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### Adolescents in planned lesbian families in the U.S. and the Netherlands: Stigmatization, psychological adjustment, and resilience

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**Publication date**  
2012

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

van Gelderen, L. (2012). *Adolescents in planned lesbian families in the U.S. and the Netherlands: Stigmatization, psychological adjustment, and resilience*.

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## CHAPTER

# 3

Quality of life of adolescents raised from birth by lesbian mothers: The US National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study



### 3 Quality of life of adolescents raised from birth by lesbian mothers: The US National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study<sup>2</sup>

#### Abstract

*The aim of this study was to compare the perceived quality of life (QoL), a measure of psychological well-being, of adolescents reared in lesbian-mother families with that of a matched comparison group of adolescents with heterosexual parents. The adolescents in the comparison group were derived from a representative sample of adolescents in Washington state. The second aim of the study was to assess whether donor status, maternal relationship continuity, and self-reported stigmatization are associated with perceived QoL in teens with lesbian mothers. This report is based on an online questionnaire completed by 78 adolescent offspring (39 girls and 39 boys) who participated in the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (NLLFS). Six items of the Youth Quality of Life Instrument were used to assess perceived QoL. Also, the NLLFS adolescents were asked whether they had experienced stigmatization, and if so, to describe these experiences (e.g., teasing and ridicule). Mothers were queried about donor status and maternal relationship continuity. The results revealed that the NLLFS adolescents rated their perceived QoL comparably to their counterparts in heterosexual-parent families. Donor status, maternal relationship continuity, and experienced stigmatization were not related to perceived QoL. In conclusion, adolescent offspring in planned lesbian families do not show differences in perceived QoL when compared with a matched group of adolescents reared in heterosexual families. By investigating perceived QoL, this study provides insight into positive aspects of mental health of adolescents with lesbian mothers.*

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<sup>2</sup> This chapter is based on Van Gelderen, L., Bos, H.M.W., Gartrell, N., Hermanns, J., & Perrin, E.C. (2012). Quality of Life of Adolescents Raised from Birth by Lesbian Mothers: The US National Longitudinal Family Study. *Journal of developmental and behavioral pediatrics*, 33, 17 – 23. doi:10.1097/DBP.0b013e31823b62af

### 3.1 Introduction

In 2006, Pediatrics published a special article describing the implications of relationship security on lesbian and gay couples and their children (Pawelski et al., 2006). This review cites the growing body of empirical data demonstrating that children of lesbian and heterosexual parents are comparable in psychological adjustment. These results contradict cultural presumptions that children reared by same-sex parents will demonstrate behavioral and emotional problems and abnormal psychosexual development (Perrin & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2002). However, the studies on which the above-mentioned review was based focused on younger children, and their findings may not necessarily be generalizable to adolescents (Perrin & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2002). During adolescence, the beliefs and attitudes of individuals outside the family, particularly peers, become increasingly important (Rivers et al., 2008). The adolescent life phase is also a period in which the offspring of lesbian and gay parents develop a keener awareness of their minority status (Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Rivers et al., 2008). Few studies have documented the life experiences of adolescents in lesbian-parent families or assessed psychological adjustment without focusing on problem behavior.

Various researchers have argued that the mental health of youths consists not only of the absence of dysfunction, but also of optimal functioning in psychological domains (e.g., Kazdin, 1993). This is in line with the positive psychology paradigm, which looks more at intrapsychic strengths than deficits (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). To obtain insight into the mental health of adolescents in planned lesbian families, it is important to study not only the absence of problem behavior, but also positive psychological adjustment (e.g., Antaramanian, Hueber, & Valois, 2010).

The current study focuses on the perceived quality of life (QoL) of adolescents in planned lesbian families. QoL is considered a positive aspect of psychological adjustment. It refers to one's "perceptions of position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which [she or he] lives, and in relation to [her or his] goals, expectations, standards, and concerns" (Edwards, Huebner, Connell, & Patrick, 2002, p. 2). QoL plays an important role in adolescents' overall adaptation (Lewis, Scott Huebner, Malone, & Valois, 2011) and has been found to be related to affective, cognitive, and behavioral functioning in children and youths (Scott Huebner, 2004). QoL may also enhance or delay recovery after painful experiences (Scott Huebner, Suldo, Smith, & McKnight, 2004).

