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Pink Parenthood: An Exploration of Lesbian Parenting in The Netherlands

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Pink Parenthood: An Exploration of Lesbian Parenting in The Netherlands
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ISP SUMMARY SHEET

STUDENT NAME: Sophia Ladner

SEMESTER/YEAR: Fall 2016

ISP TITLE: Pink Parenthood: An Exploration of Lesbian Parenting in The Netherlands

ISP Title for official transcript (maximum 50 characters): An Exploration of Lesbian Parenting in The Netherlands

ISP ABSTRACT: This is an explorative study of Dutch Lesbian parents and their experiences having and raising children in Dutch society. This research explores the social attitudes surrounding lesbian parents in Amsterdam and another city to see how their experiences are shaped by factors including their sexual orientation, their construction of family, and the relationships and values they feel are important to impart on their children. 5 qualitative interviews, four with married couples, and 1 solo interview, laid the groundwork for the research. The data from the interviews was analyzed using existing texts on LGBTQ, within a framework of social constructionist theory. Interview subjects spoke about their lives as lesbian women in the Netherlands, and their history dealing with their identities as they grew up and had children. They also spoke of their creation of their families, and the reactions and implications it had in their friends and families lives as well as their own. Overall, these women felt no discrimination in society as a result of their identities, but still recognized feeling different than other individuals, and this feeling of difference led to self-perceptions of increased tolerance in their parenting values. Their difference as same-sex parents also led to differences in the understanding of what makes a family, and their experiences resisting dominant ideas of familial construction also gave rise to feelings of increased awareness and tolerance of how gender roles were expressed in their children's lives. This research is important for anyone studying or interested in LGBTQ culture, parenthood, and Dutch society.

Key Words: marginalized parenthood, family studies, regional studies: europe, lgbtq, parenting

IDEAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH: Expand on this research by increasing the participant number, look at different identities and sexualities, and explore the experiences of participants living in more rural areas with different cultural backgrounds.

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Program and Term/Year- Netherlands, Fall 2016

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Being a parent is a challenge, no matter who you are. Raising and caring for children brings about a whole new perspective and set of duties that have to be faced. In the case of non-traditional parents that go against the dominant idea in society of having both a mother and a father, they face additional scrutinization in society. The term "pink parenthood", as referenced in the title, is a Dutch term for parents that are LGBTQ, and a way of labeling the specific experiences of sexual minorities as they have families. For this research paper, I'm interested in looking at how the experiences and social perceptions of lesbian parents differ in Dutch society given their personal identities and the existing ideas of tolerance that stem from the enactment of same-sex marriage in the Netherlands in 2001. I'd like to focus on their lived experiences as to examine how their identities as lesbians and parents have been received and reacted to within Dutch Society. I'm interested in this topic because I'd like to understand current Dutch attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals and their roles as parents, and how the presumed Dutch tolerance towards members of the gay community is actually experienced in their lives. I think this research would shed insight into the differences of experience within the lesbian community, and demonstrate existing stereotypes and public opinions of inadequacy that are attached to non-normative parenting, like how LGBTQ parents are constructed as deficient due to their departure from the ideal of two married heterosexuals (Gibson 2010, 246). By choosing to research lesbian and gay families, it forces us to evaluate, expand, and challenge existing family theories and frameworks (Berkowitz 2009, 29). As discussed in previous literature, research on homosexual couples works to inform audiences about the differences in experiences in sexual identity. "Studies of gay male and lesbian couples serve to discredit myths about homosexuals that have been prevalent in both professional and folk thinking and provide the basis for a factual depiction of homosexual relationships. For members of the gay and lesbian communities, such studies provide an opportunity to put one's own relationship experiences in the context of the spectrum of possible relationships. (Peplau 1980, 82). I'd like to specifically look at lesbian parents because they are a sub-group that has been focused on often as they

start to have children through various methods, and their processes legally obtaining children have also been studied. Initially the focus of this research would have been on the experiences of both lesbian and gay parents, but it was difficult to find gay parents to interview through the connections I had. The existing research on lesbian and gay parents in the Netherlands has given me a wide scope to choose from, and has looked at a lot of different sub-topics within the LGBTQ community. In this paper, I'm looking at their experiences after they've had kids so that to understand their new identities as parents after children enter their lives, and how they experience life in Dutch society from their positions as lesbian women.

Literature Review

The literature found touches on varying factors in LGBTQ relationships, ranging from exploring gender roles to surveying European countries to further understand their varying attitudes towards homosexuality. I will be analyzing this information from a social constructionist point of view, that describes the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live. It attempts to articulate common forms of understanding as they now exist, as they have existed in prior historical periods, and as they might exist should creative attention be so directed. (Gergen 1985, 266). By rooting my research in the understandings and dominant ideas of this current period, it will explore the lived experiences of the research subjects as they are currently positioned, and will explain how modern ideologies create meaning in the world that is then applied to their lives. The literature can be separated into two topics, one exploring current tolerance of LGBTQ issues in The Netherlands and Europe, and another looking at research on the meaning of family and how that relates to to sexuality and gender differences. Past studies of lesbian parents include the experiences of lesbian biological mothers and their role in primary

child care (Dempsey 2005), lesbian motherhood as a changing identity (Hequemborg and

Farrell 1999), and studies of tolerance on children with same-sex parents (Fulcher 2008) all

relate to the parenting experience and lesbian identities.

Cultural Ideas of Tolerance

One article, entitled "Towards Tolerance: Exploring Changes and Explaining differences

in Attitudes towards Homosexuality in Europe" by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research.

This paper looks at the rate of tolerance in European countries over the last 30 years, and

examines the room for progress in the new millennium. This paper is relevant because it looks

at the attitudes behind tolerance, and social expectations of women and men in society. Another

article that deals with similar data of tolerance in The Netherlands is "Jongeren en seksuele

orientatie", from the Social and Cultural Bureau at Den Haag. This Dutch research article that

looks at two main factors in Dutch LGBT society, mainly young people in the Netherlands and

their attitudes towards LGBT issues, and lifestyles and social situations of LGBT individuals

themselves. This research addresses the existing attitudes towards LGBT issues by conducting

surveys of different countries levels of acceptance of LGBTQ people, gathering opinions on

living near and interacting with LGBTQ people in daily life. This can help to explain the social

mindsets around these issues, and to see how that translates into acceptance other factors of

life for LGBTQ people such as having a family and raising children. Another reading that will

assist with the research is "Legal Protection for All the Children: Dutch-American Comparison of

Lesbian and Gay Parent Adoptions". This article works to examine adoptions by same-sex

parents in the United States and the Netherlands and to see how legal rights are addressed

differently between the two countries. Both countries policies recognize that it's best to have two

parents in the household, according to this study, but legal obstacles stand in the way in regards

to same-sex adoptions of children. This paper goes into the legal framework and explores how

adoptions are handled within the system and how individual cases are subject to these laws and their interpretations of an" proper" family. This reading will give insight into the legal aspect of having children for gay and lesbian parents like getting rights to the child, and help explain the potential obstacles that parents have to face when getting rights to their children, like Dutch women getting their both their names on their children's birth certificates.

