions and lifestyles in Western cultures. Whether one shares these negative views or resists them, the research questions center around comparisons between child groups. While appreciating the value of many such empirical studies, Benkov (1995) also stated: "I was uncomfortable with the existing lesbian mother studies for many reasons, I don't see the traditional nuclear family as a normative model which should set standards for all others to meet. I don't think it matters whether children grow up to be lesbian or gay, or construct their sense of gender in non-traditional ways. In both these respects, the studies took up rather than questioned homophobic and heterosexist assumptions" (p. 53; see also Clarke, 2000; Fitzgerald, 1999; Pollack, 1990). The normative status of the nuclear family within developmental psychology probably has a strong influence on which research questions are phrased and supported financially. As Burman (1994) has pointed out, normalization ideologies and adjustment rhetorics are typical within the field. Thus, the field might reinforce fear of homosexual relations by the very focus on the outcomes studied. On the other hand, in a short historical perspective, it is interesting to note that during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s research on adult lesbian women and gay men focused on their adjustment and comparison with heterosexuals (e.g. Hooker, 1957), and many would argue that this research was important in removing disease notions of lesbian women and gay men. The time now seems to have come for their children.

Future studies

What is needed is a large research program exploring specific experiences and needs of children and their lesbian mothers and gay fathers, with less emphasis on psychological outcomes as such. A panel sample of families from all Scandinavian countries aimed at cultural, cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses might be established and followed for several years. Due to the unambiguous results in the studies reviewed, we believe that large epidemiological studies with more fine-tuned instruments and tests are less needed than in-depth and process-oriented methods. An approach welcoming lesbian women and gay fathers as parents would start with the fact that their children must have experiences with their parents' identity and behavior that are different from other children. Questions that really speak up relate to issues like how one may help these families to overcome prejudice, exploring the experiences of coming out to one's children (e.g. Lynch & Murray, 2000), and exploring what nonlesbian or nongay families may learn from these families (e.g. Benkov, 1995). A growing body of literature is studying these phenomena, but much remains to be done.

The reviewed literature originates primarily in the USA and Britain. Other studies published in French or Scandinavian languages may have been published in nonindexed literature, and thus may have been overlooked by us. Our guess is that the results of the present review may be generalized to Scandinavian settings, since family structures, economic systems, gender relations, and conceptualizations of sexual categories are basically the same, in contrast to, for example, Arabic cultures. However, important differences do also exist between the regions, such as the comparative lack of ethnic diversity in Scandinavian countries, and there is a need to explore specific Scandinavian experiences.

Conclusion

The present review did not reveal evidence that children of lesbian mothers differed from other children on emotional adjustment, sexual preference, stigmatization, gender role behavior, behavioral adjustment, gender identity, or cognitive functioning. The studies reported surprisingly similar findings despite the variety of conceptual and methodological approaches. In sum, the findings support the idea that lesbian women should be allowed to be considered suitable for adoption. For men, there are too few studies to provide substantive evidence, although the same probably holds for them.

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