Moving Beyond Homonormativity in Teacher Training: A South Australian Workshop

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Abstract

As growing numbers of lesbian mother families enter the Australian education system, there comes with this an injunction to better include such families. The first step in such inclusion is to ensure that teachers are provided with knowledge about lesbian mother families that moves beyond simply refuting stereotypes, and toward acknowledgement of the specific experiences and needs of this family form. At the same time, however, it is important that educators, when attempting to include lesbian mothers and their children, do not reinstate new norms at the same time as challenging old stereotypes. The present paper reports on the development and application of a workshop aimed at providing education students at one South Australian university with a framework for understanding lesbian mother families that is critical of norms in all their forms, including amongst those who research lesbian mother families. It is suggested that the positive findings from the workshop may reflect the utility of challenging both heteronormativity and homonormativity in conjunction with one another so as to present students with a broadly critical approach to understanding sexuality education.

Introduction

Teaching students about the lives and support needs of lesbian mother families typically requires the educator to begin with the refutation of a range of stereotypes both about lesbianism, and what it means for children to be raised by lesbian mothers. Such a starting place, however, arguably produces a framework that is marginalising of lesbian mothers from the onset. This is primarily a product of the way in which such a framework treats 'lesbian mothering' as something to be explained (in contrast to mothering by heterosexual women, which is typically taken for granted). Furthermore, in having to refute the assumption that children raised by lesbian mothers will somehow be damaged, the educator is required to at least some degree accept that this is an intelligible argument in the first place, and thus worthy of some attention. As these two examples would suggest, then, knowledge transmission about lesbian mother families is always already framed by dominant discourses about what it means to be a lesbian mother. The question that this begs, then, is 'how do we go about providing knowledge about lesbian mother families without said knowledge reifying dominant discourses about such families?'. In other words, rather than simply refuting or challenging stereotypes about lesbian mothers (which runs the risk of simply reinforcing the salience of such stereotypes), how do we educate students into new ways of thinking about sexuality, mothering, children, and indeed knowledge itself? Furthermore, when presenting students with knowledge that is likely new to them, how do we encourage them to develop ways of thinking critically about knowledge acquisition and social norms in all their forms (including *within* marginal communities)?

The current paper reports on the development and application of a workshop focusing on lesbian mother families that sought to respond to the issues outlined above. The workshop focused solely on lesbian mother families (as opposed to non-

heterosexual families in general) because of the now considerable body of social scientific research on such families (which doesn't exist to the same extent in regards to other non-heterosexual families). As outlined below, being able to draw upon this body of research engendered the opportunity both to speak of the evidentiary claims it provides, as well as to examine how claims to evidence itself are made. The workshop sought to both locate knowledge about lesbian mothers in the broader social context – a heteronormative social order – whilst also creating the possibility for developing alternate ways of thinking about lesbian mothers that refuse the imposition of new norms. The workshop was undertaken with education students as part of a research project undertaken by the first author, which sought to explore multiple sites in which South Australian lesbian mother families engage with education systems. Addressing how future educators understand and engage with lesbian mother families was thus considered an important part of this project.

In order to locate the development of the workshop within a broader pedagogical and academic context, the paper begins by surveying three areas of previous research and commentary on education and sexuality in regards to lesbian mothers, namely: 1) findings on discrimination towards lesbian mother families within educational contexts, 2) findings that suggest the increasing acceptance of lesbian mother families (but the cost at which such inclusion is offered), and 3) commentaries on the 'homonormativity' at play in much of the contemporary social scientific writing on lesbians mothers. The latter area allows for the introduction of what was a key theme of the workshop and here in this paper, namely the need to question what to date has often been the replacement of one set of stereotypes (about lesbian mothers) with a new set of norms. This new set of norms (or homonormativities, following Duggan, 2003) promotes not simply inclusion for lesbian mothers via assimilation with the heterosexual majority

(i.e., liberal equality), but it also creates norms about what it means to be a lesbian mother, thus creating new exclusions (as will be elaborated further in this paper).

