

QUALITY OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS IN ADOLESCENTS OF SAME-SEX PARENTS

By:

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(Under the Direction of David Wright)

ABSTRACT

Literature has shown that peer relationships play an integral role in an adolescent's emotional and social development. For an adolescent raised by a same-sex couple, his or her peer relationships may be influenced by societal contexts that may contribute to a pre-conceived stigma against homosexual parents. In this study adolescents from homosexual and heterosexual parent-families were surveyed on their perceptions of their peer relationships. Using a quantitative approach, this study identified emergent themes and compared the nature of peer relationships for adolescents raised in a household with same-sex parents with adolescents raised by opposite-sex parents. Results indicate that adolescents raised with same-sex parents have comparable levels of social acceptance, were comfortable telling peers about their family makeup, and were treated more favorably by female peers.

INDEX WORDS: Peer relationships, Social acceptance, Social development, Male peers, Female peers, Adolescence, Same-sex parents, Opposite-sex parents

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The definition of the family is ever-changing, as it today is represented by a multitude of structures. One family of interest is that of a same-sex couple with an adolescent child. As this familial deviation becomes more socially acknowledged, it also receives intense scrutiny. The potential impact a parent's sexual orientation could have on the nature of an adolescent's peer relations lends itself to further investigation, as the nature of a parent-child relationship may have a profound influence on the social and emotional aspects of development.

Adolescence is an age marked by self-discovery, independence, and the formation of close relationships. The crucial nature of this study is grounded on research indicating that adolescents who are socially ostracized are at risk for externalizing problems and for negative developmental trajectories (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). Experiencing peer pressure and gaining social acceptance are other components of adolescence that impact psychosocial development, because adolescence is an age marked by increasing self-awareness and, for some, self-doubt (Erikson, 1963). Given the critical nature of the adolescent stage, research needs to be conducted to identify whether lasting and enriching peer relations exist for adolescents of same-sex parents.

Since adolescents of custodial, homosexual parents are a growing phenomenon, existing research in this field is formative. This study is important because it makes up for existing deficiencies in current studies; it aims to bridge two major bodies of literature – that of research on adolescent peer relations and that of research on families with same-sex parents.

Studies indicate that peer relationships, teamed with a nurturing home, play an integral role to the developing mind and to an individual's overall perception of self (Jack, 2000). Therefore, research needs to be conducted on peer relationships at this stage for adolescents who are part of an underrepresented population in most adolescent studies. Outcomes may shed

significant light on aspects of social or emotional development for this group. Furthermore, outcomes of such studies may influence a nation's family-related legislature or social policy for same-sex couples.

Statement of the Problem

Societal trends indicate an increasing number of adolescents residing with same-sex parents (Mallon, 2007). Adolescence is a critical age for social and emotional development, often highly influenced by the quality of peer relationships. As same-sex parents are gaining visibility in the structure of the American family, the potential societal stigma of such parents may influence an adolescent's psycho-social development thus the subsequent quality of peer relationships requires further investigation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to compare peer relationships of adolescents with same-sex parents with those of adolescents with opposite-sex parents. A survey will measure: (1) quality of peer relationships, (2) level of social acceptance, and (3) presence of gender differences. Findings will shed light on the nature of relationships for adolescents with two homosexual parents. Findings may also contribute to extant research on homosexual families, bridge together bodies of literature on adolescence and same-sex families, and potentially influence social policy related to the family.

Definition of Terms

Understanding the language and argot of the population under review helps one gain an appreciation for concepts and terminology used in this thesis. The following terminology is incorporated throughout this discussion:

Homosexual

An individual whose sexual attractions and, generally, sexual behaviors and sexual identities are of the same sex (D'Augelli, 2006).

Gay

Term used to connote a male homosexual.

Lesbian

Term used to connote a female homosexual.

Homophobia

An irrational fear and dread of homosexuals (Ross, 1988).

Same-sex parents

Parents of the same gender.

Opposite-sexl parents

Parents of the opposite gender.

Custodial parent

In a US legal proceeding, the adult who is awarded custody of a child.

Non-custodial parent

In a US legal proceeding, the adult who is not awarded custody of a child.

Agency

Feelings of having, or not having, control over one's life, and feelings of having power, or of powerlessness. (Vidler, 2005).

Adolescent

Middle stage of adolescence in which an individual is between 14 and 17 years of age (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006).

Peers

Individuals who naturally coalesce and affiliate with one another based on shared interests, behaviors, and orientations (Akos, Hamm, Mack, & Dunaway, 2007).

Close relationship

Closeness operationalized as intimacy, (e.g. self-disclosure), understanding, affection, cohesion, or support (Repinski & Zook, 2005).

Interpersonal interactions

Events in which adolescents and their relationship partners are involved and the meaningful interconnections among those events (Repinski & Zook, 2005).

Empathetic concern

Prosocial response that promotes an awareness of the needs of others that is positively related to prosocial behavior (Heller, Robinson, Henry, & Plunkett, 2006).

Social support

A relationship from which one gains a sense of self-worth and interpersonal competence (Laursen, Furman, & Mooney, 2006).

Stigma

The signaling of an invisible mark of shame related to membership in a deviant subgroup, often resulting in a degraded societal status (Hinshaw, 2005)

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Same-sex parents with custodial children constitute a growing area of research. To adequately address this issue, a review of adolescent development and adolescent peer relationships will first be discussed. This review will cover an examination of adolescent development, adolescent peer relationships, same-sex parents, the parent-child relationship, research concerns, and the theoretical framework that applies to this study.

