12-2012

Accounting for Lesbian-Headed Families: Lesbian Mothers' Responses to Discursive Challenges

Jody Koenig Kellas
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, jkellas2@unl.edu

Elizabeth A. Suter
University of Denver, esuter@du.edu

Accounting for Lesbian-Headed Families: Lesbian Mothers' Responses to Discursive Challenges

Jody Koenig Kellas and Elizabeth A. Suter

Corresponding author – Jody Koenig Kellas, Department of Communication Studies, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 428 Oldfather Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588-0329, USA, email jkellas2@unl.edu

Abstract
Although lesbian mothers are often called to justify their family's legitimacy, we know little about these interactions. The current study included 44 female coparents across 10 focus groups discussing the interactive process of discursive legitimacy challenges. Using the theoretical framework of remedial accounts (Schönbach, 1990), inductive and deductive coding revealed several existing and new types of challenges, accounting strategies, and evaluations relevant to interactions of lesbian mothers. Communicative processes unique to the interactions of female coparents included challenges emerging from societal master narratives (e.g., health care, education, politics, religion); accounting strategies such as leading by example; and evaluations related to the ways in which children render the family acceptable. Findings offer strategies for coping with the discursive challenges lesbian mothers encounter.

Keywords: lesbian-headed families, discourse-dependent families, remedial accounts, account episodes

Although many lesbians still experience obstacles to parenthood (e.g., legal barriers to adoption, discriminatory social attitudes, lack of access to reproductive health care, Patterson & Riskind, 2010), the number of lesbian-headed families continues to increase in the United States (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007). Estimates based on US Census data suggest that 1 in 3 female same-sex couples were raising children in 2000—up

from 1 in 5 in 1990 (Gates & Ost, 2004). Other than heterosexual marriage, the most frequent routes to lesbian parenthood are adoption, foster care, and artificial insemination (Goldberg, 2010). An estimated 65,500 adopted and another 14,100 foster children are living with lesbian or gay parents (Gates et al., 2007).

In spite of their increasing numbers, lesbian mothers continue to be challenged and are often called to justify their family's legitimacy. For instance, Brown, Smalling, Groza, and Ryan's (2009) large nationwide survey found that 93% of lesbian and gay adoptive parents reported one or more barriers (e.g., perceived discrimination) to becoming a parent, and 91% reported challenges (e.g., stigma, school challenges) in currently being a parent. Lesbian mothers experiencing high levels of rejection feel the need to justify the quality of the parent-child relationship and defend their position as mother (Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, & Sandfort, 2004).

Lesbian-headed families experience both affirmation and disconfirmation from their families of origin, social networks, community members, institutions, and the law. Lesbian mothers are held accountable for their perceived nonconformity, as others react with discomfort, skepticism, and sometimes outright denial of the lesbian family form. Such disconfirmation can lead to rejection, decreased social support, vulnerability for lesbian families, and can create barriers between female coparents (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Dalton & Bielby, 2000; Hequembourg, 2004, 2007). The ways mothers cope with such stressors is essential to the well-being and security of family members and to reducing others' heteronormative discrimination and prejudice.

Despite what we know about reactions to the lesbian family form, little research has examined the ways in which lesbian families cope with these difficulties. Hequembourg's (2004) analysis of 40 lesbian mothers' parenting stories and Short's (2007) interview study of 68 Australian lesbian mothers shed some light. Hequembourg described mothers employing three resilience strategies in response to external challenges: normalization tactics, second-parent adoptions, and commitment ceremonies. The mothers in Short's study coped with external challenges by maintaining supportive couple and social network relationships, engaging in equitable parenting practices, and enhancing their sociopolitical understandings of heterosexism. They also reported signposting, or explicitly labeling family members as family, as one coping strategy. Despite the increased knowledge afforded by these initial findings, little is yet known about how female coparents discursively respond to legitimacy challenges or how these communicative strategies are perceived. This gap in the research limits our ability to develop strategies that lesbian-headed families might use to cope with or protect themselves from stress, as well as negotiate the prejudice of others.

The current study examines the challenges lesbian-headed families encounter and the accounting strategies that female coparents employ in response to external challenges. The research on accounts derives from seminal work by Goffman (e.g., 1971) and others who argue that people engage in "performances" or self-presentations for existing audiences and create accounts when their actions have negative implications (see Orbuch, 1997). Such remedial accounts (Orbuch, 1997; Scott & Lyman, 1968) often arise out of interactions that imply undesirable behaviors or actions. In the case of discourse-dependent (Galvin, 2006) lesbian-headed families, the offense likely is raising children in the context of a same-sex

relationship, thereby challenging others' definitions of family. Research on accounts provides a theoretical framework upon which to build our understanding of how lesbian mothers talk about their family to others when discursively challenged.

In what follows, we review literature on challenges faced by families with lesbian mothers and discuss how an accounting framework can shed light on interactions involving discursive challenges to lesbian family identity. We then present the results of a two-state study on interactions lesbian mothers report having when their family identity was challenged.

Challenges Faced by Families with Lesbian Mothers

Identity negotiation is reported as a constant for families with lesbian mothers. Challenges emanate from both specific negative encounters with others (Meyer, 2003) and from negative community climates (Oswald, Cuthbertson, Lazarevic, & Goldberg, 2010).

The Origin of Challenges for Families with Lesbian Mothers

Negative interactions often stem from family of origin members' failure to recognize the nonbiological parent as a legitimate mother (Gartrell et al., 2000) and the offspring as full-fledged grandchildren (Gartrell et al., 1996). Because many lesbian mothers feel rejected by their families of origin, they often turn to chosen kin or social networks with some reporting high levels of social support from these networks (Donaldson, 2000; Rothblum, 2010). Yet research continues to find that, for others, social networks are sources of disconfirmation (DeMino, Appleby, & Fisk, 2007). Lack of social support from members of the lesbian and gay community is reported as a barrier to becoming a lesbian parent (Brown et al., 2009), and is theorized by some to result from dueling political opinions and goals in the lesbian community (Speziale & Gopalakrishna, 2004).

Stressful interaction is often compounded by negative community climates, measured by a community's religious and political affiliations, legal rights, workplace opportunities and policies, and the presence (or absence) of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) community members and services (Oswald et al., 2010). Community climates vary, ranging from hostile to tolerant to supportive. Lesbian families have been shown to face disconfirmation in health care, school, daycare, workplace, and neighborhood settings (Gartrell et al., 1999; Peplau & Beals, 2004; Shapiro, Peterson, & Stewart, 2009). Yep (2003) maintains that in many communities, lesbians are categorically denied the legal rights that heterosexual individuals take for granted (e.g., gaining custody of their children or becoming foster and adoptive parents). The lack of legal rights afforded to the second parent both presents a major stressor and calls into question the legitimacy of the second mother and the overall lesbian family form (Peplau & Beals, 2004).

Moreover, interactional challenges and negative community climates do not always remain external. Negative social climates often lead lesbian mothers to experience an associated form of stress-internalized heterosexism (Meyer, 2003). Negative external events and experiences become expected, creating in mothers an unwelcome experience of vigilance (Meyer, 2003), leaving individuals constantly on guard because of a perceived ever-present possibility of discrimination (Contrada et al., 2000; Meyer, 2003; Oswald et al., 2010). In

sum, the challenges lesbian mothers face across relational contexts result in a number of negative consequences for families with female coparents.

Communication Practices Used to Negotiate Family Identity

Research to date has examined the rituals and the symbolic practices lesbian families use to confront these issues and negotiate acceptance for their family identity. Lesbian families symbolically underscore the legitimacy of their family form and relations between members by wearing conventional wedding rings (Suter & Daas, 2007), by engaging in purposeful naming practices (e.g., using a shared last name; Reimann, 1997; Suter & Oswald, 2003), and/or by referring to the nonbiological mother in a manner that renders her role publicly visible (e.g., calling her mother; Brown & Perlesz, 2008; Short, 2007). Lesbian families have also been found to employ rituals to communicate their family form, ranging from the everyday (e.g., taking nightly walks as a family or displaying family photos at work; Bergen, Suter, & Daas, 2006; Suter, Daas, & Bergen, 2008) to the extraordinary (e.g., public commitment or wedding ceremonies; Dalton & Bielby, 2000; Hequembourg, 2004).