Having outlined these three areas of previous research and commentary, the paper then moves on to outline how the workshop was developed in response to the issues raised above (both in regards to challenging anti-lesbian attitudes, yet doing so without reinforcing new norms), before presenting findings from the workshop itself. Whilst it is acknowledged here that presenting a critical analysis of the current state of sexuality education about lesbian mothers may seem odd when paired with a fairly standard quantitative analysis of findings from a workshop, it is argued here, following Clarke (2000), that the issue is not *per se* one of critical versus mainstream approaches. Rather, the point is the ends to which any approach to research is put. In other words, and as Clarke suggests, mainstream social scientific approaches to research (such as the quantitative analysis of measures taken before and after a workshop) may well be useful if they are framed in terms of a political commentary on the issues at stake in the research. This is different, Clarke suggests, from notionally apolitical research that simplistically presents research findings as taken for granted truths about the world, with little or no commentary about why such truths exist and how the research itself is bound up with the truth making enterprise. The present paper, located in the context of this special issue of *Sex Education*, is thus not simply a commentary on one intervention into both heteronormativity and homonormativity in sexuality education, but also a commentary on what it means to make an intervention.

Ongoing Discrimination in Educational Settings

Previous research has found that whilst children raised by lesbian mothers do as well as,

if not better than, children raised by heterosexual parents on a range of educational outcomes (for example, see Gartrell and Bos, 2010), it is nonetheless the case that significant numbers of lesbian mothers and their children continue to experience discrimination in educational systems (see Kosciw and Diaz, 2008, Ray and Gregory, 2001; Riggs, 2010; Riggs and Willing, in-press). Such discrimination, research suggests, occurs in multiple forms, including explicit discrimination from other children and parents; a lack of protection from discrimination offered by educators and school systems; and the lack of representation of lesbian mothers and their children within educational curricula. Thus as Lindsay et al., (2006) note, not only are Australian schools a key site where children potentially learn and enact discriminatory social norms, but this is exacerbated when educational curricula are heteronormative.

In regards to the attitudes of educators (and future educators), Curran, Chiarolli and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2009) discuss how their provision of information about non-heterosexuality to Australian pre-service primary school teachers was met with considerable derision and indeed outright dismissal of this as a necessary topic for educators. Robinson and Ferfolja (2001) similarly found considerable resistance and hostility amongst Australian education students towards learning about issues pertaining to lesbians and gay men, with other Australian research indicating that education students often reinforce heteronorms simply by assuming that issues relating to lesbian parents are not relevant to them (Robinson, 2002). Other international research on education students working with lesbian mother families has found mixed results, with some students expressing 'tolerance', whilst others express outright hostility (e.g., see Maney & Cain, 1997). This research has, however, typically found that there is a general lack of knowledge amongst pre-service teachers about lesbian mother families.

Of course educators and educational curricula need not be explicitly hostile

towards non-heterosexual people and their families for discrimination to occur: normativity can play out in much more subtle ways. Surtees (2008) suggests that contemporary educational discourses of child-centredness and a focus on emergent curriculum (i.e., where the focus of education is primarily upon what children express an interest in) serves to reinforce a normative status quo, and thus marginalises the experiences of children of lesbian mothers (i.e., by only emphasising the spoken views of children, in a context of homophobia or heteronormativity this is unlikely to include the experiences of children of lesbian parents). Subtle forms of discrimination also occur when educational settings fail to provide resources for lesbian-parented families, such as in providing library books that include non-heterosexual families. In their analyses of large library collections in the US (Sapp, 2010), the UK (Chapman and Wright, 2008) and to a smaller extent Australia (Riggs, Hanson-Easey and Due, in-press), researchers have found that coverage of non-heterosexual families is at best minimal, and further that any coverage typically perpetuates a heteronormative image of such families, as we outline in the following section.

The Cost of Inclusion

Whilst ongoing discrimination within educational systems is important to acknowledge, it is also important to recognise that the inclusion of non-heterosexual people *does* occur, albeit typically through a guise of liberal equality that enshrines heterosexuality as the norm against which non-heterosexual people are measured. For example, Clarke (2002; 2005; Clarke and Kitzinger, 2005) argues in her research that participants, when discussing lesbian mother families, constructed themselves as liberal through the use of comparisons between themselves and 'more prejudiced' others, and used liberal discourses to present supposedly 'positive' examples of lesbian mothers. Examples of

such liberal discourses included 1) the claim that lesbian mother families are 'just like' heterosexual families, 2) an emphasis placed upon the male role-models that lesbian mothers provide to their children (i.e., that they aren't living on 'planet lesbian'), and 3) an emphasis upon love as the only factor worthy of attention in families.