Adolescent Development

Middle adolescence is the developmental period in which one is 14 to 17 years old. This phase signifies a period in which the adolescent is capable of higher-level reasoning and emotional thought, but is not yet classified as an emerging adult (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006). During this stage individuals demonstrate a capable level of agency among adolescents, but still exhibit a degree of dependence upon parents and other social systems.

Adolescence is a critical stage in a human's development; it is recognized as a developmental period characterized by profound psychological change and increasing levels of autonomy (McGue, Elkins, Walden, & Iacono, 2005). It also marks the time in which one's interpersonal competence and self-worth begin to emerge (Laursen, Furman, & Mooney, 2006). These emotional developments occur in a social context. Emotional expressions are shaped in the face-to-face interactions between adolescents and their significant others and the dual role played by expressive behavior as both an indicator of an (underlying) emotional state and a social signal (von Salisch, 2001).

One important variable in this process is empathy. Empathy is characterized by one's cognitive and emotional responses to both emotion-filled situations and the emotional states of others. Employing empathetic practices motivates pro-social behavior, contributes to a greater ability to establish friendships, and also help promotes self-esteem (Henry, Sager, & Plunkett,

1996). Should adolescents of same-sex parents experience social criticisms or teasing, empathy may serve as a protective factor for their development.

Heller, Robinson, Henry, and Plunkett (2006) argue that an adolescent's understanding and practice of empathy and perspective taking is a form of cognitive arousal that allows individuals to take on the psychological perspectives of others. This demonstrates an increased level of social competence and enhanced social relationships with others. These authors also determined that empathy differs by gender, finding it to be a quality more strongly associated with feminine gender roles.

Adolescent Peer Relationships

The development of positive peer relationships, acceptance, and friendships are important components in the everyday lives and for the developmental outcomes of an adolescent (Bovey & Strain, 2006). Since gaining peer approval is a major component of adolescent well being, oftentimes the maintaining of positive adolescent peer relationships during identity formation seems more crucial than maintaining a positive relationship with parents (von Salisch, 2001).

Repinski and Zook (2005) identified properties that characterize the interconnected closeness of peer relationships. These include: (a) the individuals have frequent influence on each other, (b) the degree of influence per occurrence is strong, and (c) the influence involves diverse kinds of activities for each person. Furthermore, the emotional aspect of such interconnectedness used to "characterize close relationships, and closeness was operationalized as intimacy (e.g., self-disclosure), understanding, affection, cohesion, or support (e.g., Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994; Paulsen, Hill, & Holmbeck, 1991; Rice & Maulkeen, 1995; Starrels, 1994)" (Repinski & Zook, 2005, p. 80). Factors such as these are fundamental for one's psycho-

social development, and also demonstrate the significance of quality peer relationships for an adolescent.

Does it matter if one has homosexual parents?

In 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its records of psychological disorders, citing a lack of evidence that homosexuality is a reflection of any pathology or impairment in functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 1974). Today, it is estimated that there are at least one million children of same-sex couples in the United States – created through adoption, as well as through assisted reproductive technologies (Rosato, 2006). For this discussion, homosexual parents will connote a residential parent, as opposed to a non-custodial parent.

While differences do exist between adolescents of homosexual versus heterosexual parents, the majority of current studies conclude that few associations exist between parental sexual orientation and a child's well-being. Some of these differences include lower self-esteem, higher stress or higher parent-child communication for adolescents raised with same-sex parents (Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004; Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua, & Joseph, 1995; Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2004). However, several studies on sexual identity, in addition to studies of other aspects of personal development – such as self-concept, locus of control, moral judgment, and intelligence – revealed no significant differences between children of lesbian or gay parents and children of opposite-sex parents (Patterson, 1992; Chan, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that lesbian parents are just as child-oriented, warm, confident, nurturant, and responsive to their children (Golombok, Perry, Burston, Murray, Mooney-Somers, Stevens, & Golding, 2003) and that gay fathers, in contrast to heterosexual fathers, are more concerned with providing paternal nurturance than economic stability, and that

they try harder to create stable home lives and positive relationships (McCann & Delmonte, 2005).

Although numerous studies show that psychosocial adjustments and school outcomes of an adolescent with same sex parents are equally comparable to an adolescent with opposite-sex parents, concerns remain (Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004; Rodgers & Rose, 2001).

Social and cultural issues, such as hurtful teasing or geographic location, posit that youth of homosexual parents often experience *minority stress* which results from experiencing individual or societal negative reactions to same-sex sexual attractions (D'Augelli, 2006). Furthermore, it is believed that children living with homosexual parents must overcome three primary fears the larger society has about this environment: (a) that the children will become homosexual, (b) that they will be sexually molested, or that (c) the children will be harmed by the social stigma of living with homosexuals (Ross, 1998). The claims to sexuality confusion and sexual molestation have generally been ruled out (Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Buxton, 1999; Cahill, 2005), but the presence of a social stigma and its subsequent effects is still in question.

Tasker (2005) conducted a study on adolescents of separated homosexual couples, and found that childhood prejudice was not as rampant as hypothesized. Interviews indicated that self-agency has proven to be a contributing factor to positive outcomes. Specifically, how children deal with the possibility of prejudice depends on how obvious they believe their parents' sexual orientation to be and how much they identify with their parents' sense of being different. Furthermore, the same participants recalled that during adolescence they had close friendships and occasional teasing about their homosexual parents, but had no more difficulty experiencing peer relationships in comparison to their peers with opposite-sex parents.