Scholars have also begun investigating the ways lesbian families *communicate* about their family identity to people outside the family. When doing so, lesbian mothers struggle with balancing their private versus public identities (Chabot & Ames, 2004) and often feel burdened by the need to constantly educate society (Sullivan, 2004). Sullivan (2004) offers three discursive strategies nonbiological mothers might employ to manage valuative inquiry—full disclosure, partial disclosure, or passing. This research has laid an important foundation for the current study in that it focuses on strategies by which lesbian mothers can *account* for and reaffirm family identity. However, Sullivan's study focuses only on nonbiological mothers and their choices to disclose or not disclose their lesbianism. Researchers have yet to examine the specific strategies lesbian mothers use when others have rejected, questioned, or challenged the legitimacy of their family form.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The work cited above confirms that lesbian families experience challenges to their identity, are subject to the negative consequences of those challenges, and enact strategic choices for symbolically communicating family identity. However, little is known about how lesbian mothers cope with challenges from people outside the immediate family. This raises the question: How do lesbian mothers *talk* to others in ways that help them successfully manage challenges and affirm their family identity?

The theoretical framework of accounts, drawing from the fields of social psychology, sociology, and communication, offers an approach for unpacking the communicative coping strategies lesbian mothers might employ. Accounting is a framework for understanding how people make sense of and explain human interaction (Buttny & Morris, 2001). Deriving from Goffman's (e.g., 1971) research on self-presentation and human "performances," Scott and Lyman (1968, 1990) describe accounts as the ways in which people explain violations of social norm, originally defining accounts as "a linguistic device employed whenever action is subjected to valuative inquiry" (p. 219). In other words, ac-

counts are explanations made for untoward behavior. Remedial accounts pertain to deviance, disruption, and social interaction (Orbuch, 1997), and the accounts literature offers a framework for understanding the social interaction processes relevant to social valuation. Thus, the current study draws from perspectives on *accounts as remedial* to better understand how lesbian families talk to others who challenge their family form and to understand how lesbian mothers make sense of the stress caused by such challenges.

Remedial Account Episodes

People create remedial accounts to explain behavior considered to be problematic and/or undesirable by other people (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Scott and Lyman (1968) introduced a taxonomy of account types, including *excuses* (accounts in which the actor admits responsibility, but denies full responsibility) and *justifications* (accounts in which the actor accepts responsibility, but minimizes the negativity of the act or claims that it has positive consequences). Schönbach (1980) extended the typology of accounts to include *concessions*, or admissions of responsibility, and *refusals*, or denials of responsibility (which may be accompanied by attempts to prove one's innocence). Moreover, Schönbach (1990) offered a four-part account sequence that has been employed to understand the communicative negotiation of accounting (e.g., Cody & Braaten, 1992; Manusov, Koenig Kellas, & Trees, 2004). The sequence includes (1) the failure event (i.e., offense), in which the actor is held responsible for violating some norm, (2) the reproach phase (i.e., challenge), in which the challenger/observer requests an account, (3) the account phase (i.e., offering), in which the actor offers an explanation, and (4) the evaluation phase, during which the observer evaluates the account given.

People are reproached for a variety of offenses including failure events, undesirable behavior, as well as dissimilarities in attitudes, beliefs, and identities. Cody and McLaughlin (1990) argue that accounts are important because they help us make sense of the world through causal explanations and because they significantly impact the psychological well-being of the accounter. Moreover, when account episodes are not handled well, they lead to interpersonal conflict. Although the accounts literature has seldom been applied to discursive identity challenges, scholars have found that visible difference between transracial, international adoptive family members elicits identity-challenging outsider remarks, which both adoptive parents (Suter, 2008) and adoptees (Docan-Morgan, 2010) must manage. One study on discourse-dependent families has explicitly applied an accounting framework. Bergen (2010) found that commuter wives "chose or felt compelled to account for why they were living apart from their husbands" based on existing master narratives of marriage (p. 53). When lesbian mothers are challenged, they likely feel similarly called to provide an account (Bos et al., 2004). Thus, in the current study, we investigate challenges that derive from tensions between master narratives and discourse-dependent families and examine the interactional phases through which lesbian mothers account for their families. We pose the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of discursive challenges to their family identity do lesbian mothers report encountering?

RQ2: How do lesbian mothers respond to (i.e., account for) discursive challenges to their family identity?

RQ3: How do challengers reportedly evaluate lesbian mothers' accounts for their family identity?

Method

Participants

Participants included 44 female coparents residing in Nebraska (n = 21) and Colorado (n = 23). Focus groups were conducted at urban universities in otherwise primarily rural states. Neither state legally recognizes same-sex marriage or domestic partnerships. To qualify for the study, participants had to be at least 18 years old and a mother currently coraising at least one child in the context of a committed same-sex relationship. Children could be biological, adopted, stepchildren, and/or from previous relations. Participants were recruited from online social networking sites for lesbian moms residing in the two states, local chapters of Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), congregations inclusive of GLBT individuals, and queer faculty associations, as well as via flyers posted around university campuses, daycares, and grocery stores.

Participants ranged in age from 25 to 63 years (M = 41.93, SD = 7.39). Thirty-eight (86.4%) identified themselves as lesbian, five (11.4%) identified as bisexual, and one (2.3%) identified as fluid/undecided. Twenty-two of the mothers in the sample had partners who also participated in the study (eight participated in the same focus group; 14 participated in separate focus groups). Participants and their partners were primarily White (participant n = 40, 90.9%, comother n = 39, 88.6%) and Christian (participant n = 27, 61.4%, comother n = 26, 59.1%).[1] The sample was highly educated—25% (n = 11) of the participants held a bachelor's degree and 54.6% held a graduate (master's n = 19, doctorate n = 5) degree—and the mean household income reported was just over \$100,000. The mothers in the sample were coraising between one and four (M = 1.86, SD = 0.93) children in relationships they described as partners/life partners (n = 16, 36.4%), married (n = 13, 29.5%), committed (n = 8, 18.2%), or constituted through civil unions (n = 5, 11.4%) or a commitment ceremony (n = 1, 2.3%). The children ranged in age from 8 months to 29 years (M = 7.57, SD = 6.00) and entered the family through donor insemination (n = 48, 59.26%), previous relationship(s) with men (n = 21, 26%), foster to adoption (n = 6, 7.4%), adoption (n = 5, 6.17%), and other family relations (i.e., a nephew) (n = 1, 1.23%).

Procedures

Following approval from the university IRB in each state, we conducted 10 focus groups (average of four mothers per group, five groups in each state) to elicit group interaction on a topic that is difficult to observe and discuss—external family challenges. Coinvestigators moderated focus groups held in their respective states. After introductions, participants

provided informed consent and completed a brief demographic questionnaire. Conversations were then audiorecorded. To answer the research questions, the interview protocol asked about external challenges (e.g., "Can you remember a time when someone outside your family either directly or indirectly challenged (rejected, questioned) your family form? In other words, have you ever felt like you had to justify your family to someone else? What did that look like? How did the conversation go?"). Questions concerned female coparents' conversations with families of origin, social network members, and strangers. Each focus group lasted between one and two hours. At the conclusion, mothers were thanked, provided community-specific resources, and compensated $20. Recorded focus groups were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist resulting in approximately 412 pages of single-spaced data. Following transcription we employed audibility analyses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to ensure the veracity of the transcripts. At this time, names were changed to pseudonyms and other identifying demographics were removed.

