Finding the other in mother: Queering social scripts for mothers and teachers

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FINDING THE OTHER IN MOTHER: QUEERING
SOCIAL SCRIPTS FOR MOTHERS
AND TEACHERS

by

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1998

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ABSTRACT

Finding the Other in Mother: Queering Social Scripts for Mothers and Teachers

by

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This qualitative study examined social scripts for mothers and teachers through the lens of queer theory. It employed the constructs of normal and deviant as a method for destabilizing these scripts as part of a larger project of promoting social justice around sexual difference. Participants consisted of eight lesbian mothers with school aged children; five women whose roles included mother, educator, and lesbian; and ten public school teachers. Data sources included one focus group interview with lesbian mothers and two focus group interviews with teachers, follow-up interviews with seven teachers and seven mothers, and two individual interviews with each mother/educator/lesbian. Data were analyzed through examination of the transcripts for statements of normal and deviant. These statements were used to identify the social scripts for mothers and teachers as revealed by participants. Findings centered on participants’ articulation of heteronormative social scripts. Participants interpreted scripts for mothers and teachers in ways that positioned heterosexuality as normal and categorized non-heterosexuality as
deviant and problematic. This suggests that sexual difference is not included in current educational and social discourses. A key implication of this study involves the importance of destabilizing social scripts for mothers and teachers in a way that creates a space for sexual difference in teacher education.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Friday before Father’s Day, Casey’s first grade teacher led the class in designing ties for their dads. The students wrote their fathers’ names in the center of the tie and drew pictures of their dads. When Casey arrived home that afternoon, her lesbian mothers read, “Happy Father’s Day, Pete. Love, Casey.” They asked their daughter about the project, only to hear that since she doesn’t have a dad, Casey invented one. Casey’s mothers had spoken with this teacher about their relationship at the beginning of the school year. The teacher had nodded politely, but she asked no questions. Casey’s mothers wonder why the teacher, knowing Casey’s family, would give such an assignment.

I heard this story during an interview for a pilot study. One of Casey’s moms told me that she could not believe “that it would be the year 2005 and we would still be talking about diversity with teachers.” Her other mother said, “A lot of people have two moms, two dads, two grandmas, aunts, uncles, green, blue, purple. Families are constructed so differently, teachers have become almost numb to that.” This study is located at the intersection of classroom teachers and lesbian mothers, adding another dimension to concepts of diversity within teacher education. It examines cultural norms similar to those negotiated by Casey’s moms and her teachers on a daily basis. The results of this study are not intended to indicate the universal experiences of lesbian
mothers and their children’s teachers. Listening to specific teachers, lesbian mothers, and women who are mothers, lesbians and teachers talk about their experiences, though, provides a window into a world of competing discourses and social scripts.

I first met Casey and her mothers well before my pilot study with them. My interest in Casey’s story and similar experiences stems, in part, from my own experiences in lesbian relationships. Discussions regarding having children inevitably led to questions about the experiences possible children would have in school. I spoke with Casey’s mothers not only as a researcher, but also as a scholar who yearned to provide Casey and her sister with better school experiences, as a teacher educator who wanted to prepare teachers to work with students from diverse backgrounds, and as a lesbian who wanted to know what I could anticipate were I to have children. Although I have not yet experienced motherhood, I continue to read the literature and listen to participants from the perspective of a potential lesbian mother.

These experiences, coupled with reading queer theory, shaped my thinking about the intersection of lesbian motherhood and schools. I began to consider how cultural norms impact lesbian mothers and their experiences within their children’s schools as well as how lesbian mothers’ presence shapes cultural norms within schools. As a result, I pose the following research questions: What social scripts do participants reveal for mothers and teachers? How do participants interpret these scripts? How is deviance constituted through the articulation of these scripts? It is my intention that answering these questions will impact my own understanding as a teacher educator in addition to providing practical implications for lesbian mothers, teachers, and teacher educators. In
essence, I want to inform Casey’s mothers and teachers and to introduce teachers and teacher educators to Casey and her family.

Difference and Teacher Education

Teacher education and research on teaching have become increasingly focused on student diversity, and attention to students’ backgrounds has provided teacher education with the idea of “culturally relevant” teaching (Banks et al., 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995). “Knowledge of self and of others (students, parents, community) is an essential foundation for constructing evaluating, and altering curriculum and pedagogy so that it is responsive to students” (Banks et al, 2005, p. 245). In order to teach students effectively, teachers must grow to understand the language, values, and culture of the communities that students represent. Rather than imposing the dominant culture’s ideals, culturally relevant teaching challenges students to employ their own cultural knowledge and compels teachers to recognize the value of such knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Such teaching requires attention to difference among students. It is therefore useful to examine how diversity is constructed and defined within education. To this point definitions of diversity in teacher education have been somewhat narrow. Dilworth and Brown (2001) explained a general approach to diversity in which a single dichotomy exists: White and “other”. Darling Hammond and Bransford’s (2005) Preparing Teachers for a Changing World provided a broader description of difference, "Individuals' worldviews are not universal but are greatly influenced by their life experiences, gender, race, ethnicity, and social-class background" (p. 36). This list is akin to what Letts (2002) described as a “laundry list” of differences, brainstorming possible types of diversity and prescribing various approaches to meet the needs of each group on
the list. He considered this approach to be problematic not because of the categories that are listed, but because of those that are not.

Sexual orientation is strikingly absent from categories of diversity in teacher education and research on teaching.

Most would agree that any teacher education program that does not prepare its students for the demands of a diverse classroom is failing them. Yet when it comes to readying educators to deal effectively with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) students, there is a virtual silence—few public demands and little reform of undergraduate and graduate curricula. (Lipkin, 2002, p. 13)

This absence marks a shortcoming within teacher education. Ladson-Billings (2000) reminded educators and researchers that we must distinguish between minority groups’ experiences rather than assuming that all minorities experience school in the same way. “When we understand the ways in which oppression has worked against many groups of people based on their race, culture, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation, we must recognize that there may be analogous experiences that are not necessarily equivalent ones” (p. 207).

Failure to include sexual orientation in school policies, research agendas, and curricula has potentially insidious consequences. Curricula rarely portray LGBT individuals in a positive light; silence dominates school discourses regarding variations in sexual orientation (Kosciw & Diaz, 2005). When LGBT issues are included in textbooks, it is often done in a negative light, with sexually transmitted diseases, teenage pregnancy, and sexual minorities falling into the same categories in high school and college health and adolescent development texts (Young & Middleton, 2002). Teachers often feel
unprepared to address LGBT concerns in their classrooms, a sentiment which often results in ignoring sexual difference altogether (Lipkin, 2002; Maney & Cain, 1997).

Students who face silence surrounding their sexual orientation experience isolation and a lack of acceptance within schools, experiences that often lead to dropping out of school (Herr, 1997). In addition to feelings of isolation, LGBT students often face verbal and physical harassment from their peers. A study of over 500 sexual minority high school students throughout the U.S. revealed that nearly three quarters felt unsafe in their schools, and that teachers rarely intervened upon hearing homophobic slurs (Kosciw & Diaz, 2005). And heterosexual children of LGBT parents experience the same level of bullying and teasing as their LGBT peers (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2003). In addition to jeopardizing the school experiences of LGBT youth, silence surrounding sexual orientation impedes some LGBT parents from participating in their children’s education (Casper & Schultz, 1999).

This study gives voice to populations that have been silenced in education, including lesbian teachers and lesbian mothers. It adds to the diversity literature within teacher education through a focus on multiple family structures and sexual identities. Yet this study moves beyond mere inclusion of additional categories of diversity to teacher education. Through the use of queer theory, this study problematizes these categories by destabilizing them and suggesting alternatives. Making social scripts visible allows for a deeper understanding of how categories are constructed and regulated. Indeed, exploring social scripts provides a means to deconstruct the categories of mother and teacher by identifying ways that these scripts act as a normalizing force and by naming alternative scripts or points of resistance. Incorporating sexual orientation and queer theory into
views of difference within research on teaching has the potential to shape teacher education by moving from the simple naming of difference to an understanding of how that difference is constructed and experienced within classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in queer theory, which is embedded within poststructuralism. It uses a qualitative design to determine social scripts that play out powerfully in the lives of classroom teachers, lesbian mothers, and mother/educator/lesbians. Queer theory, and its umbrella theory, poststructuralism, view truth, knowledge, and language as socially constructed. Poststructuralism focuses especially on power, desire, and language (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004). Language in particular serves to create categories of power and oppression; it also helps to classify some forms of desire as deviant and others as acceptable (Foucault, 1978). This attention to language, power, and desire, facilitates examination into institutional discourses as well as social scripts (Pinar et al., 2004).

Poststructural Discourses

Various disciplines and theoretical standpoints define “discourse” differently. I draw upon Foucault (1970; 1972; 1978) in my definition, relying on his attention to the intersection of language and institutions. He used discourse to describe not only verbal and non-verbal communication in use, but also the socially constructed rules governing that language. For Foucault, discourse regulates which statements can be made and which cannot. Foucault’s discourses shift over time, allowing new statements and language usage (St. Pierre, 2000). In describing a poststructural approach to discourse, Purvis and Hunt (1993) explained:
What the concept tries to capture is that people live and experience within discourse in the sense that discourses impose frameworks which limit what can be experienced or the meaning that experience can encompass, and thereby influence what can be said and done. Each discourse allows certain things to be said and impedes or prevents other things from being said. Discourses thus provide specific and distinguishable mediums through which communicative action takes place (p. 485).

I use a poststructural notion of discourse within this study in examining social norms for mothers and teachers. In the case of mothers within schools, discourses determine who can be named “mother” or “teacher” and who cannot. Discourses also distinguish appropriate and inappropriate verbal and non-verbal communicative acts for mothers and teachers in classrooms. These guidelines shaping communication are also known as social scripts, meaning the appropriate roles, behavior, and language available to individuals based on cultural expectations (Harre, 1983). One definition of social scripts described them as a ‘cultural template.’

These templates then provide a kind of recipe or script for how to live one’s life and people organize their lives and expectations to correspond to the template’s prescriptions. Sometimes only one such template is provided but at other times there may be several templates available, thus providing people with a choice of ways of being, leading to alternative lifestyles. (Onyx & Leonard, 2007, p. 382)

The notion of multiple templates makes identifying social scripts important, because appropriate templates are not always available for all individuals (Hequemborg, 2004). Nor are all options of social scripts valued equally within a given setting, as
evident through the regulation of scripts. Foucault (1978) suggested that institutions, such as the law, medicine, religion and education, create and monitor scripts through circulating discourses of normal versus deviant and safe versus perilous. In juxtaposing the expectations of teachers against the experiences of sexual minority mothers, this study examines available social scripts for mothers within classrooms as well as the regulation of such scripts.

Foucault (1972; 1978) also argued that power exists within the discursive production of deviance, yet power is never absolutely held by one institution or individual. He described “spirals of power” in which power and resistance must coexist. “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (p. 95). The idea of resistance as an integral aspect of power offers the possibility of transgressing proscriptive social scripts or authoring new scripts. This study makes use of this possibility through not only identifying scripts teachers have for mothers’ interactions in the classroom, but also in querying how the presence of lesbian mothers shapes these scripts for all mothers. As poststructuralism illuminates institutional discourses, queer theory serves to demonstrate how such discourses create normalizing ideologies.

Queer Theory

Queer theory, with the position that truth, knowledge, and language are socially constructed, fits within poststructural paradigms. With its attention to the social construction of identity, queer theory offers an alternative to recent LGBT studies (Piontek, 2006). Gay rights proponents from the mid 1970s until today have promoted assimilation of LGBT individuals and couples into society via marriage and civil rights
legislation (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1988). This political movement has the tendency to assume a singular gay identity, which usually takes the form of White, middle-class men. And the movement names sexual orientation as a static identity rather than as a set of behaviors (Piontek, 2006). Michael Warner (1999) accused LGBT political advocates of desexualizing sexual minority lives in exchange for public approval and civil rights. He explained, “Those whose sex is least threatening, along with those whose gender profiles seem least queer, are put forward as the good and acceptable face of the movement” (p. 66). Alternatively, queer theory explores the construction of acceptability, identity, and normalcy, thus destabilizing modern LGBT politics.

Piontek (2006) explained the way that queer theory destabilizes gay and lesbian identity:

Queer questions the taken-for-granted assumptions we make about categories and the supposedly stable relations among them, the dichotomies and reifications that categorize a great deal of gay and lesbian work. What I value most about the queer is its potential to challenge the way we make meaning of the world, including the ways in which we think about gender, sexual practice, and identity. (p. 2)

Judith Butler (1990) also resisted traditional LGBT politics. She explained that through resisting dominant ideologies, we may actually reinforce what we hope to defy. Accordingly, the gay rights movement reifies heterosexuality. Through claims that gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual individuals are just like their heterosexual counterparts, gay rights advocates establish heterosexuality as a standard to be met. Butler (1990) countered,
Gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather as copy is to copy. The parodic representation of ‘the original’… reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original. (p. 41)

Queer theory draws heavily up on the work of Michel Foucault (1970; 1972; 1978) and his illumination of societal discourses that govern sexualities. Rather than being biologically determined, Foucault (1978) claimed that sexuality is created by society and controlled through the discourses of religious, medical, psychological, and educational institutions. These dominant discourses conduct a juridical sanctioning of procreative heterosexual activity. Anyone who exists outside of this activity is named as a deviant. Foucault (1978) wrote, “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (p. 43). Individuals may be categorized as deviant as a result of behavior, which is particularly salient to this study in that the research questions highlight both dominant and deviant scripts.

Based on the works of Butler (1990) and Foucault (1970; 1972; 1978), Pinar (1998), M. Warner (1999), Britzman (1995), Kumashiro (2003), queer theory can be understood as a philosophical interrogation of normal. It seeks to identify dominant societal discourses and to call these discourses into question. Because of its aim to trouble dominant discourses, queer theory is a powerful framework for this study. Queer theory provides a means to identify and to problematize participants’ notions of normal and deviant as expressed through social scripts for good mothers and good teachers. The word “good” pertains to dominant beliefs regarding mothering and teaching practices. The phrases “good mother” and “good teacher” are socially constructed and highly
contextual. Queer theory facilitates exploration of the social scripts that construct the categories of “good mother” and “good teacher”

In discussing the potential for queer theory in education, Britzman (1995) recommended, “At the very least, what is required is an ethical project that begins to engage difference as the grounds of politicality and community” (p. 152). This study, my ethical project, engages queer theory in order to extend and deepen notions of diversity in schools. It engages difference in exploring lesbian mothers’ negotiations of their children’s school experiences, particularly by looking at the social scripts that play out powerfully in teachers’ and lesbian mothers’ lives. The identification of these scripts allows for disruption of scripts for “good mother” and “good teacher” that fail to recognize sexual difference. Essentially, I seek out these scripts in order to trouble them. The goal of my ethical project is to destabilize scripts in order to promote social justice around sexual difference, creating a space for sexual difference in educational and societal discourses.

_Naming Subjects_

Due to the importance of language within my theoretical framework, I find it important to explain my use of terms within this study. I frequently use the phrase sexual minority to indicate a person or people with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, making that person or group a statistical minority. In many comments I make, I use lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), while acknowledging that these categories may shift. Such language certainly holds different meanings for diverse individuals within specific cultures. In referencing other scholars’ research, I use the terms they do in order to accurately represent their findings and/or assertions. Most studies reviewed in
the next chapter included only gay men and lesbians rather than bisexual or transgender parents. When I talk about gay fathers or lesbian mothers rather than fathers who are gay or mothers who are lesbians and when I talk about mother/educator/lesbians, I do so for the sake of brevity rather than in order to imply a hierarchy of identity. [See Gabb (2005b) or Gee (2001) for a more thorough discussion of identity hierarchies.] I hope to be as inclusive as possible in my language in order to indicate the plurality of family structures and sexual identities.

I have been reluctant to define terms too narrowly in this paper. Such reluctance stems from a desire not only to be inclusive, but also a fear of imposing labels which subjects would not themselves take up. As a scholar who draws on queer theory, I understand that the meaning of any label is fluid and largely contingent upon time, place and cultural context. Nonetheless, it is my fear that by defining women as mothers or lesbians that I will create a category of subjects, who are then targets for oppression. Dever (2004) explained this quandary, “Subjects become subjects, in other words, through a process of abstraction and a mechanics of alienation; language, always alienated from the material world to which it refers, produces individual subjects in its own mold” (p. 6). Despite my reluctance, though, I must take up specific language. To fail to do so would be ignoring an opportunity to advocate for the same women I fear oppressing. I simply must allow my definitions to remain flexible, so that the subjects of the definitions may have a role in constructing these definitions.

Lesbian and feminist alike have long debated definitions of lesbian. Charlotte Bunch (2003), for example, asserted that in order to be named feminists, women must also become lesbians, thus equating lesbianism with revolting against patriarchy.
Adrienne Rich (1993) argued that all women exist on a lesbian continuum with some women interacting with other women as friends and/or confidants and others as lovers and/or lifelong companions. Regardless of their degree of interaction with other women, Rich (1980) assumed that all women drift throughout the lesbian continuum. Cook (1979) affirmed this line of reasoning, explaining, “Women who love women, who choose women to nurture and support and to create a living environment in which to work creatively and independently, are lesbians” (p. 64) While D'Emilio & Freedman (1988) identified the 1920s and 1930s as the era in the United States in which lesbian identity entered public consciousness, particularly with the publication of Radclyffe Hall’s 1928 lesbian themed *The Well of Loneliness*, Vicinus (1993) asserted that the origin of modern lesbian identity is impossible to name. I complicate this already contentious debate by adding mother to the term I define. At this point, I define a lesbian mother as a person who identifies as a woman, has a history of primarily forming or desiring to form erotic relationships with other women, and serves as a principal guardian for a child or children.

Advocating for Sexual Difference

As previously mentioned, the ultimate goal of this study is to create a space for sexual difference in educational and societal discourses. I work to destabilize scripts for mothers and teachers in order to promote social justice around sexual difference. This goal is significant for lesbian mothers and their children, for teachers and teacher educators, and for those who are marginalized within educational settings. In questioning common sense notions within education, queer theory illuminates hegemonic systems of privilege (Bedford, 2002). Understanding constructions of hegemonic norms, whether
related to race or sexual orientation, provides insight into ways such norms serve to marginalize and oppress anyone considered the “other” (Ladson-Billings, 1996).

Berrill and Martino (2002) suggested that queer theory equips teachers with a means of understanding how difference is socially constructed and the processes through which normalization occurs. “As teacher educators we cannot transform the homophobic and heterosexist cultures of schools, what we can do is provide our students with a theoretical framework for understanding how they have been formed and how they fashion themselves as particular kinds of individuals” (p. 67). In regards to this study, identifying social scripts for mothers and teachers and examining how those scripts become named as normal or deviant provides both mothers and teachers with a theoretical knowledge of how they and others are named as normal or as deviant.

Returning to the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, Casey’s teacher used her common sense of families in planning her lessons. She drew on her own social scripts for normal families. She assumed that all children not only had biological fathers, but also that these men were dads who remained in close contact with their children. As a result, the teacher communicated a specific script for families. These assumptions led to an assignment that sent a message to Casey that she should have a father with whom she spends time and for whom she should make a Father’s Day gift. Casey’s mothers received the message that their family either posed a problem for the teacher or didn’t warrant mention. Either explanation marginalizes Casey’s mothers and their relationship with her. Sexual difference did not have a place in Casey’s classroom.

Research conducted through the lens of queer theory allows educators and mothers to hold a deeper knowledge of diversity, destabilize categories of difference, and
understand how categories of difference are constructed and reconstructed across time and place (Berrill & Martino, 2002; Britzman, 1995; Kumashiro, 2003; M. Warner, 1999). Queer theory prepares Casey’s teachers and Casey’s mothers to view Casey as a growing changing little girl who has two mothers, loves to skate board, comes from China, attends church, teases her sister, has difficulty with reading, finds math problems easy, and has a middle-class family. For teachers and mothers who understand queer theory, Casey isn’t normal, but neither is any student.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present review explores the intersection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) parenting and schooling from the perspectives of parents, children and teachers. Most investigations of sexual minority families focus on children’s emotional and social health rather than their school experiences (Anderssen, Amile, & Ytteroy, 2002; Millbank, 2003; Tasker, 2005). Research related to the school experiences of such families, while necessary in an increasingly diverse educational climate, remains limited and heteronormative (Clarke, 2002). Heteronormativity refers to the invisibility of heterosexuality and the construction of LGBT sexualities as deviant and abnormal (Yep, 2002). The value of LGBT parenting in much of the current literature depends on researchers providing evidence that these families meet the standards set by heterosexual families (Laird, 1993). This review highlights outcomes for children with LGBT parents, the experiences of LGBT parents, and teachers’ perceptions of LGBT parents.

Literature Review Methodology

In identifying literature related to sexual minority families’ experiences with schools, I conducted a search of Academic Search Premier, ERIC, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Professional Development Collection, and SocINDEX. Due to the relative infancy of the field and the continually changing social climate for LGBT issues (Bohan, Russell, & Montgomery, 2002), I did not review articles published prior to 1996.
Limiting my search to recent literature, I looked at all articles generated from the following keywords: gay parent, lesbian mother, gay father, gay and families and schools, sexual minority and school. I also hand searched the table of contents of *Journal of Homosexuality* from all issues published after 1996, all issues of *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, which began publication in 1997 and all issues *Sexualities*, a journal dating back to 1998.

I limited my review to empirical articles that primarily investigated sexual minority parents and their children. This methodology yielded 26 empirical articles in addition to five literature reviews. Bibliographic branching contributed an additional 12 articles. While the primary focus of this review is the intersection of LGBT families and schools, literature related to outcomes for children in these families and the interactions between sexual minority parents and institutions provides context for the current inquiry.

Previous Reviews

Several literature reviews synthesized findings regarding LGBT families (Anderssen et al., 2002; Clarke, 2002; Millbank, 2003; Tasker, 2005), yet only one focused exclusively on the school experiences of such families. In an effort to help schools create stronger partnerships with families, Ryan and Martin (2000) reviewed literature related to the incorporation of gay and lesbian parents into school systems. They provided little information about their selection of articles or the number they reviewed, as their goal was to inform school personnel rather than to assess current research. Ryan and Martin (2000) asserted through their review that many school personnel resisted integrating sexual orientation into definitions and curricula related to families due to homophobia, heterosexist assumptions, religious affiliations, and beliefs.
about traditional gender roles. Some teachers also feared rebuke from administrators and heterosexual parents. The authors expressed concern regarding literature that indicated the reluctance of schools to acknowledge diverse family constellations. They underscored this point through highlighting current research demonstrating the importance of partnerships between homes and schools in order to better students’ academic achievement and social adjustment. In keeping with the goal of informing teachers and administrators, they concluded their review with LGBT family-affirming resources for school personnel.

In another review, Tasker (2005) focused on how studies of sexual minority families can and should impact pediatricians’ clinical practice. Although well outside of the field of education, this remains the most recent review of literature dealing with gay and lesbian families and as such warrants inclusion. The author reviewed 36 articles published between 1978 and 2004 and divided research into four categories: the quality of children’s family relationships, psychological adjustment, peer relationships, and psychosexual development. Literature in Tasker’s (2005) review showed comparable familial relationships reported by children of gay and straight parents through the use of interviews and surveys. These studies consisted of comparisons between children in “comparable” families, meaning like number of parents, similar socio-economic status, and identical race. Based upon psychological assessments, interviews with teachers, home studies and parental reports, scholars found that children raised in comparable families headed by homosexuals versus heterosexuals displayed no significant differences in intelligence, self-esteem, behavioral problems, socio-emotional or psychological adjustment. Children raised by gay and lesbian parents did not report more
teasing/bullying than their peers raised by heterosexuals, although the focus of the harassment of the former was likely to be sexuality. According to self-report, children of gays and lesbians had the same quality peer relationships as their classmates. This review indicated that regardless of parents’ preferences for their children, those raised by gays and lesbians seemed to fit traditional gender roles in terms of choice of toys and play activities. Sexual orientation of parents did not impact sexual orientation of children, although children with gay and lesbian parents expressed more comfort in discussing sexual matters with their parents.

Anderssen, Amile, and Ytteroy (2002) reviewed 23 articles published prior to 2000 in order to determine socio-emotional and academic outcomes for children raised by gay and lesbian parents. Their findings portrayed children of lesbians and gays as identical to their peers in terms of sexual orientation, emotional coping skills, gender performance, and cognitive functioning. Participating children with gay or lesbian parents experienced moderate teasing; however, they did not feel stigmatized.

Milbank (2003) used empirical research findings on gay and lesbian families to provide policy makers with a greater understanding of families in which one or more parents were sexual minorities. She did not indicate search criteria or methods for her review of literature. The review presented demographic information, including the ways gay men and lesbians form families. Family structures included parents who adopted children, had children from previous heterosexual relationships and engaged donor insemination or surrogacy. Her review of literature from the fields of psychology and the social sciences indicated that children within gay and lesbian families developed in ways consistent with their peers. Milbank (2003) used this review to refute connections
between sexual orientation and parenting ability, pointing to studies that indicated comparable development among children of homosexuals and heterosexuals.

Clarke (2002) took a different approach. In identifying her article as an analysis of varying constructions of lesbian motherhood rather than a traditional review of literature, Clarke (2002) did not indicate her methodology for selecting studies or the number she selected. Her work did not focus on findings of these studies, but instead explored how each positioned lesbian mothers. She found four constructions of lesbian parenting: “no different from heterosexual parenting; insidiously different from heterosexual parenting; different from heterosexual parenting and transformative; and, different from heterosexual parenting only because of oppression experienced by parents” (p. 210). The author suggested that from a political perspective, determining how difference and sameness are used to oppress or marginalize lesbian parents is far more important than arguing for lesbians being different or the same as heterosexual parents.

Findings of the Current Review

This section contains articles with three different foci. The first focused on the various outcomes for children with LGBT parents, including school experiences, psychological adjustment, sexual orientation, and self esteem. The second focus documented the experiences of LGBT parents, highlighting their interaction with cultural institutions, including illumination of the social scripts LGBT parents followed and (re)created. The third focus documented the perspectives of educators on interacting with sexual minority parents and their children.
Outcomes for children

A primary focus of research about families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parents included outcomes for children. These articles explored the impact of sexual minority parenting on children's school experiences, self esteem, socio-psychological adjustment, sexual orientation, and behavior, among various other outcomes. I review 14 articles in this section.

Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, Peyser, and Banks (2005) recruited participants in urban areas of the eastern part of the United States by distributing flyers in women's bookstores and at multicultural events and by placing ads in lesbian magazines. This 10 year study aimed to explore the life experiences of lesbian mothers and the families they created through artificial insemination. Participants included 78 families consisting mostly of college educated, middle and upper-middle class White lesbian mothers and their first born children, all of whom were ten-years-old. Analysis of structured telephone interviews with children, a child behavior checklist completed by mothers, and semi-structured telephone interviews with mothers gauged health status, parenting experiences, support systems, educational choices, and discrimination concerns. The authors compared their findings to national statistics regarding behavior, health problems and reports of abuse to indicate that the children of lesbians seem to thrive. In regard to schooling, 77% of children in the study attended public schools. According to maternal reports, 85% did well academically and 81% related well to peers. Seventy-eight percent attended ethnically diverse schools, 64% went to school with children from other lesbian families, 44% had lesbian or gay teachers or administrators at their school, and 47% had some LGBT curricula in their schools.
Golombok and Tasker (1996) sought to understand how being raised in a lesbian household in the U.K. affected children’s gender roles and sexuality. They gathered 25 children of lesbian mothers and a control group of 21 children of heterosexual single mothers through advertisements in lesbian and single mother magazines and through contacts with lesbian and single mother organizations. The article did not indicate the relationship status of the lesbian mothers, specifying only that all children in the studies came from fatherless homes. The authors interviewed the children at age 9.5 and again at age 23.5 in addition to interviewing the children’s mothers. These interviews revealed that although the participants with lesbian mothers were more likely to experiment with romantic relationships with both genders, they were no more likely than the control group to identify as gay or lesbian as adults.

Goldberg’s (2007) inquiry focused on the children of lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents when those children became adults. The author conducted a semi-structured interview with 42 adults, ages 19-50, raised by sexual minority parents in order to determine participants’ practices related to disclosing their parents’ sexual orientation. Participants, who were identified through organizations for children of non-heterosexual parents, consisted of eight participants with a gay father, 23 with one lesbian mother, two with a bisexual mother, and nine with two lesbian mothers. Using a thematic coding approach to data analysis, the author determined that participants expressed several reasons for talking about their sexual minority parents. Eighteen participants considered disclosure as a means to educate others about LGBT families and to advocate for those families. Nine used disclosure to identify and screen out homophobic individuals. Six talked about disclosure as a necessary element of being open and honest in personal
relationships. Six disclosed only when they felt that others would inevitably learn about participants’ families of origin. Only three participants talked about conscious decisions not to come out about their families. Adults who learned of their parents’ sexuality early in life and who had open conversations with parents surrounding sexuality expressed higher levels of comfort in discussing the structure of their families of origin. In contrast, adults who were taught as children to conceal their parents’ sexual orientation were more likely to express feelings of shame surrounding their family structure. The author asserted the importance of parental honesty in preparing children with LGBT parents for encountering and combating heterosexism.

Patterson (2001) investigated the mental health and social adjustment of children with lesbian mothers. Participants consisted of 37 families in which children ages four through nine had been born to or adopted as infants by lesbian mothers. The author gathered these participants through social and professional contacts and asking participants to identify further participants. The resulting sample consisted mostly of White, affluent well-educated women and their children. Result of interviews and psychological assessments indicated that of children’s social adjustment and mental health were significantly associated with maternal mental health. These results are consistent with studies conducted with heterosexual families. Patterson concluded, therefore, that maternal mental health has a far greater impact than maternal sexual orientation on children’s well being.

MacCallum and Golombok (2004) examined the socio-emotional development and the parent child relationships in fatherless families in the U.K. They compared 25 lesbian mother families and 38 families headed by a single heterosexual mother with 38
two-parent heterosexual families. The authors measured quality of parenting and socio-emotional development of participating children through interviews and questionnaires administered to mothers, children and teachers. The results indicated that mothers in fatherless families interacted more with their children. These children perceived their mothers as more available and dependable. Overall, participating children's social and emotional development did not vary according to the presence of a father. Boys in fatherless families tended to show more traditionally feminine behavior, but they did not exhibit less masculine behavior than their peers with fathers. The authors concluded that mothers' sexual orientation had no impact on the quality of parent-child relationships or children's socio-emotional development.

Ray and Gregory (2001) focused exclusively on school experiences of children with gay and lesbian parents. They distributed questionnaires in gay and lesbian magazines, on a gay and lesbian website, and at lesbian and gay seminars and conferences. The authors wanted to determine whether children in primary and secondary Australian schools felt discriminated against because of their parents' sexuality; incidents experienced by the children of lesbian and gay parents; and strategies used by the children, their parents and the school to deal with incidents that had arisen. Through targeting lesbians and gay men who already had children as well as those who planned parenthood in the near future, the authors received 117 returned questionnaires, 90% of which lesbians completed. From the questionnaires, the authors built a participant pool of 48 children ages 5-18. They conducted focus group interviews with 32 children and interviewed 16 individually. Results indicated that bullying as a result of parents' sexuality depended upon grade level, as did disclosure of parents' sexuality. Children in
middle grades tended to experience the most bullying and to work the hardest to hide their parents' sexual orientation. Parents’ biggest concern for their children was bullying, followed by lack of representation in the curriculum. According to participants, Australian schools did not have the knowledge to make schools safe for children of gays and lesbians, nor did they intervene upon hearing homophobic teasing or represent LGBT families in the curriculum.

Several groups of authors gathered participants from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), which enrolled all mothers who reported pregnancy in Avon (a region in the UK consisting of urban, rural, and suburban areas) within a 21 month period. When the resulting children were seven years old, mothers indicated their sexual orientation on a survey. Golombok, Perry, Murray, Mooney-Somers, Stevens and Golding (2003) used survey results to identify 18 participants. The authors recruited an additional 21 mothers through asking ALSPAC lesbian mothers to recruit and through local lesbian mothers support groups and ads in local and national press. In order to compare the quality of parent–child relationships and the socio-emotional and gender development of a sample of children with lesbian parents to two comparable samples of children with heterosexual parents, the researchers employed interviews with mothers and co-parents, questionnaires/surveys of parents and teachers, home-study visits and assessments of children. They defined quality by means of children’s academic performance, conflict and play between parents and children, children’s behavior, stress level of parents, and children’s psychological adjustment. The authors observed a higher quality of parenting in two parent homes, regardless of orientation of the mother, and more conflict between mothers and children in single parent families. Behavior problems,
as reported by mothers, did not differ according to family type or orientation of mothers. Teachers reported more misbehavior by children with single mothers. Psychiatric reports indicated no differences related to family type, nor did authors find differences in peer relations scales. Boys with two parents showed more gendered preference for activities than boys with one parent. Girls’ activity preferences did not vary according to family type or mothers’ orientation.

Perry, Burston, Stevens, Golding, Steele and Golombok (2004) also gathered participants from ALSPAC and snowball sampling in order to determine what children’s play narratives indicated about lesbian-mother families as opposed to heterosexual families. They interviewed thirty-nine lesbian mothers and asked the mothers’ seven-year-old children to complete the MacArthur Story Stem Battery (MSSB), which required children to complete play narratives describing emotional events and conflicts using dolls. The authors compared the results of the MSSB to the results of two control groups of children, one parented by a heterosexual couple and the other by a single heterosexual woman. The authors reported no significant differences among family types for parental representation (mother and father figures) or the structure of narratives. Girls included more affectionate themes in their narratives, regardless of family type. Children in each family type used fathers in their play narratives to the same extent. The authors argued that based on the results of play narratives, children of lesbians are as well adjusted as their peers, defining adjustment in terms of response to conflict and demonstrations of caring for others.

In an attempt to determine how children conceived through artificial insemination explain their family structures, Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen and Brewaeys (2002)
contacted 24 two parent lesbian families through a single sperm bank in Belgium. They constructed a control group of 24 two parent heterosexual families through snowball sampling. Each group contained 37 children (ages 7-17) and 48 parents. The authors matched the samples according to educational level of parents, age, number and gender of children; all were Caucasian, Dutch speaking. Based upon interviews with children and parents and questionnaires completed by children and parents, the authors reported no differences in self esteem, behavior, or social acceptance of children based on family type. Most children from both groups discussed being teased. One fourth of children from lesbian families were teased about family structure; none from heterosexual families experienced this type of teasing. Teachers reported more attention problems among children of lesbians; they reported no other differences in behavior between the groups. Children of lesbians knew that their mothers had informed teachers of their family structure. Although some children talked to the teacher about their families the children generally expected their mothers to do so.

Chan, Raboy and Patterson (1998) contacted a single spermbank in California to identify participants for their study related to the impact of family structure and family process on children’s well being. The authors defined family structure as the number and sexuality of parents (one parent/two parent, lesbian/heterosexual); family process as the way a family functions (division of responsibility among parents, conflict between members, levels of stress and satisfaction); and, well being as mental and physical health, low levels of misbehavior, and high levels of social competence and scholastic achievement. They used pre-existing measurements to gather information from 80 families: 55 headed by a lesbian, 25 by heterosexuals; of which 50 families were headed
by couples and 30 by individuals. When permissible by the families, the authors also
surveyed the teachers of children in the study in order to learn more about children’s in-
school behavior. The authors reported that children’s behavior, adjustment, and social
competence did not vary depending on sexuality of mother. Parents’ relationship
satisfaction contributed to children’s well being, and child misbehavior led to parental
stress. The authors concluded that family process was far more important than family
structure in impacting children’s well being.

Wainright, Russell, and Patterson (2004) drew their participants from a national
sample of adolescents as part of a health survey. The participants comprised of one group
of 44 adolescents, ages 12 to 18-year-old, parented by same-sex couples and a
comparable group of 44 youth parented by heterosexual couples. The 88 participants
represented a variety of ethnic and economic backgrounds. Using pre-existing scales of
psychosocial development and school records, the authors determined few differences
between the two groups. School performance and social adjustment did not seem to be
correlated with family type, nor were romantic relationships. Regardless of family type,
participants with close relationships with their parents reported higher scholastic
achievement.

Wainright and Patterson (2006) used the same participants and data set as the
previous article in order to assess risk behaviors among adolescents with lesbian mothers
as opposed to those with heterosexual parents. All participants lived in two parent homes.
Survey results indicated levels of risk behaviors, including drug and alcohol use,
delinquent behavior and victimization, were functions of parent-child relationships rather
than parental sexual orientation. Based on these results and previous research, the authors
suggested that adolescents living with same-sex and different-sex parents develop in comparable ways.

Perlesz, Brown, Lindsay, McNair, deVaus, and Pitts (2006) sought to determine how children of lesbian parents defined their families. The authors interviewed 20 lesbian parented families in Victoria, Canada. They gathered participants through snowball sampling, advertisements in gay and lesbian media, at gay pride events and through healthcare professionals. The sample represented diverse ages, family formations, ethnicities, classes, and levels of urbanization. Using a grounded theory approach to data analysis, the authors identified participants’ families as post-modern. This designation meant that both biology and social ties had a place in defining the concept of family, and families differed significantly from one another. Children in the study seemed to experience a disconnect between their private family lives and the way they described their families while in public setting. Young children named those with whom they had the most contact as family members, while older children named more traditional family members (mother, father, siblings) regardless of the children’s level of contact with these members. Younger and older children pointed to similarities between their families and other families, many times trying to appear as a “normal” family. Some older children in the study tried to hide their mothers’ sexual orientation. Disclosure was also difficult for children in rural and conservative locations, those in working class or high socio-economic areas and those in areas lacking in ethnic diversity. Participants expressed high levels of contentment with their family in private settings; difficulties stemmed from explaining their family arrangements to outsiders.
Dundas and Kaufman (2000) also sought to determine children’s experiences of being raised by lesbian parents in Toronto. Twenty-seven lesbian mothers, identified through their participation in lesbian social networks and a lesbian mothers’ support group participated in interviews and a questionnaire. The authors also interviewed the 27 children of participants. Results of the study indicated that participating families had a variety of parenting skills, levels of stress and child-rearing philosophies. Children reported very few differences between their families and other families. All pointed to important men in their family when asked about fathers. The authors indicated a belief that children in participating families developed in appropriate and healthy ways.

Overall, literature focused on outcomes for members of families with LGBT parents paints a picture of a population that differs very little from members of other families. Based on the outcomes examined in the literature in this section, children with LGBT families seem to be comparable with their peers. Children’s well being appears to be influenced far less by parents’ sexual orientation than by factors such as time spent with parents, number of parents, parental stress levels and levels of acceptance from extended family members.