Several participants in this study mentioned having taken preventive measures to avoid social homophobia. For example, adolescents of lesbians reported coping with their concern by mostly keeping secret their mother's lesbian identity, although this often aroused feelings of shame and disloyalty and adolescents of gays exercised "boundary control" with their fathers (Tasker, 2005). Boundary control constitutes taking preventative steps by fathers to avoid disclosure of their sexual preference if situations lent themselves to the potential for social backlash. The fathers' measures included avoiding public display of gay signifiers (such as jewelry or books) or taking steps to evade detection that a male friend was actually a partner. These strategies indicate that while adolescents of same-sex parents may not experience dramatically different childhood friendships, the family unit not only anticipated social stigmas, but also took measures to prevent it. These findings shed light on the symbolic nature of such a family within their cultural environment; even though an overabundance of negative experiences was typically not experienced by an adolescent – they were seen as a possibility. These preventive measures reflect the climate of today's society, and also reflect the importance of peer relationships if families will take such actions to ensure normalcy.

Gaps in Literature

Two primary gaps exist in literature of families with same-sex parents: inconstant pools of participants and a lack of research on gay fathers.

Families with same-sex parents may take many forms; therefore, a limitation exists since studies oftentimes use a non-uniform pool of participants. Although every study involves a homosexual parent, it could sample and address the effects of a single parent, a married couple, or divorced parents; a biological parent versus a non-biological parent; a male or female dyad; natural conception versus artificial insemination; or, lastly, whether a child was adopted or came

from a previous relationship. Covariates may exist based on the given sample. Therefore, with such participant variance all-encompassing conclusions must be approached with caution.

A second gap is that most studies on children with same-sex parents focus solely on families with lesbian mothers. Research that investigates children with homosexual fathers may yield significant differences, as the parenting styles and behaviors from two male parents have been shown to vary from the parenting techniques of two females (Patterson, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

For this study, the potential for social stigma against an adolescent with same-sex parents takes root in many areas. The new visibility of this family composition, societal perceptions or misconceptions, moral concerns, or political views are examples of such factors that may impact the welfare of a family headed by same-sex parents. Symbolic interactionism posits that meaning is subjective and humans seek meaning and identities by interacting with other humans in society (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Klein, 2005; Henderson, 2005). Specifically, symbolic interactionism is comprised of three distinct themes: human behavior, self-concept, and society.

The first theme focuses on the importance of meanings for human behavior. One assumption asserts that meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by that person in dealing with things that he or she encounters (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Using this premise, an individual's experiences will shape how he or she views or treats someone who is an adolescent of same-sex parents. As indicated in the literature, age predicts the child's acceptance level and psychological adjustment to the revelation. The research related to adolescent empathy also reflects how social interactions may shape one's interpretation of meaning.

The second theme focuses on the development of self-concept and assumes that once individuals develop a sense of self this will provide motivation for future behavior (Ingoldsby, Smith, & Miller, 2004). Developed levels of these characteristics have been shown to heighten an adolescent's development of close friendships. Therefore, the nature of a parent-child relationship greatly impacts an adolescent's development of such qualities and peer relationships. In relation to same-sex families, since families have been shown to overcome societal stressors and fears, an adolescent's positive sense of self may serve as a protective factor to societal stigmas.

The third theme addresses symbolic interactionist assumptions about society. One assumption is that individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The societal context of living in the United States plays a major role in this study. US laws concerning same-sex marriages, adoption policies, clinical procedures, or media portrayals of homosexuals are direct and indirect influencers in society.

Research Questions

Based on the literature review it is evident that the nature of one's adolescent development is intrinsically tied to the quality of peer relationships. Under the consensus that social approval plays an integral role in an adolescent's well-being, this study aims to identify factors that may be influential in an adolescent's development of peer relationships. For potential reasons such as bullying, name-calling, or peer backlash, adolescents living with homosexual parents may be hesitant to tell others that they have same-sex parents. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- Do young adults with same-sex parents versus opposite-sex parents report a difference between the quality of peer-relationships during adolescence?

- Do young adults with same-sex parents versus opposite-sex parents report a difference between the level of social acceptance during adolescence?
- Do young adults with same-sex parents report being treated differently by male and female peers during adolescence?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

A quantitative approach was implemented for this study. A comparative survey-based design was used for an in-depth examination of the differences in peer relationships and social acceptance among adolescents with same-sex and opposite-sex parents. Survey design was the preferred method as it is economical and yields a rapid turnaround in data collection.

Participants

The population of this study was young adults, both male and female between the ages of 19 and 22. There were two distinct participant groups. The researcher's goal was to have a minimum of thirty participants per group as this size will generally yield meaningful effect sizes; however, Group 1 consisted of 6 participants while Group 2 consisted of 62 participants (Whitley, 2002). To account for the participant differential the researcher randomly selected six participants from Group 2 using a table of randomly selected five-digit numbers (Neuman, 2006).

Group 1 consisted of six participants from San Francisco, CA who grew up in a household with same-sex parents. This group of participants was identified by being members of Colage (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), an organization that is restricted to individuals with same-sex parents. This group consists of one male, one transgender, and four female participants all raised in a household with two mothers, for over ten years. This sample consists of one African American/Black, two Hispanic/White, and three Caucasian participants.

Group 2 comprised a sample of undergraduate students at a large Southeastern university. It was assumed that this purposive sample would have a majority of participants from the Southeastern United States, and that they were raised with opposite-sex parents. The random sample of participants consists of six females; two are African American/Black and four are Caucasian.