In terms of educational systems, Robinson (2002) argues that such positive-but-normalising liberal discourses are common amongst pre-service teachers. In Robinson's research, the inclusion of lesbian and gay parents by participants was frequently predicated on representations of such parents and their families as 'the same' as heterosexual families. Robinson argues that this criterion for inclusion can also be seen within the broader education system in Australia, with inclusion being based on a de-contextualising of the social inequalities faced by lesbian and gay parents. For example, Robinson reports on avoidance of terms such as 'lesbian' or 'gay', with some educators instead expressing a preference to use phrases such as a family having "two mummies" when referring to lesbian mother families. Yet as we argue in the following section, liberal representations of lesbian mother families are not only reliant upon a range of heteronormative assumptions; they also promote new norms against which lesbian mothers and their children are measured.

Homonormativity and Lesbian Mothers

There is growing recognition within critical education studies that what might be read as a shift in attitudes towards non-heterosexual people is in reality potentially far less radical than may at first appear. In other words, whilst it is positive that inclusion is on offer to non-heterosexual people, the fact that this inclusion is limited to a heteronormative reading of non-heterosexual people is of ongoing concern. Writers such as Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2011) and Taylor (2011), for example, suggest

that the replacement of negative stereotypes about non-heterosexual people with a normative model of inclusion does very little to shift the actual terms upon which non-heterosexual people are included, and further that it continues to justify the exclusion of non-heterosexual people who do not confirm to the norms established for inclusion.

In terms of the establishment of new norms, Duggan's (2003) term 'homonormativity' captures well what is at stake when this occurs. In the example of lesbian mothers, homonormativity occurs when such mothers are expected to accept the liberal inclusion they are offered (as outlined in the previous section). Certainly, the uptake of such inclusion is already evident in the public attitudes of some lesbian and gay parents, as Riggs (2012a) found in his examination of Australian media articles focusing on lesbian and gay parents. Such parents typically emphasised a racially normative image of genetically related families in which two parents in 'loving relationships' raise children. This image of lesbian and gay-headed families, whilst obviously supportive and endorsing of the families who fall into this image, fails to create spaces in which a wider range of lesbian or gay families are recognised.

Furthermore, and as Berkowitz (2009) suggests, the samples upon which research on lesbian and gay parenting is typically based are most often white and middle-class, thus centering this population as the norm against which other groups of lesbian or gay parents are measured. This has two possibly negative implications. The first is demonstrated in the pioneering work of Hill (1987), in her research on the experiences of black lesbian mothers. Hill's findings indicated that the mothers in her study placed little emphasis upon gender normative behaviours amongst their children, did not highly value independence, and were more permissive about issues related to sex in regards to their children. Research conducted with white lesbian mothers within a broadly similar time period (e.g., Tasker and Golombok, 1997), in comparison,

emphasised gender normative behaviours amongst children, encouraged independence, and minimised issues related to sex. That only this latter research on white lesbian mothers is typically spoken of when lesbian mothers are represented thus engenders a homonormative understanding of lesbian mothering, one premised upon the experiences and parenting practices of white lesbian mothers.

The second possible negative implication is suggested by Riggs (2011), who proposes that as much as the now substantial body of research on (primarily white middle-class) two-mother families provides an excellent base upon which to argue for the rights of this population, it can equally be used to argue *against* the rights of those who do not fall within this relatively narrow demographic. In other words, those who oppose the rights of non-heterosexual people could potentially argue that social scientists really know nothing about outcomes of children raised by single black lesbian mothers (for example), and hence that such mothers should not be accorded rights (in a context where rights for marginal groups currently appear to be apportioned on the basis of 'evidence'). Kadi (1997) summarises this points well when she presents the following critique of the 1993 pride march in Washington: "I thought I would throw up if I heard one more TV interview with an earnest, middle-class queer explaining 'We're just like everyone else. This march will prove that'. For the phrase 'everyone else,' read middle-class, white, monogamous, heterosexual couple. Don't read poor, Chicana, single mom" (p. 38). This can equally be applied to the above discussion of homonormativity in scholarship on lesbian mothers, in that the homonorm being presented isn't simply one in which heteronormativity is the framework for understanding lesbian mothers (though as argued in the previous section, it primarily is), but also that in accepting the heteronormative form of inclusion on offer, those who

seek to support lesbian mother families (amongst other groups of non-heterosexual people) potentially enact forms of homonormativity that engender further exclusions.

