

CHILDREN IN PLANNED LESBIAN FAMILIES: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON BETWEEN THE USA AND THE NETHERLANDS

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INTRODUCTION

How children in planned lesbian families are raised is influenced by the cultural climate of the countries in which they live. Children who grow up in less tolerant countries are expected to have more experiences of discrimination, to be less open about having a lesbian mother (outness), and to show more problem behavior.

AIM OF THE STUDY

(1) Compare children in planned lesbian families from the USA ("National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study"; NLLFS) and the Netherlands ("Parenting in Planned Lesbian Families") on experiences with homophobia, outness, and problem behavior.

(2) Assess whether homophobia and outness mediated the effects of country on psychological adjustment.

METHOD

Recruitment:

USA: Announcements at lesbian events, in women's bookstores, and in lesbian newspapers. Data was collected on 4 periods (T1: insemination or pregnancy – T4; when the children were 10 years old). At T4, 78 families (93% retention) were still participating.

The Netherlands: Medical Center of Birth Control, & interest group of gay and lesbian parents (response: 74%).

Participants:

USA: 78 planned lesbian families (41 ♀, 38 ♂; including one set of twins)

The Netherlands: 74 planned lesbian families (38 ♀, 36 ♂)

Mothers in the USA sample were significantly younger than in the Dutch sample.

Proportion of couples that had broken up was in the USA sample was significantly higher compared to the Dutch sample.

Instruments:

Experiences with homophobia: "Did other kids ever say mean things to you about your mom's being lesbian?" (1 = no, 2 = yes)

Outness: "Are you out to your peers about having a lesbian mother?" (1 = no, 2 = sometimes, 3 = most of the time)

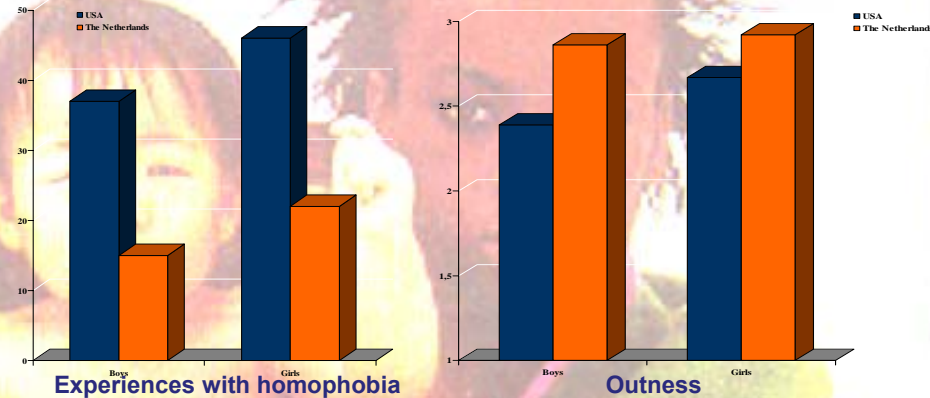
Child adjustment: *Child behavior Checklist (CBCL/4-18; Achenbach, 1991)*

Analyses:

Aim 1: X^2 -test (experiences with homophobia), a 2 (country) x 2 (gender) ANOVA (disclosure), & a 2 (country) x 2 (gender) MANOVA (CBCL)

Aim 2: Procedures for testing mediation models (Baron & Kenny, 1986) & Sobel test

RESULTS

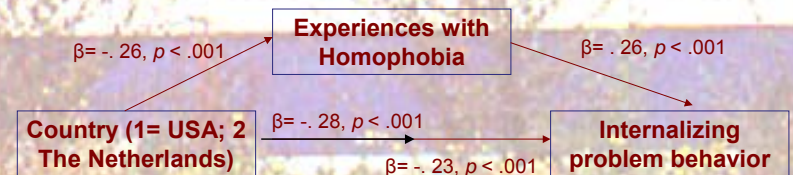


Child adjustment

Children (boys and girls) in planned lesbian families in the USA sample scored significantly higher on: anxious/depression, social problems, thought problems, rule breaking behavior, aggressive behavior, and sex problems. USA children also showed higher levels of internalizing, externalizing, and total problem behavior.

Mediational model

Mediation was found for experiences with homophobia (but not for outness): Children in planned lesbian families living in the USA have more experiences with homophobia, which in turn lead to greater problem behaviour compared to children in planned lesbian families in the Netherlands. **For example:**



CONCLUSION

Cross-national differences in the acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex parenthood have consequences for the well-being of children growing up in lesbian families, with acceptance leading to more openness and fewer experiences of homophobia.