The legal side of having a child is also explored in the American context in "Law and LGBTQ Families". This paper gives an American framework to the legal issues faced by LGBQ people as they decide to have children, and how it affects if and how they become parents. I think this article will be useful to give a more detailed framework of the society I come from in order to contrast it with the Dutch society that I will be examining. For example, co-parenting is a Dutch phenomenon that someone from the States might be unfamiliar with, and by contrasting it with the practice surrogacy in the United States, this paper can emphasize the differences in responsibilities and relationships that the two practices have.

Judith Butler covers a different aspect in tolerance in regards in her piece "Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time". She explores the construction of sexual politics and how separations are made between sexualities to distinguish people from one another. She also explores the concept of modernity and how that relates to understood values of tolerance, and how secularism as a factor of modernity then categorizes those from non-Western countries as unable to assimilate. She explores the ideas surrounding modernity in a secular time, and this work will help to connect freedom from religion to larger ideas of tolerance, specifically with the research on sexual minorities in the Netherlands. Sexual minorities and the acquisition of that title is explored in "The History of Sexuality pt. 2", by Michel Foucault. A leading text in sociological theorization, it explains how current thinking about sexuality is considered to be informed by a "repressive hypothesis", where people view sex through a lens of repression. He disagrees and says that societies discussion of sex has intensified since the 18th century, and the consequences of this discussion has shifted focus from married couples to sexual

"perversion", and this categorization of the "other" in regards to non-normative sexuality has had a lasting impact on how we discuss sex. This work informs on how these categorizations came to light, and the lasting effects of this way of discussing sex has consequences for individuals, as it's come to define a person's character. This definition creates labels on individuals and impacts the way they are viewed in society, which is what is expanded upon in the research when the interviewed women discuss their feelings of difference in society.

For a look at the current writing on gay parents from a more personal standpoint, "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Families", is a paper that discusses the Netherlands and its establishment of same-sex marriage in 2001, and how that has affected the history of research about LGBT families. This document covers what existing and recent studies of LGBTQ families has looked into. This will assist with knowledge of the research that has already been done and in turn will help with what I plan on contributing to the field. This paper discusses recent research done on lesbian motherhood and the results that have been found, with articles ranging from looking at differences in how parents work together to share responsibilities in the household, to a paper that examines how the relationship between birth mother and co-mothers can give rise to jealousy over their positions in their children's lives. This article will help because it covers existing topics that have been researched and will give additional resources for exploring potential topics related to the themes found in my research.

Since my research is exclusively looking at the Netherlands, a paper that will help is "Social Integration, Discrimination, and Acceptance of Lesbian Parenting in the Netherlands". It discusses how lesbian families are received in the Netherlands, and this piece will help to understand some background and earlier findings within that field of research, and give the ability to contrast it with the information that I gather about lesbian parents in the Netherlands. The paper starts off by discussing the existing rights of LGBTQ people to marry and have children in the Netherlands, but then goes into the existing perceptions of homosexuality and how gay parents work to overcome existing prejudices and social attitudes to have families. This

research will help explain the experiences the interview subjects have had, and look at common variables that can be found in Dutch society to create these interactions.

Family, Gender, and Sexuality Differences In Society

In continuation with the existing prejudices or gender expectations, "Does the Gender of Parents Matter?" is a research paper by Timothy Biblarz and Judith Stacey that looks into existing beliefs around gendered parenting. The paper discusses the heteronormative belief that a child needs both a father and mother to grow up as a well-adjusted adult, and look into the research that suggest that gender-specific parenting practices aren't necessary. The concept of a harsh father/caring mother reflect the gendered stereotypes of parenting, and this research article works to overcome that assumption with research that proves it's not necessary. This research will assist with one of my subtopics that addresses heteronormative ideas of parenting, and can be used to support the analysis.

In "Building Research, Building Justice: Epistemology, Social Work, and Lesbian Parents", Margaret F. Gibson looks into the marginalization of gay and lesbian parents, and how the existing research is quick to dismiss difference and to claim that the resulting children are adjusted and reflect heteronormative ideals. She uses theory to explain the construction of stereotypes around lesbians and lesbian parents, and how categorizations of their gender expression are used to enforce these constructions. This look at gender expression and identity demonstrates how people perceive women differently based on appearance, and will be helpful in explaining the experiences of lesbian parents that stem from external judgements of their character. These judgements of character such assuming they're single mothers raising children on their own relates to their personal identities and how they're viewed by others, which is additionally explored In "The Subjective Experience of the Lesbian (M)other", by Louise DuChesne and Ben Bradley. This paper explores the construction of the lesbian maternal identity and how that relates to individuals existing identities. This paper researches the

experiences of non-biological mothers in lesbian families and how their newfound identities as mothers affect them. Existing discourse places the birth mother in a position of validity whereas non-birth mothers are subject to different treatment, and this paper looks at the social construction behind this phenomenon and speaks to individuals that have experienced these divisions in their own lives as they become parents and take on the new identity of a mother. The identity of lesbian mother as it works with the presence of a donor father is a topic not frequently covered in existing research, and it's a relationship that can give insight into existing ideas of heteronormative parenting relationships and how they're challenged within LGBTQ families. For example, it can be used to deconstruct how the women I spoke to think of their status as mothers regardless of if they gave birth to their children or not. In "Donor, Dad, or….? Young Adults with Lesbian Parents' Experiences with Known Donors", Abbie E. Goldberg and Katherine R. Allen explore how young adults with lesbian parents create meaning in their relationships with their donor "fathers", and how those relationships factor into their lives. This research looks into the construction of family within non-traditional parenting research, and how family arrangements adjust with the participation of the donors in their children's lives. A topic that arose during the research was the role that the donors had in the parents lives as well as their children, and this side relationship is something that influenced their decision-making as parents, so it feels important to explore.

Male influence in a child's life may be valued differently in society then a mother's impact on her child, and my interview subjects recognized that. in "Imagining Men: Lesbian Mothers' Perceptions of Male Involvement During the Transition to Parenthood. Journal of Marriage and Family", Goldberg and Allen discusses the perspective of lesbian parents on their intentions having male involvement in their children's lives through a donor father. This choice by women to have a male presence in their life speaks to the common knowledge that men and women are socialized differently in society, and it explores why lesbian women chose to have a male presence in their children's lives. This informs upon the reasons behind lesbian women desiring

a male presence in their children's lives, and will help with explaining why the lesbian parents I interviewed chose to have a known donor, and created a possibility for a male presence in their children's lives. By discussing the prevalence of having a male figure in a non-traditional parenting situation, it explores the new structures of kinship created by lesbian parents and what that means to them. The conscious choice to bring men into the family relationship is something that came up when interacting with the interviewees, and this decision is something that speaks to the perceived importance of male influence in society, which is something to explore.

New practices around dominant forms of self and gender expression, in this case interacting with gender roles, is explored in "Bathrooms, Baseball, and Bra Shopping: Lesbian and Gay Parents Talk about Engendering their Children". This paper discusses gender roles and how lesbian and gay parents interact with these norms when raising their own children. This paper explores how these parents work to negotiate the existing narratives of heteronormativity and gender roles as individuals that may choose to stray from those norms, and what it means to them as they parent with a heightened sense of traditional gender roles and how their status as queer parents influences their awareness. This work looks at gender norms and how they are contested or followed in the lives of queer parents, and is something that comes up in the interviews of women in the Netherlands. This research will help to explore the challenges that these mothers face when parenting their children in a possibly gendered fashion. Berkowitz also explores subjective experiences of lesbian and gay parents in another paper, and looks how that translates to how they construct, manage, and negotiate their identities in the world. In "Theorizing Lesbian and Gay Parenting: Past, Present, and Future Scholarship", he works to explore how recent critiques of identity theories has changed how people talk about viewing themselves, and what that means for the experiences of people that have non-normative identities within dominant heteronormative social structures. This research is important because

it talks about past research in the queer studies field, and inquires into what can be studied in the future. This article will exploring identity formation, and set up existing knowledge in the field that can be utilized when looking at how the subjects interviewed for this research view their identities as lesbian parents when out in public with their families.

Assumptions and Positionality

I'm entering this research from the specific positionality of being a white, middle-class woman from the United States. My interest in this topic stems from my experiences as a daughter of two lesbian women in the Unites States, and growing up with that family dynamic is what has driven me to research this topic in the Netherlands. Growing up in Texas, the conservatism that I witnessed taught me what others thought a normal family should be, and I wasn't able to freely discuss my parent's relationship or even my overall family dynamic as a result of the environment I was raised in. However, given my position of privilege in America, I realize that my experiences with lesbian parents was not as difficult as it could be. I was fortunate enough to have an extended family that accepted my parents, and I although I was unable to speak about my parent's relationship in school or to my parent's various coworkers, I was still able to have a comfortable home life. Coming from an area of the United States where LGTBQ culture is less accepted, I've noticed a difference in the conversations about these individuals where it seems very matter-of-fact that the community exists and is accepted here in the Netherlands. After the legalization of gay marriage in the Netherlands in 2001, the Netherlands is viewed as a place of tolerance and acceptance for LGBTQ individuals, and I'd like to explore this perception by examining the experiences of lesbian women raising children

in a place of such alleged tolerance. I'm entering this research knowing the existing stereotype

of the Netherlands as a place of freedom due to its tolerance surrounding drugs, prostitution,

and gay marriage, but I think that there will still be existing prejudices around gay people like

stereotypes of their lifestyles or relationships. I'm also entering this research thinking that

lesbian parents will feel generally accepted in their communities, but that they will still encounter

some micro-aggressions, or casual instances of sexism or other forms of discrimination that

they have to face. I don't think that there will be any aggressive and external forms of

discrimination, but I think there will still be heteronormative assumptions that lesbian parents will

have to confront and overcome as they go about their lives. It will be interesting to see how they

identify themselves and their families when they're going about their daily lives, and to see how

they feel they are perceived by others in "tolerant" Dutch society.

Methodology

I'm choosing to do this research using a qualitative methodology, and gathering most of

my field information from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with local lesbian parents. I

primarily spoke with individuals who lived in Amsterdam, but I did interview one couple from a

suburb of Den Haag near the south of Holland. I chose to interview people who lived in

Amsterdam because that was closest to where I was studying and therefore made the most

sense to research, but also heard from various people that Amsterdam was the most liberal out

of the cities in the Netherlands, so I figured it was the best place to explore the idea of Dutch

tolerance in practice. I chose this methodology because I felt that it was the most direct way of

getting to hear the lived experiences of my interview subjects.

Data Collection

I gathered my interview subjects after speaking about my research subject with my host family in Amsterdam and my program director, and they all knew of lesbian women with families of their own that might be open to speaking with me. I wrote out a brief paragraph explaining who I was and the research that I was looking to do, and sent them to my host parents and my program director, who then forwarded it to people that they knew. They contacted them initially for me, and afterwards once I got an email from their recipients expressing their interest in participation, I then contacted them directly. I spoke with each of my interview subjects beforehand over email or Whatsapp, a messaging app, and I asked them to confirm when they were available within the week and where I could meet them for an interview. All of them responded with a time to meet and gave me their home addresses. I interviewed all of my subjects at their own homes, often in the evening after they had come home from work. Overall, I spoke to 9 women, and they were divided into 4 couples and one woman who had a solo interview. Their ages ranged from 27 to 58 years old, and they all were white, middle class couples living in Amsterdam, with the exception of one couple who lived near Den Haag. The interviews ranged from 25 to 45 minutes long, and four of them were conducted in an informal setting at their homes, where their children and spouses were present. Traveling to and conducting the interviews in their homes gave it a informal feel, and I felt like I was able to get a brief sense of their lifestyles when in their homes. In 4 of the interviews, I spoke with women in a pair, so their wives participated in the interviews at the same time. My final interview was different than the others, with one woman present, and we met at a cafe in the daytime instead of her home. When starting each interview, I made sure to let them know what the research was about and what the interview questions would cover. Before conducting each interview, I stated the subject matter of the interview, the maximum time it would take, and I gave them consent forms for them to read and sign. I also gave them the opportunity to keep a copy of the consent forms for their records, and made it clear that whatever information I gathered would be destroyed by the end date of the research project. I additionally offered to send them a copy of

research after it was finished if they were interested. In all of the interviews, I recorded the information on my phone, and then transcribed the full interview onto a document afterwards. With one interview, I was unable to completely get the whole recording because I had technical issues afterwards and lost half of the data, but with all of the other interviews I was able to capture all that was said. I had a list of prepared questions in a notebook that I read from, and expanded upon them if I felt that there was more to say about the subject.

Potential Biases

For the most part, having joint interviews was beneficial for gathering data, yet it still had the potential for possible bias. The women were able to feel comfortable during the interviews having their wives present and I was able to get two perspectives and shared experiences during the conversation, but their answers might have been influenced by their wives presence and might have changed when clarifying an experience or explaining an opinion that their wives might have viewed differently. An additional point of bias within the interviews was the fact that I conducted the interviews in English. Although all the women I spoke with spoke English very well, there were still points where they didn't know an exact translation for what they were trying to say and had to refer to their partner for help translating. Since the interviews were not conducted in their native language, it has the potential to skew data slightly and perhaps not give an entirely accurate picture of what they were trying to say due to a very slight language barrier. Other distractions that might have hindered data collection were the presence of children in the room, and although they were well behaved for the majority of the interviews, they might have distracted the women slightly in the middle of giving responses.

Interview Guidelines

In regards to the interview questions themselves, I asked a multitude of questions that covered issues from their first time thinking about starting a family, from having them consider

advice that they would have for other gay parents. These questions were gathered from existing literature as well as questions I felt held personal importance. They were formatted starting with an introduction into their lives and then became more focused on specific experiences, so that I could begin with background information and then focus on factors of their lives. The questions dealt with topics like personal experiences with discrimination, their attitudes towards parenting, their process having a child, and other questions involving their experiences in public as a family and what they thought of others perceptions of their sexual orientation in the Netherlands. I created my list of interview questions by expanding on topics presented in existing research like the role of donor fathers in their children's lives (Goldberg and Allen, 2013), how they deal with societal gender norms (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011), as well as adding questions I had regarding their personal lives, like personal values as parents and how they explained their family to others. The findings were organized by reviewing the interview transcripts multiple times, reading through them and making initial notes of things that stood out or were interesting. I made connections between the dialogues when finding similar themes in multiple interviews. I then compared the themes to one another to find points of similarity and difference, and then finally narrowed them down to the main topics of interest in the paper. These topics were decided by information the interviewees gave, and I underwent the categorization process without looking for any existing themes or results from prior literature, although it did influence the questions I asked.

Ethics

The ethical issues regarding this research are important because I'm looking into the experiences of a marginalized group of people in society. Sexual minorities like lesbian women are subject to forms of discrimination in their lives, and it's important that the research I'm doing allows a look into their lives but doesn't exploit them or discredit their experiences. I changed

the names of all the subjects to ensure their anonymity, and carefully transcribed their

statements to the best of my ability. Another ethical issue is the fact that I'm looking into their

roles as parents, and although I am not directly speaking with their children, minors are a group

that also need to be treated ethically, so I'm conscious of the indirect role they play in the

research. Although some children were present during my interviews, I only spoke with the

parents, and was careful to not disclose their children's identities, only their gender when

applicable.

Findings and Analysis

 The findings for this research are laid out in themes found in the conversations with the

individuals that were interviewed. These findings were placed into separate sub-topics that

covered their experiences as lesbian parents in the Netherlands and dealt with how their

identities were received by others where they were living. The findings gathered from the

research can be separated into 3 sections, with one section addressing existing social attitudes

and self-perception as married lesbians in the Netherlands, another covering their ideas of

family, from identification within the partnership to donor father relationships, and a final section

that discusses their experiences with existing gendered expectations of their children and what

their family values mean to them. When conducting this research, I was unsure what results I

would find, and wasn't sure to what extent I would find the cultural differences of tolerance and

acceptance in the Netherlands. I quickly found that all of the couples interviewed had absolutely

no problems in their family lives relating to their queerness and their partnerships with other

women. Every couple spoken with reported that their parents were excited when they

announced they were having children, and that those that were available ended up playing a

large role in their grandchildren's lives, babysitting once or twice a week. There seemed no lack

of love and familial and friend support for these women and their families. This initial finding was

pleasantly surprising, and to me emphasized the social acceptability of being gay in the

Netherlands. However, my research was exclusively with white, middle-class women from Amsterdam that came from families with educated backgrounds, and coming from that position of privilege may have also influenced their families opinions on social issues in a way where other communities with dissimilar cultural backgrounds or socioeconomic status might differ.

Social Attitudes and Self-Perception

Within recent history, The Netherlands has been recognized as a place of tolerance and acceptance for people within the LGBTQ community after the official enactment of same-sex marriage in 2001. The subjects that were interviewed benefited from this enactment of LGBTQ rights, and were all in long-term marriages. After interviewing 9 people, they all said that they had never felt discriminated against in the Netherlands as a result of their sexual orientation, just responding with variations of "No, I don't think so", or "No. Not really". There seemed to be a unanimous feeling of positivity and acceptance, and I heard no stories of outright discrimination in their jobs or daily lives, or even familial resistance to their coming-out. As a result, a common point that came up with a few women about being accepted in Dutch culture was that their status as lesbians led to positive feelings of self-importance and confidence. When asked if they had ever felt discriminated against in Dutch society as a result of their sexual orientation, one woman named Lisa discussed her experiences at work where people made gay jokes, but she didn't find that to be threatening or discriminatory.

> "Our parents are completely fine with it, all of our friends, so it gives you a very strong fundamental to cope with other opinions. And I think at work everybody knows I'm gay, I make jokes and I also feel safe about it, like in an ambassador's role. So yeah when there are jokes I am visible and I try to make fun of it but I've never felt threatened."

Her status as a gay woman is known at her work, and despite the presence of jokes, she participates in them and calls on her background of acceptance to know that nothing harmful was meant by it. The mention of an ambassador's role is interesting because it explains how she views herself in a position of representation within her own working environment. By positioning herself as a open member of the gay community who recognizes and participates in jokes at her expense, she is able to be a visible LGBTQ figure, which demonstrates how safe she feels displaying that aspect of her identity. Existing Dutch tolerance towards LGBTQ individuals is also utilized as a source of safety and comfort by other interview subjects, like in the response of her partner, Julie, who reported even stronger feelings of comfort. When asked about her experiences with discrimination, she responded,

> *"....people look at you, so you know you're different but I don't feel, we don't feel, not like oh you're gay so [you] can't have this, or less opportunities. I do recognize that we do- we do hear a different stories but we are lucky. If I feel discriminated I always have this feeling of su-superiority? Yeah. (laughs) because I feel mainstream, and at that point when someone does that, I think- you don't know how it works in the Netherlands."*

Another interview subject, Clara, also spoke of feeling very safe with her wife in Amsterdam, saying,

> *"Yeah, actually in Amsterdam by default, I try not to think about it, and just hold her hand, and it's just when i spend some time abroad that i think "Oh yeah, we really have it easy here". And also yeah, I feel some sort of sense of entitlement that it's like my city and I can do what I want (laughs)".*

Her sense of privilege as a result of her inherent safety as a gay woman in the Netherlands attests to the personal safety and freedom experienced by the research subjects living in Dutch society.

However, most spoke of feeling or knowing a difference between themselves as gay people and others around them in mainstream culture, and this feeling of otherness can be connected to the structures of power in everyday life. This structure can be explained existing social dynamics using power over others (through speech, labeling others, social hierarchies, etc) to treat some social groups differently than others. Michel Foucault wrote about individuality and categorization, and how power works to "categorize the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him" (Foucault 1982, 781). This recognition stems from "differentiations' determined by past laws and social status, and by society recognizing these lesbian women as "different", they are subsequently marked and categorized by others as a result. One couple, Vera and Anna, spoke of their feelings when identifying themselves as one of their children's mothers in school, and how it seemed very personal after both identifying themselves as mothers of their child.

> *"Sometimes your child is going to school and you have a meeting with all parents and the teacher and they introduce you 'I'm the father, I'm the mother, I'm the mother of this, and I'm the mother'- and she (*referring to Anna*) says 'I'm the mother' and then eh? (confused noise) So then we have to explain that they have two mothers. We always have to explain something and sometimes i think I don't know all these other people so I don't like to do that.*

When asked if it feels personal, and why it might feel that way if they're just explaining their parental relationship, they responded-

"Yeah a bit, a bit personal, yes."

"That's a good question."

"Yeah because you're different. I don't like to be different sometimes."

I then asked if it feels like they're making themselves stand out, and they agreed. Vera feels that identifying her relationship in front of everyone at her child's school feels like publicly marking herself as different, and it's a personal feeling that she doesn't like.

Another interview subject, Alice, spoke of the reactions she receives after she identifies herself with her family out in public.