When applied to educational contexts, homonormativity occurs in the increasing uptake of books featuring lesbian or gay parents by school libraries. Whilst again this is a positive change (i.e., that some schools are including such books), it is problematic for the limited range of families represented. Both Riggs (2012b) and Taylor (2012) argue that children's storybooks featuring lesbian or gay parents offer a very narrow range of intelligible identities (almost exclusively white middle-class couples); depict birth parents (in the context of adoption) as problems to be overcome (or indeed in some cases as invisible); and treat lesbian and gay families as 'model minorities'[i] who must prove their worth by approximating the heternorm. Again, then, whilst attempts to move beyond heteronormativity within educational spaces are important, when they simply introduce a homonorm they potentially create as many problems as they address. The workshop outlined below sought to address these complex issues in relation to both heteronormativity and homonormativity.

The Workshop

Taking all of the points made above into consideration, the workshop that was developed sought to provide education students with knowledge about lesbian mothers and their children that 1) recognised the impact of heteronormativity and discrimination, 2) was cognisant of the similarities *and* differences between lesbian and heterosexual mothers as represented in the mainstream social scientific research, but which 3) challenged homonormativity as it appears within this research and within lesbian parenting communities more broadly.

The workshop also sought to address limitations in regards to point three as they

applied to previous workshops conducted on the topic of non-heterosexual people by the first author and colleagues (Fell, Mattiske & Riggs, 2008; Riggs & Fell, 2010). These earlier workshops were successful in changing attitudes and increasing cultural competency amongst psychology students in working with non-heterosexual people, but as the second such workshop (Riggs & Fell, 2010) indicated, this was largely at the expense of students truly grasping a critical approach to the topic (where students instead primarily endorsed a liberal equality model of inclusion for non-heterosexual people).

The workshop reported on below sought to address the three points above in the following ways. First, the workshop began by introducing the five main stereotypes about lesbian mothers, namely: 1) Lesbian mothers try to make their children non-heterosexual, 2) all children need a mother and a father, 3) lesbians are sick or sinful, 4), children raised by lesbian mothers are likely to suffer discrimination and negative mental health outcomes, and 5) lesbian relationships are inherently unstable and thus unsuitable contexts for raising children. These myths were then refuted on the basis of social scientific research. Then, following Hicks (2008), the 'evidence game' that this form of refutation evokes was examined, with the premises of both the social scientific research and the myths themselves subjected to critique. This included a specific focus on how the category of 'the child' is depicted within both the myths and the research, and how this highly normative image is problematic both for its perpetuation of the abhorrence of talking about children and sex in the same sentence (see Robinson, 2005; 2008; Martino and Cumming-Potvin, 2011), and how this perpetuates the assumption that all children are heterosexual (Bond Stockton, 2004; Riggs, 2008). This focus on the 'evidence game' also emphasised the points raised in the previous section about which lesbian mothers are typically represented, and emphasis was placed on differences

across a range of lesbian mothers.

Having both established and critiqued an evidence base for knowledge about lesbian mothers and their children, the workshop then sought to problematise the 'model minority' image of lesbian mother families. This was achieved in a number of ways. First, the issue of bullying was addressed (an issue that is often side-stepped in discussions of lesbian mothers as a result of the drive to present an idealised image of lesbian mother families). A clip from the TV movie *Other Mothers* was shown, along with a digital documentary made by a young person with two mothers. The TV movie is useful as it highlights homonormativities (i.e., a white middle-class lesbian couple raising their teenage son), heteronormativity (i.e., assumptions made by other parents in the school that the two mothers are 'sisters'), and the effects of homophobia (i.e., how the son distances himself from his mothers, and how the mothers are subjected to marginalisation by one heterosexual mother at the school). The digital documentary similarly addressed these issues, by highlighting the experiences of a teenage girl who grew up with two mothers, and both how this was a 'loving family' (depicted within a framework of liberal inclusivity), but how this did not prevent her from experiencing discrimination in the school yard. These two videos state clearly both that lesbian relationships are legitimate contexts in which to raise children, but that heteronormativity and homophobia translate into considerable challenges for such families. Furthermore, the clips demonstrate that sometimes the effects of discrimination mean that family members cannot always support one another, an issue seldom mentioned in the social scientific literature. These issues were covered not so as to undermine lesbian families, but rather to complicate the image of such families depicted in the mainstream social scientific literature.

