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The New Normal:
A Narrative Analysis of Nonbirth Lesbian Mothers Postpartum Experiences
Disclosure

- Michele M. McKelvey reports no conflict of interest

- Membership:
  - Beta Zeta Chapter-at-Large
  - Iota Upsilon Chapter-at-Large
  - Mu Chapter

- Employers:
  - Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT, USA
  - St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center, Hartford, CT, USA
Gay/lesbian couples more socially accepted

One fourth of gay couples are parents (US Census, 2010)

16% gay male couples, 49% lesbian couples raising children (US Census, 2010)

1 million gay parents raising approximately 2 million children (UCLA, Williams Institute, 2012)

Gays/lesbians cannot adopt partner’s biological child in all states (HRC, 2017)

Gay couples can legally marry in ALL states & the DC (HRC, 2016)
Interdisciplinary support for LGBT health

- American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists (2005) & American Society for Reproductive Medicine (2009) sexual orientation should not prohibit access to care
- America Medical Association (2009) published document opposing *Don’t ask, don’t tell*
- American Psychiatric Association, The American Psychological Association & The National Association of Social Workers have statements advocating lesbian/gay health
Nursing’s silence on LGBT health

- American Academy of Nursing (2007) expert panel on cultural competence sited sexual orientation as a “secondary characteristic of culture”

- AAN position paper on health care for sexual minorities & gender diverse populations (July 2012)
  - Nurses must address unique needs of LGBT population
  - Nurses must adamantly oppose LGBT discrimination
  - Marriage equality endorsed as a significant civil rights & health issue. Marriage equality equated with mental health

- Nurses must urge their professional organizations to emulate the AAN (Eliason, et al., 2010)
Significance

Institute of Medicine


The Joint Commission

- Field guide: *Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence, and Patient and Family Centered Care for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community* (2011)
Review of the literature

- 25 research studies, 1 theoretical publication
  - 1980s (2), 1990s (4), Since 2000 (20)
  - Doctoral dissertations (7), Published articles (19)
- Variety of Disciplines
  - Nursing (11),
  - Education, Marriage/Family Therapy (2 each)
  - Medicine, Human Ecology, Social Work, Psychology, Creative Arts/Communication, Family Studies, Human Relations/Multicultural Education, Sociology and Human Communication (1 each)
- Variety of countries of origin
  - USA (15)
  - Canada and Sweden (3 each)
  - UK (2)
  - Australia (1)
  - Norway and Israel (1 each)
Method

• Research Question
  • What is the postpartum experience for nonbirth lesbian mothers?

• Research Design
  • Narrative Analysis
  • Structural approach: Riessman’s thematic analysis

• Theory
  • Mercer’s (1985) Process of maternal role attainment
Results: Research participants

- 10 Nonbirth lesbian mothers
- 9 American states represented
- 30-61 years old
- 9 White, 1 African American
- 2 previously gave birth
- Children aged 20 months-14 years
- 6 have one child, 3 have two children, 1 has nine children
- 2 expecting second baby (partner is pregnant)
- 5 legally adopted
- 3 legally married in home state, 2 married in another state, 2 civilly united, 3 no legal relationship status
- 3-25 years in current relationship
Metastory of the experiences of nonbirth lesbian mothers

...Prologue to postpartum

Six overarching themes

1. At the mercy of health care providers
2. Nursing is the major difference between us
3. Defined by who I am not
4. Trying to protect my family: The world can take them away
5. What’s in a name?
6. Epilogue: The new normal
Theme One
At the mercy of healthcare providers

- Labor/delivery: Treated like an equal parent
- Postpartum nurses reminded us that we are not equal
- The NICU advantage
- Condemned by homophobic health care providers in the ED and primary care
Theme Two
Nursing is the major difference between us

- Supporting the breastfeeding unit
- Combining breast and bottle-feeding helped me to feel involved
- Insecurities and fear about breastfeeding
- Exclusive pumping: She needs me too
Theme Three
Defined by who I am not

- I still worry
- We have to work harder
Theme Four

Trying to protect my family:
The world can take them away

- Fighting for every piece of motherhood
  - Second parent adoption
- Adoption not an option
- We are legally married: Isn’t that enough?
Theme Five
What’s in a name?

- A family name means we cannot be separated
- The name of the “real” mother
Theme Six
Epilogue: The new normal

- The glue of our family
- Bone rattling impact
- Going it alone
- Repeatedly coming out as a lesbian
- My process of self discovery
Recommendations for practice

- Follow recommendations from TJC & IOM
- Create a more welcome environment for lesbian families
- Create more inclusive visitation policies
- Broader view of family
- Advisory group of lesbian mothers/families
- LGBT champions
- More inclusive medical forms
- Participation in the GLMA, display membership
Recommendations for healthcare leadership

- Leaders safeguard LGBT patients
- Nondiscrimination policies displayed and enforced
- Staff held accountable
- Monitor initiatives, conduct ongoing evaluation
- Mechanisms for safe patient reporting of discrimination

(The Joint Commission, 2011)
Recommendations for education

- LGBT health is rare in nursing curricula, frequently overlooked in nursing education
- LGBT health is sometimes dismissed in nursing education as a taboo subject, stigma remains
- LGBT health should be part of overall cultural competence
- Support exists from organizations like lavenderhealth.org
- Nursing education must acknowledge their own LGBT members (faculty, staff, students) Diverse points of view should be celebrated within the scholarly community (Eliason, et al., 2010)
Recommendations for research

- Research is the primary recommendation of the 2011 IOM report. IOM (2011) report revealed
- Few studies exist on childbearing in lesbians
- Pregnancy loss is difficult for childbearing women but only two studies investigated this (Peel, 2010; Wojnar, 2007)
- Lesbians are at greater risk for postpartum depression (Ross, Steele, Goldfinger & Strike, 2007)
- Scarce research on reproductive technology and motherhood among lesbians
- Maternal jealousy (Pelka, 2009) discussed in reference to IVF with partner’s eggs as a possible option
- Encourage programs of LGBT research
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