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, we used both deductive and inductive methods by coding participants' descriptions of their interactions. Our initial analysis was guided by three steps in the account episodes sequence outlined by Schönbach (1990): the reproach phase (i.e., the challenge), the account phase (i.e., an explanation of the "offense"), and the evaluation phase (i.e., the follow-up or aftermath). Specifically, we allowed a priori categories from previous research on remedial accounts to sensitize us to the data (see also Manusov et al., 2004). For the challenge phase, sensitizing categories included indirect or open questions, direct questions or rebukes, and no verbal challenge. For the account phase, sensitizing categories included excuses, justifications, concessions, and refusals (Manusov et al., 2004; Schönbach, 1990). Finally, for the evaluation phase, we were informed by the a priori categories of honoring (i.e., accepting the account or agreeing and adding another offering) and nonhonoring (i.e., rejecting the account, taking issue with it, and/or disagreeing and offering another explanation) (see Manusov et al., 2004).

The analysis was also largely inductive (Bulmer, 1979) in order to allow for challenges, accounts, and evaluations unique to the interactions of lesbian mothers and their challengers to emerge naturally. Accordingly, we created new categories for recurring challenge, response, and evaluation types that extended beyond Schönboch's typology. Using Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method, we refined each emergent code both within and across interviews. Then, applying Glaser's (2001) articulation of theoretical saturation, we treated each of our emergent categories theoretically and deemed categories saturated when they no longer generated new theoretical insights. Results indicate that although the existing typologies were a useful starting place, particularly in understanding the parts of the account sequence, 53% of challenge, response, and evaluation categories and 96% of subcategories emerged as unique to these data.

The researchers created and refined the codebook by first reading through the transcripts of one focus group from each state and noting how the interactions participants described (1) were explained by existing typologies, and (2) included discursive strategies that extended the existing typologies. We coded any challenge, account, and evaluation

mentioned across the focus group interview when the participant described a specific interaction. Although we probed participants to uncover accounting sequences, participants sometimes only commented on part of the interaction. We coded each part of an episode whether it was mentioned as part of a full sequence or not. Moreover, we found participants often reported on multiple challenges, offerings, and evaluations within one conversation, and we coded each separately for challenge, offering, and evaluation type.

Once we developed the initial codebook, we individually coded and then jointly discussed eight of the 10 focus groups, refining the categories as necessary. We reached theoretical saturation after individually and jointly analyzing approximately half of the focus groups. To further establish the validity of the coding scheme, we individually coded 20% of the data not coded in common. Data were unitized by identifying response units into the categories of challenge, account, or evaluation. Unitizing reliability was calculated across the data set and resulted in 63% agreement, and intercoder reliability using Cohen's kappa for challenges (κ = .78), accounts (κ = .78), and evaluations (κ = .83) was good. Differences were discussed and rectified such that data were unitized and one code was assigned to each aspect of the accounting sequence.

Results

The research questions asked about the types of challenges, accounts, and evaluations that characterize interactions lesbian mothers consider to be discursively challenging and/or subjecting their family to valuative inquiry. The analyses revealed four categories of challenges, six categories of accounting strategies, and seven categories of evaluations. Each overarching category included several subtypes. Figure 1 summarizes the discursive responses.
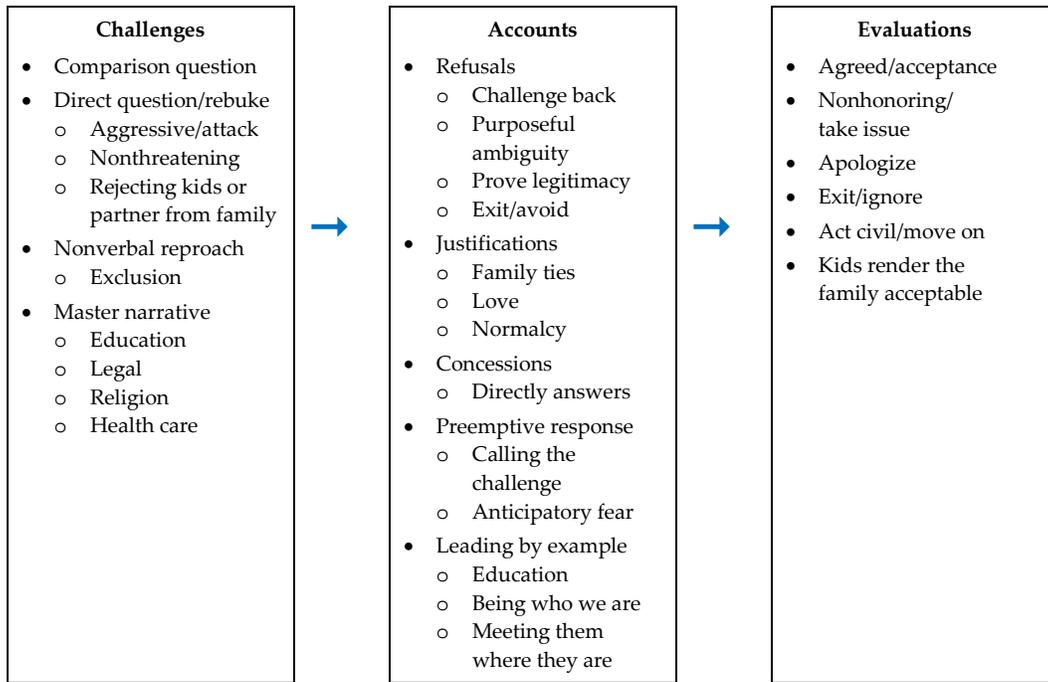
Challenges	Accounts	Evaluations

• Comparison question
• Direct question/rebuke
  o Aggressive/attack
  o Nonthreatening
  o Rejecting kids or partner from family
• Nonverbal reproach
  o Exclusion
• Master narrative
  o Education
  o Legal
  o Religion
  o Health care
	• Refusals
	  o Challenge back
	  o Purposeful ambiguity
	  o Prove legitimacy
	  o Exit/avoid
	• Justifications
	  o Family ties
	  o Love
	  o Normalcy
	• Concessions
	  o Directly answers
	• Preemptive response
	  o Calling the challenge
	  o Anticipatory fear
	• Leading by example
	  o Education
	  o Being who we are
	  o Meeting them where they are
		• Agreed/acceptance
		• Nonhonoring/ take issue
		• Apologize
		• Exit/ignore
		• Act civil/move on
		• Kids render the family acceptable

Figure 1. Types of discursive challenges, accounts, and evaluation types.

Challenges

RQ1 asked about the discursive challenges female coparents report receiving about their family identity. Participants reported receiving four types of challenges: comparison questions, direct questions/rebukes, nonverbal challenges, or master narrative challenges.

Comparison questions

Comparison questions indirectly challenge the family form (e.g., by comparing it to the heterosexual family form) or implicitly question the difference of lesbian families (e.g., questioning the role of one or both of the mothers). These challenges often suggest confusion and are characterized by role and/ or definitional questions or clarifications, such as "Are you the grandmother?" or "Who had her?" Cara, for example, told a story about her partner's experiences with a teacher in their daughter's afterschool program: "I had met her [before when I went to school] and . . . then the next day my partner came to pick up our daughter and this, this woman said, 'Oh, no, you're not her mom, I met her mom already'" (FG1, 102–103).[2] Although mothers understood comparison questions were often unintentional, they still experienced comparison questions as discursively challenging.

Direct question or rebuke

Direct questions or rebukes directly challenge or negatively evaluate the family form. This category includes three subtypes: aggressive/attack, nonthreatening, and rejecting kids or partner from the challenger's family. The subcategory of *aggressive/attack* includes direct questions or rebukes that explicitly challenge or reject the lesbian family form (e.g., "Why

would you want to have kids?" or "What about a male influence in her life?"). For instance, Gail described an aggressive encounter when scheduling a playdate for her son. The father of the playmate responded to the invitation with, "Well, wait a minute, what is that, is this a lesbian relationship because I don't want my kid around any lesbians, and if you're lesbian then my daughter is not allowed to even *speak* with your son anymore" (FG3, 932–936). In addition, the category of aggressive/attack also includes passive aggressiveness (i.e., joking that is taken offensively, "You're such a 'fruit'"; FG7, 1139–1144) and insensitivity or thoughtlessness. For instance, Callie's family member articulated her relief when she was able to avoid explaining to her children the true nature of Callie and her partner's relationship (e.g., "Boy, I dodged a bullet on that one, I didn't have to answer that question"; FG10, 846–847).