> *"The first thing people let you know when you tell them that you're gay is like, "Oh, I know somebody….", like they need to let you know that they're okay with it. I'd be just as happy if you didn't say that, it doesn't make it ok because you know someone already.... No, they mostly say I know somebody that "has that" (laughs)".*

Having someone try to relate that they know someone "has that"- or knows someone who's also gay, works to continue this categorization of difference, and by trying to add to the conversation with their alleged familiarity with gay people, it places Alice's identity as a gay woman as something that needs be recognized and accepted by a heterosexual member of society in a conversation. It also allows people to view gayness as a separating factor of identity, and by creating this sense of difference it allows people to question it, sometimes inappropriately. As discussed by Foucault in "The History of Sexuality pt. 2", "The legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion. It tended to function as a norm, one that was stricter, perhaps, but quieter ….. Whence the setting apart of the "unnatural" as a specific dimension in the field of sexuality." (1985, 320) By placing "unnatural" sexualities into a specific category, it allows the heterosexual and "legitimate" couple the right to more privacy, and the non-normative behaviors, in this case homosexuality, are then viewed as acceptable to be questioned. In the case of Margaret and Sara, when they started having children and Sara became pregnant, it opened a window for questioning by heterosexual people that they found surprisingly invasive.

> *" Everybody wants to know a little more about how we organized it an-"*
>
> *"Yeah everybody. Not only friends."*

"Not only friends, no, but friends are ok. But also people you don't know or rather know, they were- they felt like they can ask everything-"

"Yeah it made me really- it's a really weird question! But are you going to have sex with the father-to-be or uh… at some point it's just like we decide, ok we're not going to discuss anything about it, we're going to keep it to ourselves-

"Well it was like god, I'm not asking straight people how they have sex to have a child."

When asked to expand on why others would think that was an appropriate response to Sara's pregnancy, they responded:

"Yeah well I think like 'yeah I'm just curious!' and I was like, ok but its not your- its really inappropriate."

"Maybe I think they can ask because it's so weird that they think well if it's here then we can ask maybe everything, then it's not so weird."

"It's because we are different, not the normal way, yeah."

"Yeah yeah. And when we said back there that 'I don't ask you', then they realize that it is not so different from their own situation maybe. Yeah, I don't know."

This experience of questioning from others that they don't know demonstrates the prevalence of this idea of "difference". By choosing to have a child in "not the normal way", they feel that others feel that difference makes it reasonable to question. Margaret and Sara shared their experiences being gay parents and by explaining that they wouldn't ask a straight person those kinds of personal questions, it creates a possibility to change the minds of those asking. As As With this new association of "gay" and "family" in people's minds, it has the potential for traditional conversations on sexuality to move on from arguments about similarity and difference: When lesbians and gay men can present themselves as fully social persons capable of laying claim to families, their distinctive sexual identities need no longer sharply segregate them as members of a species unto itself (Weston 1991, 93). By being able present themselves

as a members of a lesbian family, it gives visibility to other aspects of their lives, and they try to change existing ways of thinking by showing that they're more than just their sexual orientation. Although this difference of sexual identity may be questioned and scrutinized as a source of difference, it is still widely accepted where they live and work in Amsterdam. However, that might not be the case in other locations in the Netherlands.

Despite the answers given that spoke highly of tolerant social attitudes in the Netherlands, there seemed to be an understanding by these women that attitudes were less open in more rural areas than in the bigger cities. The women interviewed were predominantly living Amsterdam, with the exception of one couple that lived near Den Haag. When asked if they were more comfortable living in a bigger city as lesbian women, they spoke of the tolerance in Amsterdam, and added that attitudes vary depending on where you are in the country. One woman who was interviewed, Clara, originally came from a small town and was now living in Amsterdam. When asked if she felt a difference in social attitudes or had negative experiences elsewhere she responded,

> "*Oh yes. Well, not really consciously but I think now when I go back to that town… I notice how more- yeah. It's not really very conservative town, but still it feels a lot more conservative than Amsterdam. When you look around, people sort of look the same, there's no diversity…. And I never really had any bad experiences? But there are areas there that I wouldn't want to hold my wife's hand".*

The conservative lifestyle in those surroundings explains why some would feel less comfortable living there as lesbian woman with a more "diverse" sexuality, and the mindset behind it can be explained as a result of currently living in an area that's seen as more modern. Another aspect of modernization that is related to attitudes towards homosexuality is the degree of urbanization (Kuyper 2012, 20). Several studies have shown that people living in urban areas report more tolerant attitudes to homosexuality than people living in more rural areas. (Anderson and Fetner,

2008b; Van den Akker et al. 2012; Anderson and Fetner 2008a; Van den Akker et al 2012; Stulhofer and Rimac 2009; Ohlander et al. 2005).

An additional concern with living outside of Amsterdam is a religious aspect, which one interview subject, Margaret, saw as a potential problem for her children. As to living

> *"in the country… it depends. It depends on [the] religious town, which we have*
>
> *[in the Netherlands]. I wouldn't have chosen to raise my children there because maybe*
>
> *at school there would be- how do you say- treated not nice."*

This concern of bullying is rooted in a religious aspect, which is a factor that connects to Butler's theory of a very specific sense of modernity. This "sense of modernity is maintained through a dogmatic grounding, and that already we are introduced to a kind of dogmatism that belongs to a particular secular formation (Butler 2008, 5). The dogmatism that Butler speaks of explains how modernity considered to be present society free from religious influence, and this is seen as undeniably true due to existing dogma, or the facts that the dominant figures in society present as undeniable truths. The subjects interviewed see this acceptance of gay culture in Amsterdam as a truth free from religious influence or possible negativity, and therefore an objective fact of their modern way of life. Another woman also spoke of the ease that came from it, saying,

> *"Living in Amsterdam-in that way it's really easy. So eh, it all helped to so that we*
>
> *could just freely talk about it, there was no other objection to- to do it in secret or*
>
> *something, no church."*

Although the women interviewed all felt comfortable in their status as gay women in Amsterdam, they were conscious of their location in The Netherlands, and were able to recognize their privilege that came from living in the country. An interesting factor that emerged was that out of the few experiences of negativity they reported, they stemmed from people within migrant communities, and were identified as "other" by their nationalities. One woman spoke of an

elderly Turkish man who "*mumbled something not so nice*", and another spoke of a "*Moroccan guy who was giving a negative comment*". Kupyer writes on this, speaking of a factor often discussed as a possible explanation for attitudes to homosexuality is migration. In countries with relatively high levels of acceptance, in particular, immigration from less tolerant regions is often perceived as a threat to the tolerance of homosexuality in the host country (2012, 61). The experiences of women with people staring or making a rude comment can be explained by the different cultures the men were from, and because they chose to include their nationalities as a descriptive factor it can be assumed that the interview subject's consider intolerance to be linked to members of migrant communities based on their experiences.