The second approach to problematising the 'model minority' image of lesbian

mother families was to more directly target homonormativity. This was framed through a discussion of why a heteronormative social context in western liberal democracies produces homonormativities, with information then provided that was critical of lesbian mothers for their complicity with homonormativities. Students were encouraged to consider the imagery in the children's storybooks and media articles discussed earlier in this paper, and to again consider what it means for only some families to be represented (with a focus on racialised assumptions about adoption, mononormativity in terms of an emphasis on coupledom, and the norm of biological reproduction). This was then placed alongside a clip from the documentary *Destiny in Alice* (Dare, 2007) examining the experiences of lesbians living in Alice Springs, a remote town in northern South Australia. In the clip both white and Indigenous lesbians talk about what it means to be a parent, usefully highlighting not simply the differences between the two groups, but also what happens when only one group (i.e., white lesbian mothers) is taken to stand for all lesbian mothers.

Method

Participants

Participants were 25 students enrolled in an education topic at Flinders University, and included 15 females and 10 males, with a mean age of 23 years, all of whom self-identified as heterosexual. Forty-four per cent (N = 11) of the participants identified as Christian, with 32% (N = 8) identifying as atheist or agnostic. One participant identified as Buddhist, two as 'Other' and three did not record responses for their religious affiliations. Fifteen of the students (60%) were studying a Bachelor of Education, seven (28%) a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, two (8%) a Bachelor of Health Sciences, and one student was undertaking a Teaching Masters.

Procedure

Following ethics approval, the first author approached a colleague teaching a topic on sexuality to education students. It was agreed that the first author would provide a workshop on lesbian mothers and their children, and that students would be invited two weeks beforehand to participate in completing pre-test measures related to the workshop. It was made clear to students that if they decided not to complete the measures, this would have no detrimental impact upon their course participation, and that the workshop was not assessed as part of their assessment for the topic. The 25 students who participated represent the entire cohort enrolled in the topic.

Materials

Two weeks before the workshop, participants completed a questionnaire that involved demographic information (reported above), forced choice questions about their experiences to date in relation to lesbian mother families (reported below in Table 1), and a number of measures designed to assess their attitudes towards lesbian mother families (outlined in more depth below). All of these three forms of data collection were undertaken via a paper and pencil survey handed out to participants by the topic lecturer during a lecture two weeks before the workshop, at which point participants were assured that their responses would be anonymous and that they should create a unique identifier for use in matching their pre-workshop responses to their post-workshop responses, but that this unique identified should be anonymous (i.e., not their name or birth date). The third form of data collected (i.e., the measures) were then administered again by the first author at the conclusion of the workshop.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

The measures included a 'Comfort Scale' that consisted of 10 items ranked on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 5, from 'totally uncomfortable' to 'completely comfortable'. Items on this scale asked participants about their comfort undertaking teaching-related tasks such as "teaching students with lesbian mothers" and "lesbian mothers discussing their family life". There was also a 'Knowledge Scale' (containing 7 items), a 'Beliefs Scale' (containing 7 items) and an 'Inclusivity Scale' (containing 5 items), all answered on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 to 7. Examples of items on each of these scales respectively include; "In general, lesbian mothers are at least as good parents as heterosexual mothers", "Lesbian women should not be allowed to raise children", and "It is a teacher's responsibility to support lesbian mothers and their children". These scales were adapted from the 'Gay and Lesbian Parenting' questionnaire designed to assess attitudes, knowledge and comfort in relation to gay and lesbian parents (as developed by Maney and Cain, 1997), and the Index of Attitudes towards Homosexuals (Hudson and Rickets, 1980).

Results

In this section we briefly comment on the findings of the study concerning the effectiveness of the workshop, before moving on to a more detailed discussion of the implications in terms of modes of teaching about sexuality that attempt to resist both heteronormativity and homonormativity.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all variables are given in Table 2. Additionally, it is worth noting that 16 (64%) of the participants said that they had heard the phrase "that's so gay" used pejoratively whilst on placement within a school, and that all of these instances were heard from students. This echoes findings from research conducted by Riggs (2010) with South Australian lesbian mothers and their children, