An Exploration of the Influence of Lesbian Parents on Their Children's Gender Conformity

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ABSTRACT

Family and LGBTQ+ researchers have had an interest in lesbian parented families since the 1970s (Bozett, 1987; Chan et al., 1998; Golombok et al., 1983; Green, 1978; Kirkpatrick et al., 1981; Miller, 1979), including any impact on the children of these families. Common areas of research in this area included gender socialisation, psychological development and social adaptation (Berkowitz, 2009; Clarke, 2002; Clarke and Kitzinger, 2005). This literature review focusses on the existing research in this area, to explore the influence of lesbian parents on their children's gender conformity (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Bos and Sandfort 2010; Garwood and Lewis, 2019; Goldberg, 2010; Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023). This research was analysed alongside relevant legislation and policy, which enabled a critical review of the existing themes in the literature. Findings from this critical analysis suggest that lesbian parents are able to resist heteronormative assumptions through challenging gender stereotypes (Goldberg, 2007), and that, whilst research pre-2007 suggested that lesbian parents raised gender conforming children (Anderssen et al., 2002; Kane, 2006), advancements in language and understanding in more recent studies have challenged this notion (Averett, 2016; Teo et al., 2022).

LGBTQ+, Lesbian, Parenting, Family, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Heteronormativity

ACRONYM

LGBTQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer +

NHS – National Health Service

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the early 2000s, there have been high-profile, widely documented challenges to the discriminatory practices and policies that have affected and marginalised LGBTQ+ people and their families, which have resulted in some improvements in these areas (Biblarz and Savci, 2010; van Eeden-Moorefield and Alvarez, 2015; van Eeden-Moorefield *et al.,* 2018). LGBTQ+ people, particularly in countries such as the United Kingdom (Kimberly and Williams, 2017), the United States of America (van Eeden-Moorefield and Alvarez, 2015) and Australia (Moloney *et al.,* 2012), have experienced advances in legal and social practices, including the right to marry, second parent adoption by same-sex couples (Biblarz and Savci, 2010) and anti-discrimination legislation (van Eeden-Moorefield *et al.,* 2018). The 2021 UK Census found that 23.9% of lesbian parents and 6.5% of gay male couples have children, in comparison to 39.7% of heterosexual couples (Smith *et al.*, 2023). Although the same level of comparable data is not available from the 2011 Census, figures do show that 1.5% of all parents were same sex in 2011, which had increased to 1.7% by 2021 (Smith *et al.,* 2023). The children of same-sex parents are, therefore, a growing group within society and their numbers will continue to increase with improvements to LGBTQ+ equality, inclusion and social acceptance (Garwood and Lewis, 2019). However, disparities in social experiences and treatment (Herek, 2006; Patterson, 2009; Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023), in addition to LGBTQ+ identities being contested, pathologized and criminalised across the world (van Eeden-Moorefield *et al.,* 2018), have meant that LGBTQ+ people remain marginalised in society, potentially reducing the numbers of same-sex parents and impacting on their

experience as a family unit (Bowleg, 2013; van Eeden-Moorefield and Alvarez, 2015).

With the social and legal advances that were beginning to take place for LGBTQ+ people and communities since the early 2000s, increasing numbers of lesbian parent families were visible within society, with more researchers interested in focussing on these families within their area of study (Averett, 2016; Garwood and Lewis, 2019). Initial research on the children of lesbian parents was undertaken in the 1970s (Green, 1978; Miller, 1979), 1980s (Bozett, 1987; Golombok *et al.,* 1983; Kirkpatrick *et al.,* 1981) and 1990s (Chan *et al.,* 1998), although these mainly focussed on the psycho-social adjustment (Chan *et al.,* 1998; Golombok *et al.,* 1983), physical health (Kirkpatrick *et al.,* 1981) or emotional wellbeing (Bozett, 1987) of these children (Garwood and Lewis, 2019; Goldberg and Allen, 2020; Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023). These studies were often limited in terms of participant numbers, and results consistently stated that there was no difference between the children of heterosexual or lesbian parents (Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Garwood and Lewis, 2009; Hicks, 2005a). Allen and Demo (1995) conducted a literature review on three family science publications and concluded that LGBTQ+ families, and particularly the voices of children in such families (Goldberg, 2007), were being largely ignored in this field, which was problematic for any researchers who were studying the family (Hosking *et al.,* 2015; van Eeden-Moorefield *et al.,* 2018). Allen and Demo's (1995) work further highlighted the need to challenge heteronormativity in this field and

include a range of LGBTQ+ lived experiences, both for individuals and families (van Eeden-Moorefield *et al.,* 2018).

As Allen and Demo (1995) highlighted, studies on the family have relied on heteronormative assumptions (Luzia, 2012; Taylor, 2009; Weeks *et al.,* 2001), as this has been considered the norm within family structures (Berkowitz, 2009; Kitzinger, 2005). 'Heteronormativity' is used to explain the view that heterosexuality is the natural way of being (Martin, 2009; Oswald *et al.,* 2005), which brings privilege to those who are heterosexual, through the multi-dimensional ways that heterosexuality is reproduced as normal (Jackson, 2006; Kitzinger, 2005). 'Heteronormativity' is used in various theories, including social and critical, to explain legal (Averett, 2016; Phelan, 2001), systemic (Grace, 1999) and social (Blasius, 2000; Jackson, 2006; Lancaster, 2003; Schilt and Westbrook, 2009) practices that occur due to the widely held assumptions and stereotypes relating to sexuality and gender. This includes social institutions, such as parenthood, being centred on heterosexual pairings (Kitzinger, 2005). Queer Theory is often used to counter heteronormativity, as LGBTQ+ people and communities have historically subverted sexual and gender binaries (Garrett-Walker and Montagno, 2023; Hyde *et al.,* 2019; Levitt, 2019), concepts which have traditionally been used to uphold heteronormative expectations (Butler, 1990; Crawley *et al.,* 2019; Garrett-Walker and Montagno, 2023; Magnusson and Marecek, 2018; Rahman and Jackson, 2010). Heteronormativity is still seen as normal, however, and impacts on the production of family life, for example in conversations and social expectations that children will be heterosexual

(Averett, 2016; Martin, 2009; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001), with little or no consideration given to the possibility of them having other sexual orientations.

With researchers recognising the need to challenge heteronormativity since the early 2000s, more studies have been undertaken to explore the diversity within gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation, in an attempt to move away from binary thinking around these concepts (Garrett-Walker and Montagno, 2023; Hyde *et al.,* 2019; Jacobson and Joel, 2019; Salomaa and Matsick, 2019; Vrangalova and Savin-Williams, 2012). It can be uniquely challenging for some scholars to study lesbian parent families due to the potential for researchers holding heteronormative beliefs (Clarke *et al.,* 2010; Heck *et al.,* 2012) and the stereotypes that LGBTQ+ people can face within society (Kimberly and Williams, 2017). The relatively lower number of studies, potential bias of researchers and unique challenges that lesbian parents face is why they are a focus of this submission.

Gender identity, gender expression and gender non-conformity have been used as a focus of this submission, although these have often been confused, or used interchangeably, within studies (Byrne, 2023; Haig, 2004), despite having different meanings. The term ‘gender identity’ was first used by Stoller (1964) and Greenson (1964) and was described as the ‘sense of knowing to which sex one belongs’ (Stoller, 1964, p.220). Gender identity of the self usually develops in early childhood, with children able to verbalise gender identity between 18 months and two years old (Zosuls *et al.,* 2009), usually through language such as ‘I am a girl’ or ‘I am a boy’ (Riskind and Tornello,

2022), with a firmer sense of gender identity typically being developed by the age of three (Fausto-Sterling, 2021). Gender expression, however, is different and refers to how individuals portray their gender identity (Martinez *et al.,* 2017). This could be through the clothes they wear, hair styles and name choices, amongst other outward behaviours (Hennekam and Ladge, 2023). Similarly, gender non-conformity refers to the degree to which a child's appearance and behaviours do not align with socially defined gender stereotypes, according to their sex assigned at birth (Mahfouda *et al.,* 2023; Kaltiala-Heino *et al.,* 2018; Turban and Ehrensaft, 2018). Gender identity, gender expression and gender non-conformity are used throughout this submission: gender identity to refer to an inherent sense of gender; gender expression to indicate how children convey this and gender non-conformity to express how children may show behaviours that are not socially defined, as related to their sex assigned at birth (Mahfouda *et al.,* 2023; Riskind and Tornello, 2022). These aspects of gender have been chosen for this submission, as parents', and other outside influences including their peers and the media (Brown and Stone, 2018; Langlois and Downs, 1980; Lee and Troop-Gordon, 2011; Sumontha *et al.,* 2017), can influence a child's gender expression, but not their identity (Riskind and Tornello, 2022).

Throughout this submission, the author has been mindful of reflexivity, as an 'insider'. In the field of research an 'insider' is a researcher who shares a personal identity with the group that they are researching (Gair, 2012). In this instance, the author is a lesbian, who is about to become a non-biological parent. Throughout the writing of this submission, the researcher has reflected

on their insider position (LaSala, 2003; Watts, 2006) and has considered this as an epistemological concept, as their position as a lesbian parent-to-be, and related values and experiences, has an impact on the information that has been researched and how this has been critically analysed (Berger, 2015; Griffith, 1998; Hayfield and Huxley, 2015; Kings, 2024). In this instance this has been seen as beneficial, as the author has been able to have an active role in presenting marginalised experiences (Tang, 2007), in this instance lesbian parents.

This submission will be an exploration of the influence of lesbian parents on their children's gender identity. Starting with a literature review, four themes will be discussed and shared, beginning with lesbian parents raising gender non-conforming daughters (Green *et al.,* 1986; Goldberg, 2007), whereas theme 2 will review if lesbian parents raise gender conforming sons (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Bos and Sandfort 2010; Goldberg, 2007, 2010). The third theme in the literature review will consider the impact of lesbian parents own experiences of gender identity on their children's gender expression (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2007; MacCallum and Golombok, 2004; Oswald *et al.,* 2005), whilst theme 4 reviews whether lesbian parents uphold gender norms and stereotypes due to societal influence (Tasker and Golombok, 1997; Clarke, 2002). Following this, there will be three themes in the discussion of results, which have been formed from a critical analysis of the literature review. The first theme in this section is that lesbian parents resist heteronormative assumptions of parenting and gender through the challenging of gender stereotypes (Goldberg, 2007). The

second theme consider studies from before 2007, which suggest that lesbian parents raise gender conforming children (Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Oswald *et al.,* 2005), which contrasts with theme 3 which considers the advancements in language and understanding regarding gender expression and sexual orientation in more recent studies (Averett, 2016; Teo *et al.,* 2022). The discussion of results section is followed by conclusions and recommendations for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Introduction

This literature review will focus on how lesbian parents influence their children's gender conformity (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). To do this, four themes will be focussed on, firstly the extent to which lesbian parents raise gender non-conforming girls (Green *et al.,* 1986; Goldberg, 2007) as daughters of lesbian parents may feel less restricted by societal gender roles (Averett, 2016; Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Goldberg, 2007; Green *et al.,* 1986). The second theme will review the literature on whether lesbian parents raise boys to be gender conforming (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Bos and Sandfort 2010; Goldberg, 2007, 2010) or non-conforming (Averett, 2016; Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Goldberg, 2007; Golombok *et al.,* 1983; MacCallum and Golombok, 2004). The final two themes will review the existing literature on the impact of lesbian parents' experience of gender on their children's gender expression (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2007; MacCallum and Golombok, 2004; Oswald *et al.,* 2005) compared to lesbian parents upholding gender norms due to societal pressure (Tasker and Golombok, 1997; Clarke, 2002).

1.2. Theme 1 – Lesbian Parents Raising Gender Non-conforming Daughters

Until relatively recently, lesbian parents were not included in studies on the family (Berkowtiz, 2009), as they were considered incompatible with family life. Lesbians now have a greater opportunity than ever to create their own families (Berkowitz, 2008), through advances in the LGBTQ+ movement

(Bernstein and Reimann, 2001; Lewin, 1993), developments in, and access to, reproductive technology, including donor insemination, adoption and surrogacy (Goldberg, 2023; Mooney-Somers and Golombok, 2000) and improved societal views on LGBTQ+ people, families and communities (Coontz, 2000; Ryan and Berkowitz, 2009; Stacey, 1996). Berkowitz (2009) study discusses the consequent 'proliferation in both the quality and quantity of research on lesbian and gay parenting' (p.117) since the 1990s, which is supported by the amount of research dedicated to this topic in this time period (Allen and Demo, 1995; Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; McCann and Delmonte, 2005; Patterson, 2000, 2006; Pennington and Knight, 2011; Perrin, 2002; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001; Tasker, 1999, 2005; Tasker and Patterson, 2007). A search of a research database for studies completed between 1981 and 2000 showed only 76 results with 'lesbian and gay parents' in the title, compared to 352 studies published between 2001 and 2024, a 363% increase. Most earlier studies that researched lesbian parent families were divided between studying people who gave birth in an opposite sex relationship and later formed a lesbian family unit, or a lesbian couple who become parents through donor insemination or adoption (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Since the turn of the millennium, the research has mainly focussed on donor insemination conceived children of lesbian parents (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Despite this, there continues to be an overall lack of specific data or research into the experiences of families headed by lesbian parents (Fish and Russell, 2018). This is despite, or potentially because of, these families facing unique experiences and barriers, including homophobia (Bos and Gartrell,

2020; McCann and Delmonte, 2005), that families with heterosexual parents do not (Carone *et al.,* 2022).

There is a long history of research into the gender socialisation of children, beginning with whether lesbian parents would prefer sons or daughters (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Kane, 2009). Gartrell *et al.'s* (1996) research involved interviewing 154 lesbian prospective parents during fertility treatment or pregnancy and found that, whilst only 55% had a preference of their child's gender, 88% of those who had a strong preference wanted a daughter (Golberg, 2009). Hermann-Green and Gehring (2007) conducted a similar study with 105 lesbian mothers who already had a child and found that 32% of those who had a gender preference wanted a girl. Further research showed that 54% of lesbian adoptive parents, where preferences for the gender of the child being adopted could be stated, adopt daughters, compared to 54% of gay (male) parents who adopt sons (Goldberg, 2009). Goldberg (2009) and Kane (2009) have suggested that this is due to stereotypical gender expectations about sons and daughters, with lesbian parents in both studies expressing concern about ensuring that their children had appropriate gender role models, alongside fear of coping with a son's experience of male puberty (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Kane, 2012; Maccoby, 1998). Social Learning Theory states that boys need a male role model to understand what society expects of males and girls need female role models to understand what is expected of women (Bandura and Walters, 1963; Bos *et al.,* 2012). Goldberg's (2009) and Kane's (2009) research therefore agrees with the findings and principles of Social Learning Theory.

Family input into gender socialisation has also been studied widely, with early theorists, including Chodorow (1978), stating that mothers are a ‘central and constituting element in the social organisation and reproduction of gender’ (p.7). Further scholars (Averett, 2016; Kane, 2009, 2012; Lytton and Romney, 1991; Parsons, 1943; Schroeder and Liben, 2021) have used Chodorow’s findings to highlight family, and mothers in particular, as the main factor in the gender socialisation of children. Stereotypical ideals of femininity and heteronormativity would state that fathers reproduce heterosexual, feminine traits in daughters, such as deterring early pregnancy or promiscuous behaviours (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010), but scholars of Queer Theory suggest that lesbian parents can subvert this expectation (Garrett-Walker and Montagno, 2023). Goldberg’s (2007) research supports this to an extent, as this showed that 15 of 36 women with a non-heterosexual parent(s) were ‘more comfortable with gender non-conformity than they might have been had they been raised in a more traditional family environment’ (p.557). This is supported by those studying lesbian parenting, as various pieces of research across different time periods (Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Golombok *et al.,* 2003*;* Green *et al.,* 1986; Lorber, 1994; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001) showed that daughters of lesbian parents show more gender non-conforming behaviours than their peers with heterosexual parents. Gender expression, non-conformity and performativity are theories and concepts used by scholars within this research area, to understand what gendered roles and behaviours for men and women are in modern society (Shively and De Cecco, 1977; Anderssen *et al.,* 2002). Scholars including Lorber (1994) and Green *et al.*

(1986) have suggested that gender non-conformity is more socially acceptable for girls than for boys and therefore daughters are more likely to display these behaviours than sons (Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Goldberg, 2007).

Scholars including Green *et al.* (1986) and Fulcher *et al.* (2007) have suggested that lesbian parents are more liberal in their views on gender than heterosexual parents. This can entail participating in groups, including feminist groups, related to their views on gender and being engaged with aspects of feminist theory, such as women's independence (Bergstrom-Lynch, 2020). This is supported by studies on adult children of lesbian parents, which also suggest that an advantage of being raised by lesbian parent(s) is that they championed and understood women's independence (Bergstrom-Lynch, 2020; Patterson, 2017). Goldberg's (2007) study suggested that the adult daughters of lesbian parents noted that observing the relationship between their mother's 'presented an alternative to the gender inequality typical of many heterosexual relationships' (p.551). This was in support of Saffron's (1998) work, which stated that being raised by lesbian parents provides an alternative to a heteronormative society and relationships (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023; Saffron, 1998). Parents in Averett's (2016) study tried to move their daughters away from stereotypes about women and instead focussed on alternative femininities, including teaching car maintenance and differing beauty ideals (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2009), which also challenges a heteronormative society's stereotypes of femininity.

1.3. Theme 2 – Lesbian Parents Raising Gender Conforming Sons

As mentioned in Theme 1, much research on understanding gender conformity in children is based on a heteronormative family unit (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010). Research by Biblarz and Stacey (2010) in this area states that 'married wives exceed their husbands relatively and absolutely on… most types of interaction with their children' (p.4), an assertion that is supported by scholars across various time periods (Hall *et al.,* 1995; Hawkins *et al.,* 2006). Biblarz and Stacey (2010) also state that 'married fathers generally spend more time with their sons than daughters' (p.4), which is again supported by research by other scholars (Blankenborn, 1995; Harris *et al.,* 1998; Marsiglio, 1991; Popenoe, 1996; Wilson, 2002). Biblarz and Stacey (2010) have argued that the consequence of this is that more importance is placed on sons to conform to gender stereotypes, primarily by fathers (Pruett, 2000). Heterosexual fathers also place more emphasis on demonstrating perceived masculine traits, such as autonomy (Kane, 2012) and initiate and participate in more boisterous play with their sons (Eliot, 2009). Fathers encourage masculinity with their sons, with Connell (1995) stating that masculinity changes over time and cultures, with current masculine traits including aggressive play, bravery, strength and dominance (Kane, 2012; Kingsman, 2023; River and Flood, 2021). There have been advancements in the 21st century towards fostering a culture of positive masculinity (Kingsman, 2023), with a focus on boys' strengths and emotional and social skills (Claussen, 2017; Flood, 2020; Kiselica and Englar-Carlson, 2016; O'Neil *et al.,* 2013), although research by River and Flood (2021) suggests that boys still often behave in line with masculine, gendered norms.

In more recent years, research into the gender conformity of sons of lesbian parents has been conducted, and, at times, these studies have shown contradictory results. MacCallum and Golombok (2004) found that boys raised by lesbian parents and/or single mothers demonstrated feminine personality traits more frequently than those raised by heterosexual parents (Golombok *et al.,* 1983; Goldberg, 2007), which was supported by Goldberg's (2007) research. She further suggested that this was due to two women being in parental roles, which allowed their children to behave with more sensitivity and view women through a feminist lens as being strong and capable, due to their parental experiences. Conversely, other studies, particularly 'early investigations of lesbian-mother families' (Golombok *et al.,* 2003, p. 21) did not find any differences in gendered personality traits between those raised by lesbian parents and those by heterosexual parents (Averett, 2016; Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Golombok *et al.,* 1983; Green *et al.,* 1986; Hoeffer, 1981; Huggins, 1989; Kirkpatrick *et al.,* 1981). Kane's (2006) research into the gender non-conformity of children showed that 11 out of 17 lesbian parents were more worried about their sons being gender non-conforming than their daughters. Martin (2009) has argued that this is due to mothers being 'simultaneously constrained by what it means to be a good mother and the many dimensions on which mothers are judged for their mothering' (p.193). Additional scholars have therefore proposed that this is due to mothers being more harshly criticised for their parenting than fathers (Blum, 2007; Hays, 1996; Singh, 2004). Historically, mothers have faced harsh treatment if their son was gay, with the mother's relationship with her gay son being

pathologized by the psychiatric community (du Plessis, 1993; Martin, 2009; Miller, 2024). Berkowitz and Ryan (2011) furthered this work and found that the intersection of gender expression and sexual orientation created more scrutiny for the sons of lesbian parents, meaning that they were more likely to be gender conforming, when compared to daughters of lesbian parents. Fulcher *et al.'s* (2007) research into children's views of gender identity and expression suggested that children of lesbian parents were less concerned about gender non-conformity of their peers, when compared to the children of heterosexual parents. The suggestion is that the liberalness of lesbian parents' attitudes fosters a similar level of flexibility in their children's perceptions of gender expression (Fulcher *et al.,* 2007), with children of lesbian parents showing less interest in other children's gender conformity.

Although previous studies have suggested that lesbian parents are more likely to want a daughter (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Gartrell *et al.,* 1996; Kane, 2009), the majority of Goldberg's (2009) participants wanted a son (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg and Allen, 2007). Lesbian parents who desired boys in this study highlighted that this was due to their own gender non-conformity (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2009). Some scholars have, however, suggested that sons of lesbian parents are more likely to be gender conforming than daughters of lesbian parents (Bos and Sandfort 2010; Goldberg 2007, 2010), as Goldberg's (2010) research argued that gender non-conformity can be viewed as 'radical or deviant' when portrayed by males (p.132). Berkowitz and Ryan (2011), alongside other scholars, have therefore argued that it is less socially acceptable for boys to be gender non-

conforming, due to heteronormative societal assumptions that this may also mean they were homosexual (Kane, 2012; Martin, 2005; Riggs, 2008).

1.4. Theme 3 – Impact of Lesbian Parent's Own LGBTQ+ Status on Children's Gender Non-conformity

As mentioned in Theme 1, and supported by work by Schroeder and Liben (2021), 'parents are children's earliest gender socialising agents' (p.127), often gendering their children as soon as they are aware that they exist, for example during pregnancy or when informed of an adoption match (Caldera *et al.,* 1989; Endendijk *et al.,* 2017; Fagot and Hagan, 1991; Kane, 2006, 2009; Tomasetto *et al.,* 2011). There is a myriad of ways that this can occur, ranging from choosing gendered names (Pilcher, 2017; Vishkin *et al.,* 2022) to using gendered decorations and colours in nurseries (Pomerleau *et al.,* 1990). However, research has suggested that heterosexual parents are more likely to encourage gender conformity than lesbian parents (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Fulcher *et al.,* 2007; Schroeder and Liben, 2021). Whilst other factors do play a role in gender socialisation of children, such as education settings (Pascoe, 2007), friendship groups (Thorne, 1993) and the media (Martin and Kazyak, 2009), Averett (2016) has argued that 'parents remain central to the process of gender socialisation because they control their children's exposure to cultural discourses about gender, especially in early childhood' (p.190), an assertion that is supported by other scholars (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Coltrane and Adams, 1997; Kane, 2006; Lytton and Romney, 1991; Maccoby, 1998; Martin, 2009; Meadow, 2011). Parents views on gender roles may also mean that their sons and daughters are treated differently, with sons being

supported to show more masculine behaviours and girls encouraged to act in a feminine way (Bem, 1981; Eagly *et al.*, 2000; Endendijk et al., 2017). The early years of a child's life have been found to have a large impact on later gender conformity, identity, expression and development (Bornstein, 2012; Thompson, 2008), although most of the research in this area has been done on families with heterosexual parents (Ellis-Davies, 2022; Lamb, 2012; Thompson, 2008). Allen and Demo (1995) were amongst the first researchers to acknowledge the requirement for more research into alternative family structures, with initial research focussing on whether gay or lesbian parents could be adequate gender role models for their opposite gendered children (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Doherty *et al.,* 1993, Stacey and Biblarz, 2001). More in-depth studies into the gender socialisation of children did follow, however, although initial research often stated that there were no differences in children raised by heterosexual or lesbian parents (Almack, 2005; Dunne, 2000; Weeks *et al.,* 2001). There has been a growing body of research in recent years to suggest that children's views and expressions of gender are formed through a myriad of different factors, including their parent's gender expression and sexual orientation (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2007), their own gender identity and expression (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010) and other factors, such as schooling and their peer group (MacCallum and Golombok, 2004). Participants in Berkowitz and Ryan's (2011) research said that they actively reproduced their children's gender and identity, with their own sexual orientation and gender identity playing a key part in this (Kane, 2006).

It is only more current research (Averett, 2016; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Goldberg, 2010; Kane, 2012; Martin, 2009) that has focussed on the differences in how heterosexual and lesbian parents reproduce gender for their children. All lesbian (and gay) parents in Averett's (2016) research engaged with Queer Theory by saying that they aimed to raise their children in a way that challenged the heteronormative constraints of gender. Heteronormative attitudes towards parenting often separates boys and girls into binary groups, which can create a notion of gender that reflects stereotypical societal views (Kane, 2012). Kane (2006) challenged this concept and furthered West and Zimmerman's (1987) research by not only considering how children perform gender during childhood, but also how parents respond to behaviours that can lead to other's assessing their children's gender. Her research argues that most lesbian parents do not encourage behaviours that conform to stereotypical assumptions of masculine or feminine behaviours, and instead utilise concepts of Queer Theory to create their own normative understanding of gender (Kane, 2006). Sutfin *et al.* (2008) stated that the offspring of lesbian parents grow up in less stereotypically gendered environments and, consequently, have less binary notions of gender. Averett's (2016) research also used aspects of Queer Theory to show that lesbian parents used resisted the gender binary, for example through choosing non-stereotypically gendered toys, clothing and names.

Averett's (2016) research uses data from in-depth interviews with LGBTQ+ parents to understand if lesbian parents resisted reproducing gender

stereotypes in their children. She questioned if this was due to parents own sexual orientations and a way to challenge heteronormative assumptions made about children's gender expression and sexual orientation (Averett, 2006). Her study argued that, as lesbian parents live in a heteronormative society and navigate this as sexual minorities, they feel empowered to resist and challenge binary notions of gender in their children (Averett, 2016). Goldberg (2007) highlighted that:

> 'gender and sexuality interact in complex ways, and, by virtue of their non-heterosexual identities, LGB people cross gender boundaries and challenge norms of femininity and masculinity' (p.559).

Lesbian parents are, therefore, required to balance their own sexual orientation and gender expression with their parental roles and responsibilities (Berkowitz and Marsiglio, 2007; Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Kane, 2012). This means that lesbian parents are not only portraying their own gender identities, but also reproducing their children's gender identities and expressions (Averett, 2016; MacCallum and Golombok, 2004).

Tasker and Golombok's (1997) research has suggested that lesbian parents experience of being a sexual minority means that they are more open to their children having questions about sexuality and gender. Stacey and Biblarz's (2001) work furthered this by stating that lesbian parents are also more sensitive to their children not conforming in various ways, not only in relation to gender identity (Goldberg, 2007). Studies that have focussed on the children of lesbian parents have also found that openness towards these topics is more common (Goldberg, 2007). Seminal work by Green *et al.*

(1986) and Tasker and Golombok (1997) found that participants with lesbian parents felt that their upbringing contained freedom in conversations about sexuality and gender (Goldberg, 2007). Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino's (2023) 30 participants described the open-mindedness they experienced growing up and Oswald *et al.'s* (2005) research found that the children of lesbian parents were brought up to question heteronormative views of gender (Goldberg, 2007). 46 participants of non-heterosexual parents in Goldberg's (2007) study stated that being bought up in a family unit that challenged heteronormativity, both through its existence as a family and through topics of conversation, meant that they were more comfortable with gender non-conformity. LGBTQ+ communities have historically celebrated and been inclusive of gender non-conformity, which scholars claim is partly in an attempt to subvert binary notions of gender through the use of Queer Theory and may be why children growing up with lesbian parents felt that they were offered more freedom regarding gender expression (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011).

Many researchers have researched whether gender identity and expression is innate (Fuchs-Epstein, 1988; Kane, 2012; Kimmel, 2008), for example, if a person is born with their gender already determined, or if it can be changed (Averett, 2016; Lorber, 2005). The parents interviewed in Kane's (2012) research generally believed that that, as parents, they could alter their children's gender identity and expression, and this was often compared to their own, sometimes negative, experiences of gender identity and expression from their childhood. They concluded that gender can be misrecognised by different social actors (Kane, 2012; Pfeffer, 2014), which made lesbian

parents more likely to challenge binary notions of gender to ensure that their children did not experience negative reactions in the same way that they had during childhood, including their own parents attempts to ensure gender conformity through clothing and behaviour (Averett, 2016; Kane, 2012). Averett's (2016) research, however, did suggest that lesbian parents believed that their children were born with an innate sense of gender identity, and disputed the notion that sexual orientation and/or gender identity are a choice, but acknowledged that gender expression could be influenced, both positively and negatively. Parents did not use this argument to ignore gender identity, however, and instead used it to demonstrate the importance of challenging heteronormativity, through concepts of Queer Theory (Averett, 2016).

1.5. Theme 4 – Lesbian Parents Upholding Gender Norms Due to Societal Pressure

Lesbians can face more societal judgements than their heterosexual peers (Goldberg, 2010; Kane, 2006, 2012), and this is exacerbated when they are mothers (Bos and Sandfort, 2010). Berkowitz (2009) has highlighted work by Clarke (2002) and Clarke and Kitzinger (2005) that states that:

> 'those who draw from religious or politically conservative rhetoric, assert that a child will not develop his or her gender identity fully if he or she is without a mother and a father as gender role models' (p.125).

Berkowitz (2009) states that the meaning behind this is that some lesbians portray gender non-conformity themselves, which Clarke (2002) and Clarke and Kitzinger (2005) suggested meant that they cannot be effective gender role models for their own children. Lesbian parents can, therefore, experience

judgements that their children's gender development will be negatively affected, due to having lesbian parents (Berkowitz, 2009; Clarke, 2002; Clarke and Kitzinger, 2005). Lesbian parents have also faced arguments against their existence as a family unit (Bos and Sandfort, 2010). The first studies into the children of lesbian parents were in the 1970s, when lesbians applied for custody of their children following divorce from an opposite gendered partner (Falk, 1989; Golombok, 1999; Golombok *et al.,* 2003; Patterson, 1992, 1995). Some lesbian parents were denied custody of, or access to, their children because of their sexual orientation and the perceived interests of the child/ren (Golombok *et al.,* 2003). Consequently, scholars have argued that lesbian parents are more likely to have their children's gender identities and expressions scrutinised by social agents, including families, friendship groups (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011), the legal system (Golombok *et al.,* 2003), education establishments (Birkett *et al.,* 2009), strangers and politicians (Kosciw *et al.,* 2009; Luzia, 2012; Moloney *et al.,* 2012). Due to these factors, and the negative reactions that lesbian parents can experience, some lesbian parents uphold and reproduce gender norms to limit the societal pressure that they face (Berkowitz, 2009; Clarke, 2002).

Lesbian parents raising their children according to traditional gender roles may be due to the increased scrutiny that they can face (Averett, 2016; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2009; Hequembourg, 2007). Lesbians becoming parents can still cause controversy within society (Berkowitz and Marsiglio, 2007), with negative media portrayals (Clarke, 2001; Mallon, 2000), religious debates (Clarke, 2002; Herek, 2006) and political discussions

(Clarke and Kitzinger, 2004; Patterson, 2009; Sandfort, 2000) to argue against the morality of this form of family and any impact on the children (Berkowitz and Marsiglio, 2007; Dunne, 2000). Studies have also shown that children of lesbian parents are more likely to be bullied at school due to their mothers' sexual orientation (Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Gartrell *et al.,* 2005; Tasker, 1999). Social Constructivism can be considered here (Goldberg, 2007), as the way that children are raised, and the relationships between themselves and their parents, do not exist in isolation, with wider aspects of society influencing and impacting the way a child is raised (Golombok *et al.,* 2003). Despite the barriers that they have faced, lesbians have found ways to create families and challenge the heteronormative notion of families (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023). However, arguments have continued later into the 2000s that growing up with lesbian parents could negatively influence a child's gender expression (Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001) and lead to social stigmatisation (Clarke, 2002).

Scholars in the field of gender have stated that gender expression and sexual orientation are socially interconnected, meaning that judgements made based on people's gender expression are linked with their sexuality (Aveline, 2006; Kane, 2012). Kane (2012) has suggested that this connection is particularly stark for males and the children of lesbian parents, both of whom are more judged socially if they deviate from gendered norms. In Berkowitz and Ryan's (2011) study, most parents, including lesbian parents, discussed a desire for their child to have normative masculine or feminine traits that were socially appropriate for their gender, but did not mention that they wanted them to be

heterosexual. They argued that this was because heterosexuality is assumed within society, even for lesbian parents, and therefore does not warrant being mentioned (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). Gender non-conformity is, therefore, viewed as being directly connected to sexual orientation. Media and social portrayals (Clarke, 2001) have further suggested that children raised by lesbian parents are more likely to be gender non-conforming and, consequently, gay. This claim was emphasised in Bos and Sandfort's (2010) research, that a common argument against lesbian parent families is that 'growing up with two mother's will negatively influence the child's… sexual orientation' (p.115). This has been further supported by numerous scholars (Golombok, 2015; González, 2004; Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023; Miller, 1979; Patterson and Far, 2016; Pennington and Knight, 2011; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001).

Seminal (Green *et al.*, 1986; Tasker and Golombok, 1997) and more current (Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Goldberg, 2007) research has suggested that there are minimal differences between the gender conformity of the children of lesbian and heterosexual parents. Bem (1981) suggested that society emphasises gender norms, which means that, by viewing the world through a gendered lens, people adhere to restrictive gender behaviours (Menon, 2017). This research suggests that society continues to reproduce the narrative of masculine stereotypes, such as that men are authoritative, whereas women are more passive, creating a self-fulfilling gender prophecy (Kane, 2012; Mattingly and Bianchi, 2003). Further research has supported Bem's (1981)

argument, with a review of research by Stacey and Biblarz (2001) which stated that

> 'this body of research, almost uniformly, reports findings of no notable difference between children reared by heterosexual parents and those reared by lesbian and gay parents' (p.160)

(Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Brewaeys *et al.,* 1997; Golombok *et al.,* 1983; Gottman, 1990; Green, 1978; Green *et al.,* 1986; Hoeffer, 1981; Kirkpatrick *et al.,* 1981; Kweskin and Cook, 1982; McLeod and Crawford, 1998; Patterson, 1992; Tasker and Patterson, 2007). Factors considered within this research ranged from imagining futures with potential children in a gendered way (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011), to choosing the surname of the biological parent (Almack, 2005; Dempsey and Lindsay, 2017; Pilcher, 2017) and gendered toy choices (Golombok *et al.,* 1983; Green, 1978; Green *et al.,* 1986; Hoeffer, 1981; Kirkpatrick *et al.,* 1981). Allen and Burrell (1996) summarised some of this research to understand any potential differences of the impact of having lesbian or heterosexual parents on gender conformity. They completed a meta-analysis of quantitative research conducted from 1971 to 1996 to compare the gendered behaviour of children of lesbian and heterosexual parents (Allen and Burrell, 1996). The results showed minimal difference in gender role behaviour between children of heterosexual and lesbian parents, based on parent, teacher and child interviews (Allen and Burrell, 1996; Pennington and Knight, 2011).

Kane's (2012) research suggests that:

> ‘parenting advice books, although progressing somewhat with the times, still include gender stereotypical advice and limitations on the amount of gender nonconformity they recommend parents encourage or even tolerate’ (p.21),

a claim supported by others (Krafchick *et al.,* 2005; Martin, 2005; Riggs, 2008). Kane (2012) argued further that gender non-conforming behaviours were not tolerated within some parenting books, let alone encouraged. Lesbian parents in Berkowitz and Ryan’s (2011) study initially discussed having no preference for a son or daughter but kept clothes in pink and blue ready for the birth, highlighting gendered views and stereotypes. One parent discussed how dressing their child in the gender-coloured baby-grow helped ease their interaction as a lesbian mother with others within society (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). Averett’s (2016) research involved interviewing parents, with one lesbian parent with two sons expressing a desire to let her children play with toys of their choice but was concerned if they chose toys that were gendered as ‘feminine’. She feared that this would attract extra judgement to herself and her son. One out of eight of the parents interviewed avoided gendered toys and interests but chose enough gendered markers to avoid social judgements (Averett, 2016; Kane, 2012). This happens because lesbian parents queer the heteronormative view of parenting, which exposes themselves and their children to the risk of social judgements (Oswald *et al.,* 2005). Queer Theory was introduced by Seidman (1994, 1996) as a theoretical perspective to consider how queer insights could be used to study gender and sexuality (Gamson and Moon, 2004; Valocchi, 2005). Queer Theory has its origins with symbolic interactionism and feminism (Epstein,

1996) as it aims to understand how social interactions lead to the creation and distribution of power (Smith, 1990). Queer theory criticises the knowledge, systems and practices that creates sexuality as a concept (Seidman, 1994) and moves from studying homosexuality solely as a sexual category and towards heterosexuality as a way to politically and socially categorise others (Berkowitz, 2009). Using Queer Theory, and understanding the social judgements that lesbian parents and their children can face (Clarke, 2002; Clarke and Kitzinger, 2005), demonstrates why lesbian parents may conform to heteronormative practices (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011).

1.6. Conclusion

The literature review has identified four key themes, starting with lesbian parents raising gender non-conforming daughters. Lesbians now have greater opportunities than ever to become parents (Berkowitz, 2008) and, consequently, the amount of research has increased in this area (Allen and Demo, 1995; Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Patterson, 2000, 2006; Pennington and Knight, 2011; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001; Tasker, 2005; Tasker and Patterson, 2007). Research has shown that lesbian parents show a preference towards having daughters, rather than sons (Gartrell *et al.,* 1996; Hermann-Green and Gehring, 2007), as they want to ensure that they are adequate gender role models for their children (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Kane, 2012). Although fathers' are seen to promote masculinity and mothers' promote femininity, lesbian parents can subvert this through their own experiences (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010), with Queer Theory used to show that the daughters of lesbian parents are more likely to be comfortable with gender non-conformity

(Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Goldberg, 2007; Golombok *et al.,* 2003*;* Stacey and Biblarz, 2001).