Ideas of Family

These experiences as gay women living in the Netherlands emphasize attitudes as and towards LGBTQ people, and shows how these women choose to respond towards different reactions about their sexual identities. In their own lives, however, they are able to choose how they construct meaning, from their experiences as women and as mothers who have a family. A common idea of "family" that was mentioned in the interviews was where two people, regardless of gender, can love and support their children in a safe environment. When asked about their role as parents, several couples interviewed agreed that "*the basics are the same*", with one woman, Margaret, responding *"that there are two people who are loving their children and- give them a warm and safe youth, and try to make some nice people of them and get education and so on."* Another interview subject named Hannah, agreed, saying she thought the "*root of a family are the people that raise you, that love you, that see you everyday*". This idea of family that doesn't necessarily depend on gender differences is reflected in existing research, and "a vast body of research indicates that….two compatible parents provide advantages for children over single parents. This appears to be true irrespective of parental gender, marital status, sexual identity, or biogenetic status. (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010, 16). Many of the

interviewees see family as two people caring for children, regardless of gender. However, gender does play a role in their lives, however, because others outside the home view their status as women and as mothers but not always together as a legitimate, non-deviant couple. Their gender is a factor in the concept of heteronormativity, which is the dominant framework for how relationships are seen in society. In other words, it's the "mundane, everyday ways that heterosexuality is privileged and taken for granted as normal and natural" (Martin 2009, 190). The assumption that heteronormativity perpetuates is that couples and/or families are made up of two people, a man and a woman, and that they follow typical heterosexual expectations and roles in society. "Heteronormativity sustains itself by ignoring the possibility of any "homosexual" relationships or identities and by describing heterosexual structures and categories as the singular option. For example, under a heteronormative framing, terms such as "the family," "the mother," or "the grandfather" are presumed to be heterosexual" (Gibson 2010, 242). These assumptions are recognized by the women that were interviewed, and their experiences being ignored or confused by others takes away from their identities as lesbian mothers. One couple, Alice and Hannah, describe their experiences where people assume they aren't together or are both single mothers.

> "The only thing I found a little upsetting is that when we are together, like yesterday we were at her office and then we were both there and both have one child on our arm, and people ask "Whose are they?" like which belongs to which, but we are a family, so that's the only thing that I- that would definitely be different if one of us was married to a man and had children."

When asked if they have had similar experiences like that before, her wife continued, saying-

> "Yeah. people assume we are sisters, or if we go baby-swimming they think we are a mother with a baby- single mothers with children or a baby instead of two with twins."

Although these women construct their own ideas of family, they are still assumed to be single mothers or related, and this heteronormative assumption of family by others in society erases

their status as lesbian parents with a family. A lesbian mother regularly experiences social legitimacy on the basis of her status as a mother because of the presumed assumption that she is heterosexual. In other words, lesbian mothers' sexual identities are often erased or at least become publicly less visible by their status as mothers (Reimann, 1997; A. Stein, 1997).

This idea of heteronormativity, as well as needing a male presence in children's lives, is also something they recognize especially when they were choosing to start a family. The women that were interviewed all recognized the challenge in have a family as lesbians, and the process of finding a donor for their children was something that made them consider what it meant to have this new relationship in their lives. By choosing to have a donor to create a child, they again subvert typical normative assumptions of what makes a family. According to Dempsey (2010), lesbian mothers who pursue insemination both innovate new forms of kinship as they enact complex reproductive relationships, and also draw from established (hetero)normative dimensions of kinship, including the assumption of greater maternal power in the reproductive contract (Goldberg and Allen 2013, 2). By choosing to create their own reproductive relationships with others by choosing them as a donor, lesbian mothers challenge existing ideas of what makes a mother and a father, as well as give themselves as women more power in the creation of a life. The women that spoke on their relationships with their children's donors were very aware of the seriousness of the relationship, and often chose people who would be present in their children's life but not in a dominant parental role. The question of "having a known father or an unknown father" came up in a few couples experiences, and this decision was something they had to think through. In the case of Margaret and Sara, they had to consider all of the options when starting the parenting process.

> "I think in the way to it, to the moment that we really had started with having children-"

> "It was so big, and so- how are we gonna find someone and who is it going to be, there was no friend of ours where we both had the feeling well it should be him-"

> *"No, but that was also the point where we decided we wanted a dad who is known or somebody who could be known for the children. So we decided not to have, to use a sperm bank, I don't know the word, but also that before you went there or adoption, of course we talked about all the possibilities. Yeah, so it affects a lot."*
>
> *"Ehm, so we decided it would be very important to have a man, who would be if the children would like to, be someone for them. Not really a father, necessarily-"*
>
> *"We would be the family… and like the choice for the schools or the shoes or whatever."*
>
> *"And also the legal parents, I would say."*
>
> *"But we would, we preferred someone who was known to them."*
>
> *"And we also thought it would be nice if we find something who, who is not really, it shouldn't be someone very close, because we thought that's too risky for maybe friendship that's there, but we thought, yeah that was it actually. Well we thought when you have to look for somebody, we look in our friends and then friends on friends."*

By choosing to look for a donor through their network of friends instead of the other options available to them, it set up Margaret and Sara's future donor relationship as a something that will benefit them, by choosing a male friend to help create a child but keeping the parental rights. This allows for a guarantee of legal rights if the agreement was successful, and this creation of a family by two women and a male friend uses the basic building blocks of family formation by borrowing, theoretically and practically, from established heteronormative patterns. At the same time, however, they are creating new pathways to parenthood, new familial forms, and new kinship structures, by (re)shaping biological, legal, and chosen kin ties in complex and innovative ways (Biblarz & Savci). This can be both positive and negative, using a friend for insemination, and complications can arise that might challenge things. In the case of Hannah and Alice, that was something they recognized, and the familiarity that comes from having a known donor was something that they felt could get uncomfortable.

"We talked about it and first we considered having a friend as our donor, we

talked about that and had a friend that also wanted to be part of a process, but then he

had a girlfriend and we started to think about it a little bit more and we didn't necessarily

like his girlfriend-"

When asked if it would it have been a co-parenting situation, she responded:

"No, just a donor, but he's part of our lives so we would have seen them at

parties and just come by and we were worried that if- say his relationship didn't work out

or if he had children of his own that our friendship would get complicated. So we decided

that it would be best for the peace of mind for everybody to just have an anonymous

donor, through the clinic, so that we know that we have all the medical information but

also that they can find the donor when their older. When they're about 18, they'll get a

letter saying who it is and then they have the right to meet him. So that was important for

us."

The importance of having an unknown donor father allows for the mothers to have complete

control over the child, but the presence of a known donor, despite the risk of complication, also

creates the opportunity to establish a relationship between the donor and the children. In the

case of other couples, like Vera and Anna, they also arranged it so

"we had a daughter and she had a son but they have the same father, so we

were both pregnant from the same father. And we arranged it so we would be

responsible for the education of the children, and he would have no role in the

education…....He visited the children but only to visit."

His role in the children's lives is still removed, but "*it's important also for them [the children].*"

She spoke of the current relationship her family had with their donor, saying, "*they go have*

dinner with him, and our daughter just moved out so he was helping painting her things, and

sometimes we go on holiday together in the past, and stuff like that". Having a donor father that

the children could meet or have some contact with if they desired seemed to be an issue of

importance, and the choice to have a known donor was considered so that their children could know him if they wanted to. Julie and her wife thought that

> *"it's nice, its necessary for the children, so when they turn 18 they can go and really [know] from the beginning, if its possible eh? That you know ok, so the guy that is our friend, that's always coming [to the house], he's your donor father…. So that's what we found, that we had the luxury that there were several friends, heterosexual in relationships, friends of ours with children who offered to have a conversation about it. So they said if you think about children, maybe we can- help out."*

Having their friends as an available resource gave them the opportunity to have their children know their donor father, and that was something they felt was important.

Gendered Expectations and Family Values

Their experiences finding a donor father also brought up follow-up questions about gender roles and the importance of a masculine influence in their children's lives. Although the parents were comfortable in their ability as parents to raise children, they were aware of the differences in gender that they benefitted from and the potential importance of having a male figure, or the known donor, in their children's lives. When asked if they thought others saw them differently as two women out with their children compared to gay men with children, Clara, a woman who has a co-parenting relationship with her wife and two male friends of hers, said

> *"Mmm yeah, very much so. I think people are very- already much more used to seeing lesbian couples with kids then seeing male gay couples with kids, and we never- when we explain that we are both the mommies, we never get the question 'So where's the daddy?'. But when the guys have to explain about or when they see that they're together with a kid, they always ask "So where's the mom?". So they always have to acknowledge that there's another part of their family, and we- they don't really assume that there's another part of the family."*

Vera, another interview subject, also recognized the gender assumptions that came with raising children, saying *"maybe for gay people it's more difficult, because maybe two fathers- it's more, it's raising people is something, a lot of people think it's more something for a woman.*" The general assumption of women's roles as mothers leads to more questioning when two men are in the primary position of parents, and this demonstrates how the social acceptance of LGB individuals seems rooted in a broader gender belief system that focuses on appropriate pathways and roles for women and men in society (Kuyper 2012, 32). Women are seen as mothers and unquestioned in their legitimacy, and this mainstream idea is also recognized by Sara, another mother. She noticed that *"in the mainstream thinking, it's usually maybe, yeah like traditional thinking that a woman is the basic- the most important person in the family for a child, so maybe in that way.... that it's more difficult for two guys*."

However, she notes the importance of having a male figure in her children's lives through her choice of having a known donor.

> *"I think there's another… dynamic? When there's a man and a woman in the family. Or P, the dad...there's another- a difference I think with energy….and so there is- there must be a difference there. But they have all my nephews and who are more- my brother- they have a lot and they live close by so it's what I was hoping when the whole thing was just a theory, about having kids, that there would be other men for them to- yeah, be an example in their lives."*

Existing research shows that in some cases, women wish to secure a known donor so that their child will have at least one good male role model, and that's demonstrated in Sara's desire to have a male influence in her child's life (Goldberg & Allen, 2007). Women may view contact with men as valuable because it is a parent's responsibility to prepare children for social interaction, and women may value men's contribution with children in terms of their higher activity level, playful interaction style, and physically arousing play (Paquette, 2004; Teti, Bond & Gibbs, 1988). By recognizing a different "dynamic", Sara consciously wanted a male presence in her

children's lives to give them the opportunity for different kind of socialization rather than only having a female influence from their two mothers. Securing proper gender role models allows lesbian and gay parents to strategically negotiate their face-to-face accountability (to friends, family members, acquaintances, and strangers) which manifests from the cultural narrative that children need a male and a female role model in order to mature as appropriately gendered adults (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2010, 342).

The women noticed possible gendered expectations of parenthood in their experiences as lesbian parents compared to male gay parents, and some were conscious of them when choosing whether to have a known donor or not. They additionally encountered gendered expectations for their children when raising them, and their choices when faced with normative gender roles was something that they consciously considered in their parenting. In the case of Julie and Lisa, they were aware of gendered expectations in their choice of clothing for their daughter and play toys for their sons, and although they tried to avoid it, it manifested in other ways.

"I think we do have the gender neutral- we're playing the gender neutral card sometimes like in clothing, for T, who is a bit boyish."

(laughs, shakes head)

" No? Well, she was but now peer pressure forced her to become a girl. (both laugh)

"No, we influence, no I think we actually influence- because when she goes shopping with us, then she chooses neutral clothes, but when she goes shopping with my mother, she comes back with all this very girly things, so the question is, is she just fluid with us and giving us what she wants and my mother what she wants? So I think she's too young to know for sure what she wants."

"We are more conscious that girls don't have to play with dolls and guys don't have to play with cars, but the funny thing is the guys only want to become firefighters-"

"Football players-"

"We don't stimulate it, in our opinion, but we have it all because they ask for it, and we-our daughter never, we played with our daughter several times and she was never this (gestures) or nothing and the guys are like (gasps) "Omg we're in a plane-oh look outside there's a car and a firetruck" and that's something, yeah, that just happens."

Biblarz explores this with research on children parented by lesbians, showing that the conscious choice to be gender neutral and encourage a wide variety of options can be seen as a deliberate rejection of "norms" rather than a failure to attain them (Stacey and Biblarz 2001, 247). However, despite gender fluidity in forms of dress and play, a bigger issue within lesbian parenting is the values passed on in regards to their sons. Lesbian mothers raising sons may face unique tensions in wanting social and socioeconomic success for their sons when that may mean colliding with cultural ideas of hegemonic masculinity that encourage male achievement but involve the subordination of women. To teach their sons to reject dominant definitions of masculinity risks potentially subjecting sons to ridicule and obstacles in the extra-family environment (Biblarz and Savci, 2010, 4). This problem was discussed by Hannah and Alice, who are raising twins, a boy and a girl. Hannah was conscious of differences in gender roles growing up, and it affects the way she sees her children's future responsibilities.

"I know in my family that my brothers were treated differently than I was, not in particular that I preferred it that way. For example on birthday parties I was expected to help with food and beverage and make everyone- entertain a little bit, while they could just go upstairs and play a game. And I would hope for [my son] that he would also partake in, for example, entertainment just to learn what that's like, so I think for him, being surrounded by 3 women, with 2 moms, and 3 female cats, so there's a lot of estrogen in the house. He's going to be very sensitive probably, very-

"So but we also want him to like, to like, to get the chance to be just male and and 'oh I don't want to do that". Yeah, yeah especially when he gets an age where he

says he doesn't want to do those kind of things, yeah then he has a right to do that, and

you have to look at what they need and anticipate from that. And it may be that she

(gestures to her daughter) doesn't want to wear dresses or something then also that's

ok, to look how they want to."

This unique situation is something that they recognize, and although they have registered the

possibility of their son being sensitive as a result of being raised in a mainly female

environment, they still want to allow him to "just be male" and opt out from more supposedly

female responsibilities, like entertaining guests when they visit. By recognizing gendered

expectations of children, subverting them, but still being sympathetic to their son's eventual

expressions of masculinity, they place themselves in a strange position of acceptance of

deviation from the norms but still upholding the expectation that he will inevitably reject feminine

responsibilities like entertaining as a result of being male. This position stems from their

experiences as women living and interacting with societal norms, and emphasizes how

gendered experiences shape a person's attitude and expectations. Their positions as lesbian

mothers shows how in addition to sexuality, gender is an unavoidable consideration in any

construction of lesbian parents (Gibson 2010, 242). Alice's recognition and subversion of

gender norms as a result of her gender and sexuality continues when discussing her children

dressing up, saying

> *"So if he wants to be Ella from frozen or whatever, then that's fine, and if she*
>
> *wants to be Robin Hood, you know, bless her heart. I think because we are both gay we*
>
> *are- we would support them a little bit more than an average parent would, so they have*
>
> *all the opportunities that they want and need."*

Alice and her wife's acceptance of their children's activities stems from their experiences feeling

different in mainstream society as a result of their sexual orientation, and is explained as the

reason that they're more open to non-normative behaviors.