Some direct questions were identified as challenges, but were seen as *nonthreatening*, as they represented questions that were considered nosy. For example, Alyssa explained people's curiosity about her family form: "There's still people that come to us at church and say, 'Can I ask?' . . . because they know that I gave birth to my daughter and that my partner gave birth to the boys, but they don't get why they look alike" (FG4, 1101–1105). Like indirect comparison questions, nonthreatening challenges reflect a heteronormative bias. Yet, unlike indirect comparison questions, nonthreatening challenges were evaluated by mothers as relatively innocuous.

Finally, participants described challenges in which extended family members made statements interpreted as *rejecting their children or their partner from the family*. Several reported that their parents either rejected the role of grandparent or expressed feelings that the child wouldn't "*really*" be their grandchild given that their daughter was the nonbiological mother. Other family members, such as siblings or cousins, voiced similar challenges. Some challenges were issued wistfully and easily corrected by participants. For example, Leslie's sister's comment, "Well, he's not really going to be my nephew because he's not your son" (FG1, 221–222), was easily corrected when Leslie compared her nonbiological status to adoptive parent status. By contrast, other family rejection messages were more aggressive and hurtful. For example, Virginia told the story of talking with her sister after a two-year estrangement due to her sister's negative feelings about Virginia and her partner having a baby:

> It was going pretty civilly and then, uh, at one point [my sister] said "There's one thing that really bothers me a lot." And I said, "What's that?" And she said "When . . . you talk to my kids and you call your son their cousin." That really got to me. Because I hadn't realized . . . she doesn't count him as family at all. (FG5, 199–206)

Tia was similarly taken aback by her partner's father's failure to introduce his daughter's nonbiological child as his grandchild, "He said 'This is my daughter and my grandson [to whom his daughter had given birth], and this is Tia and [her daughter] Jennifer'" (FG5, 417–419). Our data shows discursive omissions, ambiguities, or outright rejections were experienced as hurtful and discursively identity-challenging.

Nonverbal reproach

In addition to verbal challenges, participants also reported various forms of nonverbal reproaches. Participants saw certain nonverbal behaviors as exclusionary, such as silence, disinterest, ignoring, and what we termed "nonverbal hostile" (e.g., dirty looks or purposely staying on a different side of the room). Sandy described a situation in which her aunt "didn't even look at our girls . . . I mean they're babies . . . you know, twins, infants. Most people would be like gawking over [them] . . . She just like walked right by, didn't like even acknowledge" (FG10, 169–174). Toni explained her partner's mother's standoffishness when she and her partner were adopting their first child: "They wouldn't come visit . . . they didn't really invite us to come visit" (FG2, 399–401). Participants experienced exclusion, silence, and disinterest as nonverbally reproachful and challenging.

Master narrative challenges

Master narratives describe societal expectations for relationships, conduct, and family (see Bochner, Ellis, & Tillman-Healy, 1997). Through inductive analyses, master narrative challenges emerged as interactions that implicitly or explicitly challenged lesbian family identity by evaluating the lesbian family in terms of heterocentric expectations. Master narrative challenges surfaced across a variety of interpersonal, organizational, and political settings. First, *educational* challenges captured mothers' perspectives of school personnel attempting to exclude them or make them feel uncomfortable at parent-child conferences. Primarily, however, this category was dominated by references to school forms. Participants routinely encountered school forms that required information about "Mother" and "Father" (as opposed to "Parent"). Mothers interpreted the language on such forms as societal challenges to their lesbian family identity.

Second, *legal* master narrative challenges reminded mothers that they did not enjoy the same legal benefits as heterosexual parents. Kendra described an interaction with a benefits manager who was legally restricted from adding Kendra's son to her benefits: "And he's like, 'I'm . . . I'm not saying it's good, I'm just saying legally I can't, nothing I can do for you. You're not legally related'" (FG9, 758–763).

Third, participants described encounters grounded in the master narrative that *religion*, particularly conservative Christian denominations, rejects homosexuality and, by extension, female coparenting. Kathy, for example, described her pastor's reaction after she and her partner volunteered to start a GLBT parenting group. The pastor said, "You're welcome to come, we'd love to still have you be there, but you can't be in leadership and you're never gonna find a GLBT uh, group" (FG9, 1100–1103). Family and friends also issued religiously-based identity challenges. For instance, Angie described her relative: "His whole family is Irish Catholic, very strong Irish Catholic, um, and so they considered our [family] a sin . . . it was like, 'We love you even though you're sinners . . . we tolerate you, but you're sinning'" (FG2, 1148–1154).

Finally, *health care* master narratives included interactions in hospital settings in which primarily nonbiological mothers experienced challenges to their parental legitimacy. For example, Kendra narrated a health care challenge when her partner gave birth to their son who after complications spent several weeks in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU):

> My partner got to hold him that first day, uh, but I still didn't get to hold him, uh, and I was kind of freaking out, cause they told us that he was . . . better than a fifty percent chance that he was gonna be brain-damaged, that he was never gonna walk, he's never gonna talk . . . it had been now three days and . . . I asked if I could hold him, and the nurse said I couldn't, and I asked why not, and she said *cause I wasn't family*. So that was probably the most negative experience that I've ever had. (FG9, 50–68, emphasis added)

In summary, participants reported that strangers, friends, coworkers, community, society, and family members all challenged their family identity. Challenges ranged from direct attacks to silence to heteronormative misconceptions and legalized discrimination. In response, participants offered a wide variety of accounts.

Accounts

RQ2 asked about the types of accounts or offerings female coparents provide in response to challenges. Analyses identified multiple types of refusals, justifications, and concessions (Schönbach, 1990). Although sensitizing coding schemes included excuses (i.e., the accounter placing blame outside herself; denying responsibility), excuses did not emerge in our data. We also inductively identified three other accounting strategies specific to our participants' experiences, namely preemptive responses, leading by example, and second-party accounts.

Refusals

Refusals can take several forms, such as refusing to account when challenged, denying that an infraction or failure event occurred, or accounting in such a way that "proves" one's "innocence" from any wrongdoing (Schönbach, 1980, 1990). In the context of lesbian mothers accounting for challenges to their family identity, we identified several strategies that represent modified forms of refusals. The spirit behind refusals in the current data included challenging the assumption of wrongdoing and avoiding the need to account. Participants challenged the assumption of wrongdoing in two ways. First, one of the most common responses, challenge back, referred to addressing the challenge head on and calling the challenger to account or take responsibility for the challenge. For example, when a stranger confronted Olivia and her partner, they challenged her right to question them:

> We're at the department store and, um, the girls were particularly charming one day and, um, some older, um, woman says, you now, "Which one of you is the mom?" and we said, "We are," and she said "That is just so wrong, that is morally wrong, that's reprehensible, how dare you." And my partner said, "If you didn't want to know the answer to the question, you shouldn't have asked." (FG3, 1060–1067)

Challenge back accounts often meant calling others out on insensitivities or correcting misconceptions about the family form. These type of responses ranged in their tone from benign corrections (e.g., Angie's partner telling her mother that it wasn't necessary to specify

who the biological mother was in the family Christmas letter; FG2, 161–167) to more aggressive (e.g., Jade telling her brother to "Go to hell" when he asked why they would want to have children in a lesbian relationship; FG6, 281) to, in very few instances, hostile (e.g., Kendra's near physical altercation with the NICU nurse who wouldn't let her hold her son). Finally, participants also challenged back in response to master narrative challenges (e.g., crossing out the terms "Mother" and "Father" on school forms and inserting the word "parent" instead).