Design and Procedure

The survey consisted of two parts. The first section asked all participants questions about their peer relationships during adolescence. This survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. If the participant resided with same-sex parents he or she had an additional, short section of questions to answer. This portion asked participants questions that specifically pertain to being an adolescent with same-sex parents and the impact that it had on peer relationships and social acceptance. This section required an additional 5-10 minutes to complete. The second section asked questions pertaining to demographic data from both groups. Major content sections include: a cover letter, consent form, the questionnaire, and a page with closing remarks. This study's complete survey can be found in the appendix.

Participants from Colage were recruited through an online announcement via their member listserv. They were informed of the nature of the study, the scope of the survey, the primary researcher's contact information, and the gift card incentive upon completion. Interested participants accessed the survey through the provided link, which included the consent form as the first survey question. After finishing the survey, participants were asked to provide the primary investigator with their email address to be entered into a raffle to win the gift card.

Participants for Group 2 were recruited through a classroom announcement by the professor. Students were sent through their student account a link to the online survey, as well as the aforementioned detailed information. After finishing the survey participants were also asked to provide the primary investigator their email address to be entered into a raffle to win the gift card.

Following completion of the questionnaire participants were given a list of agencies that can offer assistance should they develop any psychological problems as a result of this survey.

Measures

For both groups the participant's peer group size during adolescence was first established. Group 1 had a mean peer size of 13.3 and Group 2 had a mean peer size of 16.0. Both groups had more female friends than male friends.

The measurement scales in the questionnaire included both discrete and categorical questions, as well as one open-ended question. The portion of the questionnaire that only examined friendship quality was adapted from a previous study (Lansford, Criss, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 2003). The "Friendship Qualities Scale" has established measures (see Bukowski, Hoza, and Boivin, 1994) and was adopted and altered slightly for the purposes of this study by only employing an abbreviated version of the original questionnaire. Survey questions address companionship, conflict, help received, security received, closeness in relationship, help provided, and security provided. These items were measured on a scale of 0, 1, or 2 (0 = not true, 1 = somewhat true or sometimes true, and 3 = very true or often true). Questions pertaining to friendship quality were asked of both groups, so comparison of these responses addressed the first research question about quality of relationships. An internal consistency estimate of reliability was conducted for the Friendship Quality Scale for each group. These analyses yielded a Group 1 (participants raised with same-sex parents) Cronbach's alpha of .75 and a Group 2 (participants raised with opposite-sex parents) Cronbach's alpha of .78, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

The second research question addressed social acceptance during adolescence for those raised with same-sex parents. These questions measured peer acceptance through the participant's comfort level around those who knew of his or her same-sex parents, the length of

time a participant waited to tell others about his or her parents, and the participant's level of happiness or regret experienced after telling peers about his or her parents.

The final research question addressed the difference, if any, during adolescence between treatment from male and female peers who knew about the participant's same-sex parents. This question measured acceptance based on varying levels of understanding and support.

Specifically, responses were scored on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = very concerned and unsupportive, 2 = somewhat concerned and unsupportive, 3 = somewhat understanding and supportive, and 4 = very understanding and supportive).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed primarily using descriptive statistics and analyses of variance. Initial survey items compared size and composition of adolescent peer groups between the two samples. The first research question examined the differences between the quality of peer relationships for adolescents with same-sex parents versus adolescents with opposite-sex parents. The frequency group mean scale scores were compared for the two groups using a *t*-test.

The second research question examined the level of social acceptance for adolescents with same-sex parents. An analysis of survey questions that measured levels of comfort, time, and regret, along with one open-ended question, was conducted to determine social acceptance. The third research question asked if male and female peers treat adolescents with same-sex parents differently. This was analyzed through a *t*-test of responses that measured understanding and support.

Validity

Internal validity may have been affected by selection bias, volunteer bias, reactivity, and the environment. Selection bias may have existed because participants with same-sex parents

were recruited based on involvement in an activist organization, and this agency may have affected their outlook or experiences since it could provide a protective factor against same-sex negativity. Volunteer bias may have existed because for both groups participation was voluntary so responses may have reflected invested interest in the topic. Also, the study relied on all participants having had access to the internet and being computer literate.

There may have been a threat of reactivity if participants have had negative experiences pertaining to survey content. To reduce reactivity, participants were informed before providing consent that they will remain anonymous and that all answers were confidential and non-identifiable. Lastly, for both groups, taking this survey at a remote location may have affected internal validity because the environment was out of the researcher's control.

External validity is weak, as the number of participants is small. Moreover, the study employed non-random samples and only surveyed participants primarily from two states. Therefore, since the samples were not nationally-representative the generalizability of the findings is low. However, this study does proffer insight for future studies that may be conducted at a larger scale.

Ethical Issues

The only perceived ethical issue that may have arisen in this study is the stress or anxiety incurred by participants if this survey brought from the past memories of stressful experiences. To assist participants in this issue, a list of local agencies that offers psychological services was provided.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Analyses were conducted for each research question. For the first, responses from young adults raised in a household with same-sex parents versus opposite-sex parents were compared on the scale of friendship quality. For the second question, survey responses specific to social acceptance during adolescence for young adults with same-sex parents were examined. For the third question, a within-group *t*-test was performed to determine the differences between male and female reactions during adolescence to learning that participants were raised in a household with same-sex parents.

Quality of Peer Relationships

The first research question is whether peer relationships and friendship quality differ between the two groups during adolescence. Table 1 shows the univariate results for the eleven items on that scale. Means for Group 2 were higher than means from Group 1 for all but three items: “I felt happy when I was with my friends,” “I would help my friends if they ever needed it,” and “If other kids were bothering my friends, I would help them.” Responses to the item “I sometimes got into fights with my friends” were reverse-scaled for directional consistency.