Although there are no prior studies of the perceived QoL of adolescents in planned lesbian families, several researchers have reported on psychological adjustment of the lesbian mothers' offspring. One of the first such studies was conducted by Tasker and Golombok in the United Kingdom (Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

Twenty-five young adults born in the context of a heterosexual relationship and reared by their lesbian mothers following divorce were compared on measures of anxiety and depression with twenty-one young adults reared by divorced, heterosexual single mothers. The adult offspring of lesbian mothers showed no differences from the young adults in the control group.

The participants in the above-mentioned study experienced the coming out of their mothers, as well as parental discord and divorce, which distinguishes them from youths who have been reared since birth in what are known as planned lesbian families. Golombok and Badger (2010) compared the psychological adjustment of young British adults in 20 planned lesbian families, 27 heterosexual single-mother families, and 36 heterosexual two-parent families. The researchers obtained information about the psychological adjustment of the young adults by using self-reports about psychological disorders (e.g., depression) and self-esteem. The mean age of the offspring was 19 years. The three groups did not differ on measures of the young adults' psychological adjustment. Higher levels of self-esteem were found for adolescents in the female-headed families (heterosexual and lesbian) than among their counterparts in traditional families.

Wainright and colleagues have published several studies (e.g., Wainright et al., 2004) that were based on the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), for which data collection took place in 1994 and 1995. The studies by Wainright et al. are unique in that the participants were drawn from a stratified random sample of American high schools. The Add Health survey did not collect data on the mothers' sexual orientation, or on the parental constellation at the time of their offspring's birth. In these studies, 44 adolescents parented by female couples were compared with 44 adolescents parented by fathers and mothers. These two groups of teenagers were matched on sex, age, ethnic background, adoption status, learning disability status, family income, and parental educational attainment. Adolescents with two female parents were not significantly different in personal adjustment (e.g., anxiety, depression, and self-esteem) from the matched group of adolescents living with opposite-sex parents (Wainright et al., 2004).

The above-mentioned studies investigated whether adolescents in lesbian families differ from adolescents in other family types. Gershon, Tschann, and Jemerin (1999) were the first researchers to examine differences in psychological adjustment within a group of adolescents with lesbian mothers. They investigated whether the experience of stigmatization – defined by the researchers as an outcome of negative societal attitudes toward those who are different from culturally agreed-upon norms – was related to lower self-esteem. Gershon et al (1999) interviewed 76 adolescents (aged between 11 and 18 years old) with lesbian mothers; most of these adolescents had been born in the context of their mothers' previous heterosexual relationships. Their results showed a significant

negative relationship between homophobic stigmatization and self-esteem in adolescents with lesbian mothers.

Gartrell and Bos (2010) recently published a study based on data from the US National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (NLLFS), which was initiated in 1986 to examine the social, psychological, and emotional development of children who were conceived by donor insemination and born into planned lesbian families. Data for the NLLFS were collected at five time intervals, namely during insemination or pregnancy (T1) and when the children were 2 (T2), 5 (T3), 10, (T4), and 17 (T5) years old. Gartrell and Bos (2010) investigated whether the psychological adjustment of the NLLFS adolescents was different from that of adolescents in a normative comparison sample. The mothers of the adolescents were queried about the problem behavior of their offspring. The results showed that the 17-year-old adolescents with lesbian mothers were rated higher in social, school/academic, and total competence, and lower in social problems, rule-breaking, aggressive behavior, and externalizing problem behavior than their age-matched counterparts in the normative sample. The researchers also found that within the group of NLLFS adolescents, there were no differences in problem behavior between adolescent offspring who were conceived by known, as-yet unknown, and permanently unknown donors, or between offspring whose mothers were still together and offspring whose mothers had separated (Gartrell & Bos, 2010).

The current study used self-report data from the fifth wave of the NLLFS. The general aim is to expand our understanding of psychological adjustment in adolescents from planned lesbian families by focusing not on clinical symptomatology or problem behavior, but on a more positive aspect of psychological adjustment, namely adolescent perceived QoL. The specific aims of the study are: (1) To compare the perceived QoL of the NLLFS adolescents with that of a group of adolescents with heterosexual parents who were matched with regard to gender, age, ethnicity, and parental education and (2) to assess within the NLLFS group whether donor status, maternal relationship continuity, and self-reported stigmatization are associated with perceived QoL.

## **3.2 Method**

### *3.2.1 Procedure*

Between 1986 and 1992, families were recruited for the NLLFS via announcements at lesbian events and in women's bookstores and lesbian-oriented newspapers (e.g., Gartrell & Bos, 2010). Lesbians who were planning to become pregnant, or were already pregnant, were eligible for participation. Prospective participants were asked to contact the researchers by telephone. During these calls, the researchers discussed the nature of the study. All callers became study participants. The total cohort comprised 84 families. At the

fifth time interval (T5), 78 families were still participating, constituting a retention rate of 93%. Approval for the NLLFS was granted by the Institutional Review Board at the California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco.

### 3.2.2 *Participants*

Since one NLLFS family did not return all parts of the survey instruments, the total *N* used for the T5 analyses was 77 families with 78 index adolescents (one set of twins), evenly divided between the two sexes. The mean age of the adolescents was 17.05 years ( $SD = .36$ ; range 16-18 years). Sixty-eight (87%) of the adolescents identified as White/Caucasian, and 73 adolescents (93.6%) had a mother with at least a college education (see Table 3.1).

At T5, the birthmothers' age range was 43 to 60 years ( $M = 52.0$ ,  $SD = 3.89$ ); the co-mothers ranged in age from 43 to 66 years ( $M = 52.9$ ,  $SD = 5.2$ ). Although all participating families originally resided within 200 miles of Boston, Washington DC, or San Francisco (e.g., Gartrell & Bos, 2010), many have since relocated. At T5, the families were residing in large urban communities, mid-sized towns, and rural areas in northeastern (47%), southern (9%), midwestern (1%), and western (43%) regions of the United States.

### 3.2.3 *Measurements*

Once the NLLFS mothers had consented and their adolescent offspring had assented, the adolescents were asked to complete a confidential, password-protected questionnaire on the study's Web site. All data for the current study were collected at T5.

*Perceived quality of life.* Six items of the Youth Quality of Life Instrument – Research Version (YQoL-R; Patrick, Edwards, & Topolski, 2002) were used to assess perceived QoL. On five of these items (“I feel I’m getting along with my parents/guardians,” “I look forward to the future,” “I feel alone in my life,” “I feel good about myself,” “I’m satisfied with the way my life is now”), answers range from 0 (= *not at all*) to 10 (= *completely*). The answer categories of the sixth item (“Compared with others my age I feel my life is ...”) range from 0 (= *worse than others*) to 10 (= *much better than others*). The correlations between the YQoL-R items in this study ranged from  $-.06$  to  $.60$ .

*Donor status.* The mothers were asked whether they had used a known, an as yet unknown, or a permanently unknown donor.

*Maternal relationship continuity.* Information about the maternal relationship continuity was obtained by asking each mother whether she was still with the partner she had been with when her child was born.

*Stigmatization.* Experiences of stigmatization were assessed by asking the NLLFS adolescents “Have you been treated unfairly because you have a lesbian mom?” (1 = *no*

and 2 = yes). Adolescents who answered affirmatively were asked to specify whether they were (1) teased or ridiculed, (2) stereotyped, and/or (3) excluded from activities. They were also asked to indicate by whom they were treated unfairly: classmates, teachers, family members, other adults (indicate who), and/or other people (indicate who).

### 3.2.4 Comparison Group

We constructed a comparison group of adolescents reared by opposite-sex parents using data from the Washington Healthy Youth Survey (HYS; Washington State Department of Health, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Department of Social and Health Services, Department of Commerce, & Family Policy Council and Liquor Control Board, 2010), which is a representative statewide sample. A total of 32,531 students at 203 randomly selected schools participated in the HYS.