LGBT Parents

The literature reviewed in this section focused primarily on sexual minority parents rather than on their children. This research examined the ways LGBT parents interacted with institutions within specific communities and how they (re)defined parenthood. Several articles within this category examined sexual minority parents’ adherence to social scripts. In total, this section contains reviews of 19 articles.
Mercier and Harold (2003) gathered participants using what they called “modified snowball sampling” (p. 36). They identified groups of lesbian parents and asked them to distribute surveys to other lesbian mothers, with the goal of determining how lesbian families and schools interacted and what issues were important to lesbian mothers within these interactions. One hundred twenty-five families completed questionnaires, and the authors interviewed 21 participants, representing 15 families of varied structure. Most participants were White (86%), college educated women with children aged six months to 17 years; 50% of children were of color. Interviews and questionnaires revealed that 80% of participants experienced positive interaction with their children’s schools. Diversity within schools was a priority for the participants; levels of diversity seemed to correspond to the schools’ level of acceptance of lesbian families. Some participants drove long distances so that their children could attend diverse schools. The authors documented high levels of parental involvement in schools, partially motivated by a desire to protect their children, but also to increase visibility. Most parental stress related to school had to do with how and when to disclose sexuality. When parents did not disclose sexuality, school personnel were likely to misunderstand the relationship between co-mothers. Mothers expressed greater concern for other students’ reactions to their sexuality than with staff reactions. When other children teased participants’ children because of their mothers’ sexuality, staff rarely intervened.

Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, and Sandfort (2004) investigated how stress related to being a societal minority impacted lesbian mothers and their children in the Netherlands. They gathered participants through a local sperm bank as well as through contacts within the gay and lesbian community and advertisements in a lesbian magazine.
This strategy resulted in 100 families with one biological mother and one social (non-biological) mother in which one child was between four and eight years old. This group of children consisted of 48 boys and 52 girls with a mean age of 5.8. The authors surveyed mothers and target children using pre-existing measures of minority stress, internalized homophobia, experiences with parenting, and child adjustment. The authors determined that lesbian mothers who felt more rejection from family members and institutions, such as their children’s school, experienced more parental stress and defended their position as mother more vehemently than other mothers in the study. Mothers with internalized homophobia also felt a strong need to defend their motherhood. Participants who recounted higher levels of rejection from their children’s schools and other institutions reported more behavior problems with their children.

A second report by two of the authors of the previous study and a third author, Bos, van Balen and van den Boom (2004) conducted a similar study, also in the Netherlands, in order to determine whether lesbian families differ from heterosexual in qualities thought to impact child well being. Such factors included quality of couple relationship, experiences with parenthood, social support and child-rearing goals. The authors employed pre-existing questionnaires to measure these qualities. Participants consisted of 100 lesbian two-mother families with 100 heterosexual families having naturally conceived children. All participants were Dutch and had children ranging in age from four to eight years old. The authors recruited lesbian participants from a sperm bank, a mailing list for lesbian moms and advertisements in lesbian magazines. They drew heterosexual families from city registers, attempting to match lesbian and heterosexual families in terms of degree of urbanization, number of children, and age and
gender of target child. The results of the questionnaires indicated that lesbian parents did not differ in competence or level of burden from heterosexual parents. While all participants considered independence an important quality to develop in their children, conformity was a far less important goal for lesbian mothers. An additional difference between the two groups included lesbian social mothers' feelings that they must justify the quality of their parenthood to others in society.

Gabb (2004; 2005a; 2005b) gathered participants through the mailing list from a women's book store and snowball sampling. "Locating Lesbian Parent Families" (2005b) focused on 18 mothers and 13 of their children in the Yorkshire region of the United Kingdom. Her inquiry focused on determining how participants negotiated their simultaneous identities of mother and of lesbian. Based on in-depth interviews and observations of the authors own and participants' families, Gabb determined that for lesbian mothers, motherhood, rather than sexuality, remained the most salient aspect of identity. These identities, though, were complex and shifted according to the time of day and the space occupied by each woman. During the school day, for example, the lesbian mother's sexuality receded. Because of heteronormative expectations in schools, being a mother often caused others assume that participants were heterosexual. Conversely, parent night and waiting on the playground to pick up children made lesbian mothers' sexuality publicly owned knowledge as others viewed the interaction between lesbian mothers and their significant others. In primary grades, children freely revealed their mothers' sexuality. In later grades, children drew boundaries around their parents to prevent disclosure.
Gabb's (2004) previous article focused on 21 lesbian families across the Yorkshire region of the UK in order to determine how children of lesbians learned about sexuality. Based upon nebulous analysis of interviews with the mothers and ethnographic observations of each family, Gabb identified common approaches to sexuality education among her participants. Parents in the study felt the need to supplement the sex education provided in schools in order to include additional sexualities. Lesbian mothers’ discussions of their family structure with children interrupted the traditional procreative narrative as they discussed donor insemination and the difference between reproduction and love. Learning about sexuality at home made the children of lesbians more aware of the non-reproductive nuances of sex. In interviews, children discussed determining their own sexual identity through reflection rather than by assuming heterosexuality.

In a third article, Gabb (2005b) investigated how lesbian mothers and their children negotiate gender identity and parental roles within their families. She conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 18 lesbian mothers and 13 of their children. The children described their family in terms of societal norms, talking about male family members to the exclusion of their non-birth mother. Mothers also took up gendered terms, with some identifying themselves as filling a father role in the family. Mothers and children in participating families expressed concerns that linguistic terms do not exist to adequately describe a parent who is not a birth mother, but has an important role in the child’s life. Gabb (2005b) insisted that “It is lesbian maternity’s disruption of progenitor categories of parenthood which denote its radical potentialities, through resistance to simple mapping of parental categories onto gendered bodies” (p. 590). She concluded that lesbian parent families continually review and rework definitions of family and
parenting, assuming that lesbian families will eventually develop appropriate linguistic devices to describe their families.

Bergen, Suter and Daas (2006) interviewed lesbian mothers in long term relationships whose partners had given birth to children parented by both women in the relationship. The authors explored how non-biological lesbian mothers attempted to legitimize their parenthood through legal maneuvers. The authors gathered participants through lesbian meetings and gay and lesbian magazines, resulting in 21 families. The researchers found that participants addressed both mothers with maternal names, used a common last name for all family members and pursued legal means, such as power of attorney, wills and second parent adoption in order to construct non-biological mothers as equal parents within families.

The symbolic construction of legitimate motherhood mentioned by Bergen, Suter and Daas (2006) required empowerment of gay and lesbian parents. Lassiter, Dew, Newton, Hays and Yarbrough (2006) examined what factors were necessary for gay and lesbian parents to have access to social, economic and legal resources. Based on in-depth interviews with 10 individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, the authors identified internal and external factors required for such empowerment. Internal factors included self acceptance, non-traditional gender norms, valuing parenthood, and resiliency. External factors consisted of social support, integration of co-parenting roles, role modeling and affirmative community resources. The authors asserted that the presence of such factors facilitated the incorporation of gay and lesbian families into institutions.

Kozik-Rosabal (2000) interviewed three mothers from Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), one lesbian, one bisexual, and one heterosexual in order to
make educators aware of the needs of children from gay families and to enable teachers to foster growth in all students. In compositing parental perceptions, she determined that all participants believed that schools reproduce heterosexist ideology through curricula and school programs, school children and personnel had negative misconceptions about being gay and school officials were unaware of any problems experienced by children of lesbians and gays at their school. Parents’ advice for teachers involved awareness on the part of school personnel, training for pre-service and in-service teachers, and gay straight alliances.

Casper and Schultz (1999) also gathered participants primarily from organizations, both those for gay and lesbian parents of color and the largest organization for gay and lesbian headed families in the New York City area. They interviewed seven gay and lesbian couples with children and three single lesbian parents, with a total of 16 children in pre-school through first grade. Among the parents were 10 Caucasians, four Puerto Ricans, and three African Americans. The authors interviewed the teachers and administrators of participants’ children if parents had disclosed their sexuality to schools. The authors sought to determine the impact of parents’ (non)disclosure of sexuality on communication between school and home and to discover dynamics that encouraged lesbian and gay parents to participate in schools. They found that LGBT visibility in the community encouraged disclosure. Minimal economic freedom and minority ethnicity decreased likelihood of disclosure. Regardless of class and race, participants expressed a common fear of how their own sexuality would impact the way teachers treat their children, yet all would like to be out to schools. The authors concluded that school staff
must understand the presence of gay and lesbian families, start using the words lesbian and gay, and represent diverse family structures in their classrooms.

Hequembourg (2004), in an effort to document how institutions incorporated lesbian mothers as compared to heterosexual step parents, gathered 40 participants through word of mouth, newspaper advertisements, signs posted in community stores, community service providers, and online list serves. She interviewed 22 lesbian mothers with their partners and nine without their partners. An additional nine did not have partners at the time of the investigation. These participants, mostly White, middle class, well educated women, had a mean of 1.5 children per household, with the children ranging in age from under one to 30 years. Twenty respondents had been married before coming out and 19 gave birth to their children during a prior heterosexual marriage. Five respondents became stepmothers when they formed a relationship with a woman with children from a previous heterosexual marriage. Hequembourg (2004) conducted interviews with open-ended questions and asked participants to respond to the story of a lesbian mother who came out late in life. She found that lesbians who came to be mothers in disparate ways demonstrated common strategies for negotiating their novel status in institutions. They tended to emphasize similarities to heterosexual parents, point to a commitment ceremony as legitimacy of their family, and in some cases, pursue second parent adoptions. Lesbian step-families took steps not to overshadow children’s biological father. Adoptive and artificial insemination couples sought out father figures for their children. Rather than transforming institutions, lesbian mothers in the study seemed to seek assimilation into those institutions. Comparisons between participants and literature regarding heterosexual step-families indicated similarities between the two
groups; however, lesbian participants faced additional difficulties assimilating into institutions.

One major aspect of LGBT parents’ interaction with institutions includes their adherence to social scripts. Dalton and Bielby (2000) investigated how sex, gender and sexual orientation intersected in lesbian families with attention to social scripts perceived and followed by participants. They recruited their participants through an e-mail from a lesbian mothers’ list serve, word of mouth, and an ad in a newsletter from the National Center for Lesbian Rights. Such methods yielded fourteen well-educated, middle to upper-middle class lesbian mothers in California. Through analysis of interviews, the authors determined that participants viewed their decisions to have children as a natural outgrowth of their committed relationships to their partners. These parents used motherhood in place of a wedding to indicate the beginning of their family. Participants worked to disrupt the tie between biology and motherhood, even as they adhered to social scripts for good mothering and labeled themselves as mothers and sperm donors, regardless of each man’s involvement with the participants’ families, as fathers. The authors concluded that participating mothers challenged gender norms at the societal level through their creation of two-mother families, even as they reinscribed these norms at an individual level through their adherence to social scripts for “good” mothers.

Hequemborg and Farrell (1999) explored the strategies lesbian birth mothers and co-mothers employed to gain acceptance for their marginal-mainstream identities. Their study relied upon symbolic interactionist ideas of identity construction. According to this framework the actor’s identity performance (mother-birth or social) had to be recognized as such by significant others (children, family, partner, legal system). The authors
conducted in-depth interviews of nine mostly White, mixed class, well educated lesbian mothers, recruited through lesbian organizations and snowball sampling. The authors indicated that lesbian mothers in the study established themselves as mothers through seeking affirmation from extended family members and establishing legal ties between non-biological mothers and children. Within families, lesbian co-parents established routines that allowed both mothers to have equal care-giving roles. The authors suggested that despite the diversity that exists among lesbian families, parents must firmly establish themselves as mothers within their own families before outside social and familial networks will view them as such.

DeMino, Appleby, and Fisk (2007) also focused on acceptance of lesbians, looking specifically at lesbian participants’ perceptions of social support and their levels of internalized homophobia. Participants, gathered through lesbian mother groups, advertisements in lesbian publications, and distribution of flyers at gay and lesbian community centers consisted of 47 lesbian mothers and 42 lesbians who were not mothers. Participants completed demographic questionnaires, a homosexual attitude inventory, and a social support questionnaire. Results of these instruments indicated that lesbian mothers perceived less social support from friends, particularly gay and lesbian friends, than did lesbians without children. Lesbians without children perceived less support from their families of origin than lesbian mothers. The lesbian mothers experienced higher levels of internalized homophobia related to disclosure of sexual orientation than that experienced by childless lesbians. The authors suggested that mothers’ internalized homophobia might have been a reaction to stigma associated with
lesbianism. They indicated that some lesbians seek to assimilate into social scripts for mothers by masking their sexual orientation.

Clarke and Kitzinger (2005) used television talk shows and documentaries featuring lesbian families in order determine how lesbian mothers responded to concerns about the necessity of male role models for children. The authors used a discourse analysis approach in their reading of transcripts of 27 television talk shows and 11 television documentaries about lesbian and gay families aired between April 1997 and August 2001 on British, New Zealand, and U.S. television. These data revealed that lesbian mothers and their opponents, those who would deny parental rights to sexual minorities, defined male role model in very different ways. For opponents, a role model had to be a male relative; for lesbian mothers, men who exhibited what the mothers considered to be model behavior and dispositions sufficed as role models. Lesbian parents and their supporters responded to arguments about the necessity of male role models by highlighting the presence of men in their extended families and/or highlighting the presence of men in the world. Lesbians did not reject the notion of the necessity of male role models; they actually pointed to the quantity of available role models for their children. Lesbian mothers attempted to assimilate into mainstream society, drawing similarities between their families and others, missing an opportunity to celebrate their difference. The authors concluded that “debates about male role models are profoundly conservative and divert attention from the important issue of social change for lesbian families” (p. 150).

Ryan-Flood (2005) also considered discourses of fathers among lesbian parents. Through interviews with participants, investigated national scripts of families in Sweden
and Ireland and compared the ways lesbian mothers in those countries negotiated these scripts. Participants, gathered through LGBT parenting groups, consisted of 40 women in Sweden and 28 in Ireland. All had conceived children through donor insemination. The author described the majority of participants as White, middle-class professionals. Based on previous research and national policies, she categorized people in Ireland as adhering more strictly to gender-norms than those in Sweden. In contrast, she named the Swedish people as a nation who monitor and preserve bloodlines. Interviews focused on choice of donor and level of donor involvement in families’ lives. Ryan-Flood (2005) determined that cultural discourses of parenthood and kinship greatly influenced the families lesbian women created. Swedish women, with their cultural focus on bloodlines, largely made decisions to involve donors in children’s lives. The author found that Irish lesbians, having experienced a long history of political battles regarding women’s bodies, chose to distance themselves and their children from donors, thus retaining all parental rights. Participants adhered to some social scripts of parenting while dismissing others. The author concluded that “challenges to heteronormativity take a different form in different contexts, at least in part because heteronormativity varies according to context” (p. 200).

Goldberg and Allen (2007) approached the role of male involvement in the lives of lesbian mothers’ children from the perspective of 60 lesbians who were in the process of becoming parents. Participants, who were gathered through media, newsletters, religious groups and organizations catering to LGBT communities, consisted of 30 middle to upper middle class lesbian couples in their mid-30s who had participated in donor insemination in order to become pregnant. Participants completed demographic surveys and were interviewed individually in the third trimester of pregnancy and when
their baby was 3-months-old. Using a grounded theory approach to data analysis, the authors determined that participants' desire for male involvement in their child's lives varied. Prior to the birth of their children, forty participants discussed deliberating seeking male role models for their children. Fifteen participants remained open to involving men in their children's lives, but did not intend to actively pursue this situation. Five participants expressed ambivalence regarding the importance of male involvement in their children's lives. After the birth of their children, five participants became less intentional and more flexible about the role of men in their family structure, while four women transitioned from an open approach to a deliberate one. Mothers of sons were more likely to be intentional in seeking out male involvement than mothers of daughters. Participants' reasons for involving men in their children's lives consisted of adhering to societal norms, a desire to be fair to their children, and plans for their children to interact with diverse groups of people.

Stacey (2006) explored social scripts for fathers, using her investigation of gay fatherhood in order to demonstrate a shift in notions of paternity. This shift moved away from fatherhood as a form of male hegemonic social status. She conducted participant observations and in-depth interviews of 50 gay men and their community and affinity groups, including men from diverse ethnic, religious and class backgrounds. Twenty-nine of these men were fathers and four intended to become fathers. Results of the investigation represented a continuum of desires to parent. This continuum indicated that fatherhood had become a choice dependent primarily upon desire to parent rather than a means to establish masculinity. "No longer a requisite route to masculine adult social status, paternity has become increasingly situational, contingent primarily on the fate of
romantic attachments” (p. 48). Unlike other authors who determined ways LGBT parents rewrite scripts in order to negotiate institutions, Stacey insisted that gay fathers restructure the institution of paternity through their existence.

Berkowitz and Marsiglio (2007) also focused on gay fathers, drawing on in depth interviews with 19 childless gay men and 20 gay fathers who constructed their families through means other than heterosexual intercourse. The authors explored how gay men become conscious of their procreative, father, and family identities. They recruited participants through fliers in gay friendly locations in Florida and contacts the first author established through volunteering with LGBT organizations in Manhattan. Using a grounded theory approach to data analysis, the authors found that participants associated coming out as gay with expectations of remaining childless. Participants felt norms within gay male culture had dictated that they remain childless, and these social scripts were enforced through structural and institutional barriers to fatherhood for gay men. After becoming more comfortable with interacting in society as gay men, some participants came to realize their own desires to become fathers. These participants overcame barriers to achieve fatherhood, thereby resisting cultural expectations for gay men.

The literature addressing the interaction between LGBT parents and their children’s schools or other institutions shows a general disconnect between heteronormative institutional expectations and LGBT family structures. This means that LGBT parents must either modify scripts in order to fit into social institutions or they must conceal their sexual identity. The data showed that school personnel in particular lack knowledge and experience regarding sexual minority parents and their children, a
Teachers’ Perceptions of Sexual Minority Families

Rather than focusing on LGBT parents, some articles took up the perspective of teachers on sexual minority parenting. These articles consider educators' willingness and preparedness to interact with LGBT parents and their children. This section, which contains five articles, interrogates teacher education programs, preservice teachers, inservice teachers, and lesbian mothers’ perceptions of teachers.

Bliss and Harris (1999) investigated teachers’ views of sexual minority parents in the forms of exposure to and general knowledge about LGBT issues, attitudes towards LGBT people, interactions with gay or lesbian parents within schools, and expectations of problems experienced by students with gay and lesbian parents. The authors distributed an anonymous questionnaire including open ended and closed questions to 13 public schools in New Mexico. Their 17% response rate included 83 female and 24 male respondents from elementary, middle, and high schools. Results indicated that most teachers knew some gay males and lesbians, although not necessarily gay or lesbian parents. The respondents had limited education and knowledge about homosexuality, and possessed moderately tolerant attitudes towards gays and lesbians. Teachers had not received any training regarding sexual orientation, although 63% of women and 37% of men were willing to attend a workshop. Participants believed that students with gay or lesbian parents had more problems in social interaction but were more mature, tolerant, and self-reliant than other students. Open-ended questions about gay and lesbian parents
and their children revealed a wide range of dispositions, ranging from very supportive to noticeably hostile.

Maney and Cain (1997) asserted that universities must determine preservice teachers' attitudes regarding gay and lesbian parenting in order to properly prepare them for the classroom. They surveyed 195 college students enrolled in an elementary school health methods course at a large northeastern university using a 51-item "Gay and Lesbian Parenting Questionnaire" with the sections: 1) attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, 2) comfort when interacting with gay and lesbian families, 3) knowledge about homosexuality, and 4) demographic characteristics. Most respondents (70%) did not express overt homophobia and would welcome talking to gay or lesbian parents in a parent conference. Nearly 36%, though, felt very uncomfortable in asking questions about homosexuality. Men were more likely to express negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Respondents with stronger religious beliefs were more likely to express negative attitudes towards homosexuality. The authors used these results to argue that teacher education programs should include information regarding gay and lesbian family structures within the curricula.

Young and Middleton (2002) focused on curricula within teacher education programs in regards to information regarding sexual minority parents and LGBT issues in general. In order to determine the sources of information used to address LGBT issues in education courses, they analyzed 23 textbooks including 11 developmental psychology texts, 5 adolescence texts, 11 multicultural/social foundation texts. Through assessing the structural dimensions of each book (table of contents, pictures, and indices) and counting each mention of LGBT issues, the authors found that all developmental psychology texts
and adolescence texts included LGBT references, while only two multicultural texts made such inclusions. Results of the textbook analysis indicated that the texts that did include LGBT issues did so in a way that problematized gay and lesbian issues, particularly by linking AIDS and gay men. The author asserted that textual comparisons of homosexuality to heterosexuality, served to marginalize the former. Developmental psychology texts and adolescent texts included LGBT issues in sections dealing with teen pregnancy and/or suicide, further marginalizing non-heterosexual identities. The authors suggested that better materials and resources must be developed and disseminated to help teacher educators include LGBT issues in their courses.

Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) also focused on teacher education. Through self study they explored how and why teacher educators incorporated gay and lesbian concerns into their teaching and what resistance such teacher educators experienced in broaching these topics with pre-service teachers. The authors taught a 12 week course dealing with diversity and social justice to pre-service secondary teachers. They did so from the perspectives of poststructuralism and queer theory. Data for the study included the authors’ reflections and observations from the course in which they contextualize sexuality as one aspect of a person’s ever changing identity and challenge hegemonic discourses. The authors determined that the students who exhibited the most resistance to incorporation of gay and lesbian issues were those who came from a position of economic, racial, or social power and those who viewed individuals as responsible for their social position, regardless of environmental factors. Pre-service teachers in the authors’ courses exhibited more resistance to issues of sexuality than issues of race, gender, religion, etc. These pre-service teachers, with their primary focus on classroom
management, may not have seen social justice issues as essential. This may have owed to the fact that practicum students were not evaluated on the equity and social justice of their teaching. The authors, who made no mention of sexual minority teachers, suggested that many teachers were resistant to broaching the topic of homosexuality because of the discourses to which they had been exposed. Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) argued that teacher educators should unearth these discourses rather than merely adding information relative to LGBT students and LGBT parents.

Lindsay, Perlesz, Brown, McNair, deVaus, and Pitts (2006) considered the strategies lesbian mothers and their children used to negotiate schools in Melbourne, Australia. While participants consisted of lesbian mothers and their children rather than teachers, I included their article in this section because of its focus on school contexts and participants’ perceptions of school personnel. Participants consisted of members of 20 families with lesbian parents, including 36 lesbian mothers (ages 29 to 62), 20 of their collective 43 children (ages 4 to 34), three grandparents, and two donors/fathers. The authors described the families as ethnically diverse. Using grounded theory approach to analyze interviews with participants, they determined three approaches members of lesbian headed families used in disclosing sexuality within schools: proud, selective, and private. Proud participants intentionally talked about mothers’ sexuality. Selective participants made decisions about disclosure based on the context and the audience. Private participants masked mothers’ sexual orientation. The authors also identified three positions schools held towards lesbian headed families: homophobic, heteronormative, and supportive. In homophobic schools, teachers silenced children and mothers who tried to talk about sexual orientation, gay pride events, or diverse family structures. School
personnel in these contexts sometimes punished children for talking about their families. Participants who interacted with these schools frequently opted for a private approach to family structure. In heteronormative schools, lesbian families were tolerated, but not acknowledged. Participants in these schools were either private or selective in disclosure. Supportive schools celebrated diversity and discussed lesbian headed families as one type among many. Participants in these schools were generally proud. School positions depended on the social context and demographics of the school population and the presence of gay or lesbian teachers on the school staff. The authors concluded, “We found that progressive change is only possible in contexts where families are able to be selective or proud in their approach to disclosure and schools strive to be accepting rather than homophobic” (p. 1073).

Based on the previous articles in this section, teachers’ support of lesbian families and family members’ disclosure is dubious at best. Bliss and Harris (1999) suggested, “Research could be done with gay and lesbian parents and their children to determine how their school experiences have been affected by teachers’ attitudes” (p. 169). My study, like that of Lindsay et al (2007), is located at the nexus of literature on sexual minority parents and teachers.

Defining Lesbian Motherhood

The literature in the previous sections tended to define lesbian motherhood in one of three ways: biological mothering, social mothering, and step-mothering. Of the articles in the previous section with a focus on mothers, biological mothers accounted for 25 of the 28, while just two considered social mothers and only one discussed step-mothers. Biological mothers either conceived their children through artificial insemination or
within prior heterosexual relationships. These mothers served as a regular, often principal, care-givers to those children. This type of motherhood was defined primarily by means of indicating the mother’s relationship with her children. Social mothers also provided daily care for their children, with whom their relationship depended either on adoption or a pre-existing romantic relationship with the children’s biological mother. Social mothers had been a part of the children’s lives from infancy, yet their motherhood was defined in terms of the social mother’s relationship to her children and her partner. Step-mothers were defined as those who came into children’s lives by means of her romantic relationship with their mother. This form of motherhood was expressed exclusively in terms of the step-mother’s relationship with her step-children’s mother.

Much of the literature made a case for disrupting notions of a tie between sexual orientation and fitness to parent (e.g. Chan et al., 1998; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Patterson, 2001). The focus on biological mothers, largely to the exclusion of social mothers and step-mothers, however, reinforced ties between motherhood and biological ties. Additionally, the large number of articles focused on outcomes for children belied a belief that quality mothering is measured produces emotionally stable, well-adjusted, high achieving children. In examining the literature in relation to social scripts, then, “good mother” is a script available primarily to biological mothers. Further, proof of adhering this script relies in outcomes for one’s children.

Literature Surrounding Good Mothers

Given the varied definitions of lesbian motherhood within the literature, it is helpful to consider current notions of mothers that exist independent of the literature on lesbian mothers. This discussion provides insight from media, religious organizations,
and public policy. It serves to couch the previous literature in academic and popular
notions of what it means to be a good mother. These notions inform my understandings
of scripts for mothers, although they may or may not impact participants’ interpretations
of scripts for good mothers.

Pressures to provide evidence of oneself as a good mother are not limited by
sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, religion, class, or educational level. More than 80% of
American women will eventually become mothers (Williams & Cooper, 2003). These
mothers, regardless of individual characteristics, are subjected to increasingly narrow
definitions of what it means to be a “good mother”. Douglas and Michaels (2004)
identified contemporary notions of a good mother as a “set of ideals, norms, and
practices, most frequently and powerfully represented in the media, that seem on the
surface to celebrate motherhood, but which in reality promulgate a standard of perfection
that are beyond your reach” (p. 4-5).

Recent definitions of quality mothers encourage intensive mothering, as defined
by sacrificing leisure time, sleep, contact with adults and personal fulfillment through any
other means besides motherhood, all for the sake of one’s children (Douglas & Michaels,
2004; Hays, 1996; J. Warner, 2005b). While the majority of American mothers work
outside of the home, on either a full-time or a part-time basis, they are encouraged to
spend large amounts of quality time with their children in the roles of teacher, mentor,
nurse, playmate and protector (Barnett, 2004; Williams & Cooper, 2003). In a recent poll
of mothers, 81% of participants indicated a beliefs that it is harder to be a mother now
than it was 20 to 30 years ago, and 56% felt that their own mothers did a better job
raising them than participants are doing with their children (Douglas & Michaels, 2004).
Another poll found that 70% participants found motherhood to be “incredibly stressful” (J. Warner, 2005b, p. 2). Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody (2001) explained possible sources of this stress. “It is a woman’s domestic labor that produces what counts as natural and normal development and that women have been regulated very strongly as mothers, having the responsibility to produce normality, correct development and educational success” (p. 114).

Such regulation stems from media, religious organizations, and public policy (Barnett, 2004; Douglas & Michaels, 2004; J. Warner, 2005a, 2005b; Williams & Cooper, 2003).

Motherhood became one of the biggest media obsessions of the last three decades, exploding especially in the mid 1980s and continuing unabated to the present. Women have been deluged by an ever-thickening mudslide of maternal media advice, programming, and marketing that powerfully shapes how we mothers feel about ourselves. (Douglas & Michaels, 2004, p. 6-7)

Television and print product advertisements, public service announcements, magazine and newspaper articles, images of mothers on television and in movies, and sponsored websites instructing women in steps to follow and products to employ in order to ensure healthy, well-adjusted, academically gifted children (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Hays, 1996; J. Warner, 2005a).

In addition to media in the United States, conservative political and religious organizations instruct women in quality, intensive mothering. Historian Ruth Feldstein (2000) described the decade of the 1980s as one in which mother blaming, a trend which continues today, became en vogue. She described that the administration of the time
attacked mothers for failing to raise physically and emotionally sound successful future citizens. Conservative religious groups also place child-care responsibilities solely with women, contending that a man’s role is that of provider, while women serve as caregivers (Barnett, 2004; Douglas & Michaels, 2004). For example, Focus on the Family (FoF), is a Christian ministry committed to enforcing family configurations in which an authoritative father and a submissive mother, bound in marriage, rear children (Troubledwith, 2005). Mothers and fathers differ in their roles in FoF families, with mothers assuming the responsibility for providing emotional security, sympathy, flexibility, and personal safety (Stanton, 2004). Ensuring positive school experiences, as defined by physical and emotional security, seems to fall to mothers in the FoF literature. Barnett (2004) described these familial relationships as “the cult of the family”.

The cult of the family creates a culture in which women are not allowed to feel anything but good about motherhood because it is the best God has for them. We are not allowed to want something in our lives in addition to motherhood because this role should be enough. And we are not allowed to suggest that motherhood is anything but a blessing because to so do is to denigrate the most wondrous calling God can give a woman. (p. 89)

Beyond messages of good mothering from conservatives are those discourses that are purveyed through public policy, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), in which mothers play an important role in their children’s education. Former U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Paige (2004), described NCLB as the most sweeping national education reform since the 1965. The legislation has provisions for increasing parental involvement in schools. A good mother according to NCLB has a great deal of knowledge about her
child’s cognitive abilities, the educational process, and standardized test results. NCLB contains specific expectations for mothers and fathers, “Parents will know their children’s strengths and weaknesses and how well schools are performing; they will have other options and resources for helping their children if their schools are chronically in need of improvement” (Paige, 2003, p. 5).

Mothers and Schools

This focus on mother as essential element of a child’s education is particularly important due to the body of literature that indicates a strong connection between student achievement and parental involvement, as defined by participation in school events, communication with children about school, helping with homework, and communication with school personnel (Catsambis, 2002; Epstein et al., 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Spera, 2005). This connection exists regardless of gender, ethnicity, and class. Beyond student achievement, student motivation seems to be correlated to parental involvement (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan-Holbein, 2005) and adolescents whose parents are more involved in their education are less likely to have behavior problems in school (Hill et al., 2004).

Much of the literature discusses parental involvement in general; however, involvement differs according to gender (Brooks, 2004; Coley & Morris, 2002). Mothers assume the majority of the labor involved with schooling, including school choice, communicating with teacher, talking to children about school and helping with assignments (Brooks, 2004). A study in the UK, compared mothers’ and fathers’ involvement in student’s choice of university (David, Ball, Devies, & Raey, 2003). Mothers were intensely involved in the details of college searches, often calling for
information for their children and discussing decisions at length. Fathers played a much more distant role, weighing in on final decisions. These levels of involvement in school choice seemed to be consistent across levels, as demonstrated through studies of preschool and elementary school choices. Mothers tended to gather and organize info and talk to children; fathers had some say in the ultimate choice of schools (Raey & Ball, 1998). Beyond choosing schools, mothers were the parents responsible for monitoring children’s school progress, communicating with teachers, and developing solutions for educational deficits (Reay, 1998).

Vincent and Ball (2001) argued that the role of mothers in making educational choices indicated that mothers were in charge of parenting.

They are involved in constant processes of compromise—balancing work and domestic responsibilities, shouldering the primary responsibility for organizing childcare, and delivering the child, communicating with careers etc. In order to do this, most have gone part-time, perhaps compromising their careers. Fathers are very much in the background in these accounts of choosing childcare, and thereafter, the balancing of work and care. (p. 649)

Overall, current literature related to mothers indicates heavy societal pressure to be a good mother, as defined by spending intensive time with children and children’s schools. This pressure extends to all mothers, regardless of ethnicity, class, educational level, or sexual orientation. My study furthers knowledge regarding such pressures in examining specifically how lesbian mothers, mother/educator/lesbians, and teachers reveal and/or interpret social scripts for mothers. It disrupts dominant scripts for mothers
and teachers in order to infuse sexual orientation into these scripts as a means of promoting social justice and creating a space for sexual difference.

Implications of the Previous Research

In addition to drawing on the academic notions of "good mother", my study is informed by the nature of the current LGBT family research. Much of the current research dedicated to LGBT parents and their children highlighted outcomes for family members. This research in part served to convince policy makers of the disconnect between sexual orientation and parenting ability, through making comparisons between heterosexual and LGBT parents (Milbank, 2003). While this political strategy mirrors gay and lesbian identity politics mentioned in the previous chapter, such comparisons also have potentially insidious consequences. In viewing this literature through the lens of queer theory, these comparisons serve to reinscribe heterosexual parenting as normal. Such comparisons serve to problematize gay parenting, while establishing heterosexual parenting as a standard that LGBT families must meet. The value of LGBT families arises from measuring up to heterosexual families; they have no intrinsic merit in this line of thinking (Laird, 1993). In order to minimize heteronormativity within this study, I have eschewed comparisons between sexual minority and heterosexual parents. LGBT parents' negotiations of and interpretations of social scripts within schools need not be compared to those of heterosexual parents.

While the first body of literature examined outcomes for children with LGBT parents, a second body of literature examined the experiences of LGBT parents. Some articles attending specifically interaction with institutions and to cultural scripts within those institutions. Within these categories of research, schools received little attention. Of
the 43 articles reviewed, few discussed schools. Some included academic performance among outcomes and others mentioned school choices. Only Ray and Gregory (2001), Kozik-Rosabal (2000), Ryan and Martin (2000), Lindsay et al (2006), Perlesz et al (2007) and Casper and Schultz (1999) made school experiences of gay and lesbian parents and their children a primary focus. Casper and Schultz (1999) also took up the perspective of teachers, which was the primary focus of Maney and Cain (1997), Bliss and Harris (1999) and Robinson and Ferfolja (2001). Given the increasing diversity of family structures within public school systems (Banks et al, 2005), further research is clearly needed on the intersection of lesbian mothers and schools. An increased knowledge base as it relates to sexual minority parents within schools will aid in culturally responsive teaching, though equipping teachers with a greater knowledge of their students and their students’ families. Beyond learning of the experiences sexual minority parents have within their children’s schools, teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers must know what experiences are possible. My research aims to do that through exploring the social scripts available to sexual minority mother and their children’s teachers.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

My reading of poststructural and queer theory has increased my interest in discourses that govern the interactions between schools and families. These discourses consist largely of social scripts, meaning culturally constructed, common sense notions of behaviors and language use that can and should take place in particular situations (Harre, 1983). In part, teachers and mothers can be categorized as either normal or deviant through their adherence to or violation of social scripts. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the social scripts that pertain to teachers and lesbian mothers in order to destabilize these scripts.

I find these social scripts particularly interesting because I perceive teacher and mother as roles that are culturally acceptable for women, yet homosexuals have frequently been named as sexually deviant (Foucault, 1978). The tension between socially “normal” and socially “deviant” make lesbian mothers a unique population for enactment of social scripts within schools. I explored this tension using the following research questions: What social scripts do participants reveal for mothers and teachers? How do participants interpret these scripts? How is deviance constituted through the articulation of these scripts?

I approached these questions using Erikson’s (1986) framework for qualitative inquiry as his notion of allowing theory to drive methodology facilitated my use of
poststructural and queer theory throughout data collection and analysis. The poststructural focus on power, desire, and language (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004) impacted my choice of research methodology, particularly as I attempted to maximize social interaction and minimize inequitable distributions of power. I will discuss my specific strategies for distributing power, including the use of focus groups, interpretive focus groups, and member checking, later in the chapter as I discuss data sources. Additionally, queer theory structured my data analysis as I identified statements of deviance. This chapter outlines the methodology I used to answer the research questions. I begin with a discussion of participants, including methods of recruitment and biographical descriptions. Then I outline the data sources that comprise the study. I conclude the chapter with a description of the techniques I used to analyze the data.

Participants

This study consisted of three groups of participants: lesbian mothers with school-age children, in-service teachers, and women who were mothers, educators, and lesbians (MEL). In this section, I discuss the distinct methods used to recruit each group of participants and the criteria for inclusion in the study. Then I provide an overview of participants within each group and a biography for each participant. Additionally, I discuss my decisions regarding self-disclosure throughout my interactions with participants.

Recruitment of Participants

I recruited participants through purposeful sampling (Creswell, 1998). Participants were volunteers who met criteria for inclusion in the study; they were not
selected randomly. This sampling technique prevents generalization of the findings to other populations.

Lesbian mothers and mother/educator/lesbians. In order to qualify for inclusion as a mother in the study, participants had to self-identify as female and lesbian, bisexual or transgender and have at least one child currently enrolled in school. Those women who participated as mother/educator/lesbians (MEL) rather than as lesbian mothers were currently employed as K-12 teachers or administrators. I recruited lesbian mothers and MELs through word of mouth, gay and lesbian clubs, and other participants. I contacted the directors of an organization dedicated to social activities for lesbian and bisexual women as well as a group organized to provide social activities and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) parents and their children. Organization directors contacted members to solicit participants. Participants were asked to contact friends, colleagues and family members who would also qualify for inclusion. Additionally, I asked my own friends and colleagues to refer participants to me.

While I had intended to seek out participants who were diverse in terms of ethnicity, class, and educational level, convenience sampling did not provide such diversity. Because sexual minorities are a hidden population, recruiting a representative sample proved difficult. Potential participants may have chosen not to disclose their sexual orientation, thus barring them from participation. And relying on social networking ensured participants who were connected with the gay community and/or had some level of outness. Additionally, several potential participants told me they did not have time to participate, owing to their work schedules or time commitments involving their children. Other potential participants expressed an initial interest in the study, but
they did not return repeated phone calls or e-mails asking for their participation. After attempting contact with potential participants three times, I ceased efforts to include these women in the study. My efforts yielded eight lesbian mothers and five MELs. I will provide biographical descriptions of these participants later in the chapter.

*Teachers.* Another group of participants consisted of teachers identified through their enrollment in Master's level classes. I attended class sessions of two courses, a seminar course on teacher leadership and a children’s literature course, as permitted by the instructors. In each course, I made an announcement to solicit participants two weeks prior to research activities. In order to qualify for inclusion, participants had to teach within K-12 classrooms at the time of the study. This study included 11 teachers whom I will describe in detail within the following section.

**Participant biographies**

In order to maintain the anonymity of participants, I have chosen a pseudonym for each participant. I have also omitted demographic details that would allow participants to be easily identified.