Furthermore, within the seven categories of friendship quality, the three questions with the highest variance between samples pertained to “conflict” (I sometimes got into fights with my friends), “help received” (My friends would stick up for me if another kid was causing me trouble), and “companionship” (My friends and I enjoyed spending time with each others’ families). The mean scores for each of these questions were higher for adolescents with opposite-sex parents. However, it should be noted that of the seven categories “help received” and “companionship” were included on the survey twice – each is represented through a different statement. Since there was little difference between response means for the other “help

received” and “companionship” questions, it cannot be concluded that the two samples differ greatly on these two friendship areas.

Descriptive statistics indicate that the distribution is negatively skewed towards the positive friendship quality, indicating high levels of peer acceptance for both groups.

Furthermore, the scale scores for each participant were calculated and the means of these aggregate scale scores were determined to find an overall value of friendship quality for each of the two groups. Independent *t*-tests at a 95% confidence interval established the friendship quality for Groups 1 and 2 to be 16.33 and 17.67, respectively. There was no significant difference between these means.

Table 1

Univariate Results for Young Adults Reflecting on Adolescence

	Group 1			Group 2		
	Median	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Median	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Friendship quality						
Spending free time together	1.50	1.33	.82	1.50	1.50	.55
Visiting each others' homes	1.50	1.33	.82	2.00	1.67	.82
Receiving help if bothered	1.50	1.50	.55	2.00	1.67	.52
Talking about problems	1.50	1.50	.55	2.00	1.83	.41
Talking about bothers	1.00	1.33	.52	2.00	1.67	.52
Feeling happy with friends	2.00	1.83	.41	2.00	1.67	.52
Helping friends in need	2.00	2.00	-	2.00	1.83	.41
Fighting with friends	1.00	1.12	.41	0.50	0.50	.55
Sticking up for friends	1.00	1.33	.52	2.00	2.00	-
Helping bothered friends	2.00	2.00	-	2.00	1.83	.41
Spending time with families	1.00	1.00	.63	1.50	1.50	.55
Overall mean		16.33			17.67	

n = 6

Range: 0-2

Level of Social Acceptance

To answer the second research question, three closed survey questions and one open-ended question were used to measure the perceived level of social acceptance for adolescents with same-sex parents. Three young adults responded that they felt “very comfortable” around others who knew of their parents, and the other three responded as feeling “somewhat comfortable.” Furthermore, three participants responded as having told their peers “right away” about their parents, while the other three “waited weeks” to tell others. One unifying response among all participants was that they felt happy having told others and none of the participants exhibited regret in doing so.

The open-ended question asked participants to provide more detail about the experience of initially telling a peer that they live with same-sex parents. Five of the six participants responded, with four of these participants remarking that it was a positive experience. Specifically, one participant noted that “If [I] hadn’t told them it would be considered a lie,” and another stated that “It was great to just have it in the open.” One participant described that she didn’t hide the fact that she lived with two mothers, but only addressed it if it came up in conversation. Only one participant cited a negative response, which consisted of experiencing acts of homophobia once it was revealed that she lived with two mothers.

Male/Female Peer Treatment

A within-group *t*-test was performed to examine the third research question that focused on differential treatment from male and female peers towards adolescents with same-sex parents. Responses were scored on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = very concerned and unsupportive, 2 = somewhat concerned and unsupportive, 3 = somewhat understanding and supportive, and 4 = very understanding and supportive) and was conducted at a 95% confidence interval. The sample

mean for male peers was 2.67 (SD = .82), while for female peers it was 3.33 (SD = .52). There is a significant difference between the means, which indicates at the $p < .001$ level female peers are more understanding and supportive than male peers.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the quality of peer relationships and levels of social acceptance for adolescents raised with same-sex parents. This study tentatively coincides with prior findings that adolescents with same-sex parents fare just as well socially as their peers who are raised with opposite-sex parents (Wainright & Patterson, 2008; Mallon, 2007; Patterson & Hastings, 2007; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

Quality of Peer Relationships

The first research question asked whether young adults with same-sex parents had the same quality of peer relationships during adolescence as those adolescents with opposite-sex parents. Findings indicate that adolescents with opposite-sex parents had more friends and reported more positive responses to almost all survey questions, albeit not significantly different. The small sample size, as will be discussed further, envisages a larger margin of error. Therefore, it may be assumed that had there been more participants and thus larger sample sizes, the response means would have had a closer distribution.

All of the participants with same-sex parents had lived in that context for over ten years. It is reported that the age in which a child or adolescent learns that a parent is a homosexual is important. Specifically, those who learn of their parent's homosexuality at a young age have higher self-esteem, greater psychosocial functioning, and more sources of social support (Rivers, Poteat, & Noret, 2008; Patterson, 1992). These characteristics tie in with the notion of one's self-concept guiding future behaviors and impacting future relationships since a child's development is significantly related to variables associated with family process (Chan, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998). Therefore, it can be presumed that during adolescence these young adults exhibited high levels of accustom to their parents' lifestyle and this may play a part in the positive nature of their responses. This observation, further bolstered by this study's findings,

may play a crucial role in a society's public policy as it could potentially impact adoption laws or other family-related legislation.