Of the 32,531 students, those with missing values on any of the perceived QoL items were deleted, resulting in a sample of 7049 students. This group of 7049 HYS adolescents was used for 1:1 matching with the NLLFS adolescents on gender, age, ethnicity, and parental education (highest degree held by the parents). Each first matching on all these variables was used as a comparison adolescent for the target NLLFS adolescent. This resulted in a sample of 78 HYS adolescents (39 girls and 39 boys; mean age = 17.05) who had been raised by a father and a mother. The demographic characteristics of the NLLFS and HYS samples are presented in Table 1. As shown in this table, our 1:1 matching was done successfully; there were no differences in gender, age, ethnicity, and parental education between the NLLFS sample and the HYS sample.

**Table 3.1** Demographic Characteristics of the NLLFS Adolescents and the Washington State Adolescents.

	NLLFS Sample	Washington State Sample	NLLFS versus Washington State
Girls, <i>n</i> (%)	39 (50)	39 (50)	$\chi^2 < 1$ , <i>ns</i>
Age, <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	17.05 (.36)	17.05 (.36)	$t < 1$ , <i>ns</i>
With college-educated parents <sup>a</sup> , <i>n</i> (%)	73 (93.6)	73 (93.6)	$\chi^2 < 1$ , <i>ns</i>
Non-White ethnic background, <i>n</i> (%)	10 (12.8)	10 (12.8)	$\chi^2 < 1$ , <i>ns</i>

<sup>a</sup> = Based on the Hollingshead Index and using the parent with the highest occupational and educational level (Gartrell, et al., 1996; 1999; 2000; 2005; Gartrell & Bos, 2010).



### 3.2.5 Analyses

To see whether the selected HYS adolescents differed from the total HYS sample on any perceived QoL variable, we performed also a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) with the six perceived QoL items as dependent variables, and sex, age, educational background, and ethnic background as covariates. There were no differences between the selected and total HYS samples on any of the perceived QoL items, Wilks'  $\Lambda = 1.00$ ,  $F(6,7036) = 1.98$ ,  $p = .065$ .

To compare perceived QoL between the NLLFS and the HYS samples, a 2 (sample: 1 = NLLFS; 2 = HYS) by 2 (gender: 1 = *girl*; 2 = *boy*) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with the six perceived QoL items as dependent variables.

To examine possible differences in adolescent perceived QoL associated with donor status, maternal relationship continuity, and experienced stigmatization, we conducted three separate analyses: (1) a 3 (donor: 1 = *unknown*, 2 = *as-yet unknown donor*, 3 = *permanently unknown donor*) by 2 (gender: 1 = *girl*, 2 = *boy*) MANOVA, (2) a 2 (maternal relationship continuity: 1 = *yes*, 2 = *no*) by 2 (gender: 1 = *girl*, 2 = *boy*) MANOVA, and (3) a 2 (stigmatization: 1 = *no*; 2 = *yes*) by 2 (gender, 1 = *girl*, 2 = *boy*) MANOVA.

Before conducting the abovementioned MANOVAs, a priori power analyses were performed with G\*Power 3.0 to determine whether the sample size was sufficient to detect significant differences (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). These analyses were performed both for the comparisons between the NLLFS and the HYS, and for the comparisons within the NLLFS. Results revealed that our sample sizes were sufficient to detect small to medium effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). To adjust for Type 1 errors, we set the alpha in all the MANOVAs that were conducted (for the NLLFS versus HYS comparison and for the within the NLLFS comparisons) at  $p < .01$ .

## 3.3 Results

### 3.3.1 Comparison between the NLLFS and the HYS sample

The mean scores on the items that measure perceived QoL are shown in Table 3.2 for the NLLFS and HYS samples. The MANOVA showed no significant main effect for group, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .93$ ,  $F(6,143) = 1.91$ ,  $p = .083$ , no main effect for gender, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .89$ ,  $F(6,143) = 2.87$ ,  $p = .011$ , and no main effect for the interaction between group and gender, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .90$ ,  $F(6,143) = 2.79$ ,  $p = .014$ . The adolescent girls and boys in both samples did not differ on any perceived QoL item (see Table 3.2).

### 3.3.2 Comparisons within the NLLFS sample

This section concerns the relationship between donor status (known, as-yet unknown, permanently unknown donors), maternal relationship continuity (offspring whose mothers

were still together vs offspring whose mothers had separated), and stigmatization (yes vs no) on the perceived QoL scores of the NLLFS adolescents.

*Donor status and perceived QoL.* Twenty-eight adolescents (36%) had been conceived using a known sperm donor and 50 (64%) using an unknown donor. Of the unknown donors, 66% ( $n = 31$ ) were permanently unknown, while 38% ( $n = 19$ ) could be identified when the adolescent reached the age of 18.

The MANOVA showed no main effect for donor status: There were no differences between the perceived QoL scores of NLLFS adolescents conceived by known, as-yet unknown, and permanently unknown donors, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .74$ ,  $F(12,126) = 1.69$ ,  $p = .076$ . In addition, there were no differences between girls and boys, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .78$ ,  $F(6,63) = 3.00$ ,  $p = .012$ . The interaction between donor status and gender, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .70$ ,  $F(12,126) = 2.06$ ,  $p = .024$ , was also not significant.

*Maternal relationship continuity and perceived QoL.* At the time of the index adolescents' birth, the sample was composed of 62 two-mother and 11 single-mother families. By T5, 55.6% ( $n = 40$ ) of the mothers who had been co-parents when the index offspring were born had separated.

The MANOVA with "maternal relationship continuity" as independent variable showed that NLLFS adolescents whose mothers were still together and those whose mothers had separated did not differ on reported QoL, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .82$ ,  $F(6,60) = 2.17$ ,  $p = .059$ , nor was there a significant main effect for the interaction between maternal relationship continuity and gender, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .78$ ,  $F(6,60) = 2.81$ ,  $p = .018$ . However, there was a significant main effect for gender, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .68$ ,  $F(6,60) = 4.64$ ,  $p = .001$ . Additional ANOVAs revealed that the NLLFS girls scored lower on the item "I feel good about myself" ( $M = 6.62$ ,  $SD = 2.01$ ) than the NLLFS boys ( $M = 7.60$ ,  $SD = 1.93$ ).

*Stigmatization and perceived QoL.* Forty-one percent of the adolescents reported having been treated unfairly in relation to having a lesbian mother. When asked what that stigmatization involved, 29 reported being teased or ridiculed, 28 had been stereotyped as "different," and 24 had been excluded from activities because of their lesbian mothers (note that the answers were not mutually exclusive). The stigmatization was perpetrated by classmates in 28 instances, by teachers in 22 instances, by extended family members in 21 instances, by other adults in 7 instances (e.g., friends' parents or employers), and by other people in 3 instances.

A MANOVA with the perceived QoL items as dependent variables showed no significant main effect for stigmatization, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .97$ ,  $F(6,64) = .283$ ,  $p = .943$ , no main effect for gender, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .78$ ,  $F(6,64) = 2.97$ ,  $p = .013$ , and no significant main effect for the interaction between stigmatization and gender, Wilks'  $\Lambda = .93$ ,  $F(6,64) = .846$ ,  $p = .539$ .