*Lesbian mothers.* Participants who were lesbian mothers consisted of four individuals and two couples, for a total of eight participants. With the exception of one Latina participant, all women were Caucasian. They ranged in age from 37 to 49, and all had completed some level of education beyond high school. The women self identified as middle class or upper middle class, with the exception of one working class participant. In this section, I provide information about each participant’s family, including members of the family, children’s ages, the type of school each child attends, and a descriptive quote.
One participant, Erin, was raising her 7-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son with her partner. While both children were biologically Erin’s, her partner had been a part of the children’s lives since their conceptions. The children’s father was a gay male who, along with his partner, played an active role in the children’s lives. Erin’s daughter was a second grader at a charter school and her son attended a private religious school for kindergarten. Erin explained considered her daughter’s interpretation of their family. “My second grader really can’t verbalize why she has two moms yet. She doesn’t say, ‘I have two moms and two dads. I just do.’”

Kayla, a Latina woman, had two daughters, ages 21 and 13 from previous heterosexual relationships. Her older daughter was enrolled in a teacher education program at a public university, and her younger daughter was in eighth grade. Kayla’s daughters had always attended public schools. Kayla and her wife, whom she married in a civil ceremony, also served as foster parents to a 10-month-old foster daughter. Kayla, in talking about her parenting style, described herself as “A Latina lesbian mother that goes in [to school], ‘Like what is the problem today?’” Kayla’s partner, Maya, joined us during part of the follow up interview. I consented her upon listening to her join Kayla in answering questions. I included these data for analysis, but I did not include a participant biography for her. That information was unavailable to me. In addition, Maya did not participate in the focus group and only participated in a quarter of the follow up interview.

Amy and her partner were raising Amy’s grandsons, ages 13 and 14. Her grandsons were attending eighth and ninth grades at a public school in a rural area. Amy talked about her older grandson’s description of her family, “He tries to say I have two
moms and a grandpa. He tries to call me that. Just to bug me.” She explained, “The boys have a little bit of a different lifestyle, because, not just because they have lesbian parents, but because they live on a ranch.”

Becky, a single mother, adopted a son from foster care. He was 5-years-old and attended a private religious school for kindergarten. She discussed her identity, “I don’t really identify as a lesbian mom as much as a single mom. And I think that would be really different if I was in a couple. So... I’m just a mom right now.”

Shelly and Kristin were co-parenting a 9-year-old daughter, biologically Shelly’s, whom they described as “the center of our life.” Kristin entered Shelly’s life when their daughter was a 3-year-old. While their daughter had attended religious schools for preschool, she was attending a public elementary school and was in third grade.

Fern and Wendy adopted two infant daughters from China, who were ages 6 and 8 at the time of the study. As a result of second parent adoption, both women were listed on the girls’ birth certificates. Their daughters attended public schools and were in first and third grade respectively. Wendy described their family, “Every day we verbalize that, that we’re a special family and that we love each other.”

Table 1 summarizes the previous information about each participant’s family. In addition, it provides the age, ethnicity, and education level of each participant. All lesbian mothers participated in one focus group interview. With the exception of Amy, each consented to a follow up interview. While Amy had expressed initial interest in a follow up interview, she did not return e-mails requesting a specific time for the interview.
Table 1

*Lesbian Mother Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>7-year-old daughter</td>
<td>Charter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5-year-old son</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>21-year-old daughter</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13-year-old daughter</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10-month-old daughter</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Associates</td>
<td>30-year-old daughter</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14-year-old grandson</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13-year-old grandson</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Some graduate</td>
<td>9-year-old daughter</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristin</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>5-year-old son</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>8-year-old daughter</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fern</td>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>6-year-old daughter</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Teachers.* Six students in seminar course on teacher leadership volunteered to participate in the first teacher focus group. Megan was a 30-year-old, Caucasian middle school, special education teacher with five years of teaching experience. She did not have any children, but was expecting. Colleen, a 33-year-old, Caucasian high school English teacher, had ten years of teaching experience. She did not have any children. Vince was a
30-year-old, Caucasian high school English teacher with six years of experience and no children. Gina, a 52-year-old, Caucasian high school science teacher had 13 years of teaching experience. She had three sons, ages 24, 22, and 19. Chelsea was a 40-year-old, Caucasian third grade teacher with 18 years of teaching experience and a 14-year-old son and a 6-year-old daughter. Eddie was a 32-year-old, African American high school physical education teacher with five years of experience. He had a 4-year-old son and a 6-year-old son. Megan, Colleen, and Chelsea participated in follow-up interviews.

The second group of teachers consisted of four students enrolled in a Master's level children’s literature course. None of these participants had children, and all were in their second year of teaching. Cindy, a 24-year-old from a mixed ethnic background, taught third grade. Jill was a 23-year-old, Hispanic third grade teacher. Virginia, 23-years-old, was a Caucasian, fourth grade teacher. Shannon, a Caucasian 24-year-old, taught third grade. These four teachers participated in one focus group interview and each consented to a follow up interview.

None of these teachers made direct statements of sexual orientation. However, several made reference to opposite-sex significant others. Some also talked about the experiences of gay and lesbian friends, thus setting themselves apart from those friends in terms of sexual orientation. While I cannot make definite statements about teacher participants’ sexual orientation at heterosexual or non-heterosexual, none of these participants were out as LGBT in the context of the study.

Table 2 provides an overview of each teacher’s age, ethnicity, parenting status, and teaching context.
Table 2

*Teacher Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Teaching Assignment</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Middle school special</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleen</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>High school English</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vince</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>High school English</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>3 boys, ages 24, 22, and 19</td>
<td>High school Science</td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Son, daughter, ages 14 and 16</td>
<td>Third grade</td>
<td>18 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2 boys, ages 4 and 6</td>
<td>High school physical</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Third grade</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Third grade</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Fourth grade</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Third grade</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of these teachers taught in public schools in a large urban school district. Owing to low income, 39.7% of students in the district qualified for free or reduced meals. The
ethnic breakdown of the school district was 38.5% Hispanic, 37.5% Caucasian, 14.2% African American, 8.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.8% American Indian/Alaskan Native. Approximately 18.4% of students had a first language other than English (Clark County School District, 2007).

Mother/educator/lesbians. Five participants identified as lesbians, actively parented at least one school-aged child, and served either as a teacher or an administrator at the K-12 level in the same school district as the teacher participants. Penny, an elementary special education teacher, had a partner of nine years. Together, they parented their 2-year-old son and Penny’s 7-year-old nephew. Kelli taught within an elementary gifted program. She and her partner of nine years were raising Kelli’s 14-year-old son. Michele and Abigail were partners and taught at the same high school. Abigail’s 6-year-old daughter lived with them, and they remained in close contact with the 6-year-old son of Abigail’s ex-partner. Nyla was an administrator at an elementary school. She and her partner of two years were raising Nyla’s 5-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son. I have not been as detailed in my descriptions of the MELs’ teaching contexts as in descriptions of others’ teaching contexts. This is a response to MEL participants’ concerns for confidentiality and professional safety. Table 3 summarizes information regarding the MEL participants.
Table 3

*Mother/Educator/Lesbian Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Professional assignment</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>Elementary special education</td>
<td>2-year-old son; 7-year-old nephew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyla</td>
<td>Elementary administrator</td>
<td>5-year-old daughter; 3-year-old son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelli</td>
<td>Elementary gifted and talented teacher</td>
<td>14 year-old son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>High school teacher</td>
<td>6-year-old daughter; 6-year-old son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michele</td>
<td>High school teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disclosure

My interactions with these participants required attention to issues of disclosure. DeCastelle and Bryson (1998) encouraged all sexual minority researchers to disclose their own sexuality and that of participants while conducting research and disseminating results. The two argued that current research ignores the sexual orientation of participants, thus assuming that all are heterosexual. Disclosure provides a means to disrupt heteronormativity in educational research as it promotes recognition of non-heterosexual sexualities. Conversely, Tucker (2002) advised researchers to explore their own motives for "outing" participants. She recommended that researchers pay attention not only to what is revealed, but also to what is strategically not disclosed. Within this research I was forced to make decisions of whether to disclose my identities as a teacher and a lesbian. Such explicit disclosure may have impacted participants' interactions with me, although anthropologist Altorki and Fawzi El-Solh (1988) reminded readers that
insider/outsider status is not a binary, but rather can exist along a continuum in which researchers are insiders in some aspects and outsiders in others.

A similar continuum exists for disclosure of sexuality. Owing to heteronormative assumptions and the variety of contexts in which individuals interact, "coming out of the closet" is not something that a sexual minority individual completes once and for all. This is an act that may be performed repeatedly or not at all. One is not either in the closet or out of the closet. Sedgewick (1990) explained the complexity of silence regarding sexuality, "'Closetedness' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence—not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (p. 3). And while I had the opportunity to invoke a speech act to disclose my sexuality, I had no control of participants' perceptions of me as heterosexual or non-heterosexual. Thus, as a researcher, my decision was not a simple one of disclosure/non-disclosure.

In interacting with lesbian mothers, I disclosed my own sexuality as I explained my interest in the research topic. It was very important to me that participants felt as emotionally safe as possible during focus group interviews. I expected that identifying myself as a lesbian would make participants feel more comfortable. As I pursued access to the Gay and Lesbian Center, I spoke with the director of the center. I noticed a marked difference in the body language of the director when I told her that I am a lesbian. She uncrossed her arms and leaned forward. Likewise the mother/educator/lesbians, smiled upon hearing me disclose my sexuality. And when I told them that I was a teacher, they reacted with phrases such as, "Oh, well then you know what it's like [to interact with students]." These statements expressed participants' views of me as an insider. My
disclosure of sexuality may have made participants more comfortable and willing to share information. Yet this decision may have also prevented participants from sharing information that they would have considered unimportant or common sense for me as an “insider”.

In interacting with participants who were educators, I mentioned my teaching experience. I felt that this created a bridge between their experiences and mine, and communicated to teachers that I had empathy for their position and sentiments. I did not discuss my sexual orientation, but participants may have made assumptions based on the topic of the study. Not knowing participants’ assumptions, I cannot gauge the impact my choice of non-disclosure had on their responses. Although I did not directly ask teachers about their sexual orientation, I made note of instances in which teachers made a point of naming their own sexuality and the conditions under which they did so. As previously mentioned, none of the teachers identified themselves as sexual minorities. Yet many included comments about their opposite-gender significant others. Some made references to “my gay friends tell me,” thus distinguishing themselves as heterosexual and different from these gay friends.

Data Sources

Data collected in order to document social scripts for mothers and teachers within classrooms came from one focus group interview with eight lesbian mothers and follow up interviews with seven of these mothers; two focus group interviews with teachers, one with six teachers and one with four teachers and follow up interviews with seven of the teachers; face-to-face interviews with five MELs and follow up interviews with four of these participants; and demographic surveys from all participants. Based on Erikson’s
framework (1986), I entered the field with well-defined research questions derived from poststructural and queer theory. As data collection progressed, I modified specific interview questions. The overlap of data collection from disparate groups of participants allowed me to refine interview questions in response to ongoing data analysis and emerging themes. This corresponded with Merriam’s (1992) notion of qualitative research, “The design of a qualitative study is emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions in the study progress” (p. 8).

Table 4 provides an overview of the time frame in which data collection occurred. Each date may represent more than one interview. It is important to note the overlap of data collection from different groups of participants, as I modified interview questions based on responses to previous interviews and initial data analysis.

Table 4

*Data Collection Timetable*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data sources</th>
<th>2007 Data collection dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus group with mothers</td>
<td>March 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group with teachers, including interpretive portion</td>
<td>April 17, April 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up interviews with mothers</td>
<td>March 31, April 4, April 17, April 19, April 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up interviews with teachers</td>
<td>April 23, April 24, April 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with mother/educator/lesbians</td>
<td>April 25, April 26, July 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up interviews with mother/educator/lesbians</td>
<td>May 10, May 16, August 30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus group interviews with mothers and teachers

Owing to poststructuralism's focus on language and the socially constructed nature of truth, I chose research components in order to maximize social interaction, including focus group interviews. Focus groups provide a synergetic environment in which participants can influence and inform one another, rather than an environment in which the researcher dominates the focus of inquiry (Krueger, 1994). Participants in focus groups can expand and refine their ideas based on one another's statements. However, interaction between participants can be a limitation, as group dynamics may restrict participants' willingness to make certain statements. Additionally, focus group interviews disallow complete anonymity for participants, as members of focus groups know each other's identities. And for this study focused on sexual orientation, attending a focus group exclusively for sexual minorities required the participants to disclose their sexuality in a group setting.

Beyond promoting maximum social interaction, using poststructural as a theoretical framework also led me to work to minimize power differentials between me, as a researcher, and the participants. As the study explored potential sites for resistance to scripts created by hegemonic discourses, equitable distribution of power was particularly important. Focus groups help to equalize power, distributing it across group members, rather than placing it solely with the researcher (Krueger, 1994). At the same time, group members do not all have equal power. Participants' various levels of education, their socio-economic statuses, their personalities, or a variety of other factors may lead one group member to have more power than others. This may, in effect, silence other participants.
The first focus group consisted of lesbian mothers. The interview was held at the Gay and Lesbian Center of Southern Nevada. My intention was to provide participants with a message of acceptance of lesbian parenting, thus removing some potential barriers to disclosure. However, the location of the focus group interview may have been a barrier to participation by potential participants who did not feel comfortable in that environment or who feared being seen walking into an openly gay location. The focus group interview was framed as a round table discussion rather than a focus group interview, as the latter may have indicated to participants a more formal climate than desired.

I explained the study to participants, describing the consenting procedure. Upon providing consent, participants completed the survey found in Appendix A. The purpose of this survey was to provide basic demographic information about each participant and her family. I then explained the protocol for the focus group. The structure of the focus groups followed Krueger's (1994) guide, aiming for a "permissive and nonjudgmental" (p. 12) environment. Participants did not need to answer each question, but they were to listen to one another without interrupting. My role during the focus group was to facilitate conversation. I asked initial questions but encouraged participants to ask each other questions as well, and I talked very little during their interactions. Appendix B contains a list of questions I asked during the audio-recorded discussion. Questions focused on descriptions of participants' families, views of motherhood, and participants' experiences within their children's schools. Following the focus group interview, I emailed all participants, asking them to volunteer for follow up interviews.

In addition to a focus group with lesbian mothers, I conducted focus group interviews with two different groups of teachers. The first interview took place during a
class session in a seminar course on teacher leadership. The instructor left the class, and students were given the option to complete an assignment related to parental involvement or to participate in the focus group interview. The second focus group took place directly following of a class session of a children's literature course. The procedures for both focus groups mirrored those for the group interviews with the lesbian mothers, including consenting procedures, demographic surveys (found in Appendix A) and focus group interview protocols. Questions during these interviews focused on participants' experiences with parental involvement within their schools. Besides the content of the questions (found in Appendix B), a major difference between the teacher and mother focus groups was the inclusion of an interpretive portion within the teacher focus group interviews.

Interpretive focus group interviews were an additional strategy to provide participants with some control over the data. Dodson (1999), who developed this technique in her research related to women and girls living in poverty in the United States, explained, “Interpretive focus groups differ from conventional focus groups in that the focus is on data previously collected and then methodically presented to groups of women and/or girls for their analysis” (p. 253). This technique has the additional potential to allow disparate groups of participants to inform one another without directly interacting, which is particularly useful in cases in which anonymity is particularly important. However, this advantage is limited in the respect that the researcher serves as a conduit between participant groups. This configuration limits shared data to the researcher's interpretations of important and unimportant points. Nonetheless, the
interpretive portion of the focus group with teachers does provide an opportunity to share some power over analysis with participants.

I presented teachers with some of the findings from the lesbian mother focus group and asked to provide their initial impressions. These findings, which I member checked with the lesbian mothers, included the mothers’ views of desired and detrimental qualities within teachers. The lists of these qualities are presented in Appendix D. At the conclusion of each focus group interview, I asked teachers to sign up for follow up interviews.

Follow up interviews with mothers and teachers

Individual interviews can counterbalance some of the aforementioned limitations inherent to focus groups by allowing participants to make statements without the influence of group dynamics and set themselves apart from other focus group members. Additionally, the use of follow up interviews after focus groups interviews has the potential to provide participants with equitable opportunities to share their opinions. In addition to providing participants with more equitable chances to contribute, follow up interviews can also give participants more control over the data. Follow up interviews allow researchers to obtain additional information and corrective feedback in addition to providing participants with a level of control over the researcher’s interpretations (Reinharz, 1992). Glesne (1999) referred to this practice as a form of “member checking” (p. 32) and suggested it as a means of triangulation. Despite providing participants with some control over data, follow up interviews do not change the power the interviewer has in posing questions, and thus maintaining ultimate control over interview content.
Seven of the eight lesbian mothers in the focus group consented to individual follow up interviews. Follow up interviews with lesbian mothers took place after the transcription and initial stages of analysis of the focus group, which allowed me to shape interview questions based on the focus group discussion. I conducted interviews with all participants from the focus group except for Amy. Participants chose the location for the follow up interviews. I interviewed Kayla at the Gay and Lesbian Center, Becky in her home, and the others at coffee shops. Each interview was audio recorded. Prior to the interview, I e-mailed each participant a copy of the transcript from the focus group. This provided participants with the opportunity to reflect upon the focus group prior to the individual interview, although Erin and Kayla were the only participants who read the transcript. The others told me that they didn’t have time to read the transcripts. During the interview, each participant provided any reflections on the group and additional comments regarding interactions within schools. Appendix C contains an interview guide for these follow up interviews, which went into greater depth about motherhood and experiences with teachers. I also used the follow up interviews as an opportunity to member-check my initial impressions of the data with participants. For example, I asked several participants to look at the list of desired and detrimental qualities in teachers, and they suggested modifications to this list.

Seven teachers also consented to individual follow up interviews. I interviewed Megan, Colleen, and Chelsea at their schools, and Virginia, Jill, Shannon, and Cindy on the University of Nevada, Las Vegas campus. Appendix C contains sample questions for these interviews, in which I clarified their beliefs regarding parental involvement and
provided them with an opportunity to share additional reflections regarding lesbian mothers and their children. These interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

Individual interviews

I also conducted audio-taped interviews with five participants who were both lesbian mothers and teachers. Penny and Nyla, who worked at the same school, preferred to participate in an initial interview together. They also participated in follow up interviews individually. All interviews with Penny and Nyla took place in a conference room at their school. I interviewed Kelli twice at her school. Abigail met me at a coffee shop for an initial interview, and I went to her classroom for the follow up interview. I interviewed Michele at a coffee shop. She did not respond to repeated requests via e-mail for a follow up interview. In the initial interview, I asked participants about their families and their experiences as lesbian mothers as well as their teaching experiences and expectations for parental involvement. In follow up interviews, I focused on the ways the roles of teacher, mother, and lesbian inform each other, or not. Appendix C contains the questions for the initial and follow-up interviews.

The sum of participants from the three participant groups was 23. All together, the data sources included demographic surveys completed by 18 participants, three focus group interviews with a total of 18 participants, and a total of 15 interviews with individuals or pairs.

Analysis

My approach to data analysis stemmed from my conceptual framework. In particular, queer theory’s focus on constructions of normal and deviant drew my attention to the concepts of normal and deviant within the data. Analysis consisted largely of
highlighting statements of deviance, defining deviance as an action or stated belief that transcends common sense norms. M. Warner (1999) explained the relationship between normal and deviant.

It does not seem possible to think of oneself as normal without thinking that some other kind of person is pathological. What could have been seen as healthy variation is now seen as deviance. The rhetoric of normalization also tells us that the taken-for-granted norms of common sense are the only criteria of value.

Excavating statements of deviance proves useful in identifying social scripts, as common sense norms become visible through transgression.

I approached the transcripts in search of statements of deviance. These statements were references to people or actions that were wrong, harmful, or abnormal. These statements frequently contained an expression of the norm as well as the transgression of the norm. In order to qualify as statements of deviance, these transgression had to contain a perceive consequence or punishment. For the purposes of this analysis, I used negative consequences and punishment as synonymous.

An example of a statement of deviance illustrates the elements of transgression and punishment. Kelli made several statements of deviance as she talked about community diversity during the follow up interview.

This is what drives me crazy about Las Vegas and why I’m not a real true Nevadan. It’s not a blue state number one. But it’s also, you know, anything goes here. Drugs, sex, alcohol, prostitution, gambling, you name the vice. Except for you know what? We won’t accept you because you’re gay. It’s still not here. It’s still not here.
In this example, several things were categorized as deviant, albeit from different perspectives. Kelli categorized drugs, sex, alcohol, prostitution, and gambling as deviant in naming them as vices and saying that she was driven crazy by acceptance of these activities in light of the non-acceptance of gay people. Being gay was also categorized as deviant within Kelli's statement. While Kelli herself did not believe that being gay was deviant, she indicated that people in Las Vegas categorize it as such. The punishment for this deviance was non-acceptance. This example is one of 171 statements of deviance within the data. Appendix E contains a summary of these statements by individual and participant group.

For each statement of deviance, I recorded the behavior or belief that was categorized as deviant, who categorized it as such, and the anticipated consequences of this deviance. Then I created categories for like types of deviance, resulting in five categories: being or having a lesbian mother, being a gay or lesbian teacher, defining oneself primarily through one's sexuality, teaching beyond academic content, and failing to provide some level of education for children at home. I determined the various groups that named each category as deviant, including teachers, heterosexual parents, students, children of lesbians, administration, society, the gay community, and lesbian mothers. For each category, I also identified the consequences or punishment each group assigned to the deviance. Then I examined the deviance and the punishment alongside the rest of the data in order to describe the norms, or social scripts, that each category transgressed.

I created an initial list of scripts based on the punishments, category of deviance, and my impressions of the data. Then I checked these scripts against the data. I accepted each script if there was evidence of the script within the transcripts. If sufficient evidence
did not exist, I rejected the script. This process resulted in six social scripts for teachers and seven social scripts for teachers. My choice of statements of deviance led to the creation of specific categories of deviance as well as multiple social scripts for teachers and mothers.

Triangulation and Limitations

Qualitative research tends to receive criticism for a perceived lack of objectivity and verification (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The theory underpinning this research acknowledges the impossibility of value-free inquiry. It is, therefore, important to note that I identify as lesbian and have more than eight years of experience teaching and supervising student teachers in public schools. Those factors influenced my interpretation of the data. That being said, I achieved a certain amount of triangulation through the use of multiple strategies of inquiry (Creswell, 1998). The process of member checking through follow up interviews with participants served as a means to “cross-check [my] work” (Janesick, 2003, p. 69). Additionally, my articulation of my theoretical framework and personal history grants readers a greater understanding of my interpretation of data.

Despite this triangulation, this study contains limitations as a result of methodological choices. In part, these limitations stem from my selection of participants. The eight lesbian mothers, ten teachers, and five mother/educator/lesbians volunteered for participation. This selection was not random, and participants' responses cannot be generalized to other populations. In addition, participants knew the topic of the study when they consented to participate. Therefore, potential participants who did not feel comfortable discussing topics related to lesbian mothers were excluded from participation.
The use of focus group interviews with one group of eight lesbian mothers, one group of four teachers, and one group of six teachers, may have also barred potential participants as well as limited responses of participating group members. Drawing upon focus group interviews with lesbian mothers limited participation to mothers who were willing to reveal their sexual orientation within a semi-public setting. Additionally, the responses of participants within the three focus group interviews may have been limited by what the participants considered to be the dominant discourse of the group.

Beyond limitations in data collection, data analysis was limited by my own biases. As previously mentioned, I approached the data from the perspective of a lesbian teacher. Additionally, I was the only researcher who identified statements of deviance within the data. I was the only researcher who used these statements to identify social scripts and who then verified these scripts within the remainder of the data. The statement of deviance and the resulting scripts, then, were subject to my own personal biases. This study would have been made stronger in relying on the interpretations of multiple analysts in order to infuse inter-rater reliability into the study. It then follows that the results of this study, which appear in the next chapter, must be considered in light of the conditions impacting data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Social scripts for good mother and good teacher varied according to participant group. This chapter explores the scripts for mother and teacher as revealed by lesbian mothers, teachers, and mother/educator/lesbians (MEL). The first section addresses scripts revealed by lesbian mothers; the last addresses those revealed by teachers. I use the MELs to bridge the two groups, because I consider them to be a distinct participant group with experiences akin to both teacher and lesbian mother participants. Within each section, I identify and define scripts for mothers and then identify and define scripts for teachers.

Scripts Revealed by Lesbian Mothers

The lesbian mothers in this study revealed five social scripts for mothers and three for teachers. They did so either by stating their beliefs regarding normal behavior for mothers and teachers or by discussing behavior that the participants or others had perceived as deviant or transgressive. As explained in the previous chapter, eight lesbian mothers participated in the study: Amy, who lived on a ranch with her partner and her grandsons; Erin, who had two biological children whom she parents with her partner; Becky, a single mother of an adopted son; Fern and Wendy, who had adopted their daughters from China; Shelly and Kristin who were raising Shelly's biological daughter;
and, Kayla, who was raising Kayla’s two biological daughters and a six-month old foster
dughter with her wife.

This section describes each script revealed by participants, points to evidence for
the scripts within the data, provides examples of transgression of the scripts, and
discusses the consequences of such transgressions, when applicable. I begin with scripts
for mothers and continue to scripts for teachers.

*Lesbian Mother Revealed Scripts for Mothers*

Lesbian mother participants expressed beliefs about how mothers should interact
with their children and with their children’s teachers. These beliefs comprise the scripts
that lesbian mother participants revealed for mothers. I present the scripts in order of
prevalence within the data, beginning with the script that received the most attention
during the interviews and concluding with the script that received the least. Prevalence is
defined in part by which scripts served as overarching, as some of these scripts were
almost umbrella scripts that impacted others. I also determined prevalence through
attention to deviance. Some scripts were referenced through transgression of these
scripts. Appendix J summarizes statements of deviance, transgressions of the scripts. As
the research questions pertain more to the scripts than to deviance, I chose not to include
these summaries in the chapter. It is important to note that prevalence relates specifically
to evidence within the data. Participants did not specifically address the relative
importance of the various scripts.

*Mother Consider Their Children’s Needs and Identities Above Their Own*

An overarching social script for mothers was that they deemed their children to be
the chief priority within their lives. They prioritized their children above themselves. Fern
illustrated this during a follow up interview in which she discussed the importance of making her children her primary concern.

I guess for me the only thing I want to reiterate, because we were focusing in on schools and teachers is that I believe in our family, the primary focus in whatever we do if it’s for our kids, is our kids. Not our family, not us. It’s about their education and their experiences.

Fern was not alone in her belief that mothers should focus on their children rather than themselves. When asked what it meant to be a good mother, lesbian mothers talked about self-sacrifice. Becky said, “Giving of your time.” Shelly responded, “Try to give them as much as you can within the confines of your time, the finances, and their spiritual needs. Try to feed the whole person. Instead of maybe getting caught up in your schedule.” Kayla talked about sacrifice in terms of, “Being willing to ask your kids, what can I do, what can I do for you?” Wendy talked about the women who work for her, praising them for doing everything for their children. “Some of the best moms I’ve ever seen are the ones who are making $10 per hour and doing everything for their kids. Everything for their kids.”

Mothers in the study made both personal and professional sacrifices in order to prioritize their children in their lives. Erin underscored the professional risks she took to ensure that her daughter was her first priority.

I’ll do anything to make sure that I’m the one who picks my kids up every day at three o’clock. So I do that at the risk of my career. I think that this just seems to be a critical time right now. I’m creating her memories. I only have a certain number of years to do this before I’m not going to be cool enough for her to hang
out with me. So I feel like these are critical years, and I would put anything at risk to make sure that I affect these years in her life.

For lesbian mothers in this study, placing children’s interests above their own also impacted the disclosure of sexual orientation. Many resisted appearing “too gay” or being identified primarily in terms of their sexual orientation. Kayla mentioned her frustration with her sexuality eclipsing the remainder of her identity, providing an illustration of others identifying lesbian mothers primarily by their sexual orientation.

I’m a lesbian parent. I own my own agency; I’m an interpreter. And I’m not the Spanish interpreter. I’m the lesbian interpreter. And it’s infuriating, because I certainly don’t define my heterosexual friends where they like it doggy style. This is Jane and her husband. They like it doggy style. For god sake! [Laughter] Part of the same frustration, it certainly is a chip on the shoulder. I think it’s pretty honest to admit that.

Kristin talked about making their daughter, rather than their sexuality, the center of their family life.

We don’t have a gay flag on our car or out in front of our house. And we don’t do that. You know, we really just feel like we’re Kristin and Shelly, we’re family, and we love to golf and we like to vacation and we like to do this stuff. And [our daughter] is the center of our life and that’s just the way it is.

Many participants downplayed their own sexual orientation in an effort to protect their children and provide what participants perceived to be a high quality of life for them. As she talked about minimizing focus on her sexual orientation, Wendy explained, “I think we try to assimilate into the existing world, not create one of our own.” Downplaying
sexuality also became evident as participants focused on instances in which they perceived others to be "too gay" or too liberal in disclosing sexual orientation. These actions were transgressions of the script of considering children's needs and identities above mothers' needs and identities.

An example of this developed in the focus group with lesbian mothers. Participants discussed carrying various flags into their children's schools: the "gay flag," the "mommy flag," the "bilingual flag," and the "Mexican flag." Flags were used in this case as metaphors for the identity mothers wore as they approached their children's schools. Kayla explained this when I asked her what determines the flag she carries into her children's schools.

Depends on who's being a jerk. Depending on the situation. I've had to rescue my girls in separate situations from aggressive boy behavior at school. So I go marching in there with the mommy flag to the dean's office to make sure that their issues are taken care of. It really just depends on the situation.

When I asked Kayla the difference between the gay flag and the mommy flag, two of the flags she mentioned carrying, she explained the political bent of the gay flag.

They probably overlap. But the gay flag, I think we kind of touched on that in the group, too. I think probably comes on more because when you are the gay mom, the gay family at the school, there's a bit of a spotlight on you. Everybody's kind of watching. And you have to know that you're setting an example. And not always come to hit everybody over the head with the flag, but to make sure that they're being respected, the girls are being respected. That's where I get really
political. And the challenge of course in this town, with our ultra conservative school board and everything else.

Kayla’s comments contextualized her use of the gay flag as a means to be a protective, supportive mother. She did not take up the gay flag in order to point to her own sexual orientation. Thus her children remained at the forefront.

The metaphor of flags repeatedly supported the script of mothers considering children’s needs above their own. During the discussion, the gay flag received the most attention, with eight mentions as opposed to one mention each for the mommy flag, the bilingual flag, and the Mexican flag. When asked to comment on this metaphor during follow-up interviews, several participants felt they differed from the other women in the group in their willingness to take up the gay flag. Erin, for example, said, “I was sort of put off by the theme of all the gay flag carrying. Because I think that it, it doesn’t matter who you are. I don’t think any of us should be carrying a flag of any sort.” She later described the idea of carrying a gay flag to be “too in your face.” And Fern mentioned, “I still think in the focus group, it was so over the top to me about carrying the flag.” She continued by saying, “I think the other flag that was not discussed in the group was carrying the kid flag and then whatever kind of follows behind that to create comfort for them and positive experiences for them.” Wendy added, “Yeah, because we’re, if we carry the gay flag in the front door, we’re also outing the kids.” Whether participants took up or resisted the idea of carrying flags for their children, their reasons for doing so pointed to participants’ desires to fulfill their children’s needs before fulfilling their own.

Some lesbian participants resisted prioritizing sexuality above motherhood. They identified people who were “too gay” as deviant. Wendy termed this, “I’m gay, hip-hip-
hooray.” Fern reiterated the ways she believed that she and Wendy differed from the other participants in the focus group, accusing other participants of focusing too heavily on their own sexual orientation.

It was like the children and the education and ultimately their path and their life was I think somewhat ignored. And maybe these are the underlying things that maybe you’re implying that that helps better their education. But I think that absolutely needs to be said. We want our child to have the best education.

In part, participants resisted being “too gay” in an effort not to harm children’s peer relationships. Wendy illustrated this point as she talked about advice she would give to lesbian mothers who have school aged children.

I think to any lesbian parents, it’s cool to be out waving the flag and it’s cool to say you’re two lesbian moms. And we find out we’re the only ones [lesbian mothers at our daughters’ school]. But at the same time, my kid’s got to walk in that lunchroom and feel like there’s not a spot light on her.

Participants only disclosed their sexuality in instances that they did not expect to impact their children negatively. Kayla mentioned dropping her daughter off several blocks from school as a result of having gay themed bumper stickers on her car. And rather than considering their own desires to attend their daughter’s school events as a couple, Shelly explained that she and Kristin “pick and choose how we want to show up.” She went on to explain that if their daughter attended an event with her classmates, such as a school dance or performance, only one mother went. “Just to make it easier for her.” Shelly and Kristin didn’t want their visibility to cause their daughter harm from her classmates.
Overall, participants talked about making their children the main priority in their lives. To this end, they made personal and professional sacrifices. They also downplayed their own sexuality, in some cases completely concealing it, in an effort to protect their children. This script was the most prevalent one throughout focus group and individual interviews.

Mothers work to create and sustain friendships for their children

A key aspect of the high quality of life lesbian mother participants envisioned for their children was positive peer relationships. As a result, mothers discussed the importance of creating and sustaining friendships for their children. Many lesbian participants were very intentional in creating social situations for their children. Erin, for example, discussed her strategy for helping her daughter create friendships. She mentioned leading a Girl Scout troop while her partner coached a softball team, allowing the two women to create networks of friends for their daughter.

I’m the ex Girl Scout and Susan’s the ex softball player. And so basically what we’re doing is creating for our daughter what her community is going to be. These are going to be her friends for the next 10 or 12 years. These are the families which we’re going to be intertwined with.

Fern also accepted responsibility for her daughters’ social lives, as she mentioned during the focus group. “I think that we provide a lot as a family of things that our kids need socially, and as far as who they are and what kind of family they’re in and friends and our church and things.” She and Wendy relied upon their family and their church as a means of creating friendships for their children. Wendy talked about guiding her daughters in ways that would not result in them being teased by their peers, “I still think
that it’s important that if she doesn’t look good in the morning and I say, ‘Honey you don’t want to wear that because I know what’s going to happen on the playground.’”

This script was particularly evident through participants’ fears being barred from the script. Participants talked about challenges of lesbian mothers faced in creating and sustaining friendships for their children, because many participants had experienced being named as deviant by heterosexual parents. Participants talked about encountering heterosexual parents who prevented their children from forming friendships with the lesbian mothers’ children. Shelly discussed her experiences with heterosexual parents during the focus group.

And it’s hard to know if you’re being too sensitive. Before we came to [this city], [our daughter] would get invited probably to ten birthday parties a year. Since we’re very much out, she doesn’t get invited. So you don’t know, is it the gay issue? Because the PTA mom, the lady who runs the PTA knows we’re gay. And so is it out, is that the reason why our daughter no longer gets invited to anything? You know, I would rather know that you’re discriminating to my face. Come tell me. We did, we had a lady, came to our house, and just said, “Yeah, I’ve got a real problem with you. My kid can’t play with you.”

In order for lesbian mothers and their children to be named as deviant, the mothers did not need be involved in a relationship with another woman. Rather being named as deviant was a result of disclosure of sexual orientation. In some cases, participants and their children chose to disclose sexual orientation. In other cases, this disclosure was forced. Shelly explained, “And so even if you’re trying to be discrete, it’s going to be picked up. And then when it’s picked up and kids start to tease.” And during
the focus group interview, Kayla talked about the mother of her daughter’s friend forcing Kayla to disclose her sexuality. The event Kayla discussed occurred during a time that Kayla’s daughter purposefully concealed their family situation; she was “in the closet” about her mother’s sexual orientation.

So church lady is hanging around, and [my wife] comes out to start the barbeque. So she says, “So where’s your husband?” And [my daughter’s] in the closet, and all the kids were in the pool. And I was being nice, “I don’t have a husband.” And I thought that would [stop her questions]. She pushed it. “Well, so who all lives here?” And I said, “My two daughters, my foster kids, and my wife.” And I was like, I’m pushing church lady over the edge.

Kayla’s story about church lady illustrates a situation in which a lesbian mother felt bullied into revealing her sexual orientation. Even when participants chose to disclose their sexuality, they sometimes resented having to do so. Shelly explained, “Sometimes we have to participate in sharing our sexuality, when sometimes we don’t want to.”

According to participants, heterosexual parents, particularly those with strong religious beliefs, refused to allow their children to interact with the children of lesbian mothers. Kayla continued the story about “church lady” by explaining what happened after Kayla disclosed her sexuality to “church lady”.

And I kid you not. She just [got] pale white. “Just, just a minute,” she gets on the phone, “Oh my goodness, an emergency just came up. Honey, honey, come out of the pool. We have to leave now. Come on, we’re leaving.” Come to find out later after some conversation, with some of [my daughter’s] friends, the mom freaked out. You gonna ask the questions, I’m not going to lie. You’re in my house!
Wendy and Fern took a different approach to their interactions with heterosexual parents. Wendy explained her belief that being open about their relationship, she and Fern promote acceptance of gay people.

I think the working from within is helping our kids and it’s also helping other families, I think by example. I think by people getting to know us better. Now this is almost their third year at that same school. But that people are saying, “Oh, wow. Now we really do have friends that are gay and it’s great.”

Shelly and Kristin felt that their daughter faced unique challenges as a result of their relationship, such as teasing from classmates. They also talked about their daughter’s desire to fit in with her peers.

Kristin: Girls have a lot more problems with having gay parents. Because they’re so emotional. Whereas boys are a little bit more attitude of whatever.

Shelly: Yeah, I mean girls definitely want to fit in. That’s a cultural, that’s a cue. And definitely, that’s been our experience, too. [Our daughter] just wants to fit in. She doesn’t want to look a little different. She wants to wear the right clothes. And fit in. She even has a book. She bought a book on how to be cool. It’s a big deal. Because we are not, let’s get that straight. She can’t learn it at home, so she’s got to learn it from a book.

Kristin and Shelly’s daughter struggled to fit in, a challenge they felt was more difficult as a result of their lesbian relationship. Shelly explained the approach she and Kristin took to lessen this struggle.
We let her out the family as much as she feels comfortable with her friends. And she does, we let her know that you don’t have to carry the flag for us. It’s okay, and not to talk about it and not to disclose it.

Their approach stemmed from their desire that their daughter feel comfortable with her friends, illustrating Kristin and Shelly’s adherence to the script of sustaining friendships for their daughter.

Lesbian mother participants were intentional in their efforts to create and sustain friendships for their children. They established specific social network, worked towards acceptance of gay parents, and in some cases, concealed their sexual orientation. These efforts represent attempts to adhere to this social script.

Mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children

The friendships participants worked to create and sustain reflected an attempt to provide emotional safety for their children. Lesbian mothers in this study talked about the importance of working towards emotional and physical safety and security for their children. Securing friendships for children was one manner of interpreting this script. This safety also included freedom from bullying and harassment, a general sense of acceptance of their family unit, and a sense of permanency towards their family, particularly their mothers’ relationship.

The lesbian mothers felt that they subjected their children to a certain amount of bullying and teasing as a result of their own sexual orientation, and participants worked diligently to provide physical and emotional safety in spite of their sexuality. As discussed in the previous section, Shelly and Kristin encouraged their daughter not to talk about Kristin and Shelly’s relationship when she feels uncomfortable. This can be
interpreted as an attempt to provide emotional safety to their daughter. Wendy also talked
about this during the follow up interview. "I guess that every day we face adversity
because we are gay and that is reality. But we walk home every night to the safety of our
home and make our children feel very safe at all costs." She had earlier explained the
adversity her family had experienced.

In the last four months, we were taunted as a family. And the children were
scared. So it is a reality. We would love to think it isn't, but we do have different
fears than the child who might be whatever.

Participants felt that disclosure of their sexuality was at times a means of
transgressing this script. This transgression occurred to the extent that this disclosure
threatened the physical or emotional safety and security of children. One consequence of
disclosure of sexuality was the bullying and teasing that some children of lesbians
experienced from their peers. Kayla told the members of the focus group about her
daughter's experience with bullying.

We had a little girl tell [our daughter] when she was in the second grade. Because
at that time [our daughter] was out to everybody. The crossing guard, "I have two
mommies." We'd be at Home Depot, "I have two mommies." And she mentioned
it, talking to a little friend, and the little friend's like, 'That's not right. Your
moms are going to hell.' Second grade.

As Kayla told this story in the focus group interview, the other participants responded
with sounds of outrage and similar stories of their own. Shelly, for example, shared her
daughter's experiences. "The kids in her class have been mean to her this year, because
of our relationship. The teacher doesn't know it. It always happens out on the blacktop."
In these cases, it was disclosure of mother's sexual orientation that caused transgression of the social script, meaning that mothers did not ensure social or emotional safety or security for their children.

Participants' attention to emotional safety tied into a desire to make children feel secure in their family units. This desire caused participants to express concerns about current legal systems, namely that these systems were not equipped to provide permanency for lesbian families. Becky drew attention to legal rights as she asked Amy about how she and her partner negotiate their interaction with schools, "Even if you don't legal rights, they're okay with you both picking up the boys?" Beyond concerns with school personnel, some participants talked about concerns with adoption. Fern and Wendy explained that not all states allowed two women's names to appear on a birth certificate, so they strategically planned their children's adoptions based on states that permitted second parent adoption for same-sex parents. Wendy added, "And it is fact that we have a lot more planning to put our family together. So it's a lot more hoops and hurdles to jump through to get our families together." Having both women's names on their daughters' birth certificates made participants feel more secure in the permanency of their family. This was also an attempt to provide a sense of security for children.

In order to meet this script, participants tried to protect their children from teasing, bullying, and dissolution of the family unit. They did so through hiding their own sexual orientation and through legal maneuvers to provide a sense of security in the family unit.
Mothers advocate for the best educational environment for their children

Another script for mothers was evident through participants' beliefs that mothers should provide their children with the best educational experiences possible. This script involved choosing the best school and teacher for children and advocating for children through close contact with school personnel. For participants, adhering to this script began with selecting an appropriate school placement for children. Some of the mothers chose private or charter schools. Others moved to areas of their city specifically because of a local school's reputation. Participants talked about choosing schools for their children with the school social climate in mind.

Becky described her son's private school as "a phenomenal location for [my son] in terms of his growth and emotional development." Becky discussed her choice of school as a result of feeling that her neighborhood was not a good social environment. "I don't feel like I'm in the best neighborhood right now to raise him. And he's not a teenager and he's in a good school. Just the fear of what could be. I mean, he could run with the wrong gang." She hoped that her son's school would serve as an antidote to the negative influences in her neighborhood. Following the focus group, Becky talked about her relief that her son was in a private, religious school, rather than being forced to experience the challenges of public school. She reflected upon the ways her son's school differed from those discussed by mothers of public school children. "I feel very lucky. I feel very blessed. And it's a gift. I mean, the quality of learning is absolutely extraordinary. Not to mention the social situation. I just hope I can keep him there."

Erin said, "[I] couldn't afford a private school for my kids, and we moved across town after I did a bunch of research about public schools and public schools and magnet
schools.” She talked about choosing a charter elementary school that kept the same group of students together for five years.

So the kids she started with in first grade, she’ll work through that whole process up through fifth grade with those same kids and that same teacher. And I don’t have to reeducate anybody really. And I do my part at least once a month to create community in some way amongst the families. Because I feel like I have five years to work those families into a level of acceptance. Because if I can work the parents, then the kids will come along.

Beyond social setting and acceptance of diverse family structures, participants’ notions of the best educational placement included one in which their children would progress academically. In the focus group, mothers talked about wanting teachers who embraced diversity and were in the habit of “thinking outside the box”. They also wanted teachers to be committed to preventing bullying and teasing. Appendix G contains a more detailed explanation of the qualities lesbian mother participants sought in their children’s teachers.

Upon choosing the best educational placement for children, social scripts for mothers involved advocating for the best educational experiences within those schools and classrooms. Within the focus group, participants defined advocacy in schools mainly in terms of defending children from bullying and intervening when they disagreed with teachers’ actions. Mothers in the study made frequent reference to advocating for their children through disparate actions such as volunteering in classrooms, frequent communication with children’s teachers, and closely monitoring school happenings. Kayla talked about advocating for her children through conversations with school
personnel, "I've had to go marching in with my rainbow flag to set the record straight, no
pun intended."

Kayla continued by saying that she feels that advocacy was especially important
for lesbian mothers, "Especially if you're an out family, you're going to be held to a
different standard. I firmly believe that. And you're talking about having to advocate for
your child." Kristin commented during the focus group on the unique aspects of lesbian
mothers advocating for their children within schools.

And I think that kind of living your life the way we are, you do have to be willing
to get out there for your child and go to school and say this is what our family
looks like. Almost from the principal down to the teacher and not that, my child's
not gay, I am. Don't make this my child's problem.

Kristin talked about going into her daughter's schools and talking to school personnel,
suggesting that ensuring the best education setting involved educating teachers and
principals about lesbian families.

Wendy hoped that her children's teachers would communicate openly if problems
were to occur as a result of her relationship with Fern.

We try to make sure that if there's ever a problem with that, that it's an open
discussion. Maybe there are children [with parents in] same-sex relationships, but
that they know there might be issues with that child. Teasing on the playground,
words they've heard, whatever.

Shelly described advocating for her daughter through bringing bullying and
teasing to teachers' attention. Her daughter had been the victim of teasing in which
children called her names based on an assumption that the daughter was gay. (Her
daughter had not declared her sexual orientation.)

As I parent, I had to go to the teacher and say, "Hey, if I hear one more thing from
our child about her being picked on because she's gay, you're not going to like it.
Because I can get ugly quick. I can be your best advocate or I can get ugly." And
it was getting ugly on the playground. So you just have to get their attention.

Participants felt that explaining family structure to teachers was important. Shelly
encouraged lesbian mothers to "indicate that on your contact information". When Kristin
explained that she and Shelly "scratched out father," there was a chorus of "we did, too."
Kristin explained the strategies she and Shelly had developed.

And showing up together, not being afraid to show up together. You know they
have the day before, the Friday before school actually starts, and Shelly and I
show up together as a family unit. Do things together as a family, so then at
parent/teacher [conferences] actually explain to the teacher what our family looks
like. Talk to the teacher if [our daughter] is having any problems that she is
aware.

As Wendy, who explained that she wanted "quality education in a safe space and
building," described the similar approach that she and Fern took.

We represent ourselves as a family. We don't take the gay flag out, but we don't
stand back from it either when we need to. Whenever there's been an event, we
show up together. We show up strong as a family. Respectful of our children.
Amy explained that communicating about family structure has been effective within her grandsons’ school. This communication served as advocacy for the best educational placement for her grandsons.

As long as they’re aware that either one of us at any time could check with the school. And the school is also aware. And that’s not a big problem with them. We live in a small town. We’ve been living there for about ten years, so they’re more used to us already. They really don’t even ask about it anymore.

As mentioned in the previous quotes, part of providing optimal education for their children and required that mothers communicate effectively with teachers as they advocated for their children. Mothers mentioned contacting their children’s teachers frequently, using such methods as e-mail, phone calls, letters to teachers, volunteering within classrooms, and sending appreciation gifts. Erin, for example, said, “I [communicate] through e-mail about once a week with my daughter’s teacher, so my daughter doesn’t know the conversation I’m having with the teacher.” Kayla talked about being present in her daughters’ classrooms, “Physically be in the classroom. I’m an educator myself, so it was a big thing for me to be there to see what was going on, help out in the classroom.” And Shelly encouraged, “Asking questions of the, you know, make sure you get the little progress report. If something doesn’t look right, feeling comfortable to ask the questions just until you get an answer.

Throughout this communication, mothers worked not to offend teachers. Erin described this, “I don’t think you have to be in your face either. Because I don’t think you have to offend teachers or offend administrators or, you know. We want them to accept
every kid for who they are.” In a follow up interview, Wendy explained her family’s approach to communication with schools as “non-threatening.”

If we go in, when our children started to school, we went in. We did it in a very non-threatening way, let them know, just more for the kids’ sake that they have two moms. You would introduce a husband or wife, a father and mother. We introduced our two moms.

Mothers felt that offending teachers represented a transgression of this social script. They feared that the result this transgression would be that lesbian mothers’ children would receive inferior education. Erin, who described her son as a “quite the little queen” or having flamboyant traits, talked about teachers being personally offended by her son’s behavior as well as their family structure.

And I had to move him from teacher to teacher, because when I see a teacher get so frustrated that it’s more of a personal thing for her. You know, that she can’t get beyond his queen-like behavior. I can’t tell him to change, because I can’t even go about changing him. That’s who he is.

Erin felt that offending teachers resulted in a lack of positive educational experiences for her son. And Kayla described her daughter’s worst experience of school in terms of the teachers, “They were not very fond of us.” Kayla asserted that as a result of teachers objecting to her personal life, the teachers resisted protecting Kayla’s daughter from bullying and teasing. In effect, Kayla had violated this script through allowing teachers to know about her sexual orientation. Amy complained that this happened frequently in schools as a result of teachers’ negative feelings towards gays and lesbians, “Teachers promulgate that heterosexual kind of lifestyle. They just need to
broaden their spectrum of education." Amy talked about this promulgation in terms of teachers allowing teasing and bullying related to sexual orientation, asserting, "Hatred sneaks in so many ways."

In addition to allowing bullying and teasing of children with lesbian mothers, participants reported instances in which participants and/or their children felt that teachers had directly singled children out and treated them differently as a result of their mothers' sexuality. These were the types of teachers and school placements that participants tried to avoid. Kayla, who had a daughter who had graduated from high school, explained feeling that her daughter had suffered as a result of teachers' comments.

[My daughter] can tell you some of the most asinine things that she actually had teachers say in class about gays. And the children are listening, you know, and they take that to the schoolyard. And they use it as a weapon later on. And they have to be ever mindful, regardless of what their issues are and what their bigotry. They have to be ever cognizant that they are speaking to the masses. And they're validating hate or they're validating discrimination. And they have to be very cognizant of that. Seriously, some of the most asinine things.

Kayla described a situation in which her daughter's high school government teacher told the class, "If gay people are allowed to marry, their children are going to be abnormal." This statement, according to Kayla, was made to more than thirty students. Kayla felt that her daughter had been singled out and made to feel uncomfortable, although Kayla's daughter did rebut the teacher's statement. Kayla explained, "And it was that day that my daughter stood up and came up to the entire class, to thirty-some
odd kids in a high school classroom. And said, 'I have gay parents, and I am by no means abnormal.'”

Beyond making negative comments about homosexuality, participants explained that teachers left lesbian parents out of the curriculum. In order to adhere to the script of finding the best educational placement for their children, lesbian mothers worked to avoid the teachers who implemented a traditional curriculum. The lesbian mother focus group referred to this as the “Beaver Cleaver curriculum”. Shelly explained, “We definitely had seen where teachers do build their curriculum in Beaver Cleaver roles. They still have the idea, some of the teachers, that the families still look like they did in the 1950s, so the curriculum reflects that.” The most evident places in which lesbian mothers’ families were left out of the curriculum included Mother’s Day and Father’s Day projects and in discussions of families at the primary level. In talking about what they wanted from teachers, Wendy and Julie illustrated this point.

Wendy: Be conscious enough to realize what you’re reading, and do send two valentines or do send two mom gifts or whatever. Our child on father’s day did a fake tie with a name Peter on it and came home.

Fern: We don’t know any Peter.

Wendy: We don’t know who Peter is. [Laughter]

Perhaps as a result of these experiences with teachers, participants discussed their practice of compensating or overcompensating for their sexual orientation throughout interactions with their children’s teachers. Shelly introduced this topic during the focus group.
I don’t think heterosexual people or heterosexual divorcees feel the need to convince other parents that they are normal and not deviant. And so I think that subconsciously, we do that all the time. We just show up at the school and I am very aware, subconsciously. And I overcompensate, probably all the time and especially with the teachers to prove that we are normal.

This sentiment of “making up” for being deviant was echoed by other lesbian participants in the focus group. They talked about taking gifts to teachers, volunteering in schools, and providing school supplies for classrooms. Shelly referred to this by saying, “We give [the teacher] incentives to do right by our child.” Participants contextualized this as an effort to compensate for their sexual orientation. Erin, Shelly, and Kristin explained this further:

Erin: And I take my daughter to make her something for teacher appreciation time. And I think, I wonder if the other families go out of their way to connect so hard with the teacher, or am I just going out of my way because I’m...

Shelly: Compensating.

Erin: Compensating, yeah.

Kristin: Plus, you know, just that point, my sister in law kind of does the same thing that Shelly does. So I don’t think it’s just us. But I think, my sister in law certainly doesn’t have to go to school and say, “okay, we’re Protestants.”

Kristin, Erin, and Shelly were emphasizing that their involvement in their children’s classrooms stemmed from fear of being named as deviant, or from a desire to prove that they, as lesbian mothers, were normal mothers who sought the best educational experiences possible for their children.
In the follow up interview, Shelly and Kristin revisited the idea of demonstrating to teachers that their family was normal. They identified their own families as normal, distancing themselves from images of gay people on television and from those whom they described as "carrying on."

Kristin: If [our daughter's] teacher came and stayed with us for the weekend or even came and stayed with us for a Saturday and came and saw our family. I think that they might be a little surprised. I don't think that they think of us necessarily as normal. But I don't think you can get any closer to [normal].

Shelly: And that may be our bias.

Kristin: You know, I have to push back on that, because last week when we went to the AIDS walk, were you willing to take your mom and your aunts to the AIDS walk to see all those people, all those gay people around there marching around and carrying on?

Shelly: It's the stereotypes, it's that you fear that the mainstream heterosexual population watches Queer as Folk and they think that's, that's who we all are. When television plays to the stereotype. That's what makes TV so interesting.

Kristin: I mean we have a nine year old. We're trying to get home early last night, get dinner on the table, get her to basketball practice, get her home to work on the project. I mean, there's no swinging from the chandeliers going on in our house. It's like we're out of focus.

Convincing teachers of their family's normalcy was one of several strategies participants used to adhere to the script of advocating for the best educational environment for their children. Other strategies included choosing schools with
progressive social climates, communicating frequently with teachers, talking to school personnel about family structure, and working not to offend teachers.

_Mothers instill within their children a sense of pride in their family_

The final script for mothers involved making children comfortable with and accepting of their families. Erin shared her main priority as a parent, “It would be really easy to teach them shame and to teach them to have secrets. And I think it’s of the utmost importance that we don’t do that.” Participants expressed the importance of children being proud of their families. Wendy talked about how she and Fern help their children take pride in their family, making them feel that their family is special. “Everyday we say positive things about our family to each other. Every day we verbalize that, that we’re a special family and that we love each other. We don’t go anywhere without saying that we love each other. Every day.”

Erin worked to create a community in which her daughter felt comfortable with and proud of her family.

I recognize that at some point my daughter might start climbing in the closet. And I want to try to prevent that. And so my partner is a softball coach for girls’ softball. So there’s 14 families on the softball team that we’re influencing, and we’re creating community over the course of two years now, we’ve been with these little 14 families creating community with them.

Erin expected that her daughter would not “climb in the closet”, meaning that her daughter would hide her mothers’ relationship, but would be proud of her family if she felt like part of a community. The community that Erin and her partner created provided friendships for their daughter as well as a sense of pride in her family.
Becky told the story of the daughter of her ex-partner, whom she had helped raise. She proudly talked about the daughter standing up for their family and rejecting potential friends and boyfriends who did not approve of a family with two mothers.

I remember when she started dating, a lot of her friends in the school system, everyone knew [my ex-partner] and I. And nobody really cared. And I don’t know if it’s just me that’s like, if you care, tough shit. I don’t really care what your opinion is. Or if people really didn’t care. But one of the things she used to do as a teenager was she would create her friends around, “Hey, I have two moms, they’re lesbians. What do you think?” And if they cared and they made an issue out of it then they weren’t her friends. And that’s how she started her dating process too. It was like, okay, first date, what do you think about this? And if it was a big deal, either they would get over it or they’d be out of her life.

Participants talked about transgression of this script in terms of teaching children to be ashamed of their families or allowing children to learn shame as a result of harassment from others. Erin, whose daughter had not yet experienced such harassment, asked others in the focus group, “Do our kids, and I don’t know because I’m not experienced in this. Do they go from like second grade, ‘I don’t know. I just have two moms.’ Do they climb in the closet at some point?” The consensus among the group was that at the point children encountered someone who told them that their family was not normal, they stopped talking about their family. While the children themselves had not necessarily identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, they were able to “climb in the closet” about their mothers’ sexual orientation.
Kayla discussed this in terms of her daughter’s reaction to Kayla coming out, an experience which Kayla described at length during the focus group.

She says, “Now I’m the freak. Now I’m the one, I can’t have my friends over anymore. Why did you do this to me?” And it was amazing, just the disclosure.

Just the confirmation of what she already knew in her mind, because she was hearing all these things. And I guess she had trusted a couple friends when they had asked. And she finally had a name for it. And that’s when the rumors started, “Oh, you’re mom’s a dyke and you’re a dyke. And you’re a fag.” And all these things started. So it gets tough in Jr. High.

Kayla, as the only participant with children who had completed elementary school, had many stories of her daughters’ reluctance to talk about their family. Another example included her daughter distancing herself from Kayla, who was very visible with her sexual orientation at the time.

But what was interesting was my daughter, through Jr. High, I was very militant at the time. So I had the rainbow stickers and the bumper stickers “Hate is not a Family Value” blah-blah-blah, all over my car. And she was in absolute panic when we pulled up to school. And she would make me drop her off two blocks from her school. And she’s like, “I’m not embarrassed about my family. You just don’t understand how the kids are, mom.” You know, the kids always say, “That’s so gay” and “He’s such a fag” and on and on. She was just terrorized.

Kayla offered this example as an incident of her daughter feeling shame in their family structure. Kayla had to counter this shame in order to adhere to the script of promoting pride in family structure.
In addition to children hiding their family structure as a result from comments from those outside of the family, participants feared that lesbian mothers themselves sometimes transmitted a sense of shame to their children. Becky explained this fear during the focus group.

So a lot of times, within the context of our school, it’s my fear of failing, or fear of inability to provide him with the family structure he needs, whether it be extended family, or a father, or other parents, that comes out rather than it being imposed from them [the school] to me, which is a strange dynamic.

Summary of lesbian mother revealed scripts for mothers

Participants’ ideas of normal mothers surfaced through adherence to and transgression of social scripts for mothers. Participants revealed normal mothers as those who adhered to social scripts, while deviant mothers transgressed these social scripts. The social scripts revealed by lesbian mothers in this study included the following:

1. Mothers work to create and sustain friendships for their children.
2. Mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children.
3. Mothers instill within their children a sense of pride in their family.
4. Mothers advocate for the best educational environment for their children.
5. Mothers consider their children’s needs and identities above their own.

Participants viewed good mothers as those who made their children the paramount priority in their lives. Doing so was a matter of making personal and professional sacrifices in order to attend to children’s socio-emotional and academic needs. According to the social scripts revealed by participants, good mothers are those whose children have healthy friendships, are physically and emotionally safe, take pride
in their families, and have successful school experiences. Participants expected that normal mothers would adhere to these social scripts, while deviant mothers would transgress or fail to adhere to them.

*Lesbian Mother Revealed Scripts for Teachers*

In addition to naming scripts for mothers, lesbian mother participants also revealed scripts for teachers. Identification of these scripts surfaced through comments about normal teachers and those about deviant teachers, those whom lesbian mother participants classified as bad teachers.

*Teachers use knowledge of students in planning and implementing lessons*

The lesbian mothers in this study expected that teachers would have a significant knowledge of students and their families and that this knowledge would impact teaching practice. Fern talked about wanting teachers to consider students’ family backgrounds, “Portraying to teachers to be curious about that information and how that impacts learning and education, because I really believe it does.” And Wendy talked about her positive experiences with her daughter’s teacher in terms of the teacher’s knowledge of students.

Her teacher is an extremely, I think truly gifted person in terms of knowing the children. So this has allowed [our daughter] to really do some self growth, which has been great. But the teacher is involved with the children. And every day there’s a note or something back about her. So any changes, she seems to recognize as quick as we do, in her attitude or anything. So I think once they take time to get to know the child, that’s what’s going to come.
Becky described her choice of schools for her son in terms of the ability of the teachers at his private school to know students.

They’re so attentive to [my son]. I mean, and frequently, they’re the ones who are helping guide me on what to do for him. I don’t know that teachers in the public school would have that much time or know each student. I mean, he has two teachers in a classroom of 18. So it’s a ratio of 1 to 9. So they really know him.

Amy talked about knowledge of students as she provided advice for teachers of today’s youth.

Open your minds. Be open to new things, to new experiences, to new types of families, like we already discussed. To the fact that children these days have different needs that they did back in the Leave it to Beaver kind of era. They don’t have the same anything. There’s so much more on the Internet. It’s advertisement, it’s music, it’s everywhere. It’s a whole different world now. They need to be aware of that.

For the most part, participants focused on a desire for teachers to understand the different forms families can take and to know students’ family structures. Wendy explained this, “I don’t think we think that we’re so special. But I think that I think for any child it’s important to know their home structure.” Shelly mentioned during focus group, “I’m looking for a teacher that is progressive and understands that families take on a much different look and feel than they did 30 years ago.” And Amy touched on this idea as she mentioned advice for teachers, “Be open to new things, to new experiences, to new types of families, like we already discussed. To the fact that children these days have
different needs that they did back in the Leave it to Beaver kind of era.” Wendy
highlighted the importance of teachers knowing their students’ families.

My version of life is you take my child for six hours a day. You better know who
we are. [Laughter] Because you’re helping mold my daughters. I told all the
teachers that. But anyway, that’s a big responsibility, taking my kid away from
me six hours a day. So know who we are.

Kayla explained during the focus group that teachers frequently express confusion
about non-traditional family structures. “We’ve had to explain to [our daughter’s]
teachers, [our daughter] has two moms. ‘Oh it’s a step mom and a mom.’ No, it’s me and
my wife. And make that very clear to them.” Amy added, “Then they try not to act
shocked. You can see the color fading from their face.” Perhaps as a result of these
reactions and this confusion, mothers appreciated teachers who asked parents, and not
just students, about family structure. Kayla talked about a teacher who did so, “I
remember [my daughter’s] third grade teacher would ask a lot of questions. ‘Okay, so
what does Sammy call your partner? So what does, how is this? What are the dynamics?’
It was fantastic.” Shelly suggested sending a flyer home at the beginning of the year.
Rather than relying on the kids to tell them what kind of family it is, maybe they
should send a flyer home saying we’re going to start a discussion about families.
Especially in kindergarten, first, second grade. I would solicit the parents first.
Because you’re going to come back with, the Beaver Cleaver family just doesn’t
exist anymore.

Participants expected that this information would impact teachers’ classroom
practice. Wendy explained, “If they get what the families about, be conscious enough to
realize what you’re reading and do send two valentines or do send two mom gifts or whatever.” Wendy talked about an experience in which her daughter’s teacher used her knowledge of Wendy family to influence the choice of literature in the classroom.

We had [our daughter’s] kindergarten teacher, they were doing books about families, and she asked Wendy and to come in a review the books that they were going to use for the class. They had just built the school, so a lot of the books they just hadn’t bought yet. So we were able to be kind of in on choosing some of those things for the kindergarten classes.

Kayla talked about a teacher who understood Kayla’s family structure and used that information to impact her teaching practice.

[My daughter’s] third grade teacher had a gay brother. She was so cool, made all the difference in the world. She really went out of her way to make [my daughter] be okay with the kids, and that was definitely the exception in the grammar school experience.

As evident in Kayla’s comment about her daughter’s teacher, participants identified many teachers who they felt had transgressed this social script. Mothers talked about teachers who simply did not know their students. For example, Wendy and Fern’s older daughter had received a lower grade in her physical education class because the teacher thought she was a boy.

Wendy: I think the gym teacher actually got a reprimand for not knowing the children after it was over.

Fern: He said, “I didn’t know. I thought she was a boy.”

Wendy: Well that was your first mistake.
The most identifiable transgressions of this script were teachers who did not use their knowledge of students' families to plan and implement lessons. Participants' frequent references to the "Leave it to Beaver" or "Beaver Cleaver" curriculum provide evidence of the teachers whom Shelly described as "chugging along with the old mentality." Amy expressed her concerns with teachers who were not accepting of diverse family structures.

The teachers, they promulgate that heterosexual kind of lifestyle. They just need to open their, broaden their spectrum of education. For everyone. For the heterosexual group too. Like I said, hatred is not a family value. There are so many different types of families that they need to realize that. Especially the old ones. They're old; they're set in their ways. They're doing their eight hours, grade their papers and going home. They don’t want anything that upsets that.

Kristin and Shelly talked about the problems with the "Leave it to Beaver" curriculum. Kristin explained that her daughter's teacher unwittingly forced students to disclose their family situations.

She was student of the month, so there were four subjects, like what’s your favorite thing to do, what’s your favorite food. You write all this stuff, then it’s who lives in your house. And she put, "I live in my house with my two moms and our dogs and our bird." And then that was it, I guess.

Kristin, who told this story to explain why her daughter's peers called her daughter lesbian oriented names on the playground, felt that this assignment resulted in her daughter experiencing teasing and bullying.
When participant talked about the importance of teachers acquiring and using knowledge of students, they were primarily concerned that teachers understand students’ family structures. Participants wanted teachers to recognize diverse family structures through asking questions and avoiding assignments based on “traditional” family designs. 

*Teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within schools*

One reason that lesbian mothers in this study expected teachers to know students was so that teachers could use this knowledge to make students feel comfortable and emotionally safe at school. Participants defined making students comfortable and emotionally safe as not singling out students or making them feel that they were different from other students in addition to preventing bullying and teasing. Kristin addressed this script, “The teacher that did accept that our family was unique, and on Mother’s Day allowed [our daughter] to make two Mother’s Day things. And never would embarrass or do things to make her feel like she was different.” Kayla appreciated her oldest daughter’s teacher who “was just fantastic, obviously with his acceptance and the way he talked to these kids and the points he drove home.” Erin did not want teachers to single out her daughter. “I don’t want a teacher to treat my daughter any differently, just because of who we are.”

Some participants identified leaving lesbian families out of the curriculum as a form of transgression of this script, expecting that their children would feel uncomfortable in classrooms in which only heterosexual families were represented. Other participants were reluctant for teachers to talk about gay and lesbian parenting for fear that teachers would draw attention to differences between children with lesbian mothers and other children. Wendy asserted that she did not want teachers to “advertise that there
are two moms.” This stemmed from Wendy’s desire for her daughter’s not to feel uncomfortable. Kristin explained the discomfort experienced by children of lesbians when gay and lesbian issues were introduced, “We certainly aren’t looking for [teachers] to change their curriculum and add in diversity training. Because then the kids would have to assume that someone in their class had a situation like that.” She and Shelly talked about not wanting their daughter to be singled out and made to feel uncomfortable as a result of having two mothers, a situation their daughter had encountered repeatedly.

Another form of transgression was allowing teasing of children as a result of their parents’ sexual orientation. Wendy, for example, pleaded, “I don’t care if they want to understand gay lifestyle or not. Please understand bullying and teasing because I don’t want my daughter hurt.” Shelly urged teachers to be aware of bullying and teasing.

Look for signs of when kids are being picked on. Because most kids are not going to come up and say, “Flip the Farter is calling me a faggot because my mom’s gay.” I mean those kids are going to have enough to worry about. So teachers need to get dialed in.

Shelly later explained that her daughter’s teacher did not step in when teasing occurred. Many participants complained that these teachers failed to intervene when students were teased about having lesbian parents. One interaction from the focus group made this particularly evident as Kayla talked about a girl in her daughter’s second grade class who criticized Kayla and her partner’s relationship, saying it was “not right”. I asked about the schools response to this criticism. Kayla replied, “There was no intervention. [Laughter from multiple participants at the idea of school responding.] At that time the second grade teachers weren’t very fond of us.” The participants’ laughter in
response to my question implied that I was naïve in thinking that teachers would intervene when harassment occurred. Participants had experienced teachers who they believed had violated this social script by failing to provide an emotionally safe place for their students.

A third form of transgression was through negative statements about or reactions to lesbian families. One such statement was that made by one of Kayla’s daughter’s teachers, “If gay people are allowed to marry, their children are going to be abnormal.” And Wendy talked about the stigma she feels her children experience as a result of her relationship with Fern. “We introduced our two moms. And I think there’s a little stigma from the first moment.” Participants felt that allowing bullying and teasing, leaving lesbian mothers out of the curriculum, and reacting negatively to lesbian families served to make their children feel uncomfortable and emotionally unsafe in classrooms.

_Educators do not contradict personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents_

In addition to not singling out their children and making those children feel uncomfortable, lesbian mothers in this study expected that teachers would not contradict participants’ own personal, moral, or religious beliefs. Wendy expressed this in terms of teachers not infringing on the role of parents to conduct moral and religious instruction.

I think that we provide a lot as a family of things that our kids need, socially, and as far as who they are and what kind of family they’re in and friends and our church and things, that I really like to be educators to be educators and to look at the next step where the kids in the classroom are going.
For lesbian mothers in particular, not contradicting parents’ moral beliefs included accepting multiple structures of family. Becky talked about a way that her school attempts to include all families and not contradict parents’ beliefs about families.

It’s cool they teach in all the grades that kids can have different types of families. Some kids have a mommy and daddy. Some kids are being raised by grandparents. Some kids have one mommy. Some kids have one daddy. Some kids are being raised by an uncle or an aunt. And the kids are already growing up with the fact that there are different ways that families look.

Participants talked about acceptance in terms of including lesbian families in curricula and by acknowledging both women as parents. Kristin explained one example of the later.

One time, because [our daughter] calls me Kristin. So one time I went to pick her up, the teacher says, “Your mom’s here.” And [our daughter] is looking right at me, and she goes, “I don’t see my mom.” She goes, “Right there.” And she goes, “That’s Kristin.” And she goes, “Well does she make your lunch? Does she pick you up?” It was a great experience in a private Christian school in California.

Fern responded to this story by talking about a teacher who showed acceptance through inclusion of lesbian family materials in the classroom.

We had [our daughter’s] kindergarten teacher, they were doing books about families, and she asked Wendy and to come in a review the books that they were going to use for the class. They had just built the school, so a lot of the books they just hadn’t bought yet. So we were able to be kind of in on choosing some of those things for the kindergarten classes. NOT in [this city]. [Laughter]
Kayla continued this conversation by talking about a teacher whom she considered to be exceptionally accepting.

I think that by far, the best experience was with my oldest daughter. She had a gay male English teacher who wasn't necessarily out at school. I knew him from out in the community. And he was just fantastic, obviously with his acceptance and the way he talked to these kids and the points he drove home. I think my daughter really connected with him at this very crucial point in high school.

Participant expressed beliefs that accepting teachers such as these were the exception, and far more teachers transgressed this script than adhered to it. Teachers transgressed this script in part through introducing religious and moral content into their curricula. Kayla expressed her frustration with teachers in her community, "There's a very ultra-conservative stronghold in our community. Mind separation of church and state. I'm not taking my kid to your church. I'm taking my kid to your school."

Participants also considered the aforementioned examples of teasing, absence of lesbian families in the curriculum, and negative statements about or reactions to lesbian families as evidence of lack of acceptance of gay families to as a transgression of this script. They criticized teachers who contradicted lesbian mother's beliefs by opposing gay and lesbian parenting or failing to include multiple definitions of family in the curriculum. Yet they did not mention other parents whose moral and religious beliefs may be contradicted through the inclusion of diverse families within schools.

Summary of lesbian mother revealed scripts for teachers

The scripts lesbian mothers revealed for teachers focused heavily on including and accepting children from gay and lesbian families. For participants, good teachers are
aware of differences, yet they do not single students out or make them feel uncomfortable. These teachers protect students’ physical and emotional well-being. Additionally, these teachers align their classroom practices with parents’ beliefs, in this case, the beliefs of lesbian mothers. In all, lesbian mothers in this study revealed three scripts for teachers.

1. Teachers use knowledge of students in planning and implementing lessons.
2. Teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within schools.
3. Educators do not contradict personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents.

Scripts Revealed by Mother Educator Lesbians

Five participants in the study were both educators and lesbian mothers. The mother educator lesbian (MEL) participants included Peimy, a special education teacher who is raising her son and her nephew with her partner; Penny’s administrator, Nyla, who has two children and has been with her partner for two years; Kelli, a gifted education teacher who was raising her son with her partner; and Michele and Abigail, partners who taught at the same school and were raising Abigail’s daughter from a previous partnership.

These participants shared experiences and identities with the two other participant groups. The scripts they revealed are similar to both participant groups. Nonetheless, their simultaneous identities as mothers and as educators afford them a unique perspective. As a result, their specific interpretation of scripts differs from the other participant groups. I discuss the results from this group of participants separately from either the mothers or the teachers because of their unique interpretations.
The MELs delineated scripts for mothers as they talked about their own priorities and practices as mothers, but also as they discussed their interactions with their students’ parents. MELs revealed three of the same scripts for mothers, as did lesbian mothers. The MELs did not mention instilling family pride within their children, nor did they talk about establishing friendships for their children. Of the common scripts between the two participant groups, the prevalence of scripts differed. I present the social scripts in order of prevalence, with the most frequently referenced script first, and the least prevalent script last. It is interesting to note that the lesbian mothers focused chiefly on considering children’s needs and identities above their own, while MELs talked mainly about advocating for the best educational environment for their children.

Mothers advocate for the best educational environment for their children

MEL participants expressed a belief that good mothers advocate for their children within schools as the participants talked about their own practices as mothers and as they discussed interactions with their students’ parents. Advocacy for children included involvement within schools. Abigail talked about parental involvement in her school.

I wish we had a better parent involvement. But we don’t. That 3 percent, but that’s it. And you know what, I don’t know what other kids’ parents expect, because I have zero contact with them. They don’t come in. They don’t call. They survive. Which is sad, but true.

Abigail’s comments demonstrate a belief that good mothers should participate in their children’s education. She does, however, mention several reasons that parents at her school do not become more involved, including limited English proficiency, little time
off from work, and lack of understanding of educational systems. Michele echoed the sentiment that parental involvement is important, "I wish more parents in our community were involved. I think that would make a world of difference in attendance and grades. And I think it's sad."

Penny criticized some of her student's parents for their unwillingness to participate in their child's education.

Ninety percent of parents only get involved when you send something home that they actually have to with their child. Then they get mad and come back. Because they really don't want anything to do with schoolwork. Once school is over, that's the teacher's job. Just let their kid come home and play and go to soccer practice. Only a handful of parents out of twentysome kids in a class will actually participate with their kids with anything educational at home. The other 80-90% get all in a wad if you ask for anything extra that involves taking away time from their daily life.

For MEL participants, as for lesbian mother participants, the first stage in advocating for the best educational experiences for their children involved selecting the most appropriate school. They discussed their selection of school for their children. Penny's nephew and Nyla's daughter attended the elementary school where they worked. Kelli's son attended the elementary charter school where she taught, he attended a charter middle school, and Kelli was in the process of enrolling him in a private boarding school. Abigail and Michele's daughter attended a private school.

In talking about their choice of schools, participants focused on the pedagogical practices of teachers. Kelli believed that mothers were responsible for choosing the best
educational placement for their children, "Again, it goes back to my belief that you need to find, you need to advocate for your own child and you need to find the right teacher to make that fit."

Participants talked about the types of teachers they want for their children. Michele described the ideal teacher for her daughter, "One that cares, was stern, pushed her to excel, and didn’t baby her." And Abigail looked for "someone who will push her to a maximum potential." Nyla preferred "someone who is skilled at challenging students at going further and further and further." Kelli, whose son had been identified as gifted, explained, "We look for very bright teachers, first of all. Teachers who have a good background and understanding of the gifted learner." Penny talked about "someone who can take the moments and make them worthy, rather than just get through the day." Kelli, in particular discussed selecting her son's teachers and schools, "I can name all of his teachers from every year, and they've all been hand picked, and they've been exceptional."

MELs' priorities for teachers, pedagogical knowledge and high expectations for students, differed from lesbian mothers' priorities, acceptance of diverse family structures. While none of the MEL participants had encountered teachers who the participants perceived to be biased against lesbian families, they anticipated that they would at some point. Abigail explained her expectation that her daughter would encounter biased teachers.

[Our daughter] has been lucky. She's been running around telling the world she has three moms. And she hasn't encountered it. And I know she will. The first time she has some teacher who's extremely, extremely conservative and she
stands up and says, “I have three moms,” and that teacher’s like, “What are you?”
You know, I’m not naïve. She will encounter it at some point in time. But luckily we have not.

Kelli asserted that some biased teachers do exist in the school district, “When you hit the school district, it’s better now and it gets better every year, but picking the right teachers is a very important part of that.” She encouraged lesbian mothers to select teachers who are accepting of all types of families. Michele talked about her method of selecting non-biased teachers for her daughter.

Like with [my daughter’s] teachers, we’ve had great experiences. Very understanding about having a student with two moms. It seems like they could care less, just as long as you’re involved in the child’s life. And so we haven’t come across any complications yet, but again, it’s early. But we’ve also gotten lucky, because we’re teachers. You know, people talk to each other and they find out who’s really good and who’s not so good. So as a parent you’re concerned about your child’s education. So you try to find out through the grapevine who is the best kindergarten teacher, who is the best first grade teacher.

Michele’s comments suggest that teachers may have more resources for adhering to this script than mothers who are not teachers. Lesbian mother participants made choices of schools based on their own projections of the best placement for their children. They did not have the benefit of the “teacher grapevine” as a means of avoiding biased teachers.

MELs’ expectations of encountering biased teachers were also evident as participants discussed their contingency plans for such situations. Abigail explained her strategy:
So far I’ve been lucky that every teacher she’s had has been very accepting and very good. And when I get a teacher that doesn’t, well then I guess the gay part of me stands up and I say, you know what, you can’t treat my kid or disrespect her idea of a family unit.

Should this situation arise, they felt that mothers would have to confront the teacher as a means of advocacy for their children. Kelli insisted that mothers should remove their children from negative classroom environments.

If those negative qualities are coming up in any particular classroom, whether it’s elementary, middle or high school, any parent should be able to go to that administration and say, this is what I’ve heard, this is what I’ve seen, this is what I’ve noticed. And this is unacceptable. I want my child removed from that classroom and placed in another room. That’s your right as a parent.

Upon selecting the best educational placement for their children, participants felt the need to talk to teachers about their family structure. This mirrored lesbian mother participants’ approach. Nyla expressed this as she offered advice to other lesbian mothers:

Be very open and let the school administration, well, start with the teacher and then if you need to, let the school administration or higher know that this is your family, and your child’s not going to be discriminated against and is not going to be excluded. If there’s a Mother’s Day thing being made, then it’s just a natural question on the teacher’s part, “Are we making two?” Or just provide the child with supplies to make two or whatever. But go in at the very beginning and lay it down. Say this is how it is.
Kelli also suggested that lesbian mothers talk to teachers about family structure, “If you don’t tell teachers ahead of time, then shame on you as a parent for not bringing that to your teacher. You can’t deal with something if you don’t know it’s happening.”

The MEL participants in this study felt that another part of advocating for the best educational experiences for their children included preparing those children for school through engaging in educational activities at home. This is an aspect of this script that lesbian mother participants did not identify. Kelli discussed the importance of mothers reinforcing learning at home. “There’s too much outside of school that can be accomplished. And plus it’s that whole learning environment. I tell my kids you learn until the day you die. It never stops. Whether you’re in class or whether it’s just life skills.” Nyla asserted the role of all adults, rather than just teachers, in educating children.

We are all teachers. Every adult that comes into contact, whether it’s the head custodian, the parent, the grandparent, the uncle that comes to visit once a year or the teachers that they see daily. We are all responsible for educating our children. All of society is responsible.

Kelli went on to explain the benefits of parental involvement in a child’s education.

It shows your child that what he does or what she does during the day is important. It’s all about sitting down and doing homework and discussing projects and enriching their lives. Too many parents leave school up to the six hours a day that teachers have the kids.

Penny also expressed frustration with parents who do not partner in their children’s education.
And I feel kind of impositioned that I have to help parents parent. Do you know what I mean? I’m like Good God! You had them, learn something about them. That’s how I honestly feel. I feel that it’s their job to parent. And if they would parent correctly, that our job as educators would be so much easier.

In addition to reinforcing learning at home, MEL participants discussed preparing children for school. Abigail explained parents’ role in preparing children for school, “You need to act a certain way. And as a parent, it’s your job to make sure you explain to them that you behave in school. Because you are their primary teacher, period. It’s not the teacher’s job.” Penny shared her thoughts related to the responsibilities mothers have for their children’s learning.

[Parents] need to teach them morals and ethics and manners. They need to teach them self-confidence and compassion. They need to teach them how to act appropriately in social situations. They need to teach to be able meet expectations that are given to them and the skills necessary to meet them. They need to keep them clean, they need to make sure they eat; they need to make sure they get there on time. They need to make sure that they pay attention to the child. Because so many people don’t. And they need to do homework with them, because that is reinforcing.

Lesbian mothers’ attention to children’s social development did not contain this element of preparing children for school through imparting social skills. Rather lesbian mothers focused on social development through creating and sustaining friendships for children, a script that was unrelated to this script of advocating for the best educational experiences for children. For MEL participants, advocating for the best educational experiences for
children comprised selecting an appropriate school and classroom placement, talking to teachers about family structure, and reinforcing education at home.

*Mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children*

The second most prevalent script for good mother, as discussed by MEL participants, involved providing physical and emotional safety and security for children. While lesbian mothers focused on safety in terms of protecting their children from bullying and teasing, MEL participants talked about providing a sense of security through being available to and emotionally supportive of their children. These elements were particularly evident as participants talked about their beliefs regarding the definition of a good mother. Abigail discussed the safety she provides for her daughter.

She has a feeling of knowing what I was lucky enough to know. And that is that I would never fall on my face. I might fail. But my parents would never let me completely fail. I would never be homeless. I would never starve. That there’s always a safety net. And I hope that she feels that way.

Abigail’s partner, Michele, also mentioned the role of safety in being a good mother. “Always being there. Always being supportive. Listening, understanding, but setting rules and guidelines at the same time. Loving unconditionally. Always know they have a safe place to go. Somebody will always be there for them.”

Nyla talked about this script from the perspective of an administrator, “My goal for parental involvement school-wide is that parents provide a safe nurturing environment at home.” And Kelli talked about safety in connection with choice of educational environment.
But you wouldn’t put your child in harm’s way and let them playing in the middle
of a busy intersection, so why would you put your child in a situation where
they’re at school for six hours a day for five years, for three years, for four years
and not let them feel safe there. That’s what having a family is about.

This attention to emotional safety tied into a desire to make children feel secure in
their family units. Participants’ concerns related to the legal system were that this system
was not equipped to provide permanency for lesbian families, mirroring the concerns
mentioned by lesbian mothers. Abigail’s conversation about her break up with her former
partner illustrated this.

[Our daughter] lives with us. [Our son] lives with my ex. And that’s the hardest
part of all of it. We have no legal obligations so the kids can see each other. It’s
just about getting around our differences. We were together eight years, and so at
a certain point we have to get around our differences and realize that the kids still
consider each other brother and sister. So you know, we just do our best to make
sure that those two stay connected.

Another element of emotional safety identified by MELs included promoting
positive feelings about family. Abigail alluded to this in talking about similarities
between her family and families with heterosexual parents.

I’m not going to tell her not to talk about her family. We’ll deal with issues as
they come up. But if I try to tell her, then I’m saying that she’s different and less
than. And I’m not. I’m not going to do it. We’ll deal with issues that come up. But
it’s no different than any other parent.
Abigail revisited this idea during the follow up interview, “But I’m not going to make [my daughter] feel different or alienated until we have to deal with the issue. I just want her to feel like a kid who has a family and has a home.” Abigail worked to prevent her daughter from feeling negative about her family. This was similar to lesbian mothers’ script of making children feel proud of their family. Yet MELs contextualized this not in terms of making children proud, but rather not wanting them to feel different.

Additionally, this was not a major focus of the data from MELs, and so was not an independent script. MEL participants identified several elements as essential components of making children feel safe. They felt that good mothers provided safety from physical harm and emotional insecurity, positive feelings about family, and a sense of permanency regarding the family unit.

_Mothers consider their children’s needs and identities above their own_

The third script for good mothers that MEL participants discussed involved making personal sacrifices for children. Abigail talked directly about self-sacrifice in her definition of a good mother.

You put your kids first. You sacrifice. It doesn’t mean they always get their way, but you have to take time when they do something wrong to show them how to do something right. Instead of just tell them not what to do. But when you’re busy, you have so much to do you want to scream, they want to play. Sometimes you’ve got to put your stuff down and play with them and then come back to your other work.

Similarly, Kelli, who described being a mother as “a full time job”, talked about the sacrifices she and her partner make in order to ensure that their son completes his school
work or participates in extracurricular activities, "We don't mind giving up a weekend of
doing X, Y, and Z, of going out of town when we know that he has a large project or
something that he needs to do."

Abigail also talked about the sacrifices she and Michele make to ensure that their
daughter continues to interact with Abigail's son, who lives with Abigail's ex-partner.
So you know, we just do our best to make sure that those two stay connected and
that [my son] stays in my life and that [my daughter] stays in [my ex-partner's].
And that [my ex-partner] and [her new girlfriend] and Michele and I just try to
adjust. Heck, [my ex-partner] and [her new girlfriend] and Michele and I went to
her kindergarten graduation. Not always fun. But the whole "kid first" thing.

In addition to making sacrifices for their children, participants talked about
downplaying their own sexual orientations. They resisted being defined through their
sexuality. She cautioned gays and lesbians against identifying themselves primarily
through their sexuality, warning that as a result society would not see beyond sexual
orientation.

If you ask me to identify who I am, first and foremost, I am a woman. I don't
identify myself. These people who identify themselves, I'm gay first. Well, really,
are you? That's who you are? Well I'm a woman and I'm a role model to a
daughter and I'm a teacher and we always say we don't want people to identify us
because of that, and yet you identify yourself because of that.

Michele described this overt focus on sexuality among gay and lesbian parents as
"showboating". She mentioned this in providing advice for other lesbian mothers.
Just be, don’t showboat the fact that you’re gay. But you don’t have to hide it either. You know, we, in my eyes, we act just like any family would. We go to meetings; we go to conferences if we need to; we talk to the teacher openly. We do anything the teacher needs us to do. We don’t hide the fact that we’re gay. But we don’t go around holding hands or showboating either and telling everybody. Downplaying sexuality and making sacrifices were important parts of this script, which Abigail neatly summarized as “the whole ‘kid first’ thing.”

Summary of MEL revealed scripts for mothers

Mother educator lesbians articulated scripts for good mothers through their discussions of their own practices and the practices of their students’ parents.

1. Mothers advocate for the best educational environment for their children.
2. Mothers consider their children’s needs and identities above their own.
3. Mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children.

Before discussing the MEL revealed scripts for teachers, it is important to note that MEL participants did not maintain a strict divide between scripts for mothers and scripts for teachers. Nyla, in particular, resisted this divide.

Well, it’s one in the same for me. We are all teachers. Every adult that comes into contact, whether it’s the head custodian, the parent, the grandparent, the uncle that comes to visit once a year or the teachers that they see daily. We are all responsible for educating our children. All of society is responsible.

Kelli also addressed the blurring of boundaries between mother and teacher, “The role of a teacher is sometimes parenting, sometimes nurturer, sometimes nurse and counselor and everything else. You just can’t separate those things, because education doesn’t
happen if that child’s whole being isn’t in tact.” I will return to this blurring of categories in the next chapter, nonetheless, I did separate out distinct scripts for mother and for teachers.

*Mother Educator Lesbian Revealed Scripts for Teachers*

MEL participants, with their unique intersecting identities, talked about scripts for teachers as they named their own practices, as they discussed their favorable and unfavorable experiences with their children’s teachers, and as they talked about their colleagues’ teaching practices. MEL participants focused far more on teaching practice than did lesbian mothers, perhaps because of their insider perspective within the profession. Lesbian mothers talked about interactions between teachers and students, curricular choices, and teachers guiding students’ interactions with one another. MELs also visited these topics, yet they did so with attention to student learning. This section contains five scripts. I present these in order of prevalence, using the criteria for prevalence stated in the lesbian mothers section. I start with the script that was most prevalent in conversations with participants.

*Teachers use knowledge of students in planning and implementing lessons*

MEL participants focused heavily on the importance of gathering information about students and their families and using that information to shape classroom practices. Nyla talked about the importance of knowledge of students, “The more you know [about students] the better. I’m sure there’s a critical threshold after which you don’t want or need to know anymore. But the more we know the better and we can help them. We know what’s going on.” And Penny discussed knowing students as a means of being an effective teacher.
If you don't know what's going on at home and the child's having difficulties, a consequence of something could actually be detrimental to the child and you wouldn't even know because you don't know the background and what's happening at home if something major is going on. Kids are depressed. You have to know.

Kelli talked about the importance of knowledge of students as she described her practice.

The more we know about our kids the better we can help them learn. We talk about basic needs, and children can't come to the classroom hungry or in fear or tired or stressed out because parents are getting a divorced or death in the family or can't expect a child to learn if the other side of their world is upside down. So the more communicative you can be with the kids about their home life situation, the better. Helps to know if there's a divorced situation and which night they're going home to be with mom and dad or mom and mom or whatever the situation is, it's important. So we do share a lot and we talk about their feelings and I always afford them the time to come and see me if they ever have any concerns personally that they want to discuss with me and not the class, that they need to get off their chest. And they can always come in and talk to me about it.

Nyla expressed knowledge of students as a means of meeting parental expectations. She believed that parents wanted teachers to know students as individuals.

I think [parents] expect us to treat their children as complete individuals and never say, "Do you know how many kids I have in my class?" or "Do you know how many..." they don't want to hear from the principal, "Do know that I have 700
kids to take care of?" They don’t care. They only care about number 52, which is theirs.

In addition to knowing students on an individual basis, MEL participants expected that good teachers allowed this knowledge to impact practice. Abigail talked about a teacher who exceeded Abigail’s expectations through modifying instruction for Abigail’s daughter.

We got a teacher who gave [our daughter] separate homework. She’s reading different books. Her and one other girl read different books from other kids in her class. When she did rotations, [our daughter] did some extra work. And I know that’s got to be hard. You’ve got a class of 20 five-year olds, who took the time to push every child to their maximum. We’re really lucky.

Kelli also considered herself lucky in that all of her son’s teachers had used their knowledge of students in planning and implementing lessons:

I think the worst experience that I could possibly imagine is a teacher who was very rigid in her thoughts and has her curriculum set to a point where she teaches to the curriculum versus to the students she has in that room. And if they don’t address the creative side or the fact that there’s prior knowledge there, it becomes a boredom or tedious kind of learning. And that hasn’t happened very often in [my son’s] life. Like I said, he’s a very lucky young man.

Beyond experiencing teachers who modified instruction to meet students’ cognitive needs, Abigail talked about a teacher who met her daughter’s affective needs.

When [my ex-partner] and I split up, it was nasty and it’s never fun when you split up. Her teacher at [her school] was fabulous. She probably could have gotten
kicked out of [her school]. She led a revolt at lunch. She acted out and did the things, but her teacher knew what she was going through. So at that point in time, Ali really did need that compassion and her teacher gave it to her. And so that was really good.

Abigail talked about her own practice of offering extra help and attention to students whom she particularly felt were at a disadvantage.

I can judge a kid and think, oh, I need to give you a little extra help because you’ve got a bad home life. I had a student aid, did I judge her according to her parents, yeah. Because they disowned her because she was gay. She got kicked out of the house. Do I help her more because of the way her parents treat her? Yeah, absolutely. Are you kidding me?

For MEL participants, being a good teacher consisted in part of gathering information about their students and allowing that information to impact their teaching practices. Unlike lesbian mothers’ almost exclusive attention to knowledge of students’ family structure, MELs considered cognitive diversity, socioeconomic background, and individual needs as well.

*Teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within schools*

A second script for good teachers involved promoting physical and emotional safety for students. Abigail summed up this script in explaining her commitment to creating a positive classroom environment.

I am responsible truly for providing a positive atmosphere in which they feel comfortable learning. And yes that is about tolerance and about words you can’t say. In my class, you can’t say sucks, pissed, gay, retarded. You can’t say hardly
anything. And it is my job to provide a positive classroom environment and to do what I can.

Abigail expected the same from her children’s teachers, “That’s really what I want from you: a safe environment where they can reach their maximum educational potential. That is your job as a teacher.” And Penny talked about safety and comfort in discussing why she was pleased with her son’s teacher.

She makes him feel comfortable and takes away some of the anxiety and the pressure that sometimes I put on him to get it right. She makes him relaxed and comfortable in the environment so that he can learn as much as he can. And that is a good thing, because I am not a relaxed and easy-going person. So she really helps with that. So that would be the best experience I’ve had thus far.

In part, participants discussed making students comfortable and emotionally safe in terms of not singling students out or making them feel different from their peers. Nyla talked about this singling out in terms of language as she asserted that some teachers used language that told children of lesbians that there was something wrong with their families.

It’s just plain people not using inclusive language. So always from day one, new teachers, sending the message, “Okay boys and girls, tell your mom and dad this and tell your mom and dad that.” And I want that teacher from day one to be using inclusive language and say, “Tell your parents.” Just, it’s so easy to use inclusive language. Because it’s the subtle messages that get into their little heads, that there’s something wrong or something missing. And that’s what I want to avoid.
Kelli echoed Nyla’s concern regarding language, “If teachers would be more aware of how many gay and lesbian families are out there, then they might use different language when they are describing or talking.”

Abigail discussed the importance of treating children fairly, which for her meant not singling out individual students or treating them differently.

I think the bottom line is when a kid runs through your door, you treat every kid, you can’t treat them equally. Life is not equal. But you can treat everyone fair. As long as you treat them fair, I don’t care if you know [my daughter’s] mom is gay. As long as you don’t treat her different.

Nyla expressed concerns about her daughter being singled out as a result of Nyla’s sexual orientation as she discussed her expectations of teachers. These concerns echoed those of participants from the lesbian mother participant group.

Ultimately I would be demanding that the teacher use inclusive language, that the teacher make sure to never make any homophobic comments or make my child feel any different from any other child because of something she might say that’s a natural comment about her family or anything like that. I don’t want her hushed or shushed when she’s sharing information that anyone else can share. And I guess just those times when kids are making little things like Mother’s Day gifts, that at Mother’s Day she makes two. And she also has a father and at Father’s Day, whatever.

As she read data from the lesbian mother’s focus group, Abigail discussed singling out children by mentioning unwanted attention on children of lesbians.
Yes, you want to provide a good environment for [children of lesbians], but you can be accepting without making it different. To me, that makes it worse. They’re just a kid. What the heck-ola. Accept the student’s families. If you’re talking about all of them, that’s fine. But don’t say, “Oh, look at Susie’s parents, accept them.”

In addition to not singling students out, MEL participants were reluctant to engage in other practices that would make students uncomfortable. High school teachers, in particular, were reluctant to ask students for too much personal information. They asserted that this practice could result in students becoming uncomfortable when asked to talk about their families or their personal lives. When I asked Michele what information was important for teachers to have about students’ families, she discussed her concern in knowing too much.

Sometimes I don’t know, because sometimes I think it’s hard for students to be honest about their home life and about their dad being in jail, their mom being a recovering crack addict or something. Or their mom having their fourth kid by a different dad. I mean, there’s a lot of home life situations that are extremely sad. But they’re not proud of it, so they’re not going to share it.

Abigail echoed this sentiment in describing knowledge of students as “Pandora’s box”:

Sometimes it’s wonderful. But I think that you as a teacher need to be very careful when you learn about the bad things that are happening in the kid’s life to not make excuses, because then you are becoming part of the problem.

For participants, making students comfortable and emotionally safe consisted of providing a positive classroom environment and not singling out or excluding students.
MELs and lesbian mothers described different consequences for violating this script. Lesbian mothers feared that teachers’ failure to make students emotionally safe would result in bullying and teasing of children with sexual minority parents. MEL participants associated this failure, or transgression of this script, with decreased student learning.

*Teachers only engage in self-disclosure in a way that does not interrupt student learning or offend parents or co-workers*

The third script for teachers mandated that teachers only talked about themselves in ways that contributed to, rather than detracting from, student learning. Abigail felt that her personal life had no place in the classroom. When I asked her if being a lesbian impacted her practice as a teacher, she said, “Absolutely. I have to completely hide my personal life. Complete separation, complete.” And Kelli explained her discussions of her personal life in her classroom, “I do tend to personalize myself to my students, but not in that respect. I think sexuality needs to stay out of the classroom. It’s not relevant, what your sexual orientation is to be a good teacher.”

As with the other lesbian participants, MELs talked about disclosure as something that was at times forced. Penny, for example, Penny told me about one of her friends who was a lesbian teacher. Someone had discovered the friend’s sexual orientation and had told other parents at the school.

A friend of mine was outed at school. And you could not believe the awful year she had. She must have had twenty some kids wanting to be pulled out of her class. And the principal luckily was like no. But she had a really rough couple of years after that.
While the possibility of forced disclosure existed, participants talked about disclosure of sexuality in terms of conscious choices they had made. They intentionally adhered to this script through non-disclosure. None of the participants talked about their sexual orientation with students. For Kelli, Penny, and Nyla, some parents knew about their sexual orientation as a result of friendships among children. Kelli explained, “Having [my son] at school with me, he obviously made friends with students that I had, so if we were having a sleepover, or we were doing something that was families, it became obvious.” Otherwise, the lesbian educators concealed their sexual orientation from parents. MELs discussed talking openly about sexuality with some co-workers but not others. Penny explained this decision in terms of her relationship with various colleagues, “If there’s any kind of bond or connection on a daily basis when we work together and I feel comfortable, that determines it.” Participants made decisions regarding disclosure largely in terms of their impact on others.

MEL participants explained their refusal to disclose their sexual orientation to students. Abigail talked about students’ negative reactions to homosexuality, “How many times, have I heard, ‘Oh, Miss, this teacher could be gay. Oh my god!’” Abigail’s tone in quoting her students reflected students’ shock and disdain at imagining that certain teachers were gay. She continued by saying, “I don’t want that to define who I am in my classroom.” Abigail also explained that she did not feel that her students were ready to talk about sexual orientation, “But I think sometimes the concept of gay is hard for 13 and 14 year olds to grasp. And I think when that becomes the issue in your classroom, you are doing your kids a disservice.”
Participants’ concerns surrounding revealing sexuality to students were couched in student learning. The perceived result of being an out gay or lesbian teacher was that students would learn less. Abigail explained this:

The danger of being out to students, there’s the danger that I become the gay teacher and not that hard teacher, that demanding teacher. That they think they can… Because you know, you deal with parents and “I don’t want my kid in that teacher’s classroom.” And all of the sudden, 20 years of a reputation is thrown out the door because they make judgments. And you know, there are teachers I’m sure who have their opinions. But as long as, I don’t care what they personally think of me, as long as they professionally respect me. I could really care less.

Participants also used student learning as an explanation for not disclosing sexual orientation to students’ parents. Participants framed their reluctance to disclose sexuality to students’ parents around fears of offending parents, which MELs feared would detract from student learning. Penny explained this connection as she talked about the reasons she did not disclose her sexual orientation to students or their parents.

A lot of parents have ethics that, and morals, that are just, that would not be able to handle it. They would think that I’m going to be a predator on their child or inflict my opinions on them just because their own beliefs are so strong against it. That’s not something that I want to spend my time battling, trying to change someone’s mind, when probably there’s a very slim chance. And meanwhile their kid suffers. Because if the parent and I are battling and the parent is trying to get them out of my class and the principal’s like no, the child hears it at home, and he’s going to be uncomfortable, and it’s going to be awkward for him and then he
loses his chance of really receiving an education in my class. Because if the child is hearing his parents’ opinion, then he probably is going to follow that opinion, because it is his parents. And all respect is gone. And then there goes his expectations of learning.

After Nyla explained that she wasn’t out to parents at her school, I asked about factors that contributed to her decision.

Well, just general homophobia, which can manifest itself in any number of ways. They could decide to make up stories about me that I’m doing something that’s not good for kids. They could just generally harass me; make my life difficult by objecting somehow or telling everybody that I know. And I could have ugliness and rudeness that I would have to deal with. And because my child attends this school, I don’t want that ugliness. I don’t want it for her, nor for me.

Beyond not offending parents, MELs strove not to offend co-workers through their self-disclosure of sexuality. Penny talked about her former principal, to whom she did not reveal her sexuality, “He was a Jewish older male and I know that he did not believe in homosexuality.” Nyla also talked about her general reluctance to offend co-workers as a result of her sexual orientation, “If I’m hosting an end of the year party, I’m out, because my partner’s there. But I would not necessarily show physical affection very much. I would be cautious. Because I’m assuming that some people would be uncomfortable with it.” Nyla discussed her initial reluctance to disclose her sexual orientation as a new administrator, “The thing is, it’s more appropriate for me to establish myself as an effective leader first, here, no matter what my sexual orientation.” She went
on to explain her fear that offending co-workers as a result of self-disclosure could result in negative professional consequences.

It would be very easy for a group of teachers with a brand new administrator who just comes right out on the first morning, to accuse me of having an agenda and get me moved. You know, with the right amount of complaints.

Penny talked about the approach she took to try to ease conflicts with her co-workers who were uncomfortable with Penny’s sexuality.

And just recently, and it’s been about a year, I now bring up things, because I think that it takes a long time for them to be comfortable to hear about little things that can happen with my partner. But it’s okay for them to have them with their husband; do you know what I mean? Or their wife. So, and they’re just now getting comfortable with it. And I can still feel a little tension. Even if they’re trying really hard not to, it’s very hard for them.

This script pointed to a notion that sexual orientation was a minor to non-existent element of a teacher’s identity. Abigail underscored this in categorizing her sexuality in the classroom, “It’s a non-issue because it just needs to be.” Participants generally withheld their sexual orientation from their teaching personas, with the belief that they were not interfering with student learning or offending students’ parents or colleagues. Participants adhered to this script in a way that defined student learning in a particular way, meaning valid student learning is related judged according to traditional academic content. Language arts, mathematics, science, and other core academic material took precedence over topics related to diversity. I will discuss this definition of student learning in the next chapter.

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Educators do not contradict personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents

As evident in the previous script, teachers worked to avoid offending parents. Beyond not disclosing sexual orientation, teachers endeavored not to contradict parents’ personal, moral, or religious beliefs. Kelli talked about her desire for teachers not to contradict her own beliefs as she talked about teachers who objected to lesbian parenting, “Even if they have those beliefs and biases, they can hold their tongue and they can be appropriate, because that’s their job.” This desire for teachers not to contradict participants’ moral approval of lesbian parenting was evident in both the MEL and lesbian mother participant groups. As with the lesbian mother participant group, MELs did not consider parents whose moral values oppose gay and lesbian parenting.

Adherence to this script was particularly evident through MELs’ reluctance to teach morals. They discussed avoiding teaching morals in order not to contradict parents’ beliefs. Abigail was adamant about this, “But it’s not my job to teach morals and values. It’s not!” And Penny stated, “They shouldn’t be morals or ethics that we’re having to teach, which seem to always come up… For schooling, parents need to also introduce diverse culture to their kids. They need to teach them morals and ethics and manners.” Participants resisted the practice of teaching morals, although there was little indication of what these morals comprised. Abigail underscored this ambiguity in saying, “Whose morals and values do they want me to teach? Most parents would throw a fit if I taught mine.”
MEL participants expected that good teachers would avoid contradicting parents’ personal, religious, or moral beliefs. They met this expectation, in part, by attempting to avoid teaching morals. The reluctance to teach morals indicated a particular notion of what morals entail. It seems that participants categorize morals as something that can be added into the curriculum, rather than viewing teaching as a moral endeavor in itself. Additionally, they did not categorize classroom rules or codes of conduct as types of moral instruction. It seems that moral instruction for MEL participants and lesbian mother participants was grounded in conversations about gay and lesbian issues.

*Teachers prioritize student learning above all else*

One of the reasons Abigail provided for resisting teaching moral beliefs was that she feared that such teaching would detract from her content area material. As she read the list of qualities lesbian mothers wanted in teachers, Abigail expressed frustration.

Educate themselves about diversity. What the heck is that? Let them teach math facts, I don’t know. Maybe it’s just, as a teacher of high school, I just think that a large part of our job is to teach. I’m sure that if I was in the focus group, people would yell at me.

Michele added to the script that teachers should focus on academic content in talking about her perceptions of parental expectations of teachers. “To give their child an education. That their child will learn something and that it’s not just a waste of time.” This idea of wasting time was recurrent throughout several interviews, including the above quote from Abigail. Penny also lamented the academic content time lost to teaching social skills.
But the thing is that we spend so much time as educators teaching manners and social skills that their education suffers. If they come to school with bad social skills, bad behavior skills, no manners, it takes up a lot of the day when they are having these problems and meanwhile half the day is over and they haven’t even gotten to any skills yet.

For these participants, valuing student learning above all else meant concentrating on academic content. I will revisit the notions of student learning and what counts as student learning in Chapter Five. This focus on student learning did not appear in the lesbian mother data, perhaps because lesbian mother participants relied upon teachers to promote student learning, as evident in Fern’s statement, “I really like educators to be educators and to look at the next step where the kids in the classroom are going.” MELs, as educators, focused on student learning.

Summary of MEL revealed scripts for teachers

MEL participants revealed a total of five scripts that they expected that normal teachers would follow:

1. Educators do not contradict personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents.
2. Teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within schools.
3. Teachers only engage in self-disclosure in a way that does not interrupt student learning or offend parents or co-workers.
4. Teachers prioritize student learning above all else.
5. Teachers use knowledge of students in planning and implementing lessons.
Scripts Revealed by Teachers

Just as lesbian mothers in this study revealed scripts for mothers and teachers through comments related to deviant and normal behavior and ways of being, teachers in the study also articulated scripts for mothers and teachers. Teachers in the study consisted of two groups of participants recruited from Master's level classes. The first group comprised Megan, a middle school special education teacher; Colleen, a high school English teacher; Vince, also a high school English teacher; Gina, a high school science teacher; Chelsea, a third grade teacher; and Eddie, a high school physical education teacher. The second group consisted of Cindy, Jill, and Shannon, all third grade teachers, and Virginia, a fourth grade teacher.

As with comparisons between scripts revealed by MELs and by lesbian mothers, there are significant overlaps between scripts revealed by teachers and those revealed by the other participant groups. Teachers did not articulate any scripts that the MELs or the lesbian mothers did not. However, their descriptions of these scripts and the priority they place on each differed.

Teacher Revealed Scripts for Mothers

The teachers in this study expressed clear notions of what good mothers should do. They mentioned examples of their students' mothers who fail to engage these scripts for good mothers as well as those who did. Within this section, I explore the three scripts that teacher participants revealed for mothers. I begin with the most prevalent script discussed in interviews and continue to the least prevalent. Interestingly, the scripts and order of prevalence matched that identified by MEL participants.

*Mothers provide the best educational experiences possible for their children*
Colleen summarized this script as she defined parental involvement; “I know it should probably be that they’re involved in decision-making when it comes to their child’s education.” Eddie also talked about the important role parents can play in a child’s education as he talked about limits to what teachers can do.

You only have these kids for so long. So you do what you can with them in your home, your classroom. And then when they get home, you have no control over that. You know, hopefully it sticks. Maybe it doesn’t. You know, maybe the kid themselves can hopefully turn the parent around.

From the perspective of the teachers in this study, providing the best educational environment for children included preparing children for school through teaching social skills, reinforcing education at home, and partnering with teachers to further a child’s education. These strategies were also named by MEL participants. Although of these three strategies, lesbian mothers only discussed partnering with teachers. Teacher participants did not consider choosing the most appropriate school as part of this social script, as did the other two participant groups.

Participants expressed an expectation that good mothers prepare their children through school, mainly focusing on the role of mothers in teaching social skills the teachers perceived as necessary for school. This script was most evident through criticism of parents who didn’t do this. Cindy, for example, shared her belief that her students’ parents expected teachers to share responsibilities for imparting social skills. Cindy felt that this responsibility should rest with parents.

I feel like a lot of my parents expect me to obviously teach their kids the material, but also kind of also be a second parent. I feel like a lot of my parents push on me
a lot of the responsibilities that I think are almost theirs. But I mean, manners, behavior, how they should respect other people, the curriculum, the actual standards, and just how to interact with other kids and people.

Megan echoed these concerns regarding parents who expected teachers to take charge of social situations with students, feeling that parents should fulfill this responsibility.

I think they expect me to be a referee with other students and other staff. I think usually they want me to teach their child. But I think lots of times they expect me to handle problems that I think they should be handling. A lot of it is social stuff, like protect my kid from this kid or don’t let my kid sit by this kid or make sure all the kids leave my kid alone. Just things that I can’t do. Make sure my kid is by so and so in the lunchroom. I can’t do that. I can’t do that. So sometimes it’s really reasonable stuff, like things that are really within my bounds. And other times it’s really going above and beyond what I think is my job.

Cindy had similar concerns, “I think a lot of parents expect us to be more than just a teacher, teaching. They want us to parent them. And I’m like, ‘I’m not her mom. I can’t fix that.’ So that’s really tricky for me.” Chelsea and Gina also talked about mothers who expected teachers to take on roles that Chelsea and Gina felt should rest with mothers. They discussed this as they looked at the list of qualities lesbian mothers wanted in teachers. Gina said, “I think they’re asking a lot of the teacher, putting a lot of the responsibility on the teacher as opposed to taking it on themselves.” To which Chelsea agreed, “A social responsibility, a family personal. Things like this.”
Many participants expressed frustration that parents asked teachers for parenting advice, feeling that this showed a failure on the part of parents to work with their children to teach social skills and provide behavioral guidelines. Gina talked about her experiences with these families.

I get frustrated very much so with parents who say, “I don’t know what to do with him either. Can you help me out?” And I’m going, “Well, if he were two, probably I could help you out. Now that he’s 16, I’m not really sure how much I can help you.”

Vince expressed similar feelings as he talked about the types of parents with whom he enjoys working.

Enjoyable parents to work with are the ones who don’t ask me, the 30 year old with no children, how to be a parent. [Laughter] “What do I do to discipline? What do I do to be a better mother?” I have no idea.

Eddie, who had also experienced parents asking for advice, responded, “And you look at them like, I don’t know if I can really give you advice on what to do or what to do with your kid.”

In addition to preparing children for school through teaching social skills, participants expected that good mothers would reinforce learning within the home. This expectation became evident as participants discussed their definitions of parental involvement. Colleen, for example, mentioned “Encouraging their children about school at home.” Cindy talked about “Helping kids with homework and tutoring. Some parents can help tutor after school with teachers. I think it’s just basically how involved they are.
in their student’s or their child’s life, education. And life in general.” Megan also mentioned reinforcing education at home.

I’m more focused on them being involved when the kids get home from school and carrying on what we’ve done throughout the school day and trying to reinforce that. If they can reinforce what I’m doing, then I’m a happy camper.

Virginia echoed this, explaining, “It’s just the support and the follow through you receive from parents at home and at school.” Shannon articulated her definition of parental involvement.

I would say a parent’s investment in their student’s education. That can be shown within the school, volunteering or being present. Or but also at home and how they show their children what the importance of school is to them and how they sort of have their children perceive that. So at home and at school.

Jill discussed one mother who partnered with Jill in order to support her daughter’s learning. The mother did so through regular communication with Jill.

Her mother has that limitation that comes in with a lot of my parents is that she has a very tough work schedule as far as volunteering in class and things like that. But she told me that right from the beginning, and said that she wanted of course to keep communication open and you know, she’s all about sending notes and we communicate that way. But she just doesn’t have, she just can’t come in, so she’s not physically there a lot of the time, but she’s one of my more present parents.

Some participants talked about this script in terms of parents who fail to reinforce learning at home. Gina expressed frustration that many of the parents in her class do not help with homework or partner in their children’s education, “Mine don’t even care about
homework. I have virtually no involvement.” Shannon talked about her own frustration with a particular parent.

I can think of one example of a parent who’s really opinionated and then won’t follow through. Like this year I have a parent who wants her child retained and has said things like, “you need to take away his recess and make him read” and things like that. And yet when I ask her, “Do you read at home?” They say sometimes. So parents that want you to fix all their problems but don’t want to do it themselves.

The previous (non)examples of parents who reinforce education at home fit into the script of good mother who provides beneficial educational experiences for her child. Another means of adhering to this script included working together with teachers to further a child’s education. Megan talked about parents who worked with her to support their child’s education. “And then if they’re open to it, I’ll tell them, well it would really help me out if you would do X, Y, and Z. And it’s usually just helping with homework, reading with them every night. Pretty basic.” Participants praised parents who communicated with teachers, checked students’ progress, and maintained a visible presence within the classroom. Colleen described parental support as, “Being involved with teachers as far as finding out grades or behavior or just knowing what their kids are doing at school.”

In discussing parental involvement within her classroom, Virginia complained about the number of parents whom she did not see.

There’s this one mother who will actually come in. One, out of both years of teaching, who will actually volunteer regularly to come in. She’s a stay at home
mom, and she just, I mean, she buys pencils for the class, which I love her for.
And she'll come in and do art projects. And she'll come to our parties. But out of
60 sets of parents, she's the only one so far.

While Virginia talked about this script through pointing to parents who did not partner in their children's education, other participants provided reasons they believed that such partnerships were particularly valuable. Colleen explained her beliefs through recalling her own experiences as a student.

I think I came from a very involved family and I see how important that is for a kid's success in school and if the parents aren't involved or encouraging education, I think it's really hard for kids to do that on their own.

Other participants mentioned their experiences with students whose parents are a visible part of the educational process. Jill said, "When they come in for certain things, like we'll have like activities and invite the parents, even just as spectators. And they get really pumped when their parents can come and that kind of thing. And they're better behaved." Shannon mentioned, "I think it helps the parents realize, too, what their kids are really doing in school. You know, when they actually come into the classroom and see everything."

While participants discussed the benefits of mothers who are visible and present within their children's education, they also pointed to challenges mothers faced in partnering with teachers. These challenges included time, language barriers, and negative experiences in schools. The first focus group of teachers talked about the challenge of time.
Eddie: And you have parents that just can’t do it. You know, you have parents that are working two jobs.

Chelsea: Yep.

Eddie: They don’t have time to come down to the school. They don’t have time to come down for a workshop or whatever you’re holding. It is just not possible. So it depends on the parent as far as what they’re doing to survive at home.

Vince: Maybe a night job at a casino or something.

Eddie: Yeah, yeah, that type of parent is not going to make it.

Jill also mentioned challenges related to work schedules as she talked about parental involvement within her classroom.

And I would also say that my parental involvement, well, my class parental involvement, is also limited. But that the reasons vary greatly. I have a good chunk of parents who I know are very enthusiastic and very involved. However they have limited abilities to come volunteer and do in-classroom things, just because work schedules, other children and things like that.

Cindy talked about parents who face the challenge of speaking a different language from that of the teacher.

For me, language is a barrier. So I enjoy working with parents who speak the same language as me. Because I have a really hard time communicating with someone who, they don’t speak a lot of English. So then you just have to have a kid translate, and that’s never fun for me.

Virginia also mentioned challenges related to language.
There's a lot of miscommunication. Like a lot of my parents had negative experiences with school, and so their assumptions about what school are tend to be much more combative sometimes. And then obviously with the language barrier. You can get through the language barrier if the parent is willing to gesture and work with you to try to create some sort of understanding. But it can be very difficult. And then if that parent either doesn't know enough English to do that or if they're unwilling to do that, the communication can become almost impossible.

While participants did talk about challenges some mothers face in partnering in their children's education, participants' other comments reinforced the script that good mothers provide the best educational experiences possible for their children. Teacher participants identified three ways of doing so: teaching social skills, reinforcing education at home, and communicating with teachers.

*Mothers consider their children's needs and identities above their own*

The second script identified by teachers expressed a belief that good mothers consider their children's needs and identities above their own. This belief was shared with MEL and lesbian mother participants. Most statements related to this script include references to mothers who failed to adhere to it. Gina, for example, talked about mothers who violate this script in describing her beliefs related to parental involvement.

And if I never see a parent, that their kid is doing what they're supposed to be doing, they're coming to school prepared. *They're not missing a lot of school for crazy parent this or that* or something else. I don't necessarily have to see the parent to feel like they're being involved.
In her statement, Gina criticized parents who cause students to miss school for the parents’ own needs.

In general, this script was particularly couched in a belief that mothers’ social lives should not preclude their children’s social lives. This was evident as teachers spoke about the rejection children faced as a result of having lesbian mothers. Chelsea explained this during the focus group, expecting that lesbian mothers’ children would continually encounter resistance from their classmates.

Well one thing I would say is that this district is so transient that [lesbian mothers’] kids literally are going to have to get to know new kids almost on a monthly basis. And it’s going to constantly be an issue, whether or not the teacher, you know, how much the teacher works to, you know, okay this is an okay thing.

The focus group of teachers in the children’s literature course also talked about the challenges of lesbian mothers’ children encountering new classmates.

Virginia: By the time they get to fourth grade, their opinions are pretty much set. I mean you can still change them, but the more they grow up with it, the better they are with kids who are diverse.

Shannon: I think that younger kids are kind of oblivious to things like that [having lesbian mothers]. They’re like, “Oh. Okay.” But when they’re older, they might have more negative connotations that go with that.

Gina talked in the focus group about one of her students who had a lesbian mother. Gina was particularly critical that the mother’s social life had a negative impact on the student.
My girl was a cutter. She was cutting herself. I had no idea what the family life was like until I reported to the counselor that that’s what she was doing. The counselor told me that mom had left dad and moved in with her lover and the kid was really messed up. Actually the girl’s friend came and told me that she was cutting. I had never seen anything like that. And I commented, “Are you all right? What’s going on?” And she blew me off. And her friend said she was cutting herself. So I went to the counselor so the counselor brought in the mom and the lesbian lover and that made it worse. It was horrendous. It was horrendous. That girl had a lot of problems.

The notion that mothers’ social lives should not negatively impact their children reveals a belief that sexuality is a minor part of a mother’s identity. Shannon expressed this thought in reflecting on the data from the lesbian mother focus group. “Sexuality is just one part of the person’s identity. I think it sort of becomes all-consuming. Just realize that’s just one part of your identity. That’s not who you are. That’s just part of you know, where you come from.” In considering at the same data, Cindy criticized the mothers for being self-absorbed and considering their own needs above those of their children.

I feel like they really focused on sexuality issues. Like I feel like their negative qualities all have to do with almost the parent more than just the child. Like the way that the parent, their life choices and everything. And how that affects the child. And then, oh, well, those are the only negative qualities experienced from teachers, nothing else. And same with the desired qualities. They all have to do with diversity, and those kinds of issues. Which I’m surprised that that they’re
not, “Oh, I want my teacher to be intelligent or motivated or anything like that.” I just feel like they focus strictly on those issues only.

Participants discussed many examples of mothers who violated this script by considering their own needs and identities above the needs and identities of their children. In particular, they criticized lesbian mothers whose sexual orientation negatively impacted children. This criticism indicates a belief that “good” mothers separate their sexual identity from their children, and that sexual orientation can and should be kept private.

*Mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children*

The final script for mothers that teachers discussed involved a belief that good mothers protect their children, offering physical and emotional safety and security. The other participant groups also expressed this belief. Colleen talked about safety as she conjectured parents’ expectations for teachers, “I just think they want you to just be nice to their kid and not let other people be mean to them. Just keep their kid safe is, I think, the major focus.”

Shannon expressed this script as she talked about her expectations of what parents always do.

I think parents are always really concerned about their kids. And I think that you have to think, “How is this going to affect my child?” And that’s obviously going to be on the forefront of your mind. And those are the things that you’d be like, “Okay, I need to make sure that my, that she’s not in a classroom where the teacher is obviously biased or obviously going to allow teasing or whatever.”
Megan also made statements regarding her beliefs that parents work to keep their children safe. She did so as she talked about her frustration that some teachers singled out lesbian mothers and their children.

I guess just how important it is to me that people remain open minded and open to, you know, they’re parents, regardless of who they choose to be with, the situation at home. I think parents are parents, and they all want the same thing for their kids. And I just think it’s very important for people to realize that and not get hung up on the label of these are lesbian parents. Who cares? They’re parents who love their kid who want their kid to feel safe in school. And that’s what we need to provide. A safe place for their child where they can learn and grow. And it, I guess it just kind of makes me sad that it’s even an issue.

Colleen expressed feelings that lesbian mothers could provide emotional safety for their children through teaching those children to value their family.

Unless they’re taught at home that everything is positive and they have a positive family experience too. And then when it is addressed at every level, you’re like “Doesn’t matter to me if I have two loving parents. Who cares?” So you’re raised to be out there about it.

In addition to these sentiments, Colleen criticized parents who did not provide security for their children through establishing guidelines. “I came from a disciplined, structured home. And when I’m talking with a parent who lets their kid stay out till four in the morning, I don’t know, we’re so far apart that it’s hard to find common ground.” These parents violated the script of providing physical and emotional safety and security for their children.
Summary of teacher revealed scripts for mothers

Teachers in this study revealed three scripts that they expected good mothers to follow:

1. Mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children.
2. Mothers provide the best educational experiences possible for their children.
3. Mothers consider their children’s needs and identities above their own.

These scripts demand that mothers be actively involved in their children’s lives, partnering with teachers, teaching social skills, reinforcing learning, establishing behavioral guidelines. The teachers in this study, like the MEL and the lesbian mother participants, expect that good mothers will make their children their chief priority.

Teacher Revealed Scripts for Teachers

As with the scripts for mothers, participants revealed scripts for teachers through praising certain practices and criticizing others. Teachers in this study talked about their own teaching and that of their colleagues. They also conjectured parental and administrative expectations of teachers. These comments pointed to five scripts, which I discuss in order of prevalence within the data. As with the scripts for mothers, teacher participants and MELs revealed the same scripts for teachers.

Educators do not contradict personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents

Teachers talked about their desire not to contradict the personal, moral or religious beliefs of their students’ parents. They made decisions related to their teaching practices as a result of this desire. While MELs approached this script from the perspective of parents who did not want their beliefs to be contradicted, teachers worked to avoid negative reactions from parents and administrators. An additional difference
between the two groups was the priority placed upon this within the data. Focus group discussions, in particular, focused heavily on the desire not to offend parents. Unlike the lesbian mothers and MELs who did not want teachers to contradict their beliefs in the validity of gay and lesbian parenting, teachers discussed avoiding the topic out of fear of contradicting parents with conservative beliefs.

Shannon talked about the impact parental beliefs have on teachers' choice of academic content. "I think that a lot of teachers are cautious about bringing up certain issues, just because they might have to deal with other parents and complaints." Again, the reluctance Shannon articulated as a means of adhering to this script actually transgresses the script as interpreted by lesbian mother and MEL participants.

Virginia explained her own desire not to contradict parents' beliefs, feeling that parents should choose the values they impart to children.

You can't force a family to raise their family in a certain way. But on the other hand, you want the kids to grow up and be accepting of others. And so, I mean you're constantly dancing a fine line whenever you deal with something like that between being too, between trying to create the child that you want and at the same time letting the parents educate their children in the way that they want.

Virginia also talked about the challenges of not contradicting parents' beliefs in classes in which parents held vastly different opinions.

I think it's hard, because you'll have some parents who want you to educate about that [gay and lesbian parenting] and then some who are vehemently opposed to that. And so you have to somehow find a balance between helping one child be
accepted and not enraging the other parents. And that's something that I struggle with.

Colleen also mentioned this challenge during the interpretive portion of the focus group as she reflected upon the qualities lesbian mothers wanted in teachers:

Well yeah, I was like, well duh, who wouldn't want a teacher like that. But then I was kind of thinking, too. A lot of parents don’t want a teacher who thinks outside the box. And this is much more progressive, liberal type. Because, you know, not to say that all lesbians are liberal by any means of course. But a lot of times, very conservative people don’t want that open mindedness. They’re, you know, they want “just teach”. Don’t talk about anything else. Stick to the topic, whatever and avoid religion all together.

In an effort not to contradict the diverse beliefs of the parents of students within their classrooms, some teachers proposed avoiding teaching morals altogether.

Gina: I mean, I’m teaching the child, I’m teaching the subject matter. I’m not teaching, um…

Vince: Morals?

Gina: Thank you, yes. I’m not trying to teach morals.

As with the comments of mother educator lesbian participants, teacher participants were also unclear about their views of what teaching morals encompassed.

One of the particular issues that participants identified as a dilemma as related to parental beliefs was that of including gay and lesbian issues in the curriculum. Virginia reflected further upon this script during a follow up interview, as she discussed to (im)possibilities of introducing gay and lesbian issues into the curriculum.
I started thinking more about the impediments, the challenges that a teacher would face trying to create an open welcoming environment and the ways that other parents would sometimes step in to say, "Well that's not what I believe and that's not what I want my children exposed to." And where the parents' rights begin and where the teacher's rights begin as far as educating the child in a certain way.

One of the teacher focus groups debated the inclusion of gay and lesbian content in the curriculum in light of parental reactions.

Eddie: If you say in class we're going to learn about lesbian parents and what it's like or whatever, is that parent going to accept their kid receiving that?

Gina: Hmm-mm!

Chelsea: That's what I'm saying!

Gina: Or in the curriculum where are we going to put it?

Chelsea: I'm not sure if the classroom is the appropriate place.

Teachers felt rather restricted in their conversations about gay and lesbian topics as a result of perceived parental reactions. Because many participants categorized these topics as moral issues, avoiding them served as a means of adhering to the script and not contradicting parents' (conservative) beliefs. I asked Shannon about the average teacher's comfort level in teaching about gay families.

The comfort level, I would say low as in they wouldn't be comfortable, just with all of the legal issues and all of the things going on with religion as far as that in the classroom. Any of kind of the hot button issues, I think teachers are kind of leery of addressing them just for fear of what kind of repercussions they'll have.
Cindy had similar sentiments about teachers’ comfort levels in discussing gay and lesbian families.

Like on a scale of one to ten? Probably a two or a three. Especially if they weren’t in that situation. They’re not going to be like, let’s teach about lesbian moms and gay families if they don’t have someone in their class. Maybe if they had someone in their class, they’d be more likely to talk about it. And different family structures. But without that actually presented, it’s not something that a lot of teachers would be like, well, I feel like I should address this and teach a lesson on it or have a discussion.

Colleen talked about teachers who made students uncomfortable in bringing up gay and lesbian issues in a negative light, criticizing LGBT individuals and couples. This initiated a discussion regarding teachers’ beliefs, particularly as they conflict with those of students and their parents.

Colleen: We have teachers, and I know them well. Because a lot of my teacher friends are either gay or lesbian. And who are major homophobes. And it’s out there in class. I mean, comments have been made in class. And it’s gotten, kids have told us and we’re going, “[Gasp] She did not say that!” And so I’ve seen the other side of it too that is, I can’t believe that you are that close-minded.

Vince: But I don’t think that that’s fair to say, because I’m not this way, but if it’s against your religious beliefs, it’s against your religious beliefs. And I think that a school, like the school where I’m at, there’s a vast majority of the families are very religious. And it’s against what they believe. It might be against what the teacher believes.
Chelsea: But for a teacher to espouse religious beliefs, is that appropriate in a public school setting?

Colleen: That’s what I’m saying. The teacher is saying, “If you’re gay, you’re going to hell.” And flat out is telling kids that. And I’m going, “What?” I mean, not doing it like, “You know, some people say this.” Not doing it as a, you know, doing it as her own personal. Not doing it as a debate. Not doing it as a let’s get talking about both sides thing. Really saying, this is how it is and this is my religious belief. And this is, that’s not a line we should be crossing.

Teachers worked intentionally not to contradict the beliefs of their students’ parents. At the same time, they articulated the challenges inherent to this work.

*Teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within schools*

The data provide evidence of participants’ beliefs in the importance of making students feel emotionally safe within classrooms. MEL and lesbian mother participants expressed the same sentiment. The importance of student safety was discussed during the interpretive portion of the teacher focus groups. I asked the teachers about the benefits of being the type of teacher lesbian mothers want.

Megan: Students who feel comfortable and safe in your classroom.

Eddie: Exactly.

Gina: That hierarchy. Once you’ve got them there, then they’re ready to learn.

Yeah, they’re ready to learn anything.

During a follow up interview, Megan talked about the Safe Schools Program, a workshop she had led at her previous school, in an effort to sustain a safe environment for students.
And we did have kids who had come to our school because they were so horribly tormented in the other school for differences in clothing and style or orientation. And I said, “You know, the kids are here because they feel safe and we have to really make sure that continues.” But no, it [the Safe Schools Program] was an enormous response and that was just something that was so powerful for me and I was just so glad that I did it. And everything was free. All the materials were online and were free. It just brought some really interesting discussion in. And something that I offered to do here but was never taken up on those offers.

Eddie also discussed his practices related to creating a safe environment for his students.

Well, in the locker room, a lot of this, especially with the teasing and bullying, plays a role. And I always tell the kids, you know because I can’t see everything, but when it happens, just trust that you can come to me. And I’ll handle it appropriately. And usually they do that. Especially because they know I will do something about it. So, you know, as long as they have that trust in the teacher, they’ll come to you and they’ll tell you. But if they don’t have that, then you get those kids that won’t say anything. And it continues on. And they might tell mom and dad. But mom and dad is worrying why your teacher doesn’t know because I don’t feel I can go to them. Or sometimes they’re just embarrassed to tell the teacher. But usually if they don’t feel open to come to the teacher to talk about it, then they’re not going to do it. So a lot of this, you know, plays a role and especially with me. My feeling was always, you know teaching on the west side of town and growing up there. As a teacher you’re always going to be something
to a kid. You’re either going to be just strictly a teacher, you’re going to be a father figure, a brother, a mother, something to the kids that they’re missing. And I always believe that you kind of have to fill that role to get that kid to open up and be willing to learn and talk to you. Still keep that line to where, you know, teacher and don’t cross that. But there’s still that openness to where you know, some problems arise and I can come talk to you about it. So I always believe that that is a part of the qualities of being a good teacher. Usually the negative side is always those teachers that are passive, you know, in some way they’re weak in controlling and managing the classroom.

As mentioned by Eddie, participants felt that part of providing safety involved protecting students from bullying and teasing. Virginia lamented teasing related to sexual orientation that occurred at her school, “And the kids are allowed to say, ‘That’s gay’ or ‘Stop being such a homo’ or whatever they want on the playground and in specials and stuff.” In discussing the difficulty children of lesbians faced in school, Chelsea to this notion of teasing as related to sexual orientation. “And it’s going to constantly be an issue, whether or not the teacher, you know, how much the teacher works to, you know, okay this is an okay thing.” Chelsea was suggesting that teachers should work to make students feel emotionally safe within the classroom. Teacher participants’ attention to bullying and teasing mirrored the focus of the lesbian mothers, while MEL participants focused more on inclusive language and not making children feel singled out.

*Teachers prioritize student learning above all else*

Much like MELs, teachers explained many of their classroom practices and their decisions in terms of the impact on student learning. They structured communication with
parents, classroom management techniques, coverage of academic material, and self-disclosure in ways that maximized and did not detract from student learning. The subsequent quotes indicate that participants categorized prioritizing student learning as a matter of maximizing time spent on academic content. I will discuss what participants considered to count as student learning in the next chapter.

Many comments related to maximizing time spent on academic content were the result of conversations about including gay and lesbian themed information in the curriculum. Some participants resisted introducing these topics for fear of sacrificing other material. Several participants in the second teacher focus group expressed additional concerns about including gay and lesbian families in their curricula.

Jill: Because you want to get to all these topics and things like that and talking about different things and different views. But sometimes it can be a very exhausting thing to do. And just time wise, time management. Some schools are so adamant about reading and math and things like this that you might introduce more through social studies or something like that.

Virginia: There’s no time provided for it.

Jill: There’s just no time.

Virginia: And the curriculums are just so scripted that…

Jill: That it’s hard to supplement or modify sometime.

Virginia: And after a lesson on Mars, we’re going to talk for 5 minutes [about gay and lesbian families].

In this conversation, student learning was defined in terms of mandated academic content. This script allowed teachers to go beyond core subject areas only to the extent
that this digression did not hinder student learning. Jill's comments in the above conversation illustrate this point. She wanted to include different viewpoints in her teaching and to address diversity, yet she felt constrained by the time she needed to spend on core subjects.

Gina expressed her own beliefs that gay and lesbian issues should not be addressed in her classroom unless not doing so would interrupt student learning.

It’s probably not appropriate in a science classroom, obviously. I don’t feel confident enough to lead that discussion. I do feel confident enough to step in if I see a student is being harassed because of it. And if there is that big of an issue, I would probably clear the air, just to get the whole class on a better footing. So I guess on an as needed basis rather than start the school year off, “Okay, we have all kind of families here. Let’s discuss them.” I don’t, no, I don’t go there. And asking about students’ families and stuff, one, I have over two hundred students. I wouldn’t keep it straight anyway.

Teachers felt that certain content areas lent themselves to conversations about diversity in a way that did not detract from time spent on academic content. Colleen reflected on her subject matter facilitating teaching about diversity.

If I didn’t teach English, I don’t know that I would teach a lot of education about diversity. It lends itself very easily to literature. And we talk about it a ton because of that. And so I feel like I have the knowledge base and can help teach about it. But if I were teaching science…

At this point, Gina interjected, “Science. There’s no room for that in the curriculum.” There was a general feeling that academic subject areas dictated what a teacher should
cover. This sentiment tied student learning to academic content, meaning that such content was prioritized above teaching social issues.

Virginia felt that some teachers in her school discussed diversity in connection with academic content; however, they did so to the exclusion of diversity of sexual orientation.

Looking over the school year, I don’t think that any teachers have actually done anything with like gender norms or about gay and lesbian or even different structures of families. Even looking at grandparents raising kids. And I think at my school, the only type of diversity that is ever discussed is racial diversity. And the only figure who is ever mentioned is Martin Luther King. I remember one of my girls raised her hand at our peace assembly and said, “There are other people besides Martin Luther King who advocated for diversity.” And I was kind of a little bit worried about that statement, because I didn’t know how the other teachers were going to react. But it’s very true. I mean we don’t talk about anything else at my school except for racial diversity.

Cindy reiterated teachers’ reluctance to incorporate material that they do not perceive to directly pertain to academic content.

[Teachers] are not going to be like, let’s teach about lesbian moms and gay families if they don’t have someone in their class. Maybe if they had someone in their class, they’d be more likely to talk about it. And different family structures. But without that actually presented, it’s not something that a lot of teachers would be like, well, I feel like I should address this and teach a lesson on it or have a discussion.
Teachers prioritized student learning, yet they defined this learning in terms of time spent on mandated academic content. Their pedagogical decisions were made in an effort to maximize this time.

*Teachers use knowledge of students in implementing and planning lessons*

During follow-up interviews, teachers talked about the information that is helpful to know about students and their families. Their responses indicted a belief that this information should impact teaching practices, a belief that MELs and lesbian mothers shared. Shannon talked about the information she finds useful, “Definitely their background, where they come from, what are their beliefs, what’s their heritage? What kinds of things influence how they perceive what you’re teaching them?” Megan discussed wanting to know about students’ home situations.

It’s definitely [helpful] to know if mom and dad are home at night. Or if parents are home at night. To know if they have other siblings here at school. I like to know if there’s something big going on at home like a death in the family or some sort of struggle or crisis because then I can be more sensitive to their child. Work schedules are big, so I can know when I can contact them or what kind of resources the child has after school. And if they want to tell me. Usually my parents tell me, you know, grandpa died. Just so I know. And that helps me so I can be a little extra sensitive and things like that.

Cindy wanted to know similar information, complaining that little information regarding students’ home lives was provided by her school.

I think it’s helpful to know a lot. We don’t know anything really. We don’t know who they live with sometimes unless we ask. Because the information provided
for us is not that detailed. For me, I like to know if their parents are separated, who they live with, how often, if they have step parents, if they have siblings. If their siblings go to our school or if they are older or younger. Because that makes a difference if that child has an older sibling, that’s somebody I know probably for sure can help them. I’d like to know the living situation. Are they living in an apartment, in a house? Are they homeless? Are they all over the place? If they don’t live with their parents, maybe why, because that’s kind of interesting. Like to know, are their parents in jail? Did they die? Were they taken away from their parents and put in child haven? All that kind of stuff is helpful, because it’s nice to know where a child is coming from and the kinds of things that maybe you should be more careful in saying. And I think as a teacher you don’t always think about those things, but those are issues. So it would be nice to know a lot more about the family.

Jill mentioned why she finds knowledge of students to be an important part of being a good teacher.

It gives you such a stronger perspective of why they do the things they do or how they act. It’s more comprehensive. A more comprehensive view of the student as a child. Not just as a student, as a person. I think that that helps. Like if I know that a student is having a tough time at home, because I’ve had that conflict with parents. Like I have a student now whose mom is going into surgery next week. So knowing that, I kind of, we have a more open discussion about, okay, well this week might be a little tough for you, we can modify this, do that if you can’t do this. Kind of things like that. Whereas without that knowledge, I might be like,
why are you being like that? Why are you upset? Why are you, you know and assume it’s something else. I think teachers should know more about all families. Including lesbian or any gay parents, just because all the things we talked about, I think it’s better for the child. It’s better for everyone in the situation if there’s more knowledge and communication.

Colleen, a high school teacher had similar beliefs about why knowledge of students was important.

Just like with accomplished teachers, that knowledge of students. The more you know the students, the better you’re equipped to handle all of their educational needs. Once you connect with them, your chances of helping them academically, socially whatever, you know, multiplies.

Eddie talked about the knowledge of students that he considered to be most important as he discussed what who would want to know about students with lesbian moms.

Other than how that student feels about being in that situation, because as far as lesbian parents raising their kids, they can probably do it as well as anybody. But it really comes down to, I guess I feel, about how that student feels about being in that situation and how it affects them when they come in my classroom. That’s what I want to know. And if that situation is interrupting their learning, then I need to know that. And then I can adjust to it the best way that I can as a teacher.

Megan talked specifically about teachers who failed to consider their knowledge of student differences in planning instruction.
I think when you do have a child who is outside the norm or has a situation outside the norm, I think it’s kind of bizarre not to address it when it comes up. And be it a cultural difference, a whatever difference it is. I think in order for the children and staff to have an understanding, it needs to be talked about. I think when kids make fun and tease and are hard on other people is because when they don’t have information or they don’t understand. I think if you don’t answer those questions and use those teachable moments to say, okay here’s what’s going on, I think that’s what breeds the fear, the confusion.

Megan also discussed finding that teaching students with different backgrounds from her own required learning about the challenges her students faced.

When I worked with at risk students, I had no concept of what it was like to grow up in poverty. And that was a huge challenge to me. I just didn’t have a clue what these kids were facing. And it was a huge learning experience to me to the things they told me and the things that I just never thought of because of my fortunate, middle-class upbringing with two parents and just stuff that had never occurred to me and I learned as much from them as they did from me.

Colleen, who defined maintaining a deep knowledge of students as an essential characteristic of accomplished teachers talked about her practices involving gathering information about students.

Usually at the very beginning of the year, and one of the things that I need to change, I like to know, I always ask what the kid’s occupation is, who they live with, whether it’s mom, dad, aunt, uncle, random stranger, I don’t know. I always want to know who they live with. I want to know if they speak English when I
contact them or not. If they have computer access. You know, and then most of
the other information that I get from kids is just interacting. And at the beginning
of the year, I also call each kid up and I just say, “Tell me about your family. And
tell me about what you like to do.” And just to kind of break the ice a little bit and
get a vibe on the kid. But some of the other things I do have them fill out a
questionnaire so that I do have it on file so I can go, okay, this dad works here or
this mom works here or whatever.

While many participants conferred about the importance of knowledge of
students, some expressed resistance. Jill, for example, explained, “You can’t pry or you
can’t try to be overly, overbearing as far as asking for information.” Gina asserted that
most information about students did not impact her teaching, and she would rather not
know a student’s family situation. “And whether they’re living with mom or dad or
grandma or grandpa or aunt or uncle, you know, that’s the first thing out of their mouth. I
do n’t know how that helps me deal with [the student]. I don’t know if that helps at all.”

Gina returned to this thought later in the follow-up interview, maintaining that she
is a private person.

I don’t go there, asking about students’ families and stuff. One, I have over two
hundred students. I wouldn’t keep it straight anyway. Unless it pertains to, you
know, we’re having a bitter custody battle. Don’t let dad come and get him from
school. Which I think would be an important thing for all of us to know. Not just
the school administration but the teachers. Because you never know when a non-
custodial parent wants to interfere. But other than, you know, extreme situations
like that, I don’t know. Maybe it’s just my personality. I’m more private than that.
Eddie also expressed reservations in knowing too much about students and their home lives.

And then we talk about too, you know, counselors usually know a lot of this stuff. So do you really want to know some of the stuff that the counselors know about these kids, their family. If it’s abuse problems or something you really can’t handle as a teacher and that student approaches you, do you really want to handle those types of problems on top of everything else you already have to do. Okay, you’ve already got to work a classroom. And now you know this situation about the kid who comes up to you. And where are you? You’re in the middle of this situation now. That’s a lot to handle. So do you really want to know all that? I don’t know.

While Colleen wanted to know about her students’ backgrounds, she discussed the challenges related to gathering this information.

I think it takes a lot of effort to get to know about kids and to get to know about every kid’s situation when you have 150 to 200 kids, to really know. I have no idea if you’re gay or if you’re married or if you’re single or you’re whatever. Because I won’t remember if you tell me right now anyway, half the time. You know, unless it keeps coming up.

Another challenge, beyond keeping track of information about students’ families, was knowing how to use this information in teaching practice. Cindy talked about this challenge.

And at the same time I feel like, not just knowledge, but if you needed to get more knowledge, like I’ve never had that situation as far as I know as far as having any
sort of gay parents or lesbian parents. But if I did I feel like it would be really hard considering I’ve never had that and I wouldn’t know who I could talk to, like saying, you know, have you ever had any experience with this. And since it’s not anything that’s ever really talked about, I feel like in that situation it would kind of hard if it was new.

Teachers agreed upon the importance of using knowledge of students to plan and implement lessons. There was dissention, however, in the exact nature of information that was most useful. Conversely, MEL and lesbian mother participants, argued for the importance of teachers knowing about students’ family structures.

Teachers only engage in self-disclosure in a way that does not interrupt student learning or offend parents or co-workers

The final script discussed in interviews with teachers involved self-disclosure. Teachers believed that teacher disclosure should not interrupt student learning or offend parents or co-workers. Eddie hypothesized the dilemmas of disclosing gay or lesbian sexual orientation to students, including backlash and ridicule.

What would that say to the kid if I were gay, and the kid came up to me and ask me, even if that kid was gay also, “Coach are you gay?” Now I deny it. I really am and I deny it. What is that saying to that kid that I have to hide who I am? Well, why should I be open to these other kids because you feel like you don’t want to be open about it and you don’t want that backlash and ridicule. You know, you just can’t do it. Because you know, just like I know, it’s not accepted. You know instead of just saying, “Hey you know what, you’re right.” I don’t even
know who you’re going to say that to. It says something to them to deny it when you really are, even to a gay student.

Colleen discussed similar reasoning during a teacher focus group interview. She explained that many of her friends were gay and lesbian teachers who felt forced to mask their homosexuality so that it did not become “an issue” in the classroom.

Lots of time families, very Catholic, very whatever. And so they [gay teachers] choose to not put that out there. And even when kids question it or have a feeling about it or “I think so and so.” The teacher just kind of takes that back. Where if they said to me, “Miss are you married?” and I was, that would be, you know, then they would accept that. So they make up the other, like if I’m a girl I change my partner’s name from Clara to Clarence or something just to appease the kids so it doesn’t become an issue.

In addition to not detracting from student learning, teacher self-disclosure was to be done in a way that did not offend parents or contradict parents’ personal, religious, or moral beliefs. Virginia, a heterosexual teacher, understood this script. She reflected:

I prefer that [parents] engage with me as a teacher sometimes and not as an individual. Because there’s certain things, like I live with my boyfriend. And I know a lot of my parents would have trouble with that if they knew. And so I try to keep my personal life out of it.

Participants also talked about conflict caused among teachers as a result of self-disclosure. Colleen talked about clashes between gay teachers and those whom Colleen labeled as homophobes.
We have teachers, and I know them well. Because a lot of my teacher friends are either gay or lesbian. And who are major homophobes. And it’s out there in class. I mean, comments have been made in class. And it’s gotten, kids have told us and we’re going, “[Gasp!] She did not say that!” And so I’ve seen the other side of it too. That is, I can’t believe that you are that close-minded.

Cindy explained a situation at her school, “I know specifically of two teachers, one teacher who is a lesbian and another teacher she’s had the conflict between that has really strong religious views. And has told her to her face that her lifestyle is wrong.”

Both the disclosure of sexuality and the disclosure of religious beliefs could be interpreted as a violation of this final script.

**Summary of teacher revealed scripts for teachers**

Teachers who participated in this study articulated five social scripts for teachers whom they considered to be good or normal teachers.

1. Educators do not contradict personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents.

2. Teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within schools.

3. Teachers only engage in self-disclosure in a way that does not interrupt student learning or offend parents or co-workers.

4. Teachers prioritize student learning above all else.

5. Teachers use knowledge of students in implementing and planning lessons.

Overall, the scripts revealed by teachers suggested that good teachers should maximize student learning and adhere to parental expectations. Teachers did not differ significantly from other participant groups in the scripts they revealed for teachers, although they did not share other participants’ notion that gay and lesbian families should
be included in the curriculum. Nonetheless, teachers shared MEL and lesbian mothers’
desires to make schools safe, comfortable environments for all students.

Summary of the Findings

Participants articulated a total of five scripts for mothers and five for teachers.
They discussed scripts that mark good mothers: mothers work to create and sustain
friendships for their children; mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security
for their children; mothers instill within their children a sense of pride in their family;
mothers advocate for the best educational environment for their children; and mothers
consider their children’s needs and identities above their own. Participants also revealed
scripts that mark good teachers: teachers do not contradict personal, moral, or religious
beliefs of parents; teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within
schools; teachers only engage in self-disclosure in a way that does not interrupt student
learning or offend parents or co-workers; teachers prioritize student learning above all
else; and, teachers use knowledge of students in implementing and planning lessons.
Appendix F contains tables that summarize these scripts and demonstrate the overlap of
scripts named by distinct participant groups.

Participants described specific ways that mothers and teacher adhere to each
script. For example, mothers advocate for the best educational environment for their
children through selecting appropriate schools, talking to teachers about family
structures, working on academic and social skills at home, communicating frequently
with teachers, closely monitoring instances of bullying and teasing within the classroom,
and not offending teachers. A second example is teachers’ adherence to the script in
which teachers do not contradict parents’ beliefs. The did so by avoiding teaching morals,
by including diverse families within the curriculum, and by resisting the inclusion of gay and lesbian topics in the curriculum. As evident within the second, the scripts revealed by participants frequently conflicted with one another. Adhering to a script in one way prevented adhering to it in another. In the previous example, teachers who enacted the script by avoiding omitting diverse families from the curriculum ultimately transgressed the script by contradicting lesbian mothers' beliefs.

Participants discussed examples of transgressions of each script. Their statements of deviance rendering those who adhered to the scripts as normal and those who transgressed scripts as deviant. For example, deviant or “bad” mothers failed to advocate for the best educational experiences for their children. From the perspective of lesbian mothers, this meant that bad mothers failed to consider the social climate of schools before enrolling their children. From the perspective of teachers and MELs, bad mothers did not communicate with their children’s teachers. Nor did they reinforce academic learning at home or prepare their children for school with the proper social skills. These mothers violated a social script for good mothers, so they were deemed bad mothers.

The results of this study indicate that participants revealed distinct scripts for mothers and teachers. The exact nature of these scripts varied within and between participant groups, and the scripts frequently conflicted. Nonetheless, participants described specific ways that good mothers and good teachers adhere to each script. Transgression of a script or merely failure to enact the script resulted in participants naming transgressors as bad mothers or bad teachers. I will discuss the conflicting scripts, forms of deviance, and means of adhering to scripts in more detail within the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Participants articulated specific scripts for mothers and teachers, describing the varied ways that good mothers and good teachers employ these scripts. They discussed transgression of scripts as deviant and implied that transgressors were "bad mothers" or "bad teachers". These scripts and the interpretations of the scripts contained a great deal of contradiction and ambiguity, concepts embraced by queer theory. Examining the ways that participants negotiated the complex scripts for mothers and teachers provides a means for destabilizing these scripts.

This chapter provides a discussion of the data by considering the nature of social scripts revealed by participants. It also considers the ways the nature of scripts impacts the ways lesbian mothers, mother/educator/lesbians, and teachers interpret the scripts. I begin this chapter by describing the complexity of scripts and the ways that scripts contradict themselves and one another. I also highlight examples of the (mis)alignment between various participant groups' interpretations of scripts, examining the impact of such (mis)alignment on teachers' and mothers' stated experiences. Then I discuss the extent to which scripts for mothers and teachers overlap. Finally, I explore the ways that the complex, contradictory, overlapping nature of scripts causes mothers and teachers to make choices related to adhering to, modifying, or resisting various social scripts. I also consider participants' articulated choices regarding scripts through the lens of...
of queer theory, looking for ways scripts serves as normalizing forces and magnify deviance.

The Complexity of Social Scripts

Combining the data from the three participant groups revealed a total of five scripts for good mothers: mothers work to create and sustain friendships for their children; mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children; mothers instill within their children a sense of pride in their family; mothers advocate for the best educational environment for their children; and mothers consider their children's needs and identities above their own. Participants also revealed a total of five scripts that characterize good teachers: teachers do not contradict personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents; teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within schools; teachers only engage in self-disclosure in a way that does not disrupt student learning or offend parents or co-workers; teachers prioritize student learning above all else; and, teachers use knowledge of students in implementing and planning lessons.

These scripts are complex and often conflicting, as evident in the ways that participants from each group described good mothers' and good teachers' interpretations of the scripts. In this section, I discuss conflicts between individual scripts, the contradiction between various scripts, and the (mis)alignment between individual participant's interpretation of scripts. My intention is to select an example for each point in order to illustrate the complexity of the social scripts, but I do not claim to interrogate all contradictions. I chose to focus on the examples of contradictions that were the most telling in terms of relation to the research questions and theoretical framework. It is important to note that the contradictions within and between scripts occur at an
interpersonal level within participants’ social contexts, meaning that these contradictions are not indicative of individual participants’ beliefs and interpretations. Rather these contradictions are endemic within complex social contexts. Illustrating the complexity of social scripts serves to disrupt and trouble these scripts. The complexity and contradictions within social scripts for good mothers and good teachers characterize the categories of mother and teacher as contextual and changeable, rather than cohesive and universal.

Conflict within Scripts

The three participant groups had distinct, sometimes contradictory interpretations of each script. And interpreting a script in one way frequently prevented interpreting it in another. One particularly telling example of this was a script named by teachers and mother/educator/lesbians (MEL): teachers prioritize student learning above all else. Based on their comments, teachers interpreted this in various ways, depending on their perceptions of what their school and administration valued in terms of student learning. As mentioned in the previous chapter, most teacher participants interpreted the script in a way that equated student learning with time spent covering traditional core content. Jill, a third grade teacher, highlighted the contradictory interpretations of this script in talking about including gay and lesbian families in the curriculum.

"You want to get to all these topics and things like that and talking about different things and different views. But sometimes it can be a very exhausting thing to do. And just time wise, time management. Some schools are so adamant about reading and math."
With seemingly little guidance from administrators or curricular materials, it appears that Jill was faced with the challenge of choosing between students learning about diversity and learning about math and reading. Evidently dominant discourses within her school placed learning about diversity and learning about math and reading in isolation, rather than integrating diversity as part of the curriculum. The school appeared to privilege math and reading above diversity. As a result, Jill had to choose between these two competing ways to interpret the script of prioritizing student learning. Gina, a science teacher, made a comment about not discussing diverse families that demonstrated a similar position, “It’s probably not appropriate in a science classroom, obviously.” Like Jill, Gina considered student learning related to science and student learning related to diverse families to be mutually exclusive. And like most other teacher participants, Jill and Gina talked about prioritizing student learning in the areas of core content subjects above student learning in the areas of difference and diversity.

Colleen, a high school English teacher, interpreted the script differently, by prioritizing both student learning related to diversity and to her subject area. But she clarified that she was able to adhere to the script in this way specifically because of her subject area.

If I didn’t teach English, I don’t know that I would teach a lot of education about diversity. It lends itself very easily to literature. And we talk about it a ton because of that. And so I feel like I have the knowledge base and can help teach about it. But if I were teaching science…

This shows that for Colleen, who defined student learning more broadly than other participants, that content area allowed for a broader interpretation of the script. Diversity
was already integrated to some degree within English, but she described diversity and academic content as disconnected in other disciplines. It is important to note that for this script, teachers as well as mother/educator/lesbians and lesbian mothers, viewed lessons about gay and lesbian families and other diversity related topics as an addition to curricula. They did not view diversity or family structure as an integral part of existing curricula. They talked about addressing these issues only, as Gina described, “On an as needed basis.” I will return to this point later in the chapter.

Another example of conflicting interpretations of a script involved a script articulated by lesbian mothers: mothers instill within their children a sense of pride in their family. Wendy, who had adopted her children from China, talked about instilling pride by teaching her children “that we’re a special family”. Yet interpreting this script as encouraging children to feel that their family is special undermined lesbian mothers’ claims that their families were normal or no different from other families. Becky, a single lesbian mother, described having lesbian mothers as “no big deal”. There was a direct conflict between being proud of one’s family because it was special and being proud of one’s family because it was no different than other families. There were many scripts that participants talked about interpreting in multiple, often conflicting ways. Prioritizing student learning and instilling pride in one’s family, in particular, were frequently read in conflicting ways.

Competing Scripts

Just as participants discussed conflicting interpretations of individual scripts, they also articulated scripts that seemed to compete with one another. In these cases, adhering to one script prevented adhering to another. One example of competing scripts involved a
script articulated by all participant groups: mothers place their children’s identities and (social) needs above their own. This script often resulted in mothers masking sexual orientation, which lesbian mothers felt communicated shame to their children. This violated the script of instilling pride within their family structure, as masking mothers’ sexual orientation often required concealing one mother.

A particularly clear example of conflicting scripts was evident in a story told by Kayla, the Latina mother of three daughters. I include this illustration in its entirety in order to more effectively discuss it from the perspective of competing scripts.

My 13-year-old has only known me as gay mom. It’s never been an issue, at school. She’s very closeted. We had a huge end of the year party last school year. Had about 30 some odd kids over. I had a mom [who was also present], big, matronly. I could kind of tell she was like a church lady. And your antennas go up, you know. She was hanging around. Because most of the parents came in, “Hey, how you doing? What time to pick them up?” You know, left the kids and went shopping. And this mom kept hanging around and asking me questions. And she said, “Oh, the house is so nice. Blah, blah, blah, blah.” So church lady is hanging around, and [my partner] comes out to start the barbeque. So she says, “So where’s your husband?” And [my daughter’s] in the closet, and all the kids were in the pool, and I was being nice, “I don’t have a husband.” And I thought that would... She pushed it. “Well, so who all lives here?” And I said, “My two daughters, my foster kids, and my wife.” And I was like, I’m pushing church lady over the edge. [Laughter] And I kid you not. She just, pale white. “Just, just a minute,” she gets on the phone, “Oh my goodness, an emergency just came up.
Honey, honey, come out of the pool. We have to leave now. Come on, we’re leaving.” Come to find out later after some conversation, with some of [my daughter’s] friends, the mom freaked out. You gonna ask the questions, I’m not going to lie. You’re in my house.

Kayla operated through several scripts throughout this story, including creating and sustaining friendships for her daughter. Having an end of the year party and inviting 30 children was a way to create and sustain friendships for her daughter. This was also a very public way to do so, as Kayla discussed the “30-some odd kids” and their parents who were able to see Kayla as the mother who orchestrated an event in which children had the opportunity to create and sustain friendships. The public nature of Kayla’s mothering ultimately conflicted with the script that mothers place their children’s needs and identities above their own.

Kayla began this narrative by explaining that her daughter was “very closeted.” She offered this as background information, and she neither praised nor criticized her daughter’s stance. In fact, as “church lady” started to ask questions, Kayla explained her daughter’s closetedness as the reason she did not answer the questions more directly. Her vague answers stemmed from a desire to respect her daughter’s wishes and to protect her daughter. She described her behavior as “being nice.” Kayla’s decision not to reveal her sexual orientation at this point was a decision made on behalf of her daughter, placing her daughter’s wishes above her own. In this way, Kayla adhered to the script of placing her daughter’s identity and needs above her own.

Kayla’s decision to conceal her sexual orientation changed at the point that the woman “pushed it”. At this point, Kayla decided to push back by revealing information
that she expected would disturb "church lady". She described this revelation as "pushing church lady right over the edge." It seems that Kayla’s initial assumptions about "church lady" being intolerant and making Kayla’s “antenna’s go up” proved valid, because "church lady" and her daughter left Kayla’s house. As this happened, Kayla’s identity eclipsed her daughter’s identity. Thus, violating the script.

One reading of this event is that Kayla’s identity moved to the forefront because of Kayla’s decision to adhere the script of creating friendships for her daughter and to do so in a public and conventional way. Kayla’s final statement is quite interesting, “You’re in my house.” It is almost as though Kayla used the setting as additional justification to push “church lady right over the edge.” Yet Kayla had invited church lady into her house. The way she interpreted the friendship script brought “church lady” and her daughter into Kayla’s private family life, an action that resulted in Kayla disclosing her own sexual orientation. This conflicted with her daughter’s wishes and violated the children first script. Kayla was essentially caught between two scripts.

The scripts of considering children’s needs and identities above ones own and creating and sustaining friendships for one’s children were not always in opposition. Lesbian participants’ comments, though, frequently positioned them as such. They wanted to respect their children’s wishes to disclose or conceal their family structure. Yet they discussed disclosing their sexual orientation to their children’s friends as a precursor for the friends being invited to participants’ homes. This placed participants’ sexual orientation at the forefront.

Another point of conflicting scripts in the area of disclosing sexual orientation involved the script that only lesbian mother participants revealed: mothers instill a sense
of family pride in their children. Drawing on the previous example, Kayla’s willingness to allow her daughter to remain closeted conflicted with this script in that Kayla knowingly allowed her daughter to exclude a member of the family, Kayla’s partner. It seems that neither concealing her sexual orientation nor revealing it as a means to push “church lady right over the edge” would serve to served instill a sense of family pride in Kayla’s daughter. Concealing Kayla’s sexual orientation meant ignoring Kayla’s wife as an important part of the family. And using the revelation of sexual orientation as an aggressive action positioned lesbianism as negative and incendiary, a way to push people over the edge.

This conflict also occurred frequently within other participants’ families. Shelly explained, “We let [our daughter] out the family as much as she feels comfortable with her friends.” Every time mothers enabled their children to exclude family members or conceal family structure, their actions could be interpreted as undermining children’s sense of family pride. In these cases, children were not showing pride in their family structure; rather they were portraying their family to be something other than what it was. I do not intend this as a value judgment; rather I mean to show that scripts sometimes work in opposition. Instilling pride in families formed as a result of mothers’ sexual orientation and placing children’s identities above mothers’ identities seem contradictory in lesbian participants’ stated experiences.

The conflict between scripts shows that the concepts of “good mother” and “good teacher” are not cohesive, universal concepts. Rather these are contextual notions that require teachers and mothers to choose between competing scripts. These choices show the virtual impossibility of achieving the distinction of “good mother” or “good teacher”.

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Because the scripts conflict, no mother or teacher (within this study or beyond) could possibly adhere to all of the scripts articulated by participants in this study.

(Mis)alignment of Scripts

Besides the conflict that occurred within and between scripts, an additional complication arose when disparate participant groups' interpretations of these scripts did not align. There were many instances in which the ways that teachers interpreted the scripts of good teacher did not match the mothers’ interpretations of scripts for good teachers. And there were many other instances in which the mothers’ interpretations of good mother did not align with teachers’ interpretations of good mother. The misalignment of scripts is problematic for mothers and teachers who wish to be read as good mothers and teachers.

One example of misaligned interpretations of scripts involved the script that indicated that good teachers do not contradict parents’ personal, moral, and religious beliefs. All participant groups articulated this script. Most of the teachers in the study interpreted the script in such a way that mandated avoiding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) content. Specifically, teachers resisted discussing gay and lesbian families within the classroom as a result of their perceptions of community beliefs regarding LGBT issues. Vince, a high school teacher, explained, “If it’s against your religious beliefs, it’s against your religious beliefs. And I think that a school, like the school where I’m at, there’s a vast majority of the families [that] are very religious. And it’s against what they believe.” Shannon, a middle school teacher, took a similar stance.

With all of the legal issues and all of the things going on with religion as far as that in the classroom. Any of kind of the hot button issues, I think teachers are
kind of leery of addressing them just for fear of what kind of repercussions they'll have.

These two teachers and many others worked not to contradict parents' beliefs through excluding sexual orientation from the classroom. The MEL participants used similar reasoning in their decisions not to reveal their sexual orientation to students and students' parents. Penny, a MEL, expressed this position.

A lot of parents have ethics that, and morals, that are just, that would not be able to handle it. They would think that I'm going to be a predator on their child or inflict my opinions on them just because their own beliefs are so strong against it.

The teachers in the study talked about their adherence to the script of not offending parents in part by saying that they exclude sexual difference from classroom conversations. As a result, teachers succeeded in not offending some parents. Lesbian mothers read these teachers who omitted sexual difference as bad teachers who contradicted lesbian mothers' own morals and who did not meet the needs of their children. In fact, within this script, it would be impossible for any teacher in a diverse setting to be interpreted as a good teacher. Owing to the contradictions within and across parents' belief systems, teachers cannot incorporate and address the personal, religious, and moral beliefs of each student's parents in a real way within curriculum and classroom practices.

In contrast to the teacher participants who largely resisted classroom conversations regarding sexual orientation, the MEL participants, who hesitated to disclose their own sexual orientation within school settings, insisted that teachers include
gay and lesbian families in curricula. Nyla, an administrator, talked about the way that
she wanted her family to be represented within her daughter’s classroom.

Ultimately I would be demanding that the teacher use inclusive language, that the
teacher make sure to never make any homophobic comments or make my child
feel any different from any other child because of something she might say that’s
a natural comment about her family or anything like that. I don’t want her hushed
or shushed when she’s sharing information that anyone else can share. And I
guess just those times when kids are making little things like Mother’s Day gifts,
that at Mother’s Day she makes two. And she also has a father and at father’s day,
whatever.

It seems that MEL participants were comfortable with sexual orientation as a topic within
their children’s classrooms, but felt silenced within their own classrooms. Participants’
perceptions of the social climate within their schools foreclosed the possibility of
disclosing sexual orientation without offending parents. Yet as parents, the MELs
expected that teachers would discuss sexual orientation. In this case, and others, teachers’
and mothers’ interpretations of scripts did not align. Teachers, who were attempting to be
read as good teachers by not contradicting parents’ beliefs, were actually read as bad
teachers by mothers whose beliefs were indeed contradicted.

This same misalignment occurred within scripts for good mothers. An example of
this occurred as mothers talked about giving teachers gifts as a means of adhering to the
script, mothers provide the best educational experiences for their children. All participant
groups revealed this script, albeit each participant group interpreted it differently. Shelly,
a lesbian mother, explained her use of gift giving as a form of educational advocacy, “We
give [the teacher] incentives to do right by our child.” She and others felt that they did so in an effort to prove to potentially homophobic teachers “that we are normal.” Erin explained this gift giving as a form of compensation.

I take my daughter to make her something for teacher appreciation time. And I think, I wonder if the other families go out of their way to connect so hard with the teacher, or am I just going out of my way because I am compensating.

The mothers advocated for the best school experiences for their children, in part, through giving gifts in an effort to connect with teachers and to be read as good mothers. Interestingly, though, teachers did not mention gift giving as a trait of good mothers. Both MEL participants and teachers discussed communicating with teachers and time spent within classrooms in the educational advocacy script. This omission of gift giving among the qualities of good mother could imply that mothers’ strategy of giving gifts in order to be recognized as good mothers was not interpreted as such on the part of teachers. The gift giving may also indicate a certain amount of heteronormativity and internalize homophobia on the part of mothers. The notion of compensating for sexual orientation positions sexual difference as negative. The belief that teachers would require compensation in order to interact positively with lesbians may have indicated lesbian mothers’ own discomfort with their sexual orientation and certainly indicates an expectation that teachers generally object to lesbian parenting. This act of compensating for sexual orientation throughout interactions with teachers also reveals a heteronormative belief that all teachers are heterosexual and/or homophobic. I will return to the notion of heteronormativity at the end of the chapter.
Overall, the scripts identified by participants were complex. Participants articulated scripts in such a way that the scripts contradicted themselves and one another. And the scripts articulated by some participant groups did not align with those articulated by others. The complexity of scripts seemingly made achieving the distinction of “good mother” and “good teacher” a more difficult task, particularly as mothers and teachers tried to adhere to competing scripts. In today’s educational context of student and family diversity, adhering to all scripts for mothers and teachers is virtually impossible. And so mothers and teachers are left with a series of difficult choices. Yet the complexity of scripts also provided richer sites for queering the notions of mother and teacher. I will address this potential in the final chapter.

Overlapping Scripts

One aspect of the complexity of social scripts arose from the way these scripts conflicted. Another was the overlap of scripts, which had the effect of making scripts more powerful. As these scripts overlapped, they reinforced each other and added strength to each script. Some of this overlap occurred as scripts worked together within behaviors that categorized participants’ notions of good mother or of good teacher. For example, the script of using knowledge of students to plan and implement lessons buttressed the script of making students feel emotionally safe and comfortable within the classroom. Teachers’ knowledge of students allowed for a safe, comfortable classroom environment possible as they used this knowledge to meet students affective needs. Another form of overlap was the way that scripts for mothers and scripts for teachers coincided, as demonstrated in the tables in Appendix F. And an overlap that was particularly germane to this study was the overlap of scripts for lesbian mothers and
heterosexual mothers, meaning that participants did not articulate separate scripts according to the sexual orientation of a mother. This is particularly important because all participant groups made connections and comparisons between lesbian and heterosexual mothers. This section discusses overlapping scripts for mothers and teachers and overlapping scripts between lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers.

**Mothers and Teachers**

While all participants revealed distinct scripts for mothers and for teachers, these scripts overlapped in significant ways. In particular, the scripts for mothers and teacher overlapped in terms of attention to educational climate and the need to provide emotional and physical safety for children. These cases of overlapping scripts further complicate the notion of social scripts for mothers and teachers because the scripts are not rigid and bound. Rather they intersect and potentially inform one another. In part, the overlap between scripts makes the scripts stronger. This happens as an individual script is reiterated in both societal norms for mothers and those for teachers. The reiteration of scripts allows the scripts to play out powerfully in mothers and teachers lives, making these scripts difficult to ignore or resist. Additionally, the overlap of scripts between mothers and teachers serves as a place to queer these categories and to trouble the notion of good mother and good teacher, particularly because this overlap reflects the fluidity and complication of identity that is embraced by queer theory (Luhmann, 1998). The fact that the scripts for two distinct categories overlap makes the categories less rigid.

Queer generally troubles gay/straight and male/female binaries in order to destabilize them and to understand the construction of these categories.
Queer aims to spoil and transgress coherent (and essential) gender configurations and the desire for a neat arrangement of dichotomous sexual and gendered difference, central to both heterosexual and homosexual identities. But beyond suggesting gender fluidity, queer theory also insists on the complications of the two: without gender, sexuality is nothing. (Luhmann, 1998, pp. 145).

While queer theory’s disruption of binaries generally focuses on gender and sexuality, examining the mother/teacher divide is useful within the context of this study. Such examination affords a deeper understanding of the two categories and the construction of scripts for each. A universalizing concept of mother or of teacher obscures differences, as mother or teacher has one meaning. Making these categories less fixed and rigid, serves as a way to contextualize concepts of mother and teacher. Ultimately, this examination can help to destabilize the concepts of mother and teacher in ways that will create a space for difference within these concepts.

One example of overlapping scripts is that each participant group discussed child safety in scripts for mothers and teachers: mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children and teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within classrooms. Likewise, all participant groups revealed a script that required good mothers to become involved in their child’s education: mothers advocate for the best educational experiences for their children. Because lesbian mothers interpreted this script as finding the school with the most favorable social climate for children, the script overlapped with two scripts lesbian mothers revealed for teachers: teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within classrooms and teachers do not contradict personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents. In the case of these scripts revealed by
lesbian mothers, mothers and teachers both hold the responsibility for finding and/or creating a favorable social climate and ensuring physical and emotional safety within classrooms.

Another example of overlapping scripts is evident through another interpretation of the script of mothers providing for the best educational experiences for their children. MELs and teachers understood mothers' role as preparing children for school and communicating with teachers in order to prepare students for school and to reinforce learning at home. This interpretation of the script for mothers overlapped a script MELs and teachers articulated for teachers: teachers prioritize student learning above all else. The scripts for mothers and teachers overlapped in terms of promoting student learning, and responsibility for this learning fell both to the mothers and to the teachers.

Despite the multiple mutual scripts for mothers and teachers, most participants held the scripts for mothers and teachers as discrete. While the three participant groups viewed mothers and teachers as responsible for meeting children's needs, they generally assigned mothers to socio-emotional needs of children and teachers to academic needs. As previously mentioned, lesbian mothers took up the scripts in such a way that providing the best educational environment focused on social climate. And teachers did mention the importance of attending to students' emotional safety and comfort within the classroom, but the teacher participants ultimately interpreted this script as a means to support student learning and attend to students' academic needs.

Wendy, the lesbian mother of two daughters from China, reinforced the divide between teachers and mothers by asserting, "I really like educators to be educators and to look at the next step where the kids in the classroom are going." She assigned academic
tasks to her children's teachers, while she and her partner took on socio-emotional tasks. The teachers also maintained a divide between scripts for mothers and teachers. Cindy, a third grade teacher explained, "I feel like a lot of my parents push on me a lot of the responsibilities that I think are almost theirs." She described these parental responsibilities as teaching social skills and attending to physical and emotional needs. Again, the divides that lesbian mother and teacher participants constructed between mothers and teachers are significant to the extent that these divides indicate rigid, universalizing categories of mother and teacher. This serves as a challenge to my goal of destabilizing scripts in an effort to advocate for social justice around sexual difference.

Lesbian mothers and teachers reinforced the divide between scripts for mothers and teachers, yet each mother/educator/lesbian encouraged the coming together of roles for mothers and teachers. They talked about the ways that scripts for mothers and for teachers come together. Nyla, the administrator, resisted the notion of separate scripts for mothers and teachers.

We are all teachers. Every adult that comes into contact, whether it's the head custodian, the parent, the grandparent, the uncle that comes to visit once a year or the teachers that they see daily. We are all responsible for educating our children. All of society is responsible.

MELs viewed the roles of mother and teacher as mutually shaping. Kelli, a teacher of gifted students and lesbian mother, described the importance of mothers and teachers sharing both roles, "The role of a teacher is sometimes parenting, sometimes nurturer, sometimes nurse and counselor and everything else. You just can't separate those things, because education doesn't happen if that child's whole being isn't in tact." These
overlapping roles for mother and teacher were reflected in the way that MELs interpreted scripts for mothers and teachers. Children's academic and socio-emotional well-being was infused throughout all of the scripts. For example, advocating for the best school environment required finding a school with high academic expectations and a social climate that is favorable towards difference.

The MELs, unlike the teachers and lesbian mothers, blurred the categories of mother and teacher. They talked about the simultaneity of their various identities. Abigail, a high school teacher and lesbian mother, described herself, "I'm a woman and I'm a role model to a daughter and I'm a teacher." I draw attention to the MELs interpretations of simultaneous scripts because this may provide a way to destabilize scripts. In viewing the categories of mother and teacher as fluid, the MEL participants queered the divide between mother and teacher. Their simultaneous roles as mother and teacher may have allowed them to recognize the pluralism of identity. That is, individuals do not have to choose between being a mother, being a teacher, being a lesbian. All of these identities can co-exist.

Based on all participants' discussions surrounding scripts for mothers and teachers, queering the roles of mother and teacher would mean that all adults in a child's life share the responsibility for teaching social skills, providing safety and stability, engaging with academic content, etc. Queering scripts for mothers and teachers collapses the divide between the two roles. I will discuss the benefits and challenges of this collapse in Chapter Six.
Lesbian and Heterosexual Mothers and Teachers

The scripts participants identified for mothers and teachers made no distinctions between lesbians and heterosexuals, meaning that participants applied scripts to mothers and teachers irrespective of sexual orientation. And lesbian mother and MEL participants made clear statements that pointed to their own desires for people to view lesbian mothers and teachers in the same ways as heterosexual mothers and teachers. In these cases, it was almost as if lesbian mother and MEL participants categorized the differences between lesbians and heterosexuals in a way that related exclusively to sex. These differences pertained to the gender of sexual partners, not to any other issues of lifestyle. Perhaps because they viewed sexual activity as the only difference between heterosexual and lesbian mothers and teachers, the scripts revealed by all participants were markedly desexualized. The absence of sexual orientation in scripts prevents recognition of sexual difference; therefore, desexualization of scripts is akin to heteronormativity.

Kayla’s claim “I certainly don’t define my heterosexual friends where they like it doggy style,” provides an example of a lesbian mother who wanted to adhere to desexualized scripts for mothers. She did not want to be defined by her sexual orientation, because heterosexual mothers are not. Kayla, among other lesbian mother participants, articulated scripts for all mothers, not just lesbian or heterosexual mothers. Likewise, Shelly, a lesbian mother, wanted to adhere to the same scripts as heterosexual mothers, specifically trying to prove to her daughter’s teachers that her family was “normal”.

I don’t think heterosexual people or heterosexual divorcees feel the need to convince other parents that they are normal and not deviant. And so I think that
subconsciously, we do that all the time. We just show up at the school and I am
very aware, subconsciously. And I overcompensate, probably all the time and
especially with the teachers to prove that we are normal.

Shelly’s partner’s description of their family further illustrated the family’s claim
to be a normal family in which sexuality is not a primary focus.

I mean we have a nine year old. We’re trying to get home early last night, get
dinner on the table, get her to basketball practice, get her home to work on the
project. I mean, there’s no swinging from the chandeliers going on in our house.

It’s like we’re out of focus.

These examples demonstrate lesbian mothers who talked about adhering to desexualized
scripts that they articulated for all mothers.

Lesbian teachers also minimized their sexual difference. Kelli, a MEL, asserted,
“It’s not relevant, what your sexual orientation is, to be a good teacher.” Abigail, also a
MEL, expressed a similar sentiment, “I don’t want that [sexual orientation] to define who
I am in my classroom.” Her statement is particularly interesting in that she allowed her
teaching and mothering identities to inform each other, but she distanced her sexual
identity from her teaching identity. These notions indicate lesbian teachers’ desire to
adhere to mainstream, desexualized scripts.

There is an interesting tension at play here. The lesbian mothers and MELs in the
study talked about being special, they worked to create spaces in which their children
could be proud of their families, and they wanted teachers to meet the needs of diverse
families. In each of these cases, lesbian mother and MEL participants pointed to their
own sexual orientation. Yet they minimized sexual difference in order to adhere to their
own interpretations of scripts for mothers and teachers. Lesbian mothers and lesbian teachers are faced with a series of difficult choices, given the desexualized nature of scripts for good mothers and good teachers. Given these difficult choices, lesbian mother and MEL participants talked using strategies that minimize sexual difference as a claim that lesbians are normal and not deviant and as a means for adhering to social scripts.

This notion makes identification of scripts particularly important, because of the ways that these scripts can obscure difference. The ethical project I outlined in Chapter One necessitates identifying these scripts in order to disrupt scripts for good mother and good teacher and to create spaces for difference in educational and societal discourse. The next section considers the extent to which participants talked about accommodated the scripts they articulated and the extent to which they talked about using the complexity of scripts to resist or modify existing scripts.

Reconstructing Scripts (or Not)

Given the conflicting, complex, and overlapping nature of scripts, mothers and teachers are left with multiple options: they can choose to interpret prevailing scripts in certain ways and not other ways, they can negotiate or resist prevailing scripts, they can work to accommodate existing scripts, they can maintain the divide between mothers and teachers, and/or they can collapse this divide. As stated in the previous section, lesbian mother and teacher participants chose to maintain rather than to queer the binary of scripts for mothers and teachers. And when scripts competed, participants discussed making accommodations by choosing between those competing scripts rather than resisting or modifying scripts. They talked about their own actions and decisions in ways that pointed to similarities between themselves and other mothers and/or teachers. This
reflected participants’ adherence to desexualized scripts that participants revealed for all mothers and teachers. Participants described their practices in such a way that indicated that they altered their practice to fit scripts rather than altering the scripts to fit their beliefs and practices.

When viewed through the lens of queer theory, participants articulated their choices surrounding scripts in ways that were heteronormative, rather than queer. These choices refer to instances in which participants held heterosexuality as normal and often invisible. In other words, participants adhered to scripts that excluded sexual difference. This heteronormativity was an effect of adhering to rigid categories for mother and for teacher and an effect of minimizing sexual difference. As previously stated, my purpose in identifying scripts for good mother and good teacher is to trouble scripts in order to promote for social justice around sexual difference. In this section I discuss participants’ heteronormative choices.

*Heteronormative Mothers*

Lesbian mothers and MELs in this study considered themselves to be advocates for their children, themselves, and other lesbians. This was evident through the ways they advocated for their children within schools, through their insistence on instilling a sense of family pride in their children, and through their hope that their presence within schools would promote acceptance of LGBT individuals and their children. Yet lesbian participants’ choices of scripts remained heteronormative. While this may initially seem surprising, heteronormative strategies reflect other liberal gay approaches. Indeed, Michael Warner (1999) lamented, “Aversion to sex has been a constant problem in the half-century of organized gay and lesbian politics” (p. 50). He explained that leaders of
gay and lesbian advocacy groups are willing to privatize and/or minimize their sexual
lives in order to assimilate into mainstream society and to gain the political advances they
desire.

Lesbians in this study have seemingly exchanged their sexuality for acceptance
into their children’s classrooms. They have done so by drawing comparisons between
themselves and heterosexual families; creating separate, “gay-friendly” spaces for their
children; and by assuming that they need to compensate for their sexual orientation in
their interactions with their children’s teachers. These choices, which I elaborate upon in
the following sections, have allowed lesbian mothers and MELs to categorize themselves
as normal and to meet the needs of their children, yet the same choices have resulted in
reinforcing heteronormative scripts in educational and societal discourses. Lesbian
mothers and MELs made no indication that they understood the limits of their choices,
but they did point to their articulated strategies as a means for meeting their children’s
needs.

Defining lesbian families. Lesbian participants’ descriptions of their families were
particularly normalizing in that participants made claims that their families were like
other families. Kristin, a lesbian mother, mentioned this as she talked about her
daughter’s teachers, “I don’t think that they think of us necessarily as normal. But I don’t
think you can get any closer to [normal].” Another lesbian mother, Fern, expressed, “I
don’t think we think that we’re so special.” Michele, a MEL, said, “We act just like any
family would.” And her partner, Abigail described herself as “no different than any other
parent.”
It seems that participants’ notions of normal pertained to heterosexual families, because they specifically did not want their children to feel different or to stand out because of lesbian mothers’ own sexual orientation. This sentiment positioned sexual difference as negative. Abigail’s sentiment captures this, “I’m not going to make [my daughter] feel different or alienated until we have to deal with the issue.” And Erin, a lesbian mother, fought against others making her daughter feel different, “I don’t want a teacher to treat my daughter any differently, just because of who we are.” These women seemingly approached difference from a deficit position, assuming that difference, particularly sexual difference, was negative.

Lesbian mothers and MELs’ claims to be like other families and their desire for their children not to be treated differently as a result of parental sexual orientation established a connection between normal parenting and heterosexuality. This connection positioned heterosexual families as “normal” families and named families who differ from the norm as deviant. While operating within this framework, lesbian families can be judged as normal only to the extent that their families mirror heterosexual families. Any system that reinforces heterosexuality as normal and all other sexual orientations as deviant is heteronormative by definition (Yep, 2002). MEL and lesbian mother participants discussed scripts in strikingly heteronormative ways, yet their adherence to these scripts served to meet their children’s needs. Participants may or may not have been aware of alternatives to adhering to existing scripts. They interpreted scripts in ways they expected to benefit their children.

Lesbian approaches to parent/teacher interactions. Heteronormativity was also evident in the way that lesbian mothers and MELs approached their children’s teachers.
Participants wanted teachers to treat their children no differently than other children. They gave gifts and communicated with teachers with the express purpose of convincing teachers that lesbian mothers and their children were just like heterosexual parents and their children. Beyond the heteronormative strategy of using heterosexual families as the standard or the norm against which to judge lesbian families, these approaches to teachers were heteronormative in that the lesbian mothers expected that teachers would take issue with lesbian mothers. This sentiment was expressed repeatedly. In particular, the mothers who had not experienced any problems with anti-gay teachers expressed the expectation that they would. Abigail, a MEL, was one among many of these participants, “[My daughter] hasn’t encountered it. And I know she will. The first time she has some teacher who’s extremely, extremely conservative.”

The belief that teachers would take issue with lesbian mothers and their children was heteronormative for two reasons. First, it assumed that all teachers that the mothers will encounter would be heterosexual. Participants scarcely considered the possibility of a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender teacher. Further, participants’ expectations of teachers established sexual difference as a likely cause of contention. They did not consider any other reasons for tension between parents and teachers. This may have resulted from their own experiences, nonetheless, this expectation underscores a belief that heterosexual parents are normal and will not make teachers uncomfortable, while lesbian mothers must work intentionally to prove themselves as normal and not deviant.

Lesbian choices of “gay-friendly” spaces. Beyond interactions with teachers and connections to heterosexual families, lesbian mothers and MELs were heteronormative in their choices of environment for their children. In their choice of schools and in their
choice of social settings, mothers talked about being intentional in finding an environment in which people were accepting and/or tolerant of difference. Interestingly, the spaces that mothers chose were ones in which their children would not be teased, bullied, or made to feel different because having a lesbian mother. Yet none of the participants talked about making connections within the lesbian community as a means of doing so. The MELs, in particular, seemed to distance themselves from identification with gay and lesbian communities. Participants seemingly made decisions related to social scripts and to raising their children in isolation from other lesbian mothers and mother/educator/lesbians.

The strategies MEL and lesbian mother participants expressed for finding a tolerant environments for their children included selecting charter or private schools, coaching sports teams or leading social organizations, and interviewing the parents of their children’s friends. These strategies uncovered a belief that average schools and social settings would not accommodate lesbian families; MELs and lesbian mothers specifically had to seek out schools and social settings that would. MEL and lesbian mother participants created gay-friendly spaces for their children, rather than re-shaping existing spaces to be more gay-friendly. The heteronormativity of this approach is two-fold. First, it problematized lesbian identities, while reestablishing heterosexual identities as normal. Further, it reinforced social scripts in which sexual difference is absent. Despite the heteronormativity of choosing “gay friendly” spaces for their children, this strategy was one that lesbian mothers and MELs described as an important means for meeting their children’s needs. This strategy enabled them to adhere to existing, normalized scripts such as mothers work to create and sustain friendships for their
children and mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children.

**Heteronormative Teachers**

Much like the lesbian mothers and mother/educator/lesbians, the teachers in this study adhered to existing social scripts. Their adherence stemmed in part from heteronormative beliefs. Teachers’ choices related to curriculum, their perception of parental beliefs, and their definitions of student learning all contained heteronormative elements. This section describes the heteronormative choices made by teachers in this study, including mother/educator/lesbians.

**Heteronormative curricula.** The most striking element of heteronormativity in participants’ teaching practice involved the invisibility of heterosexuality, which was particularly evident through participants’ reluctance to include gay and lesbian families in the curriculum. They did so for various reasons, including a lack of time, lack of knowledge, and fear of parental or administrative reactions. Nonetheless, participants did not object to families as a curricular topic. Rather, they saw gay and lesbian families as an addition to the existing curriculum. They felt that this addition should occur only in classrooms in which a child had a gay or lesbian parent. Cindy, a third grade teacher, explained her perceptions of teachers practices.

They’re not going to be like, let’s teach about lesbian moms and gay families if they don’t have someone in their class. Maybe if they had someone in their class, they’d be more likely to talk about it. And different family structures.

In the minds of participants, teaching families involved teaching “average, normal” families. These families were heterosexual, but participants did not articulate them as
such. Teacher participants did not recognize teaching about heterosexuals as a matter of teaching about sexual orientation. Teaching about lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender individuals, couples, or families, though, was ultimately about teaching sexual orientation, because the LGBT community does not have the same sort of invisibility as the heterosexual community (Johnson, 2005).

In part, teachers resisted including gay and lesbian topics in an effort to maximize student learning. This was part of the aforementioned connection between valid student learning and time spent covering academic core content, including math, science, and language arts. Teachers viewed learning about diversity in general and gay and lesbian families in particular as an addition to the curriculum. In distinguishing between core subject areas and topics of diversity, participants divorced the two rather than integrating diversity into other academic content. This view ignored the forms of hegemony that were already inherent in the curriculum. That is, teachers did not interrogate curriculum in order to determine the prevalence of heterosexuality, Whiteness, maleness, or any other positions of power. They only considered the addition of marginalized populations to the curriculum, either describing this as diversity or referring specifically to LGBT content. When gay and lesbian topics were viewed as an addition, heterosexuality remained invisible. In this way, identifying what is invisible within the curriculum is not a mere matter of ferreting out heteronormativity in order to advocate for LGBT individuals and their families. Rather it is one form of deconstructing existing curricula and teaching practices.

The invisibility of heterosexuality was also evident in the case of the MELs. MELs reinforced heteronormativity through allowing their mother and teacher roles to
inform and impact one another but in separating sexual orientation from teaching. They assumed that (lesbian) sexual orientation would interrupt student learning, because it would be something different, abnormal. They did not problematize personalizing oneself to students, just introducing them to sexual diversity. Kelli’s comment captures this sentiment, “I do tend to personalize myself to my students, but not in that respect. I think sexuality needs to stay out of the classroom.” Kelli wanted sexuality to stay out of the classroom, but she did not mention heterosexuality, only her own lesbian sexuality. This statement captures participants’ identification of LGBT issues as potentially problematic while heterosexuality remained invisible. It is unfair to assign all of the responsibility for problematizing LGBT identities to LGBT individuals. Given the current socio-political context of many schools, MEL participants resisted revealing their sexual orientation for reasons of professional safety. This resistance served to reinforce heteronormativity, but it also allowed MELs to avoid some of the backlash they had watched out lesbians endure within school settings.

*Homophobic parents or heteronormative teachers?* As previously stated, one reason for teachers’ reluctance to introduce gay and lesbian topics within their classes was a fear of parental reactions. This revealed the heteronormative assumption that all parents are heterosexual. Some participants mentioned that they would only include gay and lesbian families in the curriculum if gay and lesbian parents were part of the classroom community. Cindy, a third grade teacher, expressed this sentiment, “But without that actually presented, it’s not something that a lot of teachers would be like, well, I feel like I should address this and teach a lesson on it or have a discussion.” It remains unclear how teachers would know if they did have a student with gay or lesbian
parents. It seems that teacher participants held the belief that all parents were heterosexual unless the parents made an explicit statement to the contrary.

There was an additional heteronormative aspect to teachers’ assumptions that parents would object to the inclusion of gay and lesbian topics. Teachers expected homophobic responses from heterosexual parents. Virginia, a fourth grade teacher, expressed this in talking about the barriers to addressing LGBT issues in the classroom.

I started thinking more about the impediments, the challenges that a teacher would face trying to create an open welcoming environment and they ways that other parents would sometimes step in to say, “Well that’s not what I believe and that’s not what I want my children exposed to.”

This repositioned heterosexuals as normal and gay and lesbian parents as deviant. Further, teachers’ willingness to make curricular decisions based on parental objectives strengthened homophobic discourses. Exclusion of these topics allowed and even encouraged fear of LGBT topics. Gay and lesbian topics remained dangerous and deviant, while heterosexuality remained safely invisible.

The social scripts identified for and by teachers in this study indicated several heteronormative practices, including assuming that all parents are heterosexual and will be offended by gay and lesbian content, excluding non-heterosexual families from the curriculum, and prioritizing academic, presumably heterosexual, content above topics related to diversity.

Summary of the Discussion

Participants in this study revealed specific scripts for mothers and for teachers. These scripts were complex, overlapping, and contradictory. The overlap of scripts was
characterized as multiple participant groups articulated the same script, as individual
scripts for mother of for teachers worked simultaneously, and as scripts for mothers and
scripts for teachers contained similar elements. This overlap served to make scripts more
powerful in participants’ stated experiences.

Despite the power of scripts in participants’ lives, the complexity and
contradiction among and between scripts made adherence to these scripts difficult.
Conflict within scripts forced participants to adhere to scripts in some ways that
prevented adhering to them in others. This form of conflict made achieving the
distinction of “good mother” or “good teacher” virtually impossible. Other forms of
conflict, such as those between scripts or those between participant groups’
interpretations of scripts further complicated this problem.

Given the conflicting nature of these powerful scripts in participants’ lives,
participants were forced to make choices between various interpretations of scripts;
between various scripts; and between adhering to, modifying, or resisting scripts. Further,
it is unclear how aware participants were of these choices; they had received little
guidance from administrators, curricular materials, other teachers, or teacher educators.
In the context of this study, which was a self-reported snapshot of participants’ lives,
participants’ choices related to scripts for mothers and teachers were markedly
heteronormative. These choices reinforced cultural beliefs that heterosexuality is normal
and any other sexual orientation is deviant. The next chapter suggests an alternative to
participants’ heteronormative choices and contextualizes these choices as a springboard
for future work.
CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this final chapter is to revisit the findings of the study through the research questions, to further delineate the limitations of the study, to explore the significance of those findings by means of envisioning queer scripts for mothers and teachers, to explore the implications of the study, and to consider avenues for future research. It is not my intent that this chapter would provide an absolute conclusion, but rather that it would serve as a starting for my continued work at the intersections of sexual minorities and schools.

Summary of Findings

I began this inquiry by posing three research questions. These questions guided every stage of the inquiry from the research design to the analysis. This section revisits those questions as a means of providing a summary of findings.

What Social Scripts do Participants Reveal for Mothers and Teachers?

Participants talked about their own practices as mothers and/or teachers in addition to commenting upon the practices of others. These conversations outlined specific scripts for mothers and teachers. While some overlap existed between the scripts articulated by the three participant groups, there were also some points of conflict and contradiction, as discussed in the previous chapter. As a result, I will review the scripts revealed by each participant group separately.
The lesbian mothers in the study revealed five scripts for good mothers: mothers work to create and sustain friendships for their children; mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children; mothers instill within their children a sense of pride in their family; mothers advocate for the best educational environment for their children; and mothers consider their children's needs and identities above their own. The lesbian mothers also revealed three scripts for good teachers: teachers use knowledge of students in planning and implementing lessons; teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within schools; and teachers do not contradict personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents.

Mother/educator/lesbians (MELs) revealed similar scripts for good teachers: teachers do not contradict personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents; teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within schools; teachers only engage in self-disclosure in a way that does not interrupt student learning or offend parents or coworkers; teachers prioritize student learning above all else; and teachers use knowledge of students in planning and implementing lessons. They also revealed three scripts for good mothers: mothers advocate for the best educational environment for their children; mothers consider their children's needs and identities above their own; and mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children.

Finally, participating teachers revealed scripts for mothers and teachers, including three scripts for good mothers: mothers provide physical and emotional safety and security for their children; mothers provide the best educational experiences possible for their children; and mothers consider their children's needs and identities above their own. And these participants revealed five scripts for good teachers: teachers do not contradict...
personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents; teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within schools; teachers only engage in self-disclosure in a way that does not interrupt student learning or offend parents or co-workers; teachers prioritize student learning above all else; and teachers use knowledge of students in implementing and planning lessons.

How do Participants Interpret these Scripts?

Participants articulated varied interpretations of scripts for good mothers and good teachers. For example, mothers discussed their interpretations of social scripts for good mothers through talking about communication with their children’s schools, structuring social events for their children, selective disclosure of sexual orientation, preparing their children for school, being visible within classrooms, and minimizing teasing and bullying. And teachers expressed their interpretations of social scripts for good teachers through discussions about communicating with parents, preventing bullying and teasing, not disclosing non-heterosexual orientations and making intentional choices related to curriculum. Neither of these lists is an exhaustive description of participants’ interpretations of scripts, but the lists demonstrate some of the ways in which participants’ discussed their interpretations of scripts.

An important element of participants’ interpretations of scripts is to recognize the complex, contradictory, overlapping nature of these interpretations. In some cases, participants interpreted scripts in one way that prevented them from interpreting those same scripts in another way. In other cases, selecting one script prevented selecting another. And in still other cases, various participant groups interpreted scripts in opposing ways. Teachers expected that good teachers would interpret scripts in one way, while
mothers expected good teachers to interpret those scripts in another way. Another element of the complexity of participants' scripts was that the scripts for mothers and teachers overlapped, meaning that these disparate scripts named some of the same responsibilities for mothers as for teachers. This element made scripts more powerful, as scripts for mothers and teachers buttressed one another.

The importance of how participants interpreted scripts lies in the extent to which they articulated the same social scripts for all teachers and all mothers and the extent to which they talked about adhering to, modifying, or resisting these scripts. Participants articulated universal scripts for all mothers and all teachers, and they described adhering to these scripts without altering them. They modified their own practice rather than modifying or existing scripts. Adhering to the social scripts revealed by participants was heteronormative and not queer, because these scripts minimized sexual difference and assumed heterosexuality as normal. Participants reinforced heterosexuality as normal (and invisible), while sexual minorities were positioned as deviant.