The second way participants challenged the assumption of wrongdoing in their accounting strategies was to "*prove legitimacy*." Mothers did so by providing evidence of their relationship for skeptics. For example, after Kendra proved she had Power of Attorney for her partner, the doctor supplied information about the condition of her partner and son in the NICU. Moreover, Josie explained: "[Due to] second parent adoption, we're both on our daughter's birth certificate. So when somebody says, 'Well, who's her mother?' we're able to say 'We both are because we're both on the birth certificate'" (FG3, 1316_1320).

Participants also "*refused*" to account through avoidance. This took one of two forms: *purposeful ambiguity* or *exit/avoid*. When using purposeful ambiguity, participants refused to account by using strategic ambivalence, not clarifying misconceptions, and/or being silent. For example, when the father of her son's friend threateningly asked if she was in a lesbian relationship, Gail used ambiguity: "I didn't go there, I didn't answer his question . . . whether it was a lesbian relationship or any of that . . . I essentially excused myself off the phone and hung up" (FG3, 942–949). Finally, participants also responded by simply *exiting* or *avoiding* the relationship or the situation. For example, in response to the minister who challenged their idea for a GLBT parent group at his church, Kathy explained, "So the next week we went church shopping" (FG9, 1110).

Justifications

In justifications, the accounter discounts the importance of the problematic, claims it does not have negative consequences, or claims it has positive consequences (Schönbach, 1980; Scott & Lyman, 1990). Participants justified their family in three ways unique to families headed by female coparents, including citing family ties, love, and claiming normalcy of female coparenting. First, and usually directly in response to challenges that rejected one's partner or child from the extended family, mothers explained *family ties* to minimize the negativity proposed by the idea that their children would not "really" be a part of the family. For example, Olivia and her partner went to great lengths to conceive their children by harvesting and inseminating Olivia's eggs and implanting them into her partner. She explained to her father, "But dad they *are* yours, because they're my eggs and so they're related to you" (FG3, 195_198). Mothers also justified family ties by comparing the relationship between extended family and a nonbiological child to adoption. Jill, for instance, described her partner's response to her sister's challenge, "'It's not like he's really gonna be my nephew,'" by saying, "'Really, what about adoption? You know, what if we were to adopt or foster care and then adopt?'" (FG2, 118–121).

Mothers also minimized others' negativity by describing the *love* and *positive consequences* of the lesbian family form. When Kay's father asked her why, after 25 years in a different-sex marriage, she would want to open herself to ridicule by raising children in a

same-sex relationships, she replied that "Love is enough" (FG3, 121). Similarly, in response to her sister-in-law's challenge "'Why would you want to do this to your child?'" Josie responded:

> It's not something we want to do to our child. We want to raise a child with love and in a loving situation with wonderful moral background and education, and all the things that you would equip a child with to go through life. And so a two, a two-parent, loving family is what does that. (FG3, 246–253)

Others justified their family form by citing the growing "*normalcy*" of female coparenting. For instance, Josie told her mother in-law, "In this day and age two mommies is not all that unusual. And we surround her with a very supportive group of people in our church family and our, our own, you know, extended family" (FG3, 321–323). For Josie and other mothers, love, positivity, and the benefits of two-parent households were invoked as justifications.

Concessions
Concessions involve accepting blame for the untoward behavior or admissions of "guilt" (Schönbach, 1990). For the moms in our study, concessions did not assume the form of taking blame, rather they involved straightforward, matter-of-fact answers. Such accounts usually came in response to indirect questions or confusion about the family form (e.g., "Who's the mommy?"). In directly answering questions, lesbian moms simply conceded that they were indeed members of a lesbian-headed family (e.g., "They're ours"; "I'm the mom"; "She has two moms and no dad").

Our inductive analysis also identified three other accounting strategies: preemptive responses, leading by example, and second party accounts.

Preemptive responses
Preemptive responses refer to mother-initiated responses that were not preceded by an explicit challenge. These were accounts given for anticipated challenges reflecting mothers' internalization of societal master narratives that negatively evaluate lesbian motherhood. These emerged in two central ways. First, *calling the challenge* referred to confronting people based on anticipated negative evaluations. For example, some participants described questioning their children's potential teachers to see if the teacher would have a problem teaching a child with two mothers. Renee explained, "We interviewed two [pre-schools] . . . we ask, you know, just, 'Do you have a problem with things at the present?'" (FG8, 440–443). Likewise, mothers initiated similar conversations with family members. Olivia described calling her parents to tell them she and her partner were expecting a baby and explaining that it was time to make a decision about accepting (or rejecting) her family. As she put it to them, "It's choice time" (FG3, 186).

Second, we coded more indirect preemptive responses as *anticipatory fear*. These were accounting strategies mothers employed based on fears of negative master narratives about lesbian families. For example, one participant discussed her and her partner's struggle with how to disclose their relationship in their son's birthday party invitations:

> Our son's birthday is the end of September, so he had only been in school for a month, and we were gonna have a birthday party for him, and he wanted to invite the kids in his class. . . . So we're writing out invitations, and my partner and I are talking like, "Shit, how are we gonna do this, because we don't, nobody knows us yet, and this is not a good, you know, place to find out at the [play center], you know." It's like, "What do you mean you're gay?" "Holy crap," and take their kid and run, you know. So it's like okay, it's like, "How do we out ourselves in birthday invitations?" And we're like trying, we're writing letters in these invitations trying to say, "Oh, we know it's the beginning of the year, and but it'd be fun if the kids got to know each other." By the way, there's [sic] two moms (inaudible), (Group chuckle) you know, just trying to get that in there" (FG9, 427–1447).

In sum, preemptive responses refer to accounts without verbal challenges mothers used when they anticipated a problem based on previous interactions, unknown situations, or preconceived notions about negative master narratives.

Leading by example

Mothers also described responding by leading by example in education, "being who we are," and "meeting them where they are." There was a sense throughout the data that the way to respond to others' discomfort, questions, or challenges was to both explain and model the image of family mothers wanted others to understand. In terms of *education*, mothers often felt called to provide information to those issuing challenges. For instance, in response to her brother's rejection, Cath described how: "My strategy with him was to originally try to educate him" (FG5, 319–324). Likewise Leslie described her friends' strategy to educate her children by invoking comparisons to opposite-sex relationship: "Jill and Leslie are like mommy and daddy. They kiss and they're a couple" (FG1, 2042–2045).

In addition, mothers discussed the importance of "*Being who we are*," which entails living by example. Olivia explained, "Our driving value for us in how we approached the communication was about integrity on our end, and what they did with it was up to them . . . truth telling in a real straightforward, but nonhostile way" (FG3, 654–660). Typical of other mothers, Josie said, "We find that just living our lives is proving to everyone else who we are . . . and how incredibly normal our life is. We pay our bills, we pay the taxes, we change dirty diapers, we buy the food. We do all the things that normal people do" (FG3, 451–457). In sum, actions speak louder than words: "And we didn't need to argue the point. We showed her the point" (FG3, 277–279).

Lastly, mothers described the response strategy of "*Meeting them where they are/Going our separate ways*." This category represents hope and patience—a sense that if participants meet the challenger at his/her level, there might be room for eventual acceptance. Jillian and her partner displayed this kind of wait-and-see attitude with her partner's sister who rejected their family form: "She has a right to believe whatever she wants to" (FG9, 186–187). This category also includes assimilation or attempting to adapt to others, as Dawn eloquently described:

> Humans are very much psychologically driven to be around people like them, and so when you look different, they assume all these other things must be different too, but when you live next door and you're exactly the same, their brain works that same way and they say, "Oh, this is all good, cause they're just like me, and they have to worry about health insurance and all those things." So to me that, my winning communication strategy has been the more I'm like 'em, the better it is, and sometimes that has meant doing things that weren't, probably weren't as natural. (FG6, 1878–1890)

Although the strategy of "assimilation" was not without some controversy, this strategy resurfaced across focus groups. In sum, participants' use of accounts included several types of justifications, refusals, and concessions that fit within existing accounting typologies. In addition, inductive analysis identified several new strategies (e.g., educating, modeling, and meeting others where they are) that extend previous typologies.