Level of Social Acceptance

Responses to the questions that measured the level of adolescent social acceptance for young adults with same-sex parents were overall positive. All of the participants felt happy after telling their peers, and all of the participants either told their peers right away or waited only a few weeks to do so. In the open-ended question one of the participants noted that it wasn't a big deal since she was from the Bay Area [California]. Geographic location may therefore have played a role in both the pro-active, happy nature of these participants' experiences and the comfort level of their peers. This finding coincides with data that suggest some lesbian-headed families choose to live in areas where heteronormative pressures are low and subsequent disclosure to social networks will not be an issue (Goldberg, 2007; DeMino, Appleby, & Fisk, 2007). This observation can be viewed through the lens of symbolic interactionism as it clearly corresponds with the notion that meaning is subjective and one's society helps facilitate this process.

Furthermore, the fact that two mothers raised all of the participants may also play a role in the nature of the responses. Research suggests that despite worry about peer judgment, adolescents of lesbian mothers expressed strong love, loyalty, and protectiveness toward their lesbian mothers and do not differ on well being or adjustment (Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2007; O'Connor, 1993). These forms of expression can also be tied to symbolic interactionism as they reflect an adolescent's psychological adjustment and interpretation of meaning.

Male/Female Peer Treatment

To date, no other research that addresses treatment by male versus female peers with same-sex parents has been found. This study did ask participants to identify the reactions of their peers based on sex, and the female peers were more understanding and supportive than the male peers. This finding is not surprising as these two qualities are associated with empathy, which is a feature typically exhibited more by females (Heller, Robinson, Henry, & Plunkett, 2006). Empathetic reactions are crucial to the social development of adolescents, particularly those raised with same-sex parents, since it promotes pro-social behavior, help, and self-esteem (Henry, Sager, & Plunkett, 1996).

Conclusion

The contemporary American family is now diverse and fluid in nature. Although families led by opposite-sex parents are still the tradition and dominate discourse about the way one understands family, the rise of same-sex parents reflects our society's shift in family composition and politics. As previously outlined, symbolic interactionism guides this study as it incorporates human and societal interaction with meaning and self-concept. This study's findings, though statistically weak, reflect such interaction. The friendship levels of each adolescent group display how quality is determined by experiences at both the personal and public levels, and how parental makeup indeed plays a role in shaping such friendships. Furthermore, the comfort level of adolescents with same-sex parents and the subsequent treatment from their peers also demonstrate the critical nature of individual and societal influences, as the length of time with homosexual parents, geographic location, and peer gender all contribute to constructing the self-concept of an adolescent raised with same-sex parents.

Strengths and Limitations

One strength of this study is its addition to the existing body of literature on families with same-sex parents. Research in this area is still in a formative state, so the nature of this study's findings may prove to be a useful, particularly in its examination of male and female treatment of peers with same-sex parents. Additional strengths include the study's straightforward, simple design and also that there was a comparison conducted between participant groups.

Several limitations exist for this study. The primary limitation is the small sample size. With small samples accuracy declines and results are not generalizable to an entire population (Neuman, 2006). It should be noted that with a sample size of $n = 6$ for each type, the statistical power is low and therefore unlikely to detect differences between the two independent samples (Cohen, 1988, 1992). It was also the researcher's goal to survey adolescents with same-sex parents and adolescents with opposite-sex parents. Due to the nature of the study and problematic issues encountered with obtaining parental consent, this study was altered to be retrospective in design. Memory recall and self-reported data has a tendency to minimize negative experiences and retain the positive, so this occurrence may also have affected the nature of the responses (Kemp, Burt, & Furneaux, 2008; Gillihan, Kessler, & Farah, 2007).

Additionally, the participants that were recruited do not constitute a geographically represented sample. Research indicates that California is typically more tolerant and accepting of homosexuality than other states or regions of the country, which may contribute to the majority of positive responses participants with same-sex parents displayed (Herek, 2006; Cameron & Cameron, 2002). Furthermore, as previously discussed there is a dearth of research on adolescents raised with two homosexual fathers. This study was unable to remedy that gap.

Lastly, the thesis measure had flaws that were encountered after data collection. For example, in the adapted Friendship Quality Scale approximately half of the subscales were addressed twice. The other subscales were only represented in one question, which makes it difficult to determine which subscales truly differ from each participant group, and which subscales were consistently similar. Another fault occurred in the demographic section: participants were asked if they were “male,” “female,” or “transgender.” The survey failed to ask if a participant was a transgender *male* or a transgender *female* – information that would have been useful when compiling demographics.

Implications for Future Research

Although positive strides were taken to examine peer relationships and social acceptance for adolescents with same-sex parents, there are many areas that could be improved upon for future research. As previously mentioned, a larger and more nationally representative participant sample would yield more accurate data. The survey should also be modified to account for more questions to equally incorporate the friendship quality subscales and it should also be adjusted for greater demographic accuracy. These revisions would contribute to a more accurate assessment of friendship components and participant samples. Lastly, adolescents should ideally be surveyed since responses in the present would be more reliable than retrospective reports.

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APPENDIX

Cover Letter

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in my research project titled, “Adolescent Peer Relationships.” Through this project I am learning about the quality of peer relationships for adolescents in different family forms.

If you decide to be part of this, you will be asked to complete a brief survey. In appreciation of your efforts, if interested you may be entered to win a \$25 gift certificate to Best Buy. I will not use your name on any papers, and your contact information will only be collected if you wish to enter the raffle. The link to my survey is:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=uKZOLHZ78RfTA231uvyHeA_3d_3d

If you have any questions or concerns you can always ask me or call my supervising professor, Dr. David Wright, at the following number: (706) 542-4825.

Sincerely,

Theresa Glasheen

The University of Georgia, Department of Child and Family Development

Glasheen@uga.edu; (706) 542-4087

Consent Form

Dear Participant:

My name is Theresa Glasheen and I am a graduate student in the Department of Child and Family Development at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled “Quality of Peer Relationships in Adolescence.” The purpose of this study is to examine an adolescent’s perceived quality of peer relationships. This study involves research and is completely voluntary. Only participants between the ages of 18 and 25 qualify for this study.

Your participation will involve taking an online survey and it should only take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. During the survey you may also choose not to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable responding to.

The survey is anonymous and the results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format. Please note that internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once the materials are received by the researcher, standard confidentiality procedures will be employed. Identifying information will not be collected on the participants except to enter in the raffle. The principal investigator and the major professor will be the only people who have access to the data, and all survey data will be destroyed after data analysis.

The findings from this project may provide information on research that benefits families. The only anticipated risk is psychological discomfort if a participant has had a negative experience with peers and the related parental issue in question. Questions are designed to be non-intrusive and not upsetting. To minimize this risk data collection will take place individually and anonymously, and when debriefed participants will be given a list of agencies to contact if there should be any discomfort. As an incentive for your participation, if you so wish you may be entered to win a \$25 gift card to Best Buy.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at (706) 542-4087 or send an e-mail to Glasheen@uga.edu. My supervising professor, Dr. David Wright is also available to discuss questions or concerns at the following number: (706) 542-4825. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By continuing (clicking through survey) you are giving your consent to participate. Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Theresa L. Glasheen

Thesis Measure

At different times in your life you have different kinds of friendships. Think about when you were an adolescent (between the ages of 14 and 17), and the quality of your friendships during this age. Specifically,

1. Think about the people you hung out with at the time. How many of them did you really call a friend? _____

(Approximate number)

2. Of this group, how many of your friends were boys?

Boys: _____

(Approximate number)

3. Of this group, how many of your friends were girls?

Girls: _____

(Approximate number)

Now I'd like you to read you some sentences and determine how they describe you and your friends during adolescence. Remember, there are no right or wrong ways to answer these questions.

There are three descriptions below each with a number assigned to it. After reading each statement determine which of the choices describes it best. In the space provided indicate the numeric value of "0," "1," or "2." If any time you would like to stop the survey you may do so.

0 = not true

1 = somewhat true or sometimes true

2 = very true or often true

_____ 4. My friends and I spent a lot of our free time together.

_____ 5. My friends and I would go to each other's houses after school and on weekends.

_____ 6. If other kids were bothering me, my friends would help me.

_____ 7. If my friends and I were ever having a problem at school or at home we could talk to one another about it.

- _____ 8. If there was ever something bothering me, I could tell my friends about it even if it was something that I couldn't tell other people.
- _____ 9. I felt happy when I was with my friends.
- _____ 10. I would help my friends if they ever needed it.
- _____ 11. I sometimes got into fights with my friends.
- _____ 12. My friends would stick up for me if another kid was causing me trouble.
- _____ 13. If other kids were bothering my friends, I would help them.
- _____ 14. My friends and I enjoyed spending time with each others' families.

Please complete the following information:

1. What is your age?

18_____ 19_____ 20_____ 21_____ 22_____ 23_____ 24_____ 25_____

2. What is your race? _____
(Fill in the answer)

3. Are you?

Male_____ Female_____ Transgender_____

I just have a few more questions for you. Again, please respond to the questions as they pertained to you during adolescence. Your responses are very important to my study – thank you for your time!

15. How comfortable were you with people knowing that you have parents of the same sex (i.e. both men or both women)?

- A. Very comfortable
- B. Somewhat comfortable
- C. Somewhat uncomfortable
- D. Very uncomfortable

16. Referring to the peer group number that you provided for question #1, how many of these friends knew of your same-sex parents? _____
(Approximate number)

17. Some kids don't wait to tell others that their parents are of the same sex, and others do wait. How long did you usually wait to tell your friends?

- A. I told my friends right away.
- B. I waited weeks to tell my friends.
- C. I waited months to tell my friends.
- D. I waited years to tell my friends.
- E. I never told my friends about my parents.

18. Sometimes kids tell others their parents being the same sex and then wish they hadn't. After you've told friends about your parents, which of the following responses best describes your experience?

- A. I felt regret after I told my friends
- B. I had mixed feelings
- C. I was happy I told my friends

Please tell me more about that answer (you don't have to share any names):

19. When your boy classmates and friends learned about your parents they were usually:

- A. Very understanding and supportive
- B. Somewhat understanding and supportive
- C. Somewhat concerned and unsupportive
- D. Very concerned and unsupportive
- E. No male peers know about my family structure

20. When your girl classmates and friends learned about your parents they were usually:

- A. Very understanding and supportive
- B. Somewhat understanding and supportive
- C. Somewhat concerned and unsupportive
- D. Very concerned and unsupportive
- E. No female peers know about my family structure

Please complete the following information:

1. What is your age?

18_____ 19_____ 20_____ 21_____ 22_____ 23_____ 24_____ 25_____

2. What is your race? _____
(Fill in the answer)

3. Are you?

Male_____ Female_____ Transgender_____

4. What is the gender of your parents?

Two Fathers: _____ Two Mothers: _____

5. How long have you lived with your homosexual parents?

Months: _____

0-5 Years: _____

6-10 Years: _____

10 + Years: _____

Study Debriefing

You have just completed a survey in which you answered a series of questions detailing the quality of your peer relationships. The purpose of this study was to examine your perception of your peer relationships, and if your parental makeup impacts these relationships. Your responses will be compared to another group of adolescents also completing this survey.

Survey Webpage

survey title:	
Adolescent Peer Relationships	
current report:	Default Report ▾
Displaying 1 of 86 respondents	
Response Type: Normal Response	Collector: Adolescent Peer Relationships (Web Link)
Custom Value: empty	IP Address: 75.10.245.57
Response Started: Wed, 4/2/08 2:37:56 PM	Response Modified: Wed, 4/2/08 2:38:31 PM
<p>1. March 27, 2008 Dear Participant: My name is Theresa Glasheen and I am a graduate student in the Department of Child and Family Development at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled "Quality of Peer Relationships in Adolescence." The purpose of this study is to examine an adolescent's perceived quality of peer relationships. This study involves research and is completely voluntary. Only participants between the ages of 18 and 25 qualify for this study. Your participation will involve taking an online survey and it should only take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. During the survey you may also choose not to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable responding to. The survey is anonymous and the results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format. Please note that internet communications are insecure and there is a limit to the confidentiality that can be guaranteed due to the technology itself. However, once the materials are received by the researcher, standard confidentiality procedures will be employed. Identifying information will not be collected on the participants except to enter in the raffle. The principle investigator and the major professor will be the only people who have access to the data, and all survey data will be destroyed after data analysis. The findings from this project may provide information on research that benefits families. The only anticipated risk is psychological discomfort if a participant has had a negative experience with peers and the related parental issue in question. Questions are designed to be non-intrusive and not upsetting. To minimize this risk data collection will take place individually and anonymously, and when debriefed participants will be given a list of agencies to contact if there should be any discomfort. As an incentive for your participation, if you so wish you may be entered to win a \$25 gift card to Best Buy. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at (706) 542-4087 or send an e-mail to Glasheen@uga.edu. My supervising professor, Dr. David Wright is also available to discuss questions or concerns at the following number: (706) 542-4825. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu. By continuing (clicking through survey) you are giving your consent to participate. Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records. Sincerely, Theresa L. Glasheen</p> <p>Yes, I agree to participate in this study</p>	
2. Growing up were you raised in a household with?	
3. At different times in your life you have different kinds of friendships. Think about when you were an adolescent (between the ages of 14 and 17), and the quality of your friendships during this age. Specifically, Think about the people you hung out with at the time. How many of them did you really call a friend (approximate number)?	
No Response	
4. Of this group, how many of your friends were boys and how many were girls (approximate number)?	
No Response	
5. Now I'd like you to read you some sentences and determine how they describe you and your friends during adolescence. Remember, there are no right or wrong ways to answer these questions. There are three descriptions below each with a number assigned to it. After reading each	

statement determine which of the choices describes it best. In the space provided indicate the numeric value of "0," "1," or "2." If any time you would like to stop the survey you may do so. 0 = not true 1 = somewhat true or sometimes true 2 = very true or often true

No Response

6. There are just a few more questions with the same scoring pattern. 0 = not true 1 = somewhat true or sometimes true 2 = very true or often true

No Response

7. Thank you for completing my survey! There are just a few demographic questions I'd like to ask. What is your age?

No Response

8. What is your race?

No Response

9. Are you?

No Response

10. Thank you for completing my survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated! If you would like to be entered in the drawing for a \$25 gift certificate to Best Buy please provide your email address below.

No Response

11. At different times in your life you have different kinds of friendships. Think about when you were an adolescent (between the ages of 14 and 17), and the quality of your friendships during this age. Specifically, Think about the people you hung out with at the time. How many of them did you really call a friend (approximate number)?

No Response

12. Of this group, how many of your friends were boys and how many were girls (approximate number)?

No Response

13. Now I'd like you to read you some sentences and determine how they describe you and your friends during adolescence. Remember, there are no right or wrong ways to answer these questions. There are three descriptions below each with a number assigned to it. After reading each statement determine which of the choices describes it best. In the space provided indicate the numeric value of "0," "1," or "2." If any time you would like to stop the survey you may do so. 0 = not true 1 = somewhat true or sometimes true 2 = very true or often true

No Response

14. There are just a few more questions with the same scoring pattern. 0 = not true 1 = somewhat true or sometimes true 2 = very true or often true

No Response

15. I just have a few more questions for you. Again, please respond to the questions as they pertained to you during adolescence. Your responses are very important to my study – thank you for your time! How comfortable were you with people knowing that you have parents of the same sex (i.e. both men or both women)?

No Response

16. Referring to the peer group number that you provided earlier, how many of these friends knew of your same-sex parents (approximate number)?

No Response

17. Some kids don't wait to tell others that their parents are of the same sex, and others do wait. How long did you usually wait to tell your friends?

No Response

18. Sometimes kids tell others their parents being the same sex and then wish they hadn't. After you've told friends about your parents, which of the following responses best describes your experience?

No Response

19. Please tell me more about that answer (you don't have to share any names):

No Response

20. When your boy classmates and friends learned about your parents they were usually:

No Response

21. When your girl classmates and friends learned about your parents they were usually:

No Response

22. Thank you for completing my survey! There are just a few demographic questions I'd like to ask. What is your age?

No Response

23. What is your race?

No Response

24. Are you?

No Response

25. How long have you lived with your lesbian/gay parents?

No Response

26. Thank you for completing my survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated! If you would like to be entered in the drawing for a \$25 gift certificate to Best Buy please provide your email address below.

No Response

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