Theme 2 of the literature review found that lesbian parents raise gender conforming sons. Contradictory results have been found in this area, with some research suggesting sons of lesbian parents are more likely to be gender non-conforming than their peers (Golombok *et al.,* 1983; Goldberg, 2007), whilst other research found minimal differences (Averett, 2016; Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Golombok *et al.,* 1983; Green *et al.,* 1986; Hoeffer, 1981; Kirkpatrick *et al.,* 1981). Research has suggested that it is less socially acceptable for boys to be gender non-conforming than girls (Bos and Sandfort 2010; Goldberg 2007, 2010), and the views of lesbian parents in Kane's (2006) research supported this, with some stating that they were worried when their sons displayed gender non-conforming behaviours. This theme contained similarities to theme 3, which considered the impact of lesbian parent's own LGBTQ+ status on their children's gender expression. Averett (2016) concluded that lesbian parents actively challenge heteronormative perceptions of gender with their children, meaning that the children of lesbian parents grow up in less gendered environments (Sutfin *et al.,* 2008). As lesbian parents are a sexual minority within society, they are more open to their children having questions about gender expression (Goldberg, 2007; Tasker and Golmbok, 1997), with parents acknowledging the impact that this can have on their children's gender non-conformity (Averett, 2016; Kane, 2012).

The final theme in this literature review is that lesbian parents uphold gender norms due to societal pressure. Lesbians face additional challenges within society, including views that, as parents, they will have a detrimental impact on their children's gender development (Berkowitz, 2009; Clarke, 2002; Clarke and Kitzinger, 2005). Lesbian parents may, therefore, raise their children to conform to gender stereotypes to avoid scrutiny (Averett, 2016; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2009; Hequembour,g 2007), including on their children's gender identity or perceived sexual orientation, as these are often linked within social discourse (Aveline, 2006; Kane, 2012). Conforming to gender stereotypes for lesbian parents in this instance could include dressing children in gendered clothing (Averett, 2016) as, rather than queering heteronormative conceptions of the family and gender, some lesbian parents conform to avoid social judgements (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011).

2. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

2.1. Introduction

This section of the submission will use three themes to discuss and critically analyse the themes of the literature review. Theme 1 discusses how lesbian parents resist heteronormative assumptions of parenting and gender through challenging stereotypes, using Social Constructivism and Queer Theory throughout (Clarke, 2002; Goldberg, 2007). Theme 2 critiques the literature from before 2007, which indicates that lesbian parents raise gender conforming children (Allen and Burrell, 1996; Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Goldberg, 2007; Golombok *et al.,* 1983; Green *et al.,* 1986; Kane, 2006; Oswald *et al.,* 2005). Theme 3 considers research after this period, with advancements in language and understanding mirroring improved societal views towards lesbian parents (Averett, 2016; Baunach, 2012; Pereira and Monteiro, 2017; Teo *et al.,* 2022).

2.2. Theme 1: Lesbian Parents Resist Heteronormative Assumptions of Parenting and Gender Through Challenging Stereotypes

The first theme that is drawn from the literature review is that lesbian parents resist heteronormative assumptions of parenting through challenging gender stereotypes, which includes critiques on all four themes in Section 2.

To critically understand and analyse the gender non-conformity of the children of lesbian parents, the sociological theories of Social Constructivism and Queer Theory are helpful. Scholars who use Social Constructivism argue that ‘truth’ is formed by social processes and political allegiances of groups with

social power (Clarke, 2002; Goldberg, 2007). This means that lesbian parenting can be formed and studied in a variety of ways, all of which represent the 'truth' for those involved (Clarke, 2002). This 'truth' also dictates that children of lesbian parents experience a different reality than those of heterosexual parents (Goldberg, 2007), as families are constructed through societal interactions (Dunne, 2000; Kelan, 2010; Oswald *et al.,* 2005). West and Zimmerman (1987) used this concept to discuss the theory of 'doing gender' to explain the ways in which gender is socially constructed and reproduced through social interactions (Bergstrom-Lynch, 2020). Using Social Constructivism challenges the heteronormative definition of relationships that largely rely on biological connections between parents and children, or dictate that heterosexual parents and children are the normal family relationship (Dunne, 2000; Goldberg, 2007). A Social Constructivist perspective also considers gendered behaviours in children as being influenced by a myriad of factors, rather than as something innate (Goldberg, 2007), which links to gender expression, rather than gender identity. This includes the environment (Hines, 2004) and social interactions with parents, family members and peers (Kitzinger, 1987; Lorber, 1994). This is therefore used to argue that having a lesbian parent could influence gender expression in children, as they may be more exposed to a less binary perspective of gender (Goldberg, 2007; Kane, 2005).

Some pieces of research that focus on children's conformity to gendered behaviours have produced contradictory findings (Bos and Sandfort, 2010). Green *et al.* (1986) and other scholars (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Fulcher *et*

al., 2007; Schroeder and Liben, 2021) stated that daughters of lesbian parents were more likely to be gender non-conforming than their peers raised in heterosexual parent families, whereas others (Brewaeys *et al.,* 1997; Fulcher *et al.,* 2007; Golombok *et al.,* 2003) found no differences in gender expression between the daughters of heterosexual and lesbians parents. The work of Lorber (1994), Goldberg (2007) and Green *et al.* (1986) is more pertinent here, as they showed that gender non-conformity is more socially acceptable, and prevalent, in daughters than sons. Previous research also suggests that mothers and fathers reproduce gender in different ways (Leaper *et al.,* 1998; Paquette, 2004), with fathers more likely to hold conservative views about gender than mothers (Kollmayer *et al.,* 2018; Schroeder and Liben, 2021). Scholars such as MacCallum and Golombok (2004) have therefore concluded that lesbian parents are more likely to hold liberal views about gender, and that daughters from lesbian parent families are more likely to be gender non-conforming (Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Goldberg, 2007).

Biblarz and Stacey's (2010) and Berkowitz and Ryan's (2011) research reports that policy makers, and others within society (Clarke, 2002), claim that children need both parents of different genders in their lives in order to be well adjusted. Reporting this finding, including that single parent or same-sex parent families are in some way deficient, has added to the discourse over single motherhood and lesbian and gay parenting (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). In relation to Berkowitz and Ryan's (2011) study, this focussed on lesbian motherhood from the perspective of lesbian mothers who were genetically linked to the child, also known as biological or birth mothers.

Eighteen lesbian birth mothers were interviewed in total, with seventeen of these being via telephone interviews (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). Although there are positives to conducting interviews over the telephone, such as the interview taking place in a convenient environment that is familiar to the participant (Punch, 2005; Schulz and Ruddat, 2012), telephone interviews have been found to reduce the ability to establish rapport with the interviewee and also means that body language and facial expressions cannot be considered (Opdenakker, 2006). When reviewing the results of this research, as lesbian parenting has been shown to challenge heteronormative assumptions of families and parenting (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023), stating that lesbian parenting could be detrimental to a child is ignoring the variety of circumstances and experiences that can be included in lesbian parenting. Social Constructivism is useful here as each family unit will have a different 'truth', depending on their individual and joint experiences (Goldberg, 2007). Co-parenting is an example of this, which, traditionally, is a way of parenting in which a man and a woman who are not in a relationship conceive and raise a child separately, which can also include these individual's partners, and can be considered for LGBTQ+ people (Herbrand, 2018; Mamo, 2007). Co-parenting was not considered or included within this research, even though it is a way in which a child can have lesbian parent(s) and male role models or parents concurrently. Moreover, Biblarz and Stacey (2010) and Berkowitz and Ryan's (2011) view that having gendered role models is an important part of a child's social development, is also a heteronormative assumption (Ward and Schneider, 2009). It is erroneous to assume that the children of lesbian parents will only have meaningful contact with adults of

one gender and it is therefore wrong to conclude that these children will have inadequate gender socialisation (Clarke, 2001; Goldberg, 2010; Goldberg and Allen, 2007). Heteronormativity such as this can be challenged through the use of Queer Theory (Elia, 2003) and Social Constructivism (Dunne, 2000), as this allows a more critical examination of the ways in which heteronormativity combines gender, sexuality and family into one ideology and how they intersect for lesbian parents in the construction of their children's gender (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Oswald *et al.,* 2005).

Research by Pennington and Knight (2011) further suggested that a child's development would be impacted by being raised by lesbian parents, with seven out of eight participants in this study agreeing with this. Although caution should be taken with generalising these findings due to the small number of participants, one of the reasons that this argument is presented is the view that having lesbian parents will reduce the amount of time spent with males, thus causing gender role confusion (McCann and Delmonte, 2005). This latter point, however, does not take into account that children who are raised by lesbian parents often have various opportunities to interact with opposite gendered adults, including relatives and family friends (Millbank, 2003; Patterson, 1992). The impact of 'Chosen Family' is relevant here, as people included within this definition may be people of different genders who interact with children who are raised by lesbian parents (Levin *et al.,* 2020). 'Chosen Family' is a phrase used by members of the LGBTQ+ community to describe family structures that are created by choice, rather than the traditional values of biological or legal reasons (Weston, 1997; Kim and

Feyissa, 2021; Levin *et al.,* 2020). The idea of a 'Chosen Family' also Queers heteronormative notions of family, as it subverts assumptions that families need biological connections (Boyd and Wei, 2023; Levin *et al.,* 2020).

Saffron (1998) argued that having lesbian parents served as an inspirational model for children, as their parents' relationship was based on equality and empathy, championing feminism and challenging the heteronormativity present in different gendered relationships (Goldberg, 2007). Saffron's (1998) study comprised of interviews with the adult children of lesbian parents to ascertain the positives of being raised by two women (Goldberg, 2007). Although themes of challenging heteronormative gender stereotypes were apparent in the results of this research, the study did have limitations, notably that the sample size was only 21 and was therefore limited, due to the relatively small number of adult children of lesbian parents who were willing to be interviewed in the 1990s, within a society where homosexuality had been criminalised and/or considered a mental illness in the preceding decades (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023; Saffron, 1998). Furthermore, the themes that emerged from the 21 participants included the advantages of growing up with 'strong, feminist women' (Saffron, 1998, p.45), which, although generalised within the results to mean lesbians, did not specifically mention the benefits of their parents' sexuality, only their gender (Goldberg, 2007). To effectively interpret the findings from Saffron's (1998) study, the use of Complexity Theory would have been more useful, to understand how gender and sexuality are linked as socially constructed, complex relationships (Dill and Zambrana, 2009; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Marra, 2015). Analysing results

using Complexity Theory would allow an exploration of gender conformity and sexual orientation, to help to characterise the differences and similarities between these two identities and understand the multidimensional approach to society and relationships (Byrne, 2013; Forss and Marra, 2014; Marra, 2015). Some scholars (Lutz, 2023; Marra, 2015) choose to use Complexity Theory alongside intersectionality, a term first used by Crenshaw (1989), to consider multiple forms of discrimination. The use of Complexity Theory and intersectionality is not as useful here, as a distinction needs to be made between sexual orientation and gender conformity and/or expression, rather than automatically linking them together, as studies that claim to study LGBTQ+ identities often confuse gender identity and sexual orientation (Aspinall, 2009; Lieurance *et al.,* 2021).

With similarities to Saffron's (1998) research, Averett's (2016) study focussed on challenging the stereotypes of women and creating alternative femininities, such as teaching car maintenance to girls. Although Averett's (2016) work did consider how lesbian parents challenged stereotypes of women and mothers, and how they resisted heteronormative norms, it is also possible that, as only 11 lesbian couples were selected as participants, other themes were not considered (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023). Boynton (2003) has argued that there are often reasons that people volunteer to participate in research, for example for altruistic reasons, a personal interest or because they are politically active. Finding participants for research into sexuality and/or gender conformity can be even more difficult, as people may not publicly identify as being LGBTQ+, or conform in their gender expression, due to fear of

discrimination (McCormack, 2014; Meyer and Wilson, 2009). Although Averett's (2016) study also used interviews with the children of lesbian parents to improve the authenticity of the study, all but one of these children were communicated with through their parents, which could have caused selection bias (Noe, 2020), with only those who had a positive parental relationship being selected for the study (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023). It can, therefore, be argued that people who did not volunteer, and who did not have the same motivations or interest to enable them to take part in the study, may have contributed to different themes being found if they had been interviewed (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023). Averett (2016), as should anyone who conducts research on the children of lesbian parents, should also have considered the possibility of participants having taken part in previous research, also known as repeat sampling (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023). Researchers could ask if participants have been involved in other pieces of research and note this in the results section, to help to alleviate this (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023). This critique, alongside the difficulty of having small samples sizes when completing research on the children of lesbian parents, particularly the adult offspring of lesbian parents, can mean it is difficult to obtain representative data (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023). However, data on a larger scale can be achieved, such as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Cubbin *et al.,* 2005; Wainwright *et al.,* 2004). This study included questions on parents' same-sex behaviours, and the participants behaviours, which led to obtaining nationally representative data (Wainwright *et al.,* 2004), although this was not specifically related to the gender conformity of children.