Evaluation

The evaluation step refers to the challenger's reaction, the follow-up, or the aftermath of the challenge-account sequence (e.g., Manusov et al., 2004). Reports on evaluations were coded into six categories: agreed/acceptance, nonhonoring/take issue, apologize, exit/ignore, acting civil/moving on, and kids render the family acceptable.

The first category, *agreed/acceptance*, refers to instances in which challengers accepted the participant's account. For instance, in the example above when Jill compared nonbiological aunting to adoption, "Her sister said, 'Oh, oh,' and it was just, it was a quick conversation, but at the time it was one of those things where you're like, God duh, you know" (FG2, 122–125). Upon hearing the account, Jill's sister's acceptance was immediate. Jackie similarly described acceptance by a heterosexual parent. After the parent's comparison question ("Which one of you is the mother?"), Jackie provided a concession, explaining that Jenny was her partner and explained that Jenny had no legal rights in State B. In response, "He was very supportive. He said, you know, he just didn't understand that, and why people couldn't just live their lives the way [they wanted]" (FG9, 348–351).

The evaluation process did not always go so smoothly, however. Evaluations in the second category, nonhonoring/take issue, include rejecting or refusing the explanation, disagreeing with the nature of the explanation, and/or disagreeing and offering a different account (Manusov et al., 2004). When, for instance, Elizabeth challenged back after finding out her mother was upset she was pregnant, her mother replied, "Well, I don't think it's right" (FG7, 212). Similarly, Andrea's aunt rejected Andrea's justification of her family:

> [My aunt said] "What have you done? How selfish of you to have children and have them in this kind of context," and, you know, and when I say, "Hey, they're thriving, you know, children thrive on love and they're thriving," [she said,] "Well, you may think they're thriving, but just wait." (FG2, 197–213)

Other examples include condescending e-mails insisting the family form is immoral, grandparents ignoring requests to use children's full names (i.e., when children's last

names include both mothers' names), religious condemnation, and rejection of siblings' family status.

Sometimes, challengers *apologized* either immediately following the account or after some time had passed. When Jenny corrects individuals who mistake her for grandmother, she has found that "[People] then fall all over themselves, you know, apologizing for thinking I was the grandmother" (FG8, 958–960). Likewise, Kim explained her brother-in-law's apology following his previous rejection of the family: "I mean, he's had a major turnaround. And he came face-to-face, very hat in hand apology. And, um, he's like 'You're a wonderful family. I'm really embarrassed, I was wrong'" (FG1, 681–700).

Some challengers responded to mothers' accounts by *exiting* the situation, *ignoring* the account, or *leaving* the relationship. For example, Dina told a story about a friend she had since the fifth grade. Yet, when the friend found out Dina was going to adopt, she wrote:

> "I cannot watch this, I don't want to be a part of it and I'm going to end communication with you" . . . I responded "I'm sorry you feel that way," and I, you know, just kind of justified things from the way I saw them. And I said "I hope you change your mind," and she never responded again. (FG1, 173–181)

The evaluator in this case both ignored the account and exited the relationship. Others *acted civil/moved on/acted like the altercation hadn't happened*. For instance, Andi's friend's e-mail response following challenging interactions about fundamental lesbian rights invokes this category: "I hope we can still be good friends and we can agree to disagree" (FG1, 582–585).

Finally, many described that although others may have expressed concerns with the female coparents starting families, ultimately, the *kids rendered the family acceptable*. In other words, having kids, rather than any specific interpersonal interaction helped relieve relational tensions, discomfort, and/or rejection. For example, although Callie's partner's parents had been standoffish when the couple decided to start a family, "Once we had kids, they were all over it . . . the kids kind of made the relationship in their eyes and uh, then it was okay" (FG10, 371–375). In sum, aside from the nonhonor/take issue category, most evaluations described by participants reflected a chance to move forward interactionally and/or relationally.

Discussion

The results of the current analysis demonstrate a complex, challenging discursive environment that must be regularly negotiated by female coparents. Our study, using a theoretically-based accounting approach, deepens current understandings both about how outsider remarks can challenge the identities of nontraditional families (Suter, 2008) and how language use can help families discursively cope with negative valuation (Short, 2007; Sullivan, 2004).

The accounts derived from the inductive coding both correspond to previous research on accounts in other contexts and also reveal strategies that may be unique to families with

female coparents. For example, under the accounting strategy of refusal, mothers employed purposeful ambiguity and the strategy of exiting/avoiding when they did not wish to account to the challenger. Each of these might be seen as similar to strategies such as evasion (Leary, 1996) and flight (Miller, 1996) identified in previous research (see also Canary, Cody, & Manusov, 2008). Yet, new strategies emerged as well. Although, like Bergen's (2010) commuter wife participants, lesbian mothers in the current study reported experiencing master narrative challenges, the challenges they reported (e.g., school forms) are unique to same-sex parents/families. Indeed, West and Turner (1995) reported very similar school-family interactions for same-sex families. Master narrative challenges unique to female coparents were prevalent in the data suggesting that discursive interpersonal challenges emerge from, and exist alongside, challenges that grow out of societal scripts that undermine lesbian-headed family identity.

Unlike Bergen (2010), the mothers in our sample did not use excuses to explain their family form. It may be that discourse-dependent families (Galvin, 2006) use different types of accounts based on differences in relational master narratives. Whereas Bergen's commuter wives defied some traditions of marriage, they still conformed to the heterosexual script/norm. Thus, excuses that deny responsibility (e.g., my job forces me to be away from my husband) may be necessary to ameliorate others' negative judgments. Lesbian mothers, rather than deviating from an existing script, may be under pressure to write a new script. Using an excuse, therefore, might undermine the family more than the challenge itself. Specifically, to claim that one is not "at fault" for being a lesbian and/or bringing children into a same-sex relationship implies that something is wrong with the family form in the first place. Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that participants did not mention excuses among their accounting strategies.

Although the nature of the current data does not allow for a systematic analysis of the predictive nature of the account sequence process, it does lend insight into the notion of a mitigating-aggravating continuum in communication across the account sequence (e.g., Dunn & Cody, 2000; McLauglin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983). Aggressive attack challenges were viewed by participants in the current study as aggravating, whereas many forms of indirect questions or nonthreatening direct questions were seen as more innocent and a product of heterocentrism rather than malice. Certain account types may be seen as more mitigating (i.e., leading by example) or more aggravating (i.e., challenge back) depending on the challenger. Previous research suggests that excuses and concessions are the most mitigating forms of accounts and justifications and refusals are more aggravating (McLaughlin et al., 1983). Future research should examine whether the accounting strategies used by female coparents correspond with or differ from these conclusions. They may differ because, as discussed previously, mothers in the current study did not employ the strategy of excuses. Moreover, concessions (i.e., directly answering questions and offering little explanation) may be seen by challengers as aggravating as they do not offer explanation for the "offense." Morris (1985) describes remedial account episodes as a negotiation of rules that illuminate structures of social order and change. Moreover, Dunn and Cody (2000) demonstrate that, in the context of "serious account episodes" (p. 372), full apologies and excuses are not the most mitigating strategies. Changing social structures, including the increase in lesbian-headed families over the last two decades (Tasker & Patterson,

2007), and the potential gravity of challenging one's family identity similarly suggests that previous theoretical explanations for mitigating and aggravating accounting strategies need to be reconsidered. Despite this, research such as the current study and those that focus on other issues of changing family (Bergen, 2010) and work structures (Dunn & Cody, 2001) highlight the usefulness of accounts for understanding how people communicatively respond to valuative inquiry in a climate of contested and changing social norms.