**Table 3.2** Quality of Life Self-Report for NLLFS and Washington State Samples.

Variable	NLLFS Adolescent Sample		Washington State Sample		Group		Gender		GroupxGender	
	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	F	p	F	p
I feel I am getting along with my parents/guardians <sup>a</sup>										
<i>M ± SD</i>	8.11±.28	8.00±.32	8.23±.33	7.65±.27	7.49±.43	7.82±.43	1.45	.230	.54	.463
95% CI	7.57-8.66	7.37-8.63	7.56-8.89	7.13-8.18	6.64-8.34	6.97-8.67				
I look forward to the future <sup>a</sup>										
<i>M ± SD</i>	8.73±.19	8.44±.27	9.03-.29	9.01±.19	8.92±.26	9.10±.26	1.01	.297	2.08	.152
95% CI	8.35-9.11	7.89-8.98	8.45-9.61	8.64-9.38	8.42-9.43	8.60-9.61				
I feel alone in my life <sup>a</sup>										
<i>M ± SD</i>	3.10±.36	3.59±.45	2.60±.47	2.76±.35	2.72±.54	2.76±.54	.45	.503	.91	.341
95% CI	2.38-3.81	2.70-4.48	1.66-3.54	2.06-3.45	1.66-3.82	1.69-3.84				
I feel good about myself <sup>a</sup>										
<i>M ± SD</i>	7.11±.25	6.62±.32	7.60±.33	7.45±.24	6.64±.37	8.26±.37	.97	.327	14.03	<.001
95% CI	6.62-7.60	5.99-7.24	6.94-8.26	6.97-7.93	5.91-7.37	7.53-8.99				
I am satisfied with the way my life is now <sup>a</sup>										
<i>M ± SD</i>	6.97±.28	7.00±.39	6.94±.41	7.28±.27	6.59±.37	7.97±.37	.651	.421	2.97	.087
95% CI	6.43-7.52	6.23-7.77	6.13-7.76	6.75-7.81	5.85-7.33	7.23-8.72				
Compared with others my age, I feel my life is worse or much better than others <sup>b</sup>										
<i>M ± SD</i>	7.70±.26	8.08±.31	7.31±.32	7.01±.26	6.51±.41	7.51±.41	3.45	.065	.10	.747
95% CI	7.18-8.22	7.47-8.69	6.69-7.96	6.51-7.52	5.70-7.33	6.70-8.33				

<sup>a</sup> = High scores reflect more agreement; 0 = not at all, 10 = completely. <sup>b</sup> = High scores reflect more positivity; 0 = worse than others, 10 = much better than others. <sup>c</sup> = Girls: NLLFS adolescents versus Washington State adolescents:  $F(1,74) = .14, p = .708$ .

### 3.4 Discussion

Most studies on the psychological adjustment of adolescents in planned lesbian families have focused on the prevalence of problems in adjustment, such as depression and anxiety. In this study we assess a more positive aspect of psychological adjustment – namely perceived quality of life (QoL). The aim of the study was to compare the perceived QoL of adolescents in lesbian parented families with that of a matched group with heterosexual parents, and to see whether variability within the NLLFS group was related to differences in perceived QoL.

Our results revealed that the NLLFS adolescents rated themselves comparably to their counterparts in opposite-sex parent families on perceived QoL. These positive reports about the NLLFS adolescents' perceived QoL are in keeping with the findings of previous studies on the psychological adjustment of adolescents with lesbian mothers (Gartrell & Bos, 2010; Golombok & Badger, 2010; Wainright et al., 2004) that suggest that adolescents living with lesbian parents function as well as, or sometimes better than, those reared by opposite-sex parents.

We found no relationship between perceived QoL and donor status for the NLLFS girls and boys. This is in line with results of a previous report based on behavioral checklists completed by the NLLFS mothers in which it was found that donor status was unrelated to problem behavior in the adolescent girls or boys (Gartrell & Bos, 2010).

Of the NLLFS mothers, 55.6 % had separated by T5, a rate that is significantly higher than the parental divorce rate (36.3%) of the 17-year-old adolescents in the 6<sup>th</sup> Cycle of the U.S. National Survey of Family Growth (see Gartrell, Bos, & Goldberg, 2011). However, there was no association between the mothers' relationship continuity and the perceived QoL of the NLLFS adolescents. Earlier NLLFS reports also showed that there was no relation between mothers' relationship continuity and the problem behavior of NLLFS adolescents (Gartrell & Bos, 2010). In contrast, the offspring of divorced heterosexual parents have been shown to score lower on measures of emotional, academic, social, and behavioral adjustment (e.g., Amato, 2000). That the NLLFS adolescents are doing well despite having experienced their mothers' separation might be due to the fact that nearly three-quarters of the NLLFS separated-parent families share custody, whereas 65% of divorced American heterosexual mothers retain sole physical and legal custody of their children (Emery, Otto, & O'Donohue, 2005). Shared childrearing after parental relationship dissolution has been associated with more favorable outcomes (Emery, 1994).