Averett's (2016) research can, however, be seen to add to the literature on how the sexual orientation of parents influences the gender conformity of their children. This can link with Queer Theory, where parenting challenges heteronormativity through acts and ideas that parents pass on to their children (Oswald *et al.,* 2005). Queer Theory allows the study of sexuality and gender to focus on knowledge and difference, rather than merely minority interest (Berkowitz, 2009), as the binary view of identity (male/female; homosexual/heterosexual) has created a rubric that has previously limited research and knowledge (Berkowitz, 2009; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2007; Lorber, 1994; Valocchi, 2005). Considering lesbian parents and their children in combination with Queer Theory allows a reconsideration of heteronormative families and contests the idea of the hegemonic family (Bernstein and Reimann, 2001; Carrington, 1999; Fields, 2001; Gamson and Moon, 2004; Stacey, 2002), understanding that identity is complex and socially constructed and gaining insight into how these identities are created (Averett, 2016; Valocchi, 2005). As children of lesbian parents have two mothers, which challenges heteronormative ideas of family, they are socialised to question heteronormative notions of gender and to view a diverse range of gender behaviours as appropriate, meaning that parents and their children contribute to the queering of family and gender (Goldberg, 2007; Oswald *et al.,* 2005). Lesbians becoming parents has, in the past, been criticised by others within the LGBTQ+ community for being conformist and ignoring Queer politics (Hull and Ortyl, 2019; Warner, 1999). However, research since the turn of the millennium has focussed on lesbian families as

challenging heteronormativity and conservative ideals, distancing themselves from the need to be biologically related to children (Dalton and Bielby, 2000; Weeks *et al.,* 2001). Lesbian families challenge the gendered notion of domestic tasks (Dunne, 2000; Sullivan, 1996) and parental roles (Donovan, 2000; Padavic and Butterfield, 2011) and have been described by Stacey (2006) as 'postmodern family pioneers' (p.28) through their queering of heteronormative social roles and values (Calhoun, 2000; Goldberg, 2007).

In addition to the aforementioned critique of Averett's (2016) study, it should also be considered that in this research, and in Goldberg's (2007) paper, some participants had lived with their lesbian or gay parents for all or most of their life, whereas others lived separately. Although this is an important distinction, and may impact on the child's views about their parents and their experiences, whether the child lived with or separately from their parents was not a focus of analysis in Goldberg's (2007) research, meaning that some results may not have been discussed or considered through the comparison of the experiences of living with, or separate to, their lesbian parent (Goldberg, 2007). It should be noted that Goldberg's (2007) study used 'quantitative and qualitative data from 93 heterosexual, 61 lesbian and 48 gay male couples' (p.55) meaning that generalisations about lesbian parents should not be made, unless only focussing on the relevant data. In the results section of Goldberg's (2007) study, 'non-heterosexual parents' were referred to more often than lesbian parents, meaning that data should not be generalised, as this could include gay men (p.557). Sexuality was also viewed in a binary way, with participants being viewed as either heterosexual, gay or

lesbian, but participants may have had other sexualities, such as bisexual or pansexual. In this study, sexuality was assumed based on the partner's gender, rather than through self-report.

Theme 2 of the literature review considered studies that suggested that the sons of lesbian parents were more likely to be gender conforming when compared to daughters, as it is less socially acceptable for boys to be gender non-conforming (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Kane, 2006; Martin, 2009). This has often been based on the perception of parents, however, with Kane's (2006) research in particular focussing on people's perceptions before they became mothers. Fulcher ***et al.'s*** (2007) research is more pertinent here, as they studied the children of lesbian parents, with results showing that gender non-conformity was viewed similarly, regardless of if the behaviours were shown by a boy or a girl, and were viewed as less serious for either gender than when compared to their heterosexual peers. Although this study focusses on the experience of children, these results could suggest that this is because lesbian parents show more liberal attitudes and that these are reflected in their children's perspectives (Fulcher *et al.,* 2007), although too much generality should not be applied to this. It should also be noted that Fulcher ***et al.'s*** (2007) participants were all well-educated and relatively affluent when compared to their peers. This is, in some ways, likely when researching lesbian parents, as these families can face difficulties and financial constraints when trying to have children, including having to self-fund fertility treatment (Fulcher *et al.,* 2007; Tippett, 2022), but, due to the limited diversity within the participant sample, caution should be shown when

generalising these findings. These limitations considered, Fulcher *et al.'s* (2007) research does demonstrate that the sexual orientation of parents can influence their children's gender expression.

All of the parents that Averett (2016) interviewed shared ways in which they resisted heteronormative assumptions of gender, through clothes, toys, names and activities, and, although they did not give the same reasons why this happened, it was concluded that this was linked to their sexualities. Living in a heteronormative society when identifying as LGBTQ+ impacts the way in which parents reproduce gender for their children, showing how this is interactional between the parents and the child, and is influenced by their own realities (Averett, 2016). The findings of Green *et al.* (1986) and Tasker and Golombok (1997), in addition to Averett's (2016) research, links with Social Constructivism, as participants felt that having lesbian parents allowed them to develop more fluid notions of gender (Goldberg, 2007). Research into gender has links with Social Constructivism, as gender is not something that children are, but something that they perform within social interactions (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2007). West and Zimmerman's (1987) work states that 'gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings' (p.128), where 'doing gender means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential or biological' (p.136). Existing gender studies on children have been criticised for focussing on a binary view of gender, such as masculine and feminine interests (Stacey and Biblarz, 2001), so by studying gender non-conformity, a more diverse view of gender

can be considered (Bos and Sandfort, 2010). Gender non-conformity and gender performativity of children can be seen to challenge heteronormative assumptions (Butler, 1990, 1993; Lorber, 1994), despite gender stereotypes beginning in the early years of childhood (Halim 2016; Schroeder and Liben, 2021; Serbin and Sprafkin, 1986; Signorella *et al.,* 1993). Feminist scholars (Gelir, 2022; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004) argue that gender has multiple locations, including through identity and social structure, but socialisation is a vital element of how children learn to behave in gendered situations (Butler, 1990; Lorber, 1994; Martin, 2009; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Research by Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino (2023) has argued that whilst lesbian parents have found ways to resist heteronormative notions of family, what has not been answered is why lesbian parents have to do this (Averett, 2016). Stacey (1997) stated that all lesbian parents 'need to contend with the particular array of psychic, social, legal, practical, and even physical challenges to their very existence that institutionalised hostility to homosexuality' (p.108), although she acknowledged that how lesbian parents respond to these challenges can be different. This again links to Social Constructivism, as it is not the lesbian identity of the parents that shapes how they raise their children, but how they experience being lesbian within a heteronormative society (Averett, 2016).

2.3. Theme 2: Studies From Before 2007 Suggest That Lesbian Parents Raise Gender Conforming Children

The second theme that emerged from the literature review is that earlier studies suggest that lesbian parents raise gender conforming children. This almost exclusively draws from research referenced in Theme 4, the

majority of which is from 2007 or earlier (Allen and Burrell, 1996; Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Goldberg, 2007; Golombok *et al.,* 1983; Green *et al.,* 1986; Kane, 2006; Oswald *et al.,* 2005). This also contradicts Theme 1 of the discussion, as this discusses how lesbians do parent differently when compared to their heterosexual counterparts. This is to be expected, however, as the complex nature of research into lesbian families, and the lower numbers of these that were open within society in previous years, can lead to earlier studies basing findings on a limited number of responses and participants (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023).

Early studies, such as the one undertaken by Green *et al.* (1986), concluded that there were no differences regarding the gender conformity of chosen television shows, games and toys between the 56 children of lesbian and 48 children of heterosexual parents that were studied, based on the mother's interviews. There were, however, themes from the interviews with the children themselves that suggested that the children of lesbian parents had less gender-typical preferences, as well as daughters enjoying more boisterous play (Green *et al.,* 1986; Tasker and Patterson, 2007). As it has previously been highlighted that lesbian parents may conform to gender stereotypes due to societal views, and therefore give less accurate accounts of their children's gender conformity, the interviews with the children, who may have less experience of this, could be more pertinent here (Ortju *et al.,* 2024). However, as this research only used interviews, when a variety of methods such as storytelling or drawing could be considered, some caution should be used when generalising results.

Studies that showed no difference in the gender conformity of the children of heterosexual or lesbian parents (Falk, 1989; Golombok, 1999; Golombok *et al.,* 2003; Green *et al.,* 1986; Patterson, 1992, 1995) were mainly based on lesbians who had previously been, and raised children, in heterosexual relationships, prior to being in a same-sex relationship (Golombok *et al.,* 2003). These studies, however, report that these women were lesbians, when they may be bisexual. This assumes sexual orientation based on their partner's gender, rather than a self-report, meaning that this labelling could be erroneous and could be wrongly describing findings on lesbian parents. Despite this, the early years of socialising a child in a heterosexual family may explain the minimal differences that were found in these studies (Lytton and Romney, 1991; Parsons, 1943; Averett, 2016; Kane, 2009, 2012; Schroeder and Liben, 2021). Other earlier studies, did, however, include a more thorough analysis of children raised by lesbian parents compared to those raised by heterosexual parents. Allen and Burrell (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of research completed from 1971 to 1996, which compared children on measures including gender role behaviour and wellbeing. These studies also reported on parent, child and education setting reports, with sufficient data to effectively triangulate and analyse the results (Pennington and Knight, 2011). The triangulated results of Allen and Burrell's (1996) research showed minimal difference between children of either parent group in all variables that were measured (Pennington and Knight, 2011).

Of other studies that found limited differences between the children of lesbian and heterosexual parents, Golombok *et al.'s* (1983) research is seen as a seminal piece of work. This study assessed sex role behaviour of 37 children with lesbian parents and 38 children with heterosexual parents, using a 14-point sex role scale during interviews with mothers and a five-item scale for interviews with the children (Golombok *et al.,* 1983). Items on the scale included sports and pretend play (Golombok *et al.,* 1983). This research devised different scales depending on the interviewees and found no differences for sons or daughters of lesbian or heterosexual parents, as reported by the mothers or by the children (Anderssen *et al.,* 2002). Although useful, and one of the first pieces of research that included the children of lesbian parents, Golombok *et al.'s* (1983) study is over thirty years old, with advances in understanding and language since completion of this research (Schiappa, 2022). This has included a move from the understanding of sex as a biological concept, as used by Golombok *et al.* (1983) in their research, towards an understanding of gender expression and identity (Schiappa, 2022). Feminist texts (Bem, 1974; Oakley, 1972) were influential in this change of language, with sex still being defined as biological, but gender being viewed as a social category (Schiappa, 2022). Golombok *et al.'s* (1983) research should therefore be treated with some caution when used in the present day, as 'sex' is used throughout, when it is gendered behaviours that are being studied.

Studies that suggest minimal differences between the children of lesbian or heterosexual parents (Green *et al.,* 1986; Tasker and Patterson, 2007) add to the heteronormativity surrounding parenting, gender expression and sexual orientation (Garwood and Lewis, 2019; Wainwright *et al.,* 2004). This reinforces the view of heterosexual parent families being better, as 'differences equal deficits' (Goldberg, 2007, p.550), with lesbian parent families only being accepted if they conform to heterosexual norms (Chevrette, 2013; Farr, 2016; Garwood and Lewis, 2019; Tasker, 2005). Rather than heterosexual parents and their children being viewed as one of various family configurations, this means that heterosexual parent families are framed as being the ideal family unit and something that lesbian parents should aspire to be (Oswald *et al.,* 2005, 2009). This creates negative implications for lesbian parent families, as treating the children of heterosexual and lesbian parents as distinct groups implies difference (Garwood and Lewis, 2019), which 'others' lesbian parent families as being in opposition to heterosexual parent families (Hicks, 2005b), rather than as a variety of family (Garwood and Lewis, 2019; Oswald *et al.,* 2009). This can mean that lesbian parents who fit into heteronormative assumptions are seen as acceptable, whereas those who are less conventional are viewed negatively (Richardson, 2005; Welsh, 2011).

Berkowitz and Ryan's (2011) work suggested that although there are different experiences for lesbian parents, they shared related concerns about their children's gender conformity. This research was, however,

based on eighteen lesbian parents, which is too small a number to generalise these results. It is unlikely that all lesbian parents would reproduce gender in a similar way, as these individual's beliefs, experiences and values would form a vital element of parenting practices (Endendijk *et al.,* 2017; Super and Harkness, 2002). Social Constructivism can also be used here to understand the 'truth' that lesbian parents create (Dunne, 2000), which will be distinct from the experiences of others. Research by Kane (2006) suggested that lesbian parents expressed more concern than heterosexual parents in ensuring that their children acted in accordance with societal gender norms, with Goldberg (2010) suggesting that 'such concerns may lead some lesbian parents… to guide their children's gender performance in such a way that their behaviour will not be considered radical or deviant' (p.132). This has been supported by other studies (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2009; Hequembourg, 2007) which state that because lesbian parents face more scrutiny within society, they reproduce heteronormative parenting paradigms of gender conformity, for example through stereotypical roles and toys. It should be noted that although some studies suggested that the children of lesbian parents were more likely to be bullied due to their mother's sexual orientation, these were from the early 1990s and 2000s (Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Gartrell *et al.,* 2005; Tasker, 1999). These studies are at least 20 years old and lesbian parent families are now more visible in society, meaning that the belief that lesbian parents may encourage their children to conform their gender to reduce bullying may be outdated. Averett (2016) summarised elements of these points, however, with the assertion that

lesbian parents are raising their children in a society that can be hostile towards LGBTQ+ people. The use of Queer Theory within research is relevant here, as to queer the family in this way creates the potential of risk (Oswald *et al.,* 2005). This shows why lesbian parents may conform and reproduce heteronormative narratives, but also raises questions about the validity of this research, when participants are recruited as volunteers (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). The majority of research before 2007 (Allen and Burrell, 1996; Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Goldberg, 2007; Golombok *et al.,* 1983; Green *et al.,* 1986; Kane, 2006; Oswald *et al.,* 2005) used volunteer samples, which limits the validity of, and ability to generalise, these results. Although the extent of bias in these studies cannot be measured, it should be noted that the children of lesbian parents who display gender non-conformity may not have volunteered to participate, due to the social stigma and potential for discrimination that they were already experiencing (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Golombok *et al.,* 2003). Studies that included volunteer participants and showed no difference in gender conformity should therefore be treated with caution.

Bos and Sandfort's (2010) research did not find differences in the gender conformity of the children of lesbian parents when compared to those raised by heterosexual parents and is notable as this was published post-2007. This research interviewed children between 10 and 12 years old and, as Bos and Sandfort's (2010) results were based on the answers that children gave, these could have been impacted by a range of factors, including conformity. Although the children being interviewed shows

improvements when compared to studies that only interview the parents, triangulating with other data sources, such as teachers and peers, and using different methods, such as observations, would have created richer data (Bos and Sandfort, 2010). In addition to this, the study was completed over a period of two years, meaning that it provided an insight into that time period, but not into adolescence. Some caution should therefore be taken when generalising the results of this study, and the lack of difference found in the gender conformity, as this could be statistically unreliable due to the limited time period (Bos and Sandfort, 2010). Future research with larger cohorts of children in a longitudinal study may therefore be useful to understand the significance of these results as this would, for example, allow an exploration of changes into their teenage years (Bos and Sandfort, 2010).

Of the early studies that did find differences in the way that lesbian and heterosexual people parent, Stacey and Biblarz's (2001) research is one of the most notable. Their literature review of 21 pieces of research concluded that lesbian parents were more likely to allow their children to embrace their non-conformity across various aspects, not just gender (Goldberg, 2007). Stacey and Biblarz (2001) also criticised other researchers for dismissing the differences that were found between children of lesbian parents compared to those with heterosexual parents. Stacey and Biblarz's (2001) study was a meta-analysis and critique of the existing research on lesbian parents, and they suggested that it was problematic for scholars to report that there were no differences between

lesbian and heterosexual parents. They reported that anti-gay researchers viewed homosexuality as a problem, meaning that they pathologized homosexuality and considered same-sex behaviours a maladjustment (Goldberg, 2007). Due to the change in societal views of lesbian parents, other scholars may be sensitive to these findings, and show more caution when interpreting results that show differences between the children of lesbian parents and those of heterosexual parents. Stacey and Biblarz (2001) argued that politicising research into the children of lesbian parents had led to a lack of meaningful research in the field (Goldberg, 2007), and concluded that the children of lesbian parents do differ, particularly in relation to gender conformity. Despite this, their study did not include meaningful statistical analysis, instead drawing conclusions based on 21 other studies and ignoring key differences in findings in the core aspects of gender, including gender expression and understanding of gender roles (Goldberg, 2007; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001). This research considered children's thoughts on gender and their gender expression as equally important and used both themes as ways to measure their gender development (Stacey and Biblarz, 2001). However, when considering psychological research on gender development, it is widely established that gender identity and related behaviours are fixed and linked to children's self-confidence and self-awareness, but thoughts and attitudes are able to be influenced, particularly by parents (Golombok and Hines, 2002; Golombok *et al.,* 2003; Jodl *et al.,* 2001; Maccoby, 1998). This would suggest that the differences proposed by Stacey and Biblarz (2001) should be treated with some caution, as they have not effectively

understood the significance of gender identity and conformity when compared to thoughts and feelings regarding gender.

On first analysis, Berkowitz and Ryan's (2011) study suggests that lesbian parents display gender conformity, with one participant detailing that although she dressed her daughter in pink clothes, she also purchased blue clothes in case she had a son. The suggestion made was that dressing their child in the gendered clothes would lead to less social stigma as a lesbian parent (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). Although this analysis could be relevant, 11 out of 40 of Berkowitz and Ryan's participants portrayed elements of reinforcing heteronormative gender assumptions alongside challenging this, through the deconstruction and reconstruction of gender. For example, one participant initially wanted a daughter, to reproduce her self-described femininity, but was later pleased that she had a son so that she could act as a 'tomboy' (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). This could be viewed as reinforcing gender norms, but applying Queer Theory to this shows the fluidity of gender expression, whilst also queering the notion of the male and female binary, as a feminine woman is reproducing both masculine and feminine gender performances (Berkowitz, 2009; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). This, therefore, suggests that lesbian parents can challenge heteronormative performances of gender, whilst highlighting the instability of the gender binary (Berkowitz, 2009; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011).

2.4. Theme 3: Advancements in Language and Understanding in More Recent Studies

Whilst earlier studies suggested that comparisons between the children of heterosexual and lesbian parents showed minimal differences, studies conducted after 2007 began to show differences, not only in findings related to children's gender conformity, but also progression in language and understanding. This may, in part, be due to a change in society's view of lesbian parents, with the legalisation of same-sex marriage (see Appendix 3 for relevant legislation) and same-sex parenting being legitimised (Averett, 2016; Baunach, 2012; Cao *et al.,* 2017; Hatzenbuehler *et al.,* 2018; Pereira and Monteiro, 2017; Teo *et al.,* 2022). Although this might be relevant to some lesbian parents, it is not relevant to all parents within the LGBTQ+ community, as research suggests that LGBTQ+ rights mainly benefit white, middle-class gay men and lesbians (Averett, 2016; Stein, 2015). It is also apparent that some research conducted before 2007 often only interviewed white parents (Kane, 2006) and those who were upper- or middle-class (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). Caution should therefore be given when generalising these results to all lesbian parents, particularly those who have different ethnicities or are working- or lower-classes.

The language used in studies conducted before 2007 is often limited and does not reflect the diversity and complexity within the LGBTQ+ community. Goldberg's (2007) study, for example, discussed 'non-heterosexual' parents as one homogenous group and stated that they

were more comfortable with gender non-conformity than those who had a more traditional family unit. This research has since been used in discussions on lesbian parents' views on gender non-conformity, even though the research does not differentiate between lesbians, gay men or bisexual people (Goldberg, 2007). Gay men and lesbians can have different experiences in society, both as individuals and as parents (Magrath *et al.,* 2022). Gay men are often expected to fulfil stereotypical assumptions of masculinity, including emotional stoicism (Anderson, 2009) and are still living with the negative aftereffects of the AIDS crisis (Clements and Field, 2014; Peterson, 2011). In addition, gay men often experience more barriers to parenthood, with adoption or surrogacy usually their most viable options, compared to some lesbian parents who can pursue fertility treatment (Goldberg, 2012). The experience of lesbian and gay parents should not, therefore, be discussed as one homogenous group, and instead researched as different variations of family units.

In later works, lesbian parenting has, therefore, been conceptualised differently than that of gay male parenting (Berkowitz, 2009). In society before 2007, the concept of a lesbian mother was considered an oxymoron (Berkowitz, 2009; Hequemborg and Farrell, 1999; Lewin, 2006). This reaction was because motherhood was regarded as a natural part of womanhood, society and femininity, whereas Queer Theorists demonstrated that lesbians disrupted the social order (Berkowitz, 2009; Lewin, 2006). Conceptualising lesbian parenting as a separate entity, has

allowed a more meaningful insight into the role of a lesbian parent and the related impact on their child's gender conformity (Berkowitz, 2009).

Research into lesbian parent families before 2007 focussed on the interconnection of gender and sexuality (Kane, 2006). Golombok and Tasker (1996) reported on children's future sexuality and gender conformity interchangeably in their study, demonstrating a misunderstanding in the distinct differences between these concepts. Studies show that parents associate gender conformity with heterosexuality when reviewing their children's gendered behaviours, and they, therefore, link gender non-conformity with same-sex attraction as adults (Kane, 2006; Sedgwick 1991a). Averett's (2016) study, however, found that a parent's perception of the social acceptance of LGBTQ+ people influenced how they reproduced gender for their children. This does not, however, show how society reacted to gender non-conformity, which again suggests that parents confuse the two identities. Although there are studies that show that same-sex attracted adults showed gender non-confirming behaviour in childhood to a higher degree than their heterosexual peers (Averett, 2016; Bryant 2006, 2008), there is not a definitive link between the two. Gender identity and sexual orientation have, therefore, been linked discursively, meaning that connections are often made, potentially erroneously, when studying gendered behaviour in children.

Berkowitz and Ryan's (2011) study highlighted that there was an increasing amount of research exploring the interconnection between children's gender conformity and sexual orientation. These included, but were not limited to, the influence of parent's gender expression and sexual orientation (Goldberg, 2007) and the gender of the child and peer interaction (MacCallum and Golombok, 2004). Berkowitz and Ryan's (2011) work found that parents wanted their children to display normative gendered behaviours, but this did not include an explicit mention of them being heterosexual. This suggests that parents expect their children to be heterosexual, and therefore no mention of a preferred sexual orientation is needed within a heteronormative culture (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). Research by Berkowitz and Ryan (2011) focussed on how parents reconstructed gender expression for their children through their own experience of gender and sexuality (Kane, 2006), but this simplifies a complex concept. Sexuality and gender are different identities, with unique social interactions (Sedgwick, 1991b). Earlier studies suggested that this was due to sexuality being an aspect of social life, whereas gender was a binary social division (Jackson, 2006). This is, however, now an outdated viewpoint (Garrett-Walker and Montagno, 2023). The emergence of studies into the fluidity and variety of genders (Garrett-Walker and Montagno, 2023; Hord, 2022; Richardson, 2007; Treharne and Beres, 2016) and an increasing focus on sexual orientation within research has allowed for the view that, whilst there are intersections between gender and sexuality, they are also separate, complex identities (Garrett-Walker and Montagno, 2023; Hord, 2022; Morgenroth and Ryan, 2020; Sojo *et al.,*

2023). Complexity theory is relevant here, to understand not only the differences between how lesbians' parent, but also the distinction between gender and sexuality. Complexity theory is rooted in science and economics but has since been extended to social thought (Fraser and Greenhalgh, 2001) and in research on the complexity of social order (Maasen and Weingart, 2000; Pandey *et al.,* 2023; Thrift, 1999; Urry, 2005). Using complexity theory allows an understanding of the relationship between two components (Cuadrado-Ballesteros *et al.,* 2017; Urry, 2005), in this example gender and sexuality, whilst acknowledging the complexity of causality (Pandey *et al.,* 2023). Complexity theory can also explain how changes happen over time, for example the advancement in language and understanding in this area of research (Gligor *et al.,* 2022). The changes did not happen in a linear way, but through qualitative advancements and further research (Byrne and Callaghan, 2013). Complexity theory also allows consideration of multiple theories and perspectives (Pandey *et al.,* 2023), as seen through using Queer Theory and Social Constructivism. Byrne and Callaghan's (2013) work and definition are relevant here:

> 'when we say complexity theory we mean by theory a framework for understanding which asserts the ontological position that much of the world and most of the social world consists of complex systems and if we want to understand it we have to understand it in those terms' (p. 8).

Gender and sexuality are complex social systems, and conflating the two can erase or confuse individual's identities (Bauer *et al.,* 2009; Elia, 2014; Garrett-Walker and Montagno, 2023; Grant *et al.,* 2014; Watson *et al.,* 2020). There

have, however, been advancements in understanding the interconnections and distinctions between them (James *et al.,* 2016; Morandini *et al.,* 2017; Watson *et al.,* 2020), which has strengthened research in this area.

2.5. Conclusion

The first theme discussed in this literature review was lesbian parents resisting heteronormative assumptions of parenting and gender through challenging stereotypes. Social Constructivism and Queer Theory were used throughout this section to explore if lesbian parenting is different to heterosexual parenting, as their social construction will differ (Dunne, 2000; Kelan, 2010; Oswald *et al.,* 2005). This also challenges the heteronormative view that families must be biologically related (Dunne, 2000; Goldberg, 2007), as Social Constructivism can be used to understand that children's experiences, including their gender expression, are influenced by a variety of factors (Goldberg, 2007), including their parents (Goldberg, 2007; Kane, 2006; Saffron, 1998). Despite this, research has produced contradictory findings on lesbian parents raising gender non-conforming children (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Golombok *et al.,* 2003; Schroeder and Liben, 2021). The research of Lorber (1994), Goldberg (2007) and Green *et al.* (1986) is most pertinent as these results show that gender non-conformity is more acceptable for daughters than sons. Heteronormativity can also be challenged through the use of Queer Theory, which disrupts the notion of more acceptable family units, and introduces concepts such as lesbian parenting (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023; Levin *et al.,* 2020; Ward and Schneider, 2009).

Theme 2 focussed on studies from pre-2007, which suggested that lesbian parents raise gender conforming children (Allen and Burrell, 1996; Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Goldberg, 2007; Kane, 2006; Oswald *et al.,* 2005). Earlier studies (Falk, 1989; Golombok, 1999; Golombok *et al.,* 2003; Green *et al.,* 1986; Patterson, 1992, 1995) had access to fewer lesbian families to base their research on, leading to a limited number of participants (Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2023). These studies (Falk, 1989; Golombok, 1999; Golombok *et al.,* 2003; Green *et al.,* 1986; Patterson, 1992, 1995) found no difference in the gender conformity of the children of heterosexual or lesbian parents. The view of lesbian parents as being similar to heterosexual parents adds to heteronormative assumptions that there is a 'right' sort of lesbian family, with only those who conform to this being accepted (Chevrette, 2013; Farr, 2016; Garwood and Lewis, 2019; Hicks, 2005b; Tasker, 2005).

Theme 3 focussed on the advancements in language and understand in more recent studies, notably those from after 2007. This included changing societal views towards lesbian parents (Averett, 2016; Teo *et al.,* 2022), although these changes often only benefit white, middle-class lesbians or gay men (Averett, 2016). Studies after 2007 were, however, more likely to distinguish between lesbian and gay parents (Berkowitz, 2009; Magrath *et al.,* 2022). Complexity Theory is a useful theoretical lens to use in this area, to explore and critically analyse the interconnection between gender conformity and sexual orientation. Berkowitz and Ryan's (2011) study suggested that the two identities were connected, with results stating that parents wanted their

children to show normative gendered behaviours, but without expressly stating that they wished them to be heterosexual, due to assumptions within a heteronormative culture (Garrett-Walker and Montagno, 2023). The use of Complexity Theory here allows a critique of both lesbian parenting and the distinction between gender and sexuality (Cuadrado-Ballesteros *et al.,* 2017; Urry, 2005). Gender and sexuality are complex entities and conflating the two can confuse identities and results (Garrett-Walker and Montagno, 2023; Watson *et al.,* 2020).

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The completed literature review has raised questions, shown gaps in the research and highlighted future areas of study. Many of the studies included in this literature review (Averett, 2016; Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Endendijk *et al.,* 2017; Goldberg, 2009; Kane, 2006) discussed the lack of diversity available within their participant samples. For example, Kane's (2006) work suggested that there was diversity regarding sexual orientation of the sample, with five gay and lesbian parents included, but of these five, all were white, in relationships, well-educated and middle- or upper-class. The findings of this study in relation to gender conformity of their children, showed that lesbian and gay parents had similar thoughts as heterosexual parents. It is difficult to generalise these results, however, as there is a lack of intersectionality within the participant sample. A variety of factors can influence the way that parents socialise their children, including class, ethnicity, legal protection and gender (Averett, 2016). The impact of the intersectionality of lesbian parents on children's gender conformity needs further research to understand the effect of social factors such as gender identity (for parents and children), sexual orientation, location, ethnicity and class, amongst other characteristics (Goldberg, 2023).

Lareau (2011) argued that middle-class parents are more likely to expect their children to conform, whereas working-class parents allow their children more freedom. Kane (2012) challenged this, however, and suggested that middle-class children are given more choice in their

expression, including through the resistance of gender norms, whereas working-class parents may feel that their children will face more barriers and therefore non-conformity would further impact on them (Averett, 2016). More research is needed with different social classes of lesbian parents to understand the impact of class on their children's gender conformity. Lesbian parents are more likely to be of a more secure financial status, potentially meaning better educated and of a higher class, because of the financial implications of fertility treatment (Meads *et al.,* 2021; Smith *et al.,* 2021). Local commissioning agreements mean that some women, depending on their home address, cannot access NHS funded treatment and would need to access private clinics (Aktoz *et al.,* 2024). A rule change in April 2005 that required sperm donors to provide contact details and all artificial insemination treatment to be performed in a clinic, also reduced cheaper options for same-sex women of purchasing sperm samples from abroad to be delivered directly to their home address, thus having a financial implication (Meads *et al.,* 2021). The concept of intersectionality and social power means that if someone is disadvantaged in one or more ways, they are more likely to need to conform (Kane, 2012). It is therefore apparent that there may still be a lack of lower-class lesbians who are able to participate in research of this nature, limiting the application of results (Meads *et al.,* 2021).

Further research is also needed on the impact and implications of different routes into parenting, including co-parenting (Weeks *et al.,* 2001) and shared biological motherhood (Golombok *et al.,* 2023; Shaw *et al.,* 2023).

Co-parenting is defined as ‘reproductive collaborations’ (Bremner, 2017) between individuals or couples, with each adult in this arrangement playing a role in the child’s life (Surtees and Bremner, 2020) and is becoming increasingly common, particularly for gay and lesbian people (Lewin, 2009; Jadva *et al.,* 2015). Despite this, there are limited research papers on this topic (Imaz, 2017; Weeks *et al.,* 2001). Shared biological motherhood is treatment whereby the egg of one parent is used with donor sperm to create an embryo and this is then implanted into the other parent, who carries the pregnancy (Aktoz *et al.,* 2024; Carpinello *et al.,* 2016; Golombok *et al.,* 2023; Lee *et al.,* 2013). This treatment option was first used in 2010 (Marina *et al.,* 2010) and, so, is still a relatively new option. Previous research has focussed on the relationship of the biological and non-biological mother with their children (Braeways *et al.,* 1997; Bos *et al.,* 2012; Golombok *et al.,* 1997; MacCallum and Golomobok, 2004), with a variety of studies suggesting that children are closer to their biological mother than their non-biological mother (Gartrell *et al.,* 2000, 2006; Patterson, 1995; Pelka, 2009). With an increase in the number of lesbian couples opting for shared biological motherhood (Bower-Brown *et al.,* 2023; Golombok *et al.,* 2023), it would, therefore, also be interesting for future studies to focus on potential differences between non-biological, biological and shared biological parenting routes on the impact of gender conformity on relationships with their children.

Early research into the children of lesbian parents and the use of Social Constructivism highlighted the unique social and cultural experience and

stigma that they faced (Anderssen *et al.,* 2002; Golombok *et al.,* 2003; Patterson, 1992; Tasker, 1999). However, there have been a limited number of longitudinal studies (Gartrell *et al.,* 2005), although notable exceptions do include the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Cubbin *et al.,* 2005; Wainwright *et al.,* 2004). Although this study asked questions on same-sex behaviours and attitudes, it was not specifically researching the children of lesbian parents, or their views on gender conformity, so additional longitudinal research is needed. Longitudinal studies can allow the life course of the children of lesbian parents to be considered (Garwood and Lewis, 2019). The life course is defined as a series of events that an individual experiences during their life (Elder, 1994, 1998) and can be a useful way of researching the experience of the children of lesbian parents (Garwood and Lewis, 2019). Utilising a life course analysis can include research into the experience of personal development, changes to social acceptance and legislation and family experience (Elder, 1998), which provides the opportunity for research to move beyond heteronormative thinking (Garwood and Lewis, 2019). Life course analysis has been critiqued as being heteronormative through its incorporation of institutionalised life events such as marriage, but others have suggested that it allows an exploration of individual agency which is specific to each person (Elder, 1998; Garwood and Lewis, 2019; Halberstam, 2005; Hunt, 2005; Schwiter, 2011). Binary characterisations of lesbian parent families, that are critiqued by Queer theorists, simplify the complexity and diversity of experience of the children of lesbian parents

and a life course approach may help to reveal these more fully (Garwood and Lewis, 2019; Ryan-Flood, 2009)

Further research is also needed understand the gendered advice that is given to parents, as, despite Kane's (2012) work stating that parenting advice books contained gender stereotypical advice (Krafchick *et al.,* 2005; Martin, 2005; Riggs, 2008), this is now 12 years out of date and further research should be completed in this area to assess the current levels of gendered advice provided in such guides.

The reasoning for the increased number of studies into the children of lesbian and gay parents since 2007 should also be considered. This may be due to societal attitudes improving towards LGBTQ+ people, but this has not been studied in detail (Goldberg, 2007). Furthermore, the increase in studies has raised questions for future research. More could be made of how lesbian parents queer gender and sexuality for their children (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011), in addition to a focus on the intergenerational relationships of the children of lesbian parents (Goldberg, 2007). Often the research focuses on how the children of lesbian parents differ from those of heterosexual parents, which simplifies a complex concept, suggesting that their parents' sexual orientation, and the impact of this, is the only thing that differs in their experiences (Goldberg, 2007). However, the impact of being part of a family that is socially marginalised is a more significant difference between these two groups, meaning that future studies should consider this wider societal influence (Goldberg, 2007).

Further research is therefore recommended to understand and enable:

- The impact of intersectionality of lesbian parents on children's gender conformity, to understand the effect of social factors such as gender identity, sexual orientation, location and ethnicity (Goldberg, 2023).
- The social classes of lesbian parents to understand the impact of class on children's gender conformity (Meads *et al.,* 2021).
- Co-parenting and shared biological motherhood (Golombok *et al.,* 2023; Shaw *et al.,* 2023), to focus on potential differences between non-biological, biological and shared biological parenting routes on gender conformity on relationships with their children.
- Longitudinal studies to study the life course of the children of lesbian parents (Garwood and Lewis, 2019).
- A review of parenting advice books (Kane, 2012; Krafchick *et al.,* 2005; Martin, 2005; Riggs, 2008).
- Why there was a proliferation of studies into lesbian and gay parents after 2007 (Goldberg, 2007).

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5. APPENDICES

5.1. Appendix 1: Ethics Form

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

RESEARCH STUDENTS This form is to be completed by the student within **SIX** months for full-time students and **TWELVE** months for part time students, after the commencement of the research degree or following progression to Part Two of your course. Once complete, submit this form via the ***MyTSD Doctoral College Portal*** at (https://mytsd.uwtsd.ac.uk). This document is also available in Welsh.
RESEARCH STAFF ONLY All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk , with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name.
STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity. Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:	Rachel Salmon			
2	Tick all boxes that apply:	Member of staff:	☐	Honorary research fellow:	☐

	Undergraduate Student	☐	Taught Postgraduate Student	☒	Postgraduate Research Student	☐

3	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	University of Wales Trinity St David
4	Campus:	Carmarthen (Distance learning)
5	E-mail address:	2106780@student.uwtsd.ac.uk
6	Contact Telephone Number:	
	For students:	
7	Student Number:	2106780
8	Programme of Study:	MA Equity & Diversity in Society
9	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Ken Dicks

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)	**YES**	☒	**NO**	☐
				Date	
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): ***Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval***	Research Degrees Committee	☐		
		Institute Research Committee	☐		
		Other (write in) Supervisor	☒	**01/11/2023**	

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	**UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice**	☒
2	**UWTSD Research Data Management Policy**	☒
3	*[List any other relevant documents here]*	☐

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity
If there are external collaborators then you should gain consent from the contact persons to share their personal data with the university. If there are no external collaborators then leave this section blank and continue to section E.

1	Institution					
2	Contact person name					
3	Contact person e-mail address					
4	Is your research externally funded?		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
5	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
6	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
7		Employed	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
8	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)?	If YES then the permission question below does not need to be answered.	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
9	Has permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation?	(If YES attach copy) If NO the application cannot continue	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

10	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
	If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation (this may be a copy of an email if appropriate).				

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	Gender conformity in children of women in a same-sex relationship		
2	Proposed start date:	November 2023	Proposed end date:	
	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words per section) **Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the points below:** *Purpose of Research Activity* *Proposed Research Question* *Aims of Research Activity* *Objectives of Research Activity*			

	Demonstrate, briefly, how **Existing Research** has informed the proposed activity and explain *What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge* *How it addresses an area of importance.*
3	**Purpose of Research Activity** To ascertain whether lesbian/same-sex parents raise gender non-conforming children (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011). Same sex parents have only been the focus of study in the last three decades (Allen & Demo, 1995; Berkowitz, 2009; Tasker & Patterson, 2007) due to previously having limited legal rights regarding having or adopting children (Berkowitz, 2009). Lesbian parents are still subjected to increased moral judgement due to their sexual orientation (Goldberg 2010; Kane 2006) and have more people assessing their parenting, including families, teachers and even curious strangers (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Clarke 2002). Lesbian parents also have to face heteronormativity (Averett, 2016), defined as a set of overlapping process, including cultural, political, legal and interpersonal, that produce and reproduce heterosexuality as both the normal and the ideal (Jackson 2006; Kitzinger 2005; Schilt and Westbrook 2009). Queer theory is therefore used throughout as this challenges binary categories such as homosexual/heterosexual and male/female (Berkowitz, 2009; Goldberg, 2007), alongside constructivism, as when using a social-constructionist approach, children of lesbian parents and children of heterosexual parents experience social reality differently (Goldberg, 2007). Gender non-conformity, meaning behaviours or appearance that do not conform to social expectations of gender (Averett, 2016; West and Zimmerman, 1987), is also used alongside gender performativity (Butler, 1989) to consider if, how and why lesbian parents raise gender non-conforming children. (this box should expand as you type)
4	**Research Question** Do lesbian parents raise gender non-conforming children? (this box should expand as you type)
5	**Aims of Research Activity** To understand if lesbian parents raise gender non-conforming children and, if they do, why this may be the case. (this box should expand as you type)

6	**Objectives of Research Activity** Firstly, to give definitions of what gender non-confirming (Averett, 2016; West and Zimmerman, 1987); heteronormative (Averett, 2016; Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Lancaster, 2003; Phelan, 2001); lesbian parents (Stein 2013); queer theory (Epstein, 1996; Gamson and Moon, 2004) and gender performativity (Butler, 1989; Kane 2006; Martin 2005; Sedgwick 1991a) are, to set a basis and outline for the work. A lit review of seminal (Parsons, 1943; Coltrane and Adams, 1997; Golombok, 2000; Maccoby, 1998; Reimann, 1997; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001) and more recent studies (Ascigil *et al.,* 2021; Averett, 2016; Ellis-Davies *et al.,* 2022; Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2022; Schroeder and Liben, 2021) will follow. Four proposed themes will then be reviewed: lesbian parents raising girls and resisting femininity (Averett, 2016; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2007); lesbian parents raising boys as less stereotypically masculine (Connell, 1995; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Bos and Sandfort, 2010); impact of parents own LGBTQ+ status on children's gender expression (Averett, 2016; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg 2007; MacCallum and Golombok 2004) and that lesbian parents actually uphold gender binaries and norms due to societal pressure (Berkowitz, 2009; Clarke, 2002). (this box should expand as you type)
	Proposed methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that **may** be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here, but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.
7	A literature review will be used, alongside Queer theory (Berkowitz, 2009; Goldberg, 2007) and social constructionist theory (Goldberg, 2007). (this box should expand as you type)
	Location of research activity Identify all locations where research activity will take place.
8	N/A (this box should expand as you type)
	Research activity outside of the UK If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are

	any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants. If you live in the country where you will do the research then please state this.
9	n/A *(this box should expand as you type)*

10	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents **NOT** publicly available?	**NO**	☒
		YES	☐
11	If Yes, please provide details here of how you will gain access to specific documentation that is not in the public domain and that this is in accordance with the current data protection law of the country in question and that of England and Wales. *(this box should expand as you type)*		

	Does your research relate to one or more of the seven aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?	**YES**	**NO**
12	A prosperous Wales	☐	☐
13	A resilient Wales	☐	☐
14	A healthier Wales	☐	☐
15	A more equal Wales	☒	☐
16	A Wales of cohesive communities	☒	☐
17	A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	☐	☐
18	A globally responsible Wales	☐	☐
19	If YES to any of the above, please give details:		
	Research will focus on LGBTQ+ families within Britain, which will include Wales. (this box should expand as you type)		

SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

	Will the research activity include:	**YES**	**NO**
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☐	☒
2	Use of interviews?	☐	☒
3	Use of focus groups?	☐	☒
4	Use of participant diaries?	☐	☒

5	Use of video or audio recording?	☐	☒
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☐	☒
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☒
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☒
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☒
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☒
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☒
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	☐	☒
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.	☐	☐
	Details of any other primary data collection method: N/A (this box should expand as you type)		

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

If there are no participants then do not complete this section, but go directly to section H.

	Who are the intended participants:	**YES**	**NO**
1	Students or staff at the University?	☐	☐
2	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☐	☐
3	Vulnerable adults?	☐	☐
4	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☐	☐
5	Prisoners?	☐	☐
6	Young offenders?	☐	☐
7	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☐

8	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☐
9	Others. Please indicate the participants below, and specifically any group who may be unable to give consent.	☐	☐
	Details of any other participant groups: (this box should expand as you type)		

	Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
10	How many participants are expected?	*(this box should expand as you type)*
11	Who will the participants be?	*(this box should expand as you type)*
12	How will you identify the participants?	*(this box should expand as you type)*

	Information for participants:	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
13	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☐	☐	☐
14	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☐	☐	☐
15	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☐	☐	☐
16	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☐	☐	☐
17	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☐	☐	☐
18	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☐	☐	☐
19	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☐	☐	☐
20	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☐	☐	☐
21	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☐	☐	☐
22	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			

	(this box should expand as you type)

	Information for participants:	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
24	Will participants be paid?	☐	☐	☐
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☐	☐	☐
26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☐	☐
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☐	☐
28	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
	(this box should expand as you type)			

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

	Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them. If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.		
1	Full risk assessment completed and appended?	Yes	☐
		No	☒
2	**Risks to participants** For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information		
	Risk to participants: *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to participants:* *(this box should expand as you type)*	
3	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities		
	(this box should expand as you type)		
4	**Risks to the investigator**		

	For example: personal health & safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest	
	Risk to the investigator: Holds a LGBTQ+ identity and planning children and may experience emotional upset over some research *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to the investigator:* Ability to access counselling through NHS and work if needed *(this box should expand as you type)*
5	**University/institutional risks** For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection	
	Risk to the University: *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to the University:* *(this box should expand as you type)*
6	**Environmental risks** For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems	
	Risk to the environment: *(this box should expand as you type)*	*How you will mitigate the risk to environment:* *(this box should expand as you type)*

	Disclosure and Barring Service			
	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
7	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	☐	☒	☐
8	If YES, please give the certificate number. If the certificate number is not available please write “Pending”; in this case any ethical approval will be subject to providing the appropriate certificate number.			

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

1	**Feedback** What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
	N/A *(this box should expand as you type)*
2	**Informed consent** Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for

	N/A *(this box should expand as you type)*
	N/A *(this box should expand as you type)*

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

2	*(this box should expand as you type)*		
4	*(this box should expand as you type)*		

	Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the	YES	NO

	following ways?		
5	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☐	☒
6	University computers?	☐	☒
7	Private company computers?	☒	☐
8	Home or other personal computers?	☒	☐
9	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☒	☐
10	"Cloud" storage or websites?	☐	☒
11	Other – specify:	☐	☒
12	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	All computers (personal and work) password encrypted and have up to date antivirus software *(this box should expand as you type)*		

	Data Protection		
	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	**YES**	**NO**
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☐	☒
14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	☐	☒
15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☒
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☐	☒
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
19	Use of data management system?	☐	☒
20	Data archiving?	☐	☒
21	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and any international equivalents, where appropriate):		
	(this box should expand as you type)		
22	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		
	(this box should expand as you type)		
23	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the		

	research activity:		
	(this box should expand as you type)		
24	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.		
	(this box should expand as you type)		
25	Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. (*Most relevant to academic staff)*		
	(this box should expand as you type)		
26	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	**YES**	☒
27	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	**YES**	☒

SECTION K: Declaration

	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants**.** In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
1	**Signature of applicant:**	Rachel Salmon	**Date:** 24/10/23

For STUDENT Submissions:

2	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Ken Dicks	**Date: 26/10/2024**
3	Signature:		

For STAFF Submissions:

4	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:		**Date:**
5	Signature:		

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
☒	I have completed **ALL RELEVANT** sections of the form in full.
☒	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☐	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (**where appropriate**)
☐	I have attached a full risk assessment (where appropriate) *ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE **ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT***
☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
☐	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.

RESEARCH STUDENTS ONLY
Once complete, submit this form via the **MyTSD Doctoral College Portal** at (https://mytsd.uwtsd.ac.uk).

RESEARCH STAFF ONLY
All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk , with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name.

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.

5.2. Appendix 2: Proposal

PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Institute of Education and Humanities/
Yr Athrofa Addysg a'r Dyniaethau

MA Dissertation Approval Form/
Ffurflen Gymeradwyo Traethawd Hir MA

Student Name/ *Enw Myfyriwr*	Rachel Salmon
Degree Scheme/ *Cynllun Gradd*	MA Equity & Diversity in Society
Start date/ *Dyddiad cychwyn*	October 2023

I have completed about to complete* Part 1 of my degree.
*Please delete as appropriate.

Yr wyf wedi/ ar fun cwblhau Rhan 1 o fy ngradd
** Dileu fel sy'n briodol*

Title of Dissertation: *Teitl eich Traethawd Hir*
Gender non-conformity in children of lesbian parents
Research Question *Cwestiwn Ymchwil*
• Do lesbian parents raise gender non-conforming children?
Aims and Objectives: *Nodau ac Amcanion*
To understand if lesbian parents raise gender non-conforming children and, if they do, why this may be the case. • To give definitions of, and rational behind selecting: • gender non-confirming (Averett, 2016; West and Zimmerman, 1987) • heteronormative (Averett, 2016; Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Lancaster, 2003; Phelan, 2001) • lesbian parents (Stein 2013); queer theory (Epstein, 1996; Gamson and Moon, 2004)

- gender performativity (Butler, 1989; Kane 2006; Martin 2005; Sedgwick 1991a)
- A lit review of seminal (Parsons, 1943; Coltrane and Adams, 1997; Golombok, 2000; Maccoby, 1998; Reimann, 1997; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001) and more recent studies (Ascigil *et al.,* 2021; Averett, 2016; Ellis-Davies *et al.,* 2022; Gonzalez and Lopez-Gavino, 2022; Schroeder and Liben, 2021)

Abstract (approximately 500 words):
Crynodeb (tua 500 gair):

Literature Review

- Theme 1 - lesbian parents raising girls and resisting femininity
    - Daughters of lesbian mothers more likely to behave, dress and play in ways that do not conform to gender norms (Green *et al.,* 1986; Goldberg, 2007)
    - Lesbian mothers more statistically likely to want daughters (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Hermann, Green and Gehring, 2007; Gartrell *et al.,* 1996; Goldberg, 2007, 2009; Kane, 2009)
    - Lesbians more likely to hold feminist views (Green *et al.,* 1986; Fulcher *et al.,* 2007)
    - Studies suggesting daughters felt 'a freedom from gender roles' (Averett, 2016; Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Goldberg, 2007; Green *et al.,* 1986)
- Theme 2 - lesbian parents raising boys as less stereotypically masculine
    - Consideration of what masculinity is (Connell, 1995)
    - Impact of the absence of a father (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Blankenborn, 1995; Popenoe, 1996; Wilson, 2002)
    - Boys growing up in lesbian families show more feminine traits (Averett, 2016; Bos and Sandfort, 2010; Goldberg, 2007; Golombok *et al.,* 1983; MacCallum and Golombok, 2004) vs opposing view (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Bos and Sandfort 2010; Goldberg 2007; 2010)
    - Fear of assessment of boys non-conformity (Fulcher *et al.,* 2007; Kane, 2006)
- Theme 3 - impact of parents own LGBTQ+ status on children's gender expression
    - Children's gender expression based on various factors, including parents gender expression (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg 2007; MacCallum and Golombok 2004)
    - Lesbian parents queer family binaries (Goldberg, 2007; Oswald et al., 2005)
    - Lesbian parents more open around children's identities (Averett, 2016; Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Goldberg, 2007; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Tasker & Golombok, 1997)
- Theme 4 - lesbian parents upholding gender binaries and

norms due to societal pressure
- Limited difference between heterosexual single mothers and lesbian parents (Clarke, 2002; Kirkpatrick, Smither, & Roy, 1981)
- Lesbian parents do not want to put themselves or their child at risk, so confirm to meet societal expectations (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011; Oswald et al. 2005)
- Gender stereotypes from birth e.g. blue for boys (Berkowitz and Ryan, 2011)

Short Introductory Bibliography:
Llyfryddiaeth rhagarweiniol byr

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Proposed Supervisor: *Goruchwyliwr awgrymedig*
Ken Dicks

- Ethics Form will be required
- Please indicate whether sufficient resources are available for the project
    - YES/NO
- *Nodwch a oes digon o adnoddau ar gael ar gyfer y prosiect*
    - *OES / NAC OES*

The above topic, proposal, and supervisor have been agreed:
Cytunwyd ar y pwnc, y cynnig a'r goruchwyliwr uchod:

Signed : …….Rachel Salmon……..
Student/
Llofnod Myfyriwr

Date:……
Dyddiad 24/10/2023

Signed :Ken Dicks .Programme Director/
Llofnod Cyfarwyddwr y

rhaglen

Date:……26/10/2023
Dyddiad

5.3. Appendix 3 – Legislation and Policies

UK Civil Partnership Act, 2004

Same-Sex Marriage Act, (England and Wales, 2013; Scotland, 2014;

Northern Ireland, 2019)