Although our results indicate a wide variety of discursive challenges, we also found that participants had experienced a number of positive interactions regarding their family form. For instance, Kendra appreciated unsolicited accommodations, such as when her son's Spanish teacher changed the stock valentine card that read "mi mama" and "mi papa" to "mi mama" and "mi mama" (FG9, 1498–1499). Future research should investigate interactions that include acceptance in order to provide the fullest picture possible of the discursive environment encountered by female coparents.

Applied Implications
Although our data do not allow us to analyze the systematic differences in the effectiveness of accounting strategies, the mothers did offer suggestions to others facing similar discursive challenges. Participants' responses suggested four themes of advice: (1) be yourself, (2) manage your emotions, (3) surround the family with positive people, and (4) focus on the kids. We hope these strategies might prove useful to female coparents just starting out or to those currently coping with discursive challenges.

Be a model for others
First, mothers advised others to be yourself and *model* for others. This advice was consistent with the accounting strategy of leading by example. Mothers were confident this strategy of responding to discursive challenges was superior and effective. As Kathy said, "(Chuckle) there are a lot of situations where you're tempted to, you know, it's like you wanna go spar, but we try really hard to do the same thing, to uh, just be the living example, you know, instead of going out and being confrontational . . . more folks will understand or have a different image by just seeing, you know, how normal you are" (FG9, 1302–1313).

Manage your emotions
For our participants, leading by example tended to also mean being nonconfrontational and managing emotions. There was some disagreement over the most effective strategies for responding to discursive challenges between mothers who valued peace and assimilation and those who believed in the power of difference and confrontation. Consistently, participants who valued the former talked about removing anger, hurt, defensiveness, and hostility from challenging interactions. They advised others to be matter-of-fact, nonchalant, keep things calm, make challenges a nonissue, and urged others not to be defensive, as this may be the only interaction the challenger has with a lesbian individual.

Others, however, discussed the importance of strong negative emotions. For example, Celia—a nonbiological coparent—argued for the effectiveness of anger when she said, "I

am frustrated by this, I *am* angered by the fact that we don't have, you know, policies that we can't adopt our children, and I can't smile and pretend that that is okay. So anger becomes and the real hurt does become part of conversations" (FG6, 2115–2120). Celia's feelings may be reflective of Sullivan's (2004) findings that nonbiological mothers bear the brunt of education and legitimacy proofs. Participants seemed to agree that both approaches are appropriate in different situations, but that balance was realistic. For example, Deanna summed it up by saying, "Yeah, you can do that to your siblings and stuff. I would have no trouble telling my brother, 'Go to hell.' . . . But seriously, but with other people, you know, you really do learn to check your emotions [when you] let them have it. But even when you were letting them have it, you were probably letting them have it in that very informational, 'This is why' form" (FG6, 2167–2174).

Surround the family with supportive people
In order to cope with discursive challenges, mothers recommended surrounding the family with supportive people or people who accept the family and will make them feel welcome. They also encouraged women to find others they could talk to about the questions or rejection they may face in order to avoid isolation and achieve catharsis.

Focus on the kids
Finally, mothers advised focusing on the kids both during and after interactions. Mothers advised reminding others to be mindful of children within earshot and pointing out that such challenges could hurt the kids during the interaction. Then, following the interaction, they recommended debriefing with children, helping them devise coping strategies for similar interactions (see Breshears, 2010, 2011).

Limitations, Directions for Future Research, and Conclusion
The current study is limited by convenience sampling in two states, one of which is currently, and one of which has historically been, politically conservative. Lesbian mothers in states where gay marriage is a contested legal matter likely face a different set of social, personal, and politicized challenges. Future research should explore how geography and political climate impact discursive challenges and acceptance. Future studies should also examine lesbian mothers and female coparents from differing races, ethnicities, religions, and social class. The current sample was White, highly educated, and, on average, well-compensated for their jobs. These factors might affect the manner in which they account for challenges to family identity. For instance, they might use more direct strategies than less-connected mothers with less social capital.

Finally, future research should extend this study design to gay fathers. Doing so might shed light on the ways in which discursive challenges, accounting strategies, and evaluation sequences of gay fathers are both similar to and different from lesbian mothers. Future research should also examine how female coparents cope with challenges together and as a family.

Despite its limitations, the current study represents an important first step in understanding the interactional environment experienced by lesbian mothers. An accounting framework lends theoretical insight into understanding the types of challenges, accounts,

and evaluations that characterize these interactions and the strategies lesbian mothers might use to manage them. Understanding how mothers externally and internally account for family identity will further illuminate effective (and ineffective) strategies for handling homophobic interactions and coping with the stress that such interactions place on them as individuals and families.

Notes

1. A small number of participants identified themselves as Black (participant $n = 2$, comother $n = 1$), biracial (participant $n = 1$, comother $n = 1$), or Native American (comother $n = 1$). Other religious affiliations reported by participants included Buddhist ($n = 6$), none ($n = 6$), Jewish ($n = 2$), non-practicing ($n = 2$), atheist ($n = 1$), agnostic ($n = 1$), and other ($n = 2$).

2. FG1 refers to the transcript of focus group number one and 102–103 refers to the specific lines in the transcript. This citation practice is employed throughout the manuscript.

References

Bergen, K. M. (2010). Accounting for difference: Commuter wives and the master narrative of marriage. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 38,* 47–64. doi:10.1080/00909880903483565

Bergen, K. M., Suter, E. A., & Daas, K. L. (2006). "About as solid as a fishnet": Symbolic construction of a legitimate parental identity for nonbiological lesbian mothers. *Journal of Family Communication, 6,* 201–220. doi:10.1207/s15327698jfc0603_3

Biblarz, T. J., & Savci, E. (2010). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender families. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72,* 480–497. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00714.x

Bochner, A. P., Ellis, C., & Tillman-Healy, L. M. (1997). Relationships as stories. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships: Theory, research and interventions* (2nd ed., pp. 307–324). New York, NY: Wiley.

Bos, H. M. W., van Balen, F., van den Boom, D. C., & Sandfort, T. G. M. (2004). Minority stress, experience of parenthood and child adjustment in lesbian families. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology, 22*(4), 291–304. doi:10.1080/02646830412331298350

Breshears, D. (2010). Coming out with our children: Turning points facilitating lesbian parent discourse with their children about family identity. *Communication Reports, 23,* 79–90. doi:10.1080/08934215.2010.511398

Breshears, D. (2011). Understanding communication between lesbian parents and their children regarding outsider discourse about family identity. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 7*(4), doi:10.1080/1550428X.2011.564946

Brown, R., & Perlesz, A. (2008). In search of a name for lesbians who mother their non-biological children. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 4,* 453–467. doi:10.1080/15504280802191574

Brown, S., Smalling, S., Groza, V., & Ryan, S. (2009). The experiences of gay men and lesbians in becoming and being adoptive parents. *Adoption Quarterly, 12,* 229–246. doi:10.1080/1092675090 3313294

Bulmer, M. (1979). Concepts in the analysis of qualitative data. *Sociological Review, 27,* 651–677.

Buttny, R., & Morris, G. H. (2001). Accounting. In W. P. Robinson & H. Giles (Eds.), *The new handbook of language and social psychology* (pp. 285–301). New York, NY: Wiley.

Canary, D. J., Cody, M. J., & Manusov, V. L. (2008). *Interpersonal communication: A goals-based approach* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Chabot, J. M., & Ames, B. D. (2004). "It wasn't 'let's get pregnant and go do it'": Decision making in lesbian couples planning motherhood via donor insemination. *Family Relations, 53,* 348–356. doi:10.1111/j.0197-6664.2004.00041.x

Cody, M. J., & Braaten, D. O. (1992). The social-interactive aspects of account-giving. In M. L. McLaughlin, M. J. Cody, & S. J. Read (Eds.), *Explaining oneself to others: Reason-giving in a social context* (pp. 225–243). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Cody, M. J., & McLaughlin, M. L. (1990). Interpersonal accounting. In H. Giles & W. P. Patterson (Eds.), *Handbook of language and social psychology* (pp. 227–255). New York, NY: Wiley.