*How is Deviance Constituted through the Articulation of these Scripts?*

Participants’ beliefs regarding what counted as a good mother or a good teacher in addition to what counted as a bad mother or a bad teacher lead them to reveal certain scripts for mothers and teachers. Additionally, participants’ interpretations of school policies regarding parent teacher interaction, curricular content, and teacher responsibilities also established certain scripts as dominant. Finally, participants’ perceptions of administrators’, heterosexual parents’ and other teachers’ beliefs led them to name certain practices as acceptable and others as deviant. In these cases, adherence to
social scripts was considered normal, while transgression of these scripts or failure to adhere to these scripts was categorized as deviant.

One example of this was the inclusion of gay and lesbian issues in schools. Teachers in this study hesitated to do so because of their interpretation that educational discourses required teachers to privilege math and literacy above other topics, including social justice issues. Additionally, teacher participants expected that heterosexual parents would have negative reactions regarding the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) topics, further limiting this practice. In this case, educational discourse and the perceived reactions of heterosexual parents caused the inclusion of gay and lesbian issues to be categorized as deviant because it violated two scripts: teachers prioritize student learning (of traditional content) above all else and teachers work not to contradict the personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents, moral beliefs of parents.

Violation of any script resulted in a form of deviance: not preparing children for school, placing one's own identity above children, failing to use knowledge of students, offending parents. Participants identified bad mothers or bad teachers as those who failed to adhere to the scripts that participants discussed for mothers and teachers. Given the sexual orientation of the majority of participants, one of most striking forms of deviance was public non-heterosexuality. As discussed in the previous chapter, the invisibility of heterosexuality and the desexualized nature of scripts allowed for heteronormative practices in which LGBT individuals and families were categorized as deviant. It is also important to note that deviance was considered to be negative, a belief that I will consider in subsequent sections.
Limitations and Conditions of the Study

The methodology of the study resulted in several limitations, many of which were mentioned in Chapter Three. Additionally, the data were collected over a short period of time, allowing for a snapshot of participants’ lives as expressed through self-report as opposed to a long-term study involving observations. The longest period of time between interviews with an individual participant was approximately six weeks. Some members of the focus groups did not participate in follow up interviews, limiting their responses to their thoughts on one given day. Further, all data were based on self-reports of mothering and teaching practices. I did not observe these practices, nor did I observe interactions between mothers and teachers. The study could have been strengthened through incorporating observations and through interviewing participants over a longer period of time.

In addition to these limitations, one condition of the study warrants specific mention. The selection of participants, particularly lesbian participants, certainly impacted the nature and results of the study. The selection of sexual minority participants frequently frustrates researchers (e.g. Donelson & Rogers, 2004). This may be considered a limitation or merely a condition of the study. Nonetheless, the selection of participants had a direct impact on the types of voices that were heard and not heard.

In recruiting lesbian participants through the channels of social contacts and lesbian organizations, I restricted the study to women who were already in contact with other lesbians. Additionally, employing focus groups for the lesbian mothers further restricted participation to women who were willing to sacrifice their anonymity as lesbian mothers to others in the focus group. As I talked to potential participants, they asked
questions about who would be present at the focus group. This gives me the impression that the focus group format foreclosed the participation of some women. Further, some potential participants choose not to participate, telling me that they did not have anything to say because they were “normal, average” families. This may indicate that the women who participated did so because of negative experiences with their children’s schools or because of being made to feel deviant. This may have contributed to lesbian mother participants’ articulation of strategies for helping their children to feel comfortable within schools. Lesbian mothers who mainly have positive experiences may not feel the need to articulate such strategies or to work toward the same set of goals for their children’s school experiences.

As with the selection of lesbian participants, the selection of teacher participants resulted in certain conditions that some may consider limitations. Because I told all potential participants the topic of the study, participation was limited to teachers who were willing to discuss lesbian parenting. It is possible that some teachers felt uncomfortable talking about lesbians, and so they opted out of the study. Further, the technique of focus groups may have influenced the findings within the teacher group. It is important to note that none of the teacher participants made any overtly homophobic comments. On the contrary, several specifically endorsed same-sex parenting or referred to their gay or lesbian friends. The prevailing discourse within the group may have silenced group members who had negative beliefs regarding lesbian mothers or LGBT individuals in general.

The conditions created through the selection of participants are of concern because of the voices that may not have been heard. This study does not inform us about
the social scripts revealed and interpreted by lesbian mothers who are not connected with lesbian social networks. Nor does it tell us about lesbian mothers who hide their sexual orientation from their children’s teachers. Further, this study does not indicate the social scripts revealed and interpreted by teachers who are uncomfortable with the topic of lesbian mothers or those who are vocally opposed to same-sex parenting. As a result, the scripts that I discussed within the results sections must be read as those revealed by socially connected, moderately “out” lesbians and teachers who do not verbalize anti-gay sentiments.

Additionally, the context of the gay and community in the participants’ city likely impacted the results. It is important to note that the city in which the study took place does not have a “gay ghetto” or neighborhood with primarily LGBT residents. Nor does the city have a women’s bookstore or any bars exclusively for women. This may be an indication that a cohesive lesbian community does not exist within the region. I am confident that lesbian mothers in a different regional context would voice their experiences differently.

Significance of the Study

I discuss the significance of this study against the backdrop of an educational context in which meeting the needs of diverse populations is positioned as increasingly important (Banks & McGee, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Kissen, 2003). Yet the lesbian mothers in this study discussed many incidences in which they felt that their needs and the needs of their children were not being met. These participants complained that their families were not represented in the curriculum and that teachers failed to intervene when children were bullied as a result of their mothers’ sexual
orientation. And lesbian teachers in the study felt forced to hide their personal lives, fearing negative reactions from students, their parents, co-workers and administrators. Further, teachers expressed a lack of knowledge related to lesbian mothers and their children. Clearly, participants' experiences did not reflect schools that met the needs of all types of diversity.

As I discussed in Chapter One, a “laundry list” approach to diversity is problematic, in that it names creates increasingly long lists of categories of difference, a process that inevitably results in the omission of some categories. And within teacher education, sexual orientation is invariably one of the omitted categories (Letts, 2002). This omission was evident in the stated experiences of participants in this study. Rather than continuing to add to lists of diversity, it is important that we begin to queer notions of diversity within educational and societal discourses. This would refute the notion of a norm against which to compare all forms of difference, such as the dichotomy of White and other (Dilsworth & Brown, 2001) or the ever-present binary of gay and straight (Sedgewick, 1990). Rather queering educational and societal discourses means destabilizing norms, including those constituted by social scripts. This study contributes to this process through identifying and destabilizing the social scripts revealed by groups of lesbian mothers, teachers, and mother educator lesbians. And a subsequent section theorizes queering curriculum and student learning.

The results of my study demonstrate that social scripts can serve as a barrier to recognizing and meeting the needs of sexually diverse individuals within educational and social discourses. To the extent that social scripts promote a normalizing concept of good teacher or good mother, these scripts obfuscate difference. In particular,
heteronormativity within social scripts obscures sexual difference. All groups of participants revealed desexualized social scripts that allowed heterosexuality to be named as normal and to remain largely invisible while reinforcing non-heterosexuality as deviant and as bad. The lesbians in the study largely concealed sexual orientation in order to adhere to the scripts they articulated. They did not trouble these scripts or criticize them. Nor did they given any indication of the ways that they could resist or modify scripts, a situation I will take up in the section of this chapter regarding future work.

The fact that lesbian mothers and mother educator lesbians revealed powerful, heteronormative scripts for mothers and teachers demonstrated the challenges inherent to destabilizing these scripts. Lesbian participants, who would seemingly be more likely to recognize sexual diversity than other populations, joined teachers in taking up heteronormative scripts that ignored sexual difference or cast it as problematic, deviant, and bad. The heteronormativity of scripts is particularly troubling within schools because heteronormative practices are characterized by silence regarding non-heterosexuality. Silence surrounding sexual difference was evident in this study through lesbian mothers’ willingness to hide their sexual orientation, teachers’ reluctance to address gay and lesbian issues in the classroom, and lesbian teachers’ complete separation of their personal and professional selves.

Silence around sexual orientation is dangerous for sexual minority parents and students as well as limiting for all students and teachers. For sexual minority parents, silence surrounding LGBT issues can be a barrier to parental participation (Casper & Schultz, 1999). This is particularly troubling because of the strong connection between parental participation and academic achievement (Catsambis, 2002; Epstein et al., 2002;
Jeynes, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Spera, 2005). Beyond posing a risk to LGBT parents and their children, silence surrounding sexual difference can lead to LGBT youth dropping out of school as the youth perceive that they have no place in schools (Herr, 1997). Further, the invisibility of heterosexuality and subsequent naming of non-heterosexuality as deviant can perpetuate violence toward LGBT youth (Kosciw & Diaz, 2005) and the children of LGBT parents (Ciancotto & Cahill, 2003). Finally, silence surrounding sexual difference undermines school efforts to be diverse, limiting “celebrate diversity” to “celebrate socially acceptable, non-controversial forms of diversity.” Given the risks of perpetuating heteronormativity within educational and societal discourses, it is important consider an alternative.

Just as the nature of the scripts revealed by participants demonstrates the challenges these scripts pose to efforts to expand notions of diversity in educational and societal discourses, the nature of these scripts also provides possibilities. Participants interpreted scripts in contradictory ways, indicating that scripts are subjective and malleable. The nature of scripts revealed by participants reflects poststructural assertions that discourses and social scripts shift over time (St. Pierre, 2000). This offers hope that the process of destabilizing scripts can promote a shift away from heteronormativity and toward recognition of sexual difference. The work of queer activism (e.g. Piontek, 2006; M. Warner, 1993) and queer pedagogy (Britzman, 1995; Luhmann, 1998; Macintosh, 2007; Pinar, 1998) can facilitate this destabilization of scripts.

In returning again to my ethical project, I have identified scripts for “good mother” and “good teacher” so that I might find ways to disrupt these scripts to promote social justice around sexual difference. I do not endeavor this alone, but rather join the
efforts of queer activist and queer pedagogues. I disrupt scripts for the sake of Casey, the little girl I discussed in Chapter One, and for the sake of her mothers and teachers. I do not want Casey’s mothers to have to decide between being good mothers and being lesbians who embrace their sexual difference. I do not want Casey’s teachers, whether they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or heterosexual, to decide between being good teachers and including Casey’s family in the curriculum. I want Casey’s mothers and teachers to embrace the messiness and complexity of scripts and to view the contradictions and overlaps inherent to scripts as a means to queer social scripts for mothers and teachers. In order to fully realize the significance of this study and to create a space for difference in educational and societal discourses, it is important to consider an alternative to heteronormative interpretations of social scripts for mothers and teachers. As a means for talking about the significance of the study, I use the following subsections to theorize what it would mean to queer the social scripts revealed by participants.

Naming Heterosexuality

The first step in queering social scripts for mother and for teachers involves naming heterosexuality, thereby positioning this orientation as one among many. The scripts revealed by participants allowed heterosexuality to remain invisible and therefore unquestioned. Kayla’s quote illustrates this from the perspective of a lesbian mother, “I certainly don’t define my heterosexual friends where they like it doggy style.” Heterosexuality was assumed to be the normal, default sexuality by participants. Participants did not consider talking about heterosexuals to mean talking about sex and sexuality in the same way that talking about lesbians seemed to infer those topics. To use an example from teacher participants, talking about families in elementary school was
considered common practice. Some teacher participants, however, dismissed discussing lesbian or gay families as unnecessary or potentially incendiary. These participants did not name the families that were already part of the curriculum as heterosexual. Thus heterosexual families were categorized as normal, while gay and lesbian parents and their families were positioned as deviant. In order to queer social scripts for mothers and teachers (and to queer teaching and teacher education), we can begin to name heterosexuality, rather than allowing it to remain invisible. In the example of discussing families in the classroom, a simple phrase such as “some families only have one mother and one father” names heterosexuality as one way of being among many. And it creates a space for sexual difference.

Queering Pedagogy and Curriculum

Participants’ varied interpretations of what counts as student learning and how mothers and teachers should promote this learning make pedagogy and curriculum particularly rich sites for queering, as notions of valid student learning are hardly rigid, universal concepts. Homophobic scripts for maximizing student learning involve excluding gay and lesbian content from the curricula, while liberal scripts involve adding gay and lesbian content as an additional topic (Piontek, 2006). This reflects the multicultural “laundry list” of difference approach mentioned in Chapter One (Letts, 2002). Alternatively, the queer approach is not in adding to the curriculum, but rather questioning the existing curriculum and how that material becomes worth knowing.

Susanne Luhmann (1998) talked about queer pedagogy, suggesting that pedagogy should be formulated as a question rather than a discrete set of facts. “Pedagogy might be posed as a question (as opposed to the answer) of knowledge: What does being taught,
what does knowledge do to students? How does knowledge become understood in the relationship between teacher/text?” (p. 148). Likewise, Macintosh (2007) encouraged educators to question that which is set forth as normal curriculum, “Rarely do educators embrace the messy, pedagogically complicated enterprise of addressing the silent and invisible underpinnings of normalcy” (p. 35). Queering teaching and learning necessitates examining what we are teaching and why, what has become normalized and what, as a result, is positioned as deviant. Britzman (1995) suggested that queer theory offers a means to determine the learning that teachers and students cannot abide, “Queer Theory offers education techniques to make sense of and remark upon what it dismisses or cannot bear to know” (p. 154).

In order to illustrate a queer curriculum, I return to the topic of families in the elementary school curriculum, because this was repeatedly referenced within the data. Homophobic scripts refuse to acknowledge families with LGBT parents. Liberal approaches attempt to represent every possible configuration of family (ultimately unsuccessfully given the enormity of the task). Queer questions why family is worthy of study and then allows children and their parents to provide descriptions of their families without establishing a fossilized concept of normal family. Shelly, a lesbian mother described various approaches to teaching family.

Rather than relying on the kids to tell them what kind of family it is, maybe they should send a flyer home saying we’re going to start a discussion about families. Especially in kindergarten, first, second grade. I would solicit the parents first. Because you’re going to come back with, the Beaver Cleaver family just doesn’t exist anymore.
In suggesting that teachers "start a discussion about families," she opened a space for families to describe themselves rather than teachers relying on homophobic or insufficient preset descriptions of families. Shelly’s statement could lead to a queer discussion of families.

The benefits of queering pedagogy and curriculum go beyond representing diverse families in curricula, although this was a priority for lesbian mothers and MELs. Queering involves an interruption of hegemonic discourses (Luhmann, 1998) that replaces the mere replication of knowledge productive forms of questioning. Teachers, students, and parents gain power over content through questioning knowledge and its production. In addition, a queer curriculum resists the notion of student as receptacle for knowledge, allowing students to construct their own knowledge.

**Proceeding in a Culturally Relevant Direction**

As teachers and as teacher educators, we need to consider not just difference among students, but also differences among their families. Some progress has been made in regard to issues of diversity within education. However, as I discussed in Chapter One, the definition of diversity needs to be reframed in a way that recognizes sexual difference. Teacher education has responded to calls to take up a culturally relevant pedagogy in interactions with students. This attention to teaching to students’ differences should also be applied to teachers’ interactions with parents. Queering notions of students’ families paves the way for a culturally relevant approach to students’ families, because it serves as a reminder of the diversity that exists within those families. Queering parents within classrooms goes beyond merely not assuming that all parents are heterosexual. It also means coming to know individual parents and the impact their
ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, age, educational level, etc. may have on their interactions within their children's schools.

The importance of moving away from fossilized notions of family is evident through considering teacher participants' comments. Teachers judged mothers as good mothers to the extent that those mothers were visibly present within the classroom. Such presence requires time, transportation, knowledge of school systems, and language skills. Not all of these resources are equally available to all parents. Queering assumptions regarding parents promotes an understanding of the discrepancies between various parents' resources by troubling notions of good mothers (or parents/guardians).

The lesbian mother participants highlighted one means of queering families and approaching them in culturally relevant ways as they complained about permission slips of other forms with one signature line for mother and one for father. This promotes one family structure above all others. Another more queer approach would be to allow several blank lines on forms in order to allow families to define themselves. Queering notions of parents moves beyond a belief that "normal" parents or families exist, and facilitates a mindset that is appropriate for culturally relevant interactions with parents.

**Collapsing Binaries**

Another way to queer social scripts for mothers and teachers and in turn for teachers and teacher educators has already been mentioned. Queering scripts for mothers and teachers means collapsing the binary of scripts for mothers and for teachers. Collapsing this binary involves dispensing with notions of separate sphere for mothers and teachers, such as those mentioned by participants in this study, with mothers
attending primarily to socio-emotional needs and teachers chiefly to academic needs.

This collapse helpful in part given feminist poststructural concerns surrounding binaries.

Feminist poststructuralism makes visible, analyzable and revisable, in particular, the binaries male/ female and straight/ lesbian. It shows how relations of power are constructed and maintained by granting normality, rationality and naturalness to the dominant half of any binary, and in contrast, how the subordinate term is marked as other, as lacking, as not rational. (Davies & Gannon, 1997, p. 318)

Queering mother/teacher interactions works against the privileging of either mother or teacher by rejecting the notion of the teacher as only imparter of academic knowledge, just as it rejects the notion of the mother as the only tender to emotional and social well being. Nyla, a MEL, took a particularly queer approach to the mother/teacher binary, “We are all responsible for educating our children. All of society is responsible.”

Sharing responsibility for educating and for parenting children is a powerful means of advocating for social justice around sexual difference. Promoting respect for diversity does not fall to either mothers or to teachers, rather this responsibility can be shared within “all of society”.

Some mothers and teachers, though, may resist blurring this binary blurring the categories of mother and teacher can result in a loss of power and privilege. Comments such as “we’re just looking for our teachers to teach” and “I just want parents to parent” indicate beliefs that mothers and teachers are experts in separate spheres. As experts, they retain a certain amount of power and privilege. For example, teachers, with their professional training, have the power to evaluate a child’s academic progress and to make decisions regarding appropriate learning experiences. Mothers, as a result of their
sustained relationship with their children, evaluate a child’s socio-emotional health and take steps to correct or ensure continued health.

In considering neither the mother nor the teacher as the exclusive expert on the child, queering mother/teacher interactions insists that the two work together (with the child) to further physical, emotional, social, and academic growth. Ultimately, teachers, parents, and children stand to benefit from queering the divide between mothers and teachers. Mothers and teachers could gain greater understanding of each other and of students as they take on the simultaneous roles of mother and teacher. Each could also benefit from the other’s expertise, particularly as mothers approach teaching with a deep knowledge of students and teachers approach mothering with a deep knowledge of child development. And the child benefits from having additional adults from different perspectives adhering to scripts that champion children’s well-being. Further, collapsing the binaries between mother and teacher makes these categories more fluid, and this fluidity recognizes difference through demonstrating multiple ways of being.

Reclaiming Deviance

A final means of creating a space for sexual difference in educational and societal discourses involves reclaiming deviance. Participants defined deviance as negative, particularly as lesbian participants focused on demonstrating that they were not deviant. Queer theory, though, reclaims deviance as positive and productive, as evident through the shift of the term “queer” from an epithet to a rally cry (Pinar, 1998). Rather than approaching sexual difference from a deficit position, it is important to recognize the value of such diversity. Queer theory uses deviance to reconceptualize new ways of being, of knowing, and of understanding (Tierney & Dilley, 1998). Instead of
categorizing deviance as negative and something to be avoided, we can seize the queer approach to deviance as a means to explore alternatives to the normalizing scripts named by participants in this study.

Overall, the queer strategies addressed in this section have been an effort to destabilize and trouble scripts in ways that promote social justice surrounding sexual difference. In particular, an alternative to the heteronormative scripts revealed by participants is to queer social scripts for mothers and teachers by reclaiming deviance, collapsing binaries between mothers and teachers, naming heterosexuality, interacting with parents in culturally relevant ways, and queering curricula and pedagogy.

Participants may or may not have been aware of these alternative choices; such awareness is an important site for future work. I will discuss this in a subsequent section.

Implications

This study has specific implications for teacher educators, for teachers, for lesbian mothers, and for those who work with LGBT parents and individuals. Many of these implications draw upon the discussion in the previous section related to queering scripts.

Implications for Teacher Education

Lesbian mother participants talked extensively about their negative experiences with teachers and teachers’ failure to consider gay and lesbian families in classroom practices. And some teacher participants expressed their own concerns related to a lack of information regarding gay and lesbian parents and their children. Teachers’ comments that they had not received training related to working with parents, in addition to their concerns that they do not know how to adequately meet the needs of students with gay
and lesbian parents, indicate that teacher education has not adequately prepared teachers
to do so.

From the perspective of a teacher educator and a scholar who draws on queer
theory, I believe that the best means for preparing teachers to work with sexual minority
families is not in simply adding LGBT families to our curricula. Rather, it is important
that we equip teachers to attend to their own notions of family, challenging teachers to
explore how family is constructed within classrooms and through curricular materials and
forms completed by students’ caregivers. We must help teachers to identify and disrupt
their beliefs surrounding normal families in order that teachers can forge meaningful
partnerships with their students’ families via the culturally relevant interactions with
families that I discussed in the previous section.

Beyond addressing interactions between teachers and families within teacher
education, I echo prior calls to queer pedagogy within K-12 and teacher education
(Britzman, 1995; Luhmann, 1998; Macintosh, 2007) through questioning our
assumptions of what counts as worthy of study within schools. The queer pedagogy
outlined in the previous section provides teacher education with the goal of questioning
what counts as worthwhile knowledge and how that knowledge becomes valued. Through
a queer pedagogy, we can equip teachers to thoughtfully consider the lessons they teach
rather than replicating a preset curriculum. This is particularly important as schools act as
highly effective socializing agents (Jackson, 1968). Yet the power of schools to teach
highly gendered and heteronormative roles has scarcely been addressed (Blount, 2000).
Teacher education programs can begin to unearth the hidden, normalizing scripts within
schools through queering our notions regarding education. This is a necessary step in promoting social justice around sexual difference.

*Implications for Teaching*

As mentioned in the implications for teacher educators, it is important for teachers to consider how family is constructed within their classrooms. Teachers, along with curriculum developers and administrators, must examine the forms they send home, their curricular materials regarding family, their classroom displays, and their choice of words in order to determine the assumptions these items convey about family and what counts as a “normal” family. Using inclusive language and drawing on representations of diverse families in classroom displays and classroom literature are two ways to move beyond promoting a singular version of “normal” families. Many lesbian mother participants repeatedly stated that they did not want teachers to add lesbian mothers to the curriculum. Rather they wanted teachers to understand that families are constructed in a multitude of ways and to respect the diversity of families in their classroom practices. In this way, participants encouraged queering families within classrooms.

Additionally, owing to participants’ concerns regarding conservative, heterosexual parents’ reactions to the inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the curriculum, teachers should view the queering families as a human rights issue. This removes religion, a common concern among teachers, from the topic of families and asserts the right of all students for their families to be respected and represented within the classroom. In structuring their classrooms around human rights, teachers can establish a classroom climate that affirms the rights of all people to be treated ethically. This means that bullying and teasing are not permitted for any reason. And it allows for
curricular topics that promote justice and equity for diverse people groups. With a human rights focus, families with gay and lesbian parents fit under the umbrella of diverse people, rather than serving as an additional topic that must be added to the curriculum.

A second implication is the importance of teachers recognizing mothers’ interpretations of good mother. For example, lesbian mother participants talked about providing classroom supplies and giving gifts to teachers. In these cases and others, teachers must realize the “cultural capital” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 1) required for adhering to scripts. This is important to the extent that not all mothers in a classroom have the time and/or money to adhere to all scripts for good mother, nor do they have the knowledge of school systems or self-efficacy to approach their children’s teachers as a means of advocacy. Many teacher participants lamented the lack of parental involvement in their classrooms; some also explained that their students’ parents did not have the time to become involved. It is therefore important that teachers employ multiple strategies to partner with students’ families and do not reserve the label of good mother for those who have abundant time and money. An alternative is to listen to parents’ notions of good mother and good teacher and to approach parents accordingly. This practice is that which I have referred to as culturally relevant interactions with students’ families.

A third implication for teachers was mentioned in the implications for teacher educators. Teachers must revisit their definitions of student learning. This will allow them to determine how the choices they make foreclose other types of learning. Exploring definitions of student learning must also involve looking for invisible hegemony within their teaching. In particular, I urge teachers to consider their frequent endorsement of heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships.
A final implication for teachers is the importance of queering the roles of teachers. Many participants complained about parents who do not parent, meaning that parents did not tend to children’s socio-emotional needs. As a result it is important that teachers expand their role of teacher to include advocacy, joining parents as advocates for children’s overall well being. When teachers position themselves as advocates rather than positioning themselves in opposition to parents, students stand to benefit.

Implications for Lesbian Mothers

The implications for lesbian mothers stem directly from participants not taking up the tenets of queer theory. Instead, participants made claims to be like other families even as they asserted the need for members of lesbian families to be protected. It is important that lesbian mothers consider the losses and gains that result from claims to be like other families. For example, establishing their family as “normal” allows lesbian mothers to adhere to certain social scripts, however doing so also masks the richness of experiences their children have as a result of their parents’ sexual identities. It is not my intention to urge lesbian mothers to take up queer theory, rather I want lesbian mothers to examine the implications of striving to be labeled as normal rather than troubling the notion of normal as it pertains to families and mothers.

In addition to considering queer mothering, I believe that lesbian mothers can learn from the experiences of lesbian mother participants in this study. The mothers in this study reiterated the importance of selecting the best possible school and teacher for their children. Participants advocated talking to school personnel about family structure. They also discussed strategies for establishing and maintaining friendships for their children and for encouraging children to take pride in their family. However, in order to
truly benefit from the experiences of the participants in this study, lesbian mothers must consider participants' strategies critically. While there are other means, queer theory provides useful tools for critiquing these strategies.

**Implications for LGBT Support Work**

Finally, this study has certain implications for those who work to provide support for LGBT populations. The fact that there are social scripts for mothers is important to lesbian parents and their advocates who are continually concerned about positioning themselves as good parents. This population is demonstrated by the plethora of literature dedicated to establishing lesbian mothers as parents who are as effective as their heterosexual counterparts (Clarke, 2002). Support providers can make lesbian mothers aware of these scripts in order that these mothers can adhere to them and gain the designation of good mother. However, this approach serves to reinforce heteronormativity to the extent that the scripts fail to include non-heterosexual orientations. Thus adhering to these scripts counters efforts to promote LGBT visibility.

A more effective form of advocacy for lesbian mothers may be in discussing social scripts and the heteronormativity inherent to these scripts. As participants revealed social scripts for mothers and for teachers, they did not categorize the scripts as heteronormative. Participants did not problematize these scripts, nor did they discuss modifying the scripts to better fit their own practices, nor did they mention the possibility of resisting the scripts. As I consider the implications of this study, I understand the importance of educating these mothers about heteronormativity as a means of advocacy within my own community. As a result, I feel it is important to disseminate the findings of this study not only in academic communities, but also in lesbian communities. I remain
aware that I must do so in ways that are not overly critical of lesbian mothers. Rather I aim to equip lesbian to recognize heteronormativity and to seek and/or create alternatives.

Future Research

This study raised additional questions about social scripts for mothers and teachers, including the source of these scripts, the nature of the performance of the scripts, and the impact of the scripts on the school experiences of children with sexual minority parents. While participants revealed specific scripts for good mothers and good teachers, it was unclear what informed these scripts. The overlap of scripts between mothers and teachers may suggest that these scripts are informed by some of the same sources. Given the project of destabilizing scripts, it is particularly important to determine what informs these scripts. Understanding their sources would provide deeper understanding of how the scripts are constructed and the factors that impact them, ultimately allowing for a more effective means for destabilization. A historical analysis of discourses surrounding mothering and discourses surrounding teaching and/or an analysis of images of mothers and teachers within popular culture would provide a logical next step in exploring the sources of scripts for mothers and teachers.

Investigating social scripts for mothers and teachers in a different geographical context may also provide insight into the sources of scripts, given differing social climates and legal rights for gays and lesbians from region to region.

Performance of scripts is another important consideration for future research. As outlined in the limitations section of this chapter, my data were based on self-report of scripts. Conducting observations of mothering and teaching practices along with mother/teacher interactions would provide insight into the ways in which mothers and
teachers employ scripts in specific contexts. As performance of identity tends to be highly gendered, and at times polarized by sexuality (Butler, 1990), observing social scripts in action may provide useful insight into ways to create spaces for sexual difference in societal and educational discourses.

Another possibility for future research involves studying the school experiences of children with sexual minority parents. As explained in Chapter Two, very little literature focuses exclusively on this topic. What I find more compelling than a gap in research, though, is the number of participants who talked about wanting to know the perspectives of children of lesbians and gays. Lesbian mother participants suggested talking to older children who have already passed through school systems, and several participants invited me to speak with their own children. Likewise, teacher participants suggested that they could improve the relevance of their teaching if they knew more about children’s experiences as a result of having a gay or lesbian parent. Future work should consider the impact of social scripts for mothers and teachers on the school experiences of children of sexual minorities. This may provide an additional avenue for destabilizing scripts in a way that would promote social justice around sexual difference.

An Additional Thought About Future Work

In viewing this work as a form of advocacy for all mothers, and lesbian mothers in particular, it is my hope that it is taken up by those who work with mothers, teachers, and sexual minorities. In terms of my own practices, I plan to allow this work to impact my teaching of teachers in addition to the aforementioned directions for my future research. In particular, this study has challenged me to take up several questions in my work with teachers, including: What counts as valid student learning? How can we forge
meaningful partnerships with our students’ families? In what ways is heterosexuality invisible within our curricula? And as previously mentioned, I plan to use the findings of the study not only within academia but also within lesbian communities. Viewing this study as a starting point, I look forward to my future work with and on behalf of sexual minority parents, their children, and their children’s teachers.
APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEYS

Demographic Survey for Lesbian Mothers

This information will be used for analysis purposes only. No identifying information will be used in publications or presentations developed based on these data.

Name:

Ethnicity:

Sexual orientation:

Highest level of education:

Age:

Occupation:

Number of children:

Gender of children:

Age of children:

Demographic Survey for Teachers

This information will be used for analysis purposes only. No identifying information will be used in publications or presentations developed based on these data.

Name:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Years of teaching experience:
Grade level(s) and/or content taught:

Age:

Marital status:

Do you have any children? (If so, please list ages and gender.)
APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDES

Focus Group Interview Guide for Lesbian Mothers

1. Tell me about your family.
2. What does it mean to be a good mother?
3. In what ways, if any, do you participate in your children’s education?
4. Describe the kind of teacher you would select for your child or children.
5. What have been some of your family’s best experiences working with teachers?
6. What have been some of the worst experiences?
7. What advice do you have for other lesbians before they send their children to school?
8. Based on your experiences in schools, what advice do you have for teachers?
9. Is there anything else that has not been asked that you would like to add?

Focus Group Interview Guide for Teachers

1. How would you describe parental involvement in your classroom?
2. What kinds of training, if any, have you received related to parents and families?
3. Are there benefits to parental participation?
4. Which parents are the most enjoyable to work with?
5. What are the challenges of working with parents who are different than you?
6. Have you ever worked with a student who has gay or lesbian parents? How would you describe that experience?
7. After reading about lesbian mother’s experiences with their children’s teachers
a. What reflections do you have regarding what these mothers said?

b. How often do you see these desired qualities in teachers at your school? How often do you see the negative qualities?

c. What are the challenges of being the type of teacher these mothers want?

d. What are the benefits of being this type of teacher?

8. Is there more you think teachers should know about lesbian mothers and their families?

9. Is there anything else that has not been asked that you would like to add?
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Follow-up Interview Guide for Lesbian Mothers

1. What did you not get to say during the round table discussion that you would like to say now?

2. After reading what was said during the focus group, is there anything you would like to clarify?

3. The theme of "carrying flags" into schools was prevalent during the focus group. What are some of the flags you carry into school?

4. What determines which flag you carry?

5. During the discussion, we talked about what it means to be a good mother. What is your definition? Would you consider yourself to be a good mother?

6. How do women learn to be good mothers?

7. What are some of the images of mothers you see on a daily basis? (Critique those images)

8. As I interview teachers about their experiences working with gay and lesbian parents, what questions do you recommend I ask?

9. Why did you decide to participate in this research?

Follow-up Interview Guide for Teachers

1. As you think about the focus group, is there anything else that you didn’t mention that you would like to tell me now?
2. We had talked during the focus group about parental involvement. How would you define parental involvement?

3. In what ways does your school promote parental involvement?

4. Are there ways that you personally promote parental involvement?

5. What are the reasons you have contacted parents? (What methods have you used to do so?)

6. What are the reasons parents have contacted you? (How have they done so?)

7. What influences your interactions with parents?

8. What do you think parents expect of you as a teacher?

9. In what ways, if any, do parents influence your classroom practices?

10. What information, if any, is it helpful for teachers to have about their students’ families?

11. We had talked about lesbian mothers in particular during the focus group interview. What conversations or thoughts regarding lesbian mothers, if any, have you had since that time?

12. Is there anything else that you would like to add at this time?

Interview Guide for Mother/Educator/Lesbian Initial Interview

1. Tell me about your family.

2. What does it mean to be a good mother?

3. How do women learn to be good mothers?

4. How does being a teacher influence the way you parent?

5. Describe the kind of teacher you would select for your child or children.

6. What have been some of your family’s best experiences working with teachers?
7. What have been some of the worst experiences?

8. What advice do you have for lesbian moms before they send their children to school?

9. As a mother, how out are you?

10. What is your level of outness as a teacher?

Now we’ll move to questions that ask about your perspective as a teacher...

11. How would you describe parental involvement in your classroom?

12. Are there benefits to parental participation?

13. In what ways does your school promote parental involvement?

14. Are there ways that you personally promote parental involvement?

15. What do you think parents expect of you as a teacher?

16. In what ways, if any, do parents influence your classroom practices?

17. What information, if any, is it helpful for teachers to have about their students’ families?

18. Which parents are the most enjoyable to work with?

19. What are the challenges of working with parents who are different than you?

20. After reading about lesbian mother’s experiences with their children’s teachers:

   a. Do you see your opinions and experiences reflected by this list?

   b. How often do you see these desired qualities in teachers at your school?

   c. How often do you see the negative qualities?

   d. What are the challenges of being the type of teacher these mothers want?

   e. What are the benefits of being this type of teacher?

21. Is there more you think teachers should know about lesbian mothers and their families?
22. Is there anything else that you would like to add at this time?

Follow-up Interview Guide for Mother/Educator/Lesbians

Lesbian mothers in my study have said that they just want teachers to teach. Teachers in the study have expressed frustration that parents expect teachers to parent or wish that parents would just be parents.

1. What are the responsibilities for a child’s schooling that are unique to teachers?
2. What are the responsibilities for a child’s schooling that are unique to parents?

It seems that being out as a lesbian occurs in degrees. It’s not an all or nothing situation.

1. Are there situations in which you are out? What are they?
2. Are there reasons that outness is important?
3. Are there situations in which you do not feel that you can be out?
4. Do you know of any educators who are out to their administrators?
   a. To their colleagues?
   b. To their students?
   c. To their students’ parents?
5. In which situations, if any, do people assume that you are heterosexual?
6. Have you even encountered stereotypes regarding lesbian mother? Lesbian teachers?

For the people in the study who are moms and teachers and lesbians, it seems like being a teacher and being a mother have shaped each other.

1. In what ways does that reflect or not reflect your experience?
2. Does being a lesbian impact the way you parent?
3. Does being a lesbian impact the way you teach?
APPENDIX D

DATA FOR INTERPRETIVE PORTION OF TEACHER FOCUS GROUP

**Desired Qualities in a Teacher:**

Energy

Willingness to try new things

Ability to think “outside the box”

Progressive

Open-minded

Knowledge of diversity (especially diversity of family structures)

Committed to preventing teasing and bullying (especially of kids with gay parents)

Knowledge of students

Advocate for students

Educates others about diversity

Inclusive of all types of diversity

Provides face time and contact with parents

Accepting of diverse family structures

Involved with students’ lives

Asks about students’ families.

**Negative Qualities Experienced in Teachers:**

Bring personal problems and biases to class

Verbally anti-gay
Adhere to strict gender norms
Categorize and/or label students without knowing them
Unaware of difference and what to do with it
Allow bullying and teasing or fail to intervene
Judge students according to parents
Assume child is gay if parents are
Ignore family unit/structure
Refuse change
Hold fast to preconceived notions
Carry religious beliefs into the classroom
APPENDIX E

STATEMENTS OF DEVIANCE BY PARTICIPANT AND PARTICIPANT GROUP

Participants made a total of 171 statements of deviance, with lesbian mothers making 78 of those, teachers 53, and MELs 40. Table 5 displays the number of statements of deviance each participant made as well as the totals for each group of participants. The first column displays the participant’s name and the second column tallies the number of statements of deviance made. The third column displays the role each participant had in the study followed by the total number of statements made by participants in that group.

Table 5

Statements of Deviance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th># of Statements</th>
<th>Role in the Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kayla</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Lesbian Mother (78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Lesbian Mother (78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>MEL (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Lesbian Mother (78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristin</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Lesbian Mother (78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Teacher (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lesbian Mother (78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>MEL (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelli</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>MEL (40)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

251
I grouped like statements together in order to create categories to represent the types of deviance discussed by participants: being or having a lesbian mother, being a gay or lesbian teacher, defining oneself primarily through one's sexuality, teaching beyond academic content, and failing to provide some level of education for children at home. Table 6 shows the how many statements each group of participants made for each category.
### Table 6

*Deviance by Participant Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Deviance</th>
<th>Lesbian</th>
<th>MELs</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being or having a lesbian mother</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a gay or lesbian teacher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining oneself primarily through one’s sexuality</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching beyond academic content</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failing to provide some level of education for children at home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

SCRIPTS BY PARTICIPANT GROUP

Tables 7 and 8 provide an overview of the scripts articulated by each participant group. The first column in each chart lists all of the scripts from the data. The next three columns pertain to specific participant groups, with an X indicating that the participant group articulated a particular script. Table 7 pertains to scripts for mothers.

Table 7

Scripts for Mothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Lesbian mothers</th>
<th>MELs</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mothers work to create and sustain friendships</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for their children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers provide physical and emotional safety</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and security for their children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers instill within their children a sense of</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pride in their family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers advocate for the best educational</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment for their children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers consider their children’s needs and</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identities above their own</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8, which has an identical format to Table 7, displays the scripts that each participant group articulated for teachers.

Table 8

*Scripts for Teacher by Participant Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Lesbian mothers</th>
<th>MELs</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers do not contradict personal, moral, or religious beliefs of parents</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers make students comfortable and emotionally safe within schools</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers only engage in self-disclosure in a way that does not interrupt student learning or offend parents or co-workers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers prioritize student learning above all else</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers use knowledge of students in implementing and planning lessons</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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