Nearly half of the NLLFS adolescents reported that they had been treated unfairly as a result of having a lesbian mother. They reported a variety of forms of stigmatization, such as being teased or ridiculed, excluded from activities, or stereotyped as being different. Classmates were most often mentioned as the source of these experiences, suggesting a

need for schools to educate students in the appreciation of diversity and to enforce a zero-tolerance policy on bullying and stigmatization. Such changes to the educational system would benefit youths from all family types (e.g., Sandfort, Bos, Collier, & Metselaar, 2010).

Other studies have shown positive associations between stigmatization and problem behavior. Gershon and colleagues (1999) found that stigmatized adolescents had lower self-esteem than non-stigmatized adolescents. When the psychological adjustment of the NLLFS offspring was assessed when they were 10 years old, experiences of stigmatization reported by the children themselves were also associated with more parental reports of internalizing, externalizing, and problem behavior (Bos, Gartrell, Peyser, & van Balen, 2008). In the current study, experiences of stigmatization were not associated with a diminished perceived QoL. The relationship between stigmatization and perceived QoL may have been mediated by the adolescents' close, positive relationships with their lesbian mothers. In a previous report, favorable relationships with their mothers was associated with a reduction in problem behavior in NLLFS adolescents who had been stigmatized (Bos & Gartrell, 2010). In addition, many mothers may teach their children from an early age how to predict and cope with possible stigma and discrimination, and provide them with options for interpreting and responding to such stresses. Others have found that positive daily experiences (e.g., hobbies, frequent opportunities to help others) were significantly related to life satisfaction, while positive and negative major events and daily negative events were not significantly related to self-reported life satisfaction (McCullough, Scott Huebner, & Laughlin, 2000).

A strength of the current study is that the data were obtained through self-reports from adolescents whose families have been followed prospectively and longitudinally since the mothers were inseminating or pregnant with them. The perceived QoL instrument we used adds a new dimension to assessments of the psychological well-being of adolescents in planned lesbian families, by focusing more broadly on well-being rather than on problem behavior.

This study has several limitations related to its samples. The first is that the NLLFS adolescents live in multiple states, while all HYS adolescents live in the state of Washington. Secondly, no data were obtained from the HYS adolescents on their family socioeconomic status or parental relationship continuity. Therefore, it was not possible to control for these factors in the analyses. However, we did match both samples on adolescents' gender, age, ethnicity, and parental education. A third limitation is that even though the NLLFS sample is the largest sample of American adolescents from planned lesbian families whose mothers have participated in a prospective, longitudinal study since before these offspring were born, the study could have been strengthened by following a matched cohort of offspring in heterosexual parent families over the same time interval. Fourth, a convenience sample

was used for the NLLFS, which is unlikely to be representative of lesbian parents. However, one should keep in mind that the targeted population was largely hidden in the 1980s, due to a long history of discrimination against lesbian and gay people, and the possibility of recruiting a representative sample of prospective lesbian mothers was even more unrealistic than it is today (Golombok et al., 2003). A fifth limitation is that most of the NLLFS and HYS parents are college graduates and therefore more educated than the U.S. population as a whole.

The current study is based on quantitative findings. Future studies would benefit from the use of qualitative research methods to investigate the nuances of life satisfaction, hopes for the future, and bullying/stigmatization among adolescents who are raised in lesbian-parented households.

In conclusion, the reported perceived QoL for adolescent offspring in planned lesbian families is similar to that reported by the matched adolescents in heterosexual-parent families. This finding supports earlier evidence that adolescents reared by lesbian mothers from birth do not manifest more adjustment difficulties (e.g. depression, anxiety, disruptive behaviors) than those reared by heterosexual parents.