This concept of being more open and more tolerant to a variety of behaviors as a result of their sexual orientation was also mentioned by other women in their interviews, specifically in the values that the couples wished to pass on to their children. Margaret and Sara feel similarly, explaining that

> *"We have, maybe, values [of open-mindedness] that are a little bit more important because we have the experience- that it's so important that we can have this situation. That of course maybe has influence on what we teach them. Yeah so always-think your background and history plays an important role in that."*

Their background and history seemed to shape their viewpoints, and subsequently influence what they teach their children. This is also explored in another perspective, where Clara, feels that her children will be open-minded as a result of her experiences in a family parented by women. She spoke of wanting her daughters to be "open to anything", through teaching them to try new foods and experiences, but also as a result of her parents and her upbringing.

> *"Yeah, I think from a very early age she has to, she will experience that even though we're different, she has a very loving- she has all the love in the world so she will be open-minded because of the situation".*

The values passed down by lesbian parents are a reflection of their experiences and the ways they want their children to see the world. Their non-traditional families are a source of difference, but these parents feel this difference can allow for a new perspective, and can increase the child's appreciation of diversity by providing a nontraditional adult role model (Riddle, 1978). That is, having a parent who is different makes it easier for a child to be open-minded and independent. They also feel their family situation gives their children strength, sensitivity, compassion, and maturity beyond their years. (Clay 1990, 34). The lesbian mothers that gave their accounts ultimately reflected on their luck, that they felt accepted to be who they

were, and that they were happy with their lives and how their relationships with their donor fathers were. Despite the difficulties some faced with finding potential donors, as well as navigating the emotional challenges that came with starting parenthood, they all reported a sense of satisfaction with their lives as lesbian parents in the Netherlands, and were working to raise their children in safe and accepting environments. These women's experiences as lesbian mothers shows how it's a negotiated identity between the marginalized position of lesbianism and the mainstream and esteemed position of motherhood, and the assumptions that they are single or heterosexual show how the dominant ideologies still influence their lives. (Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999). Research into these societal positions is important for members of the gay and lesbian communities, and such studies provide an opportunity to put one's own relationship experiences in the context of the spectrum of possible relationships. In this way, research on lesbian and gay male couples contributes not only to our knowledge about homosexuality but also to our more general knowledge about close human relationships (Peplau 1980, 82).

Conclusion

This research looked at how experiences and social perceptions of lesbian parents differed in Dutch society given their personal identities and the existing ideas of tolerance that stem from the enactment of same-sex marriage in the Netherlands in 2001. The findings showed that three major themes came up in the discussions of lesbian parenthood, and they dealt with social status and self-perception of being gay in the Netherlands, their ideas of family and how that relates to dominant heteronormative understandings of family, and how they deal with gendered expectations for their children and their own values they want to pass down. These findings show how the interview subjects had similar experiences of mainstream acceptance of them and their families, but their feelings surrounding others perceptions of them

differed depending on the individual. Some felt supported and empowered by their identities as lesbian women in the Netherlands, while others felt that their identities put them in a place of difference that was questioned by others in society. These findings demonstrate a baseline of self-awareness of their own difference, and this research explores how these women understand and work through these differences that have been assigned to them because of their sexual orientation. The women in this research demonstrate how they recognize their categorization as different as a way to teach their children to be open-minded, and reflect upon their comfort as Dutch citizens to emphasize their feelings of personal safety and to explain how threats to it came from non-native individuals in Dutch society. In a more personal social circle, however, there was less negativity, and my initial findings of complete family and friend acceptance was pleasantly surprising, and to me emphasized the social acceptability of being gay in the Netherlands. However, my research was exclusively with white, middle-class women from Amsterdam that came from families with educated backgrounds, and coming from that position of privilege may have also influenced their families opinions on social issues like LGBTQ acceptance in a way where other communities with dissimilar cultural backgrounds or socioeconomic status might differ. This research only looks at the experiences of these white, middle class women living in or near Amsterdam, and more information can be found if the boundaries of the research were expanded. Future research has the potential to gather more information by looking at different forms of sexual identity like gay fathers with children, or looking at women of color with different cultural and religious backgrounds, or even focusing on people that live in more rural areas where there might be different social attitudes. They might have different experiences about inhabiting the marginalized position of pink or queer parenthood, and could share insight into their lives to benefit future studies about marginalized parenthood. This research on lesbian parenting is important because it has the opportunity to appeal to several audiences due to the subjects intersecting points of identity as women, sexual minorities, and as well as being parents in the Netherlands. Studies of gay male and lesbian

couples serve to discredit myths about LGBTQ people that have been prevalent in society and

provide the basis for a factual depiction of homosexual relationships, and a realistic look at

these relationships may then increase visibility and awareness of LGBTQ issues and

experiences in society.

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Appendix

Interview Guide-

1. Introductions
2. When did you first start to think about having a family?
3. Did you think you'd have children when you were younger?
4. How do you think being lesbian has impacted your experience having children?
   a. Were there particular challenges in having children as a result of your sexual orientation?

5. How did you choose to have children?
   a. Why did you choose that method?

6. Do you think being a lesbian couple with children influences people's attitudes more than being a gay couple with children?

7. Have you ever felt discriminated against in Dutch society as a result of your sexual orientation?

8. Do you feel like you can be open about your sexuality in daily life?

9. How have your family and friends reacted to your having children?
   a. How has your family participated in your children's life?

10. Do you feel the need to identify your family dynamic when meeting other parents?
      a.   How do you introduce your family to others?
      b.   Do you feel comfortable using terms like wife/partner?
11. Have you noticed any negative reactions when out in public with your whole family?
      a.   Do you think living in Amsterdam has had an effect on your experiences?
12. Do you think you parent differently than your parents did?
13. Do you have any particular values or qualities you'd like to expose your children to?
14. How would you feel if your children turned out to be gay?
15. How difficult was it to have a child?
      a.   Were there any particular steps you had to take that you found challenging?
16. Did you find the resources available to you helpful or not?
17. Do you have any advice for other LGBTQ parents looking to have children?

Interview Request-

Hi, my name is Sophia Ladner and I'm currently a student with the SIT program in Amsterdam. I have an independent study project that I'm working on this semester, and I'm interested in the experiences of lesbian and gay parents in the Netherlands. As a child raised by two mothers in the conservative state of Texas, I learned from an early age that my parents were seen as different than other parents, and I grew up wondering why it was something I could never talk about. I know now that's because of the social attitudes and values of where I grew up, and as a result I'm interested in researching is the experiences of LGBTQ families having and raising children in the Netherlands. I'd like to find some couples to interview about their lives and their experiences starting families, and what it's like going through the process in Dutch society. Thank you for your time! I hope to hear back soon.