Contrada, R. J., Ashmore, R. D., Gary, M. L., Coups, E., Egeth, J. D., Sewell, A., et al. (2000). Ethnicity-related sources of stress and their effects on well-being. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 9,* 136–139. doi:10.1111/1467-8721.00078

Dalton, S. E., & Bielby, D. D. (2000). "That's our kind of constellation": Lesbian mothers negotiate institutionalized understandings of gender within the family. *Gender and Society, 14,* 36–61. doi:10.1177/089124300014001004

DeMino, K. A., Appleby, G., & Fisk, D. (2007). Lesbian mothers with planned families: A comparative study of internalized homophobia and social support. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 77,* 165–173. doi:10.1037/0002-9432.77.1.165

Docan-Morgan, S. (2010). Korean adoptees' retrospective reports of intrusive interactions: Exploring boundary management in adoptive families. *Journal of Family Communication, 10,* 137–157. doi:10.1080/15267431003699603

Donaldson, C. (2000). Midlife lesbian parenting. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services, 11,* 119–138. doi:10.1300/J041v11n02_06

Dunn, D., & Cody, M. J. (2000). Account credibility and public image: Excuses, justifications, denial, and sexual harassment. *Communication Monographs, 67,* 372–391. doi:10.1080/03637750009376518

Galvin, K. (2006). Diversity's impact on defining the family: Discourse-dependence and identity. In L. H. Turner & R. West (Eds.), *The family communication sourcebook* (pp. 3–19). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gartrell, N., Banks, A., Hamilton, J., Reed, N., Bishop, H., & Rodas, C. (1999). The national lesbian family study: 2. Interviews with mothers of toddlers. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 69,* 362–369. doi:10.1037/h0080410

Gartrell, N., Banks, A., Reed, N., Hamilton, J., Rodas, C., & Deck, A. (2000). The national lesbian family study: 3. Interviews with mothers of five-year olds. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 70,* 542–549. doi:10.1037/h0087823

Gartrell, N., Hamilton, J., Banks, A., Mosbacher, D., Reed, N., Sparks, C. H., & Bishop, H. (1996). The national lesbian family study: 1. Interviews with prospective mothers. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 66,* 272–281. doi:10.1037/h0080178

Gates, G. J., Badgett, M. V., Macomber, J. E., & Chambers, K. (2007). *Adoption and foster care by gay and lesbian parents in the United States.* Los Angeles, CA: Williams Institute.

Gates, G. J., & Ost, J. (2004). *The gay and lesbian atlas.* Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

Glaser, B. G. (2001). *The grounded theory perspective: Conceptualization contrasted with description.* Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory.* Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in public: Microstudies of the public order.* New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Goldberg, A. E. (2010). *Lesbian and gay parents and their children: Research on the family life cycle.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Hequembourg, A. (2004). Unscripted motherhood: Lesbian mothers negotiating incompletely institutionalized family relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 21,* 739–762. doi:10.1177/0265407504047834

Hequembourg, A. (2007). *Lesbian motherhood: Stories of becoming.* New York, NY: Harrington Park Press.

Leary, M. R. (1996). *Self-presentation: Impression management and interpersonal behavior.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Manusov, V., Koenig Kellas, J., & Trees, A. R. (2004). Do unto others? Conversational moves and perceptions of attentiveness toward other face in accounting sequences between friends. *Human Communication Research, 30,* 514–539. doi:10.1093/hcr/30.4.514

McLaughlin, M. L., Cody, M. J., & Rosenstein, N. E. (1983). Account sequences in conversations between strangers. *Communication Monographs, 50,* 102–125.

Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin, 129,* 674–697. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674

Miller, R. S. (1996). *Embarrassment: Poise and peril in everyday life.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Morris, G. H. (1985). The remedial episode as a negotiation of rules. In R. L. Street & J. N. Capella (Eds.), *Sequence and pattern in communicative behavior* (pp. 70–84). London, UK: Edward Arnold.

Orbuch, T. L. (1997). People's accounts count: The sociology of accounts. *Annual Review of Sociology, 23,* 455–478. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.23.1.455

Oswald, R. F., Cuthbertson, C., Lazarevic, V., & Goldberg, A. (2010). Measuring community climate. *Journal of GLBT Studies, 6,* 214–228. doi:10.1080/15504281003709230

Patterson, C. J., & Riskind, R. G. (2010). To be a parent: Issues in family formation among gay and lesbian adults. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 6,* 326–340. doi:10.1080/1550428X.2010.490902

Peplau, L. A., & Beals, K. P. (2004). The family life of lesbians and gay men. In A. L. Vangelisti (Ed.), *Handbook of family communication* (pp. 233–248). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Reimann, R. (1997). Does biology matter? Lesbian couples' transition to parenthood and their division of labor. *Qualitative Sociology, 20,* 153–185. doi:10.1023/A:1024757517386

Rothblum, E. D. (2010). "Will the real lesbian please stand up?" Lesbian relationships. In S. L. Dibble & P. Robertson (Eds.), *Lesbian health 101: A clinician's guide* (pp. 67–83). San Francisco, CA: University of California San Francisco Nursing Press.

Schönbach, P. A. (1980). A category system for account phases. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 10,* 195–200. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2420100206

Schönbach, P. A. (1990). *Account episodes.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Scott, M. B., & Lyman, S. (1968). Accounts. *American Sociological Review, 33,* 46–62. doi:10.2307/2092239

Scott, M. B., & Lyman, S. (1990). Accounts. In D. Brisset & C. Edgley (Eds.), *Life as a theater: A drama-turgical sourcebook* (2nd ed., pp. 219–242). New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Shapiro, D. N., Peterson, C., & Stewart, A. J. (2009). Legal and social contexts and mental health among lesbian and heterosexual mothers. *Journal of Family Psychology, 23,* 255–262. doi:10.1037/a0014973

Short, L. (2007). Lesbian mothers living well in the context of heterosexism and discrimination: Resources, strategies and legislative change. *Feminism and Psychology, 17,* 57–74. doi:10.1177/0959353507072912

Speziale, B., & Gopalakrishna, V. (2004). Social support and functioning of nuclear families headed by lesbian couples. *Affilia, 19,* 174–184. doi:10.1177/0886109903262753

Sullivan, M. (2004). *The family of women: Lesbian mothers, their children, and the undoing of gender.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Suter, E. A. (2008). Discursive negotiation of family identity: A study of US families with adopted children from China. *Journal of Family Communication, 8,* 126–147. doi:10.1080/ 15267430701857406

Suter, E. A., & Daas, K. L. (2007). Negotiating heteronormativity dialectically: Lesbian couples' display of symbols in culture. *Western Journal of Communication, 71,* 177–195. doi:10.1080/10570310701518443

Suter, E. A., Daas, K. L., & Bergen, K. M. (2008). Negotiating lesbian family identity via symbols and rituals. *Journal of Family Issues, 29,* 26–47. doi:10.1177/0192513X07305752

Suter, E. A., & Oswald, R. F. (2003). Do lesbians change their last names in the context of a committed relationship? *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 7,* 71–83. doi:10.1300/J155v07n02_06

Tasker, F., & Patterson, C. J. (2007). Research on gay and lesbian parenting: Retrospect and prospect. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 3*(2), 9–34.

West, R., & Turner, L. H. (1995). Communication in lesbian and gay families: Building a descriptive base. In T. J. Socha & G. H. Stamp (Eds.), *Parents, children, and communication* (pp. 147–169). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Yep, G. (2003). The violence of heteronormativity in communication studies: Notes on injury, healing, and queer world-making. *Journal of Homosexuality, 45,* 11–59. doi:10.1300/ J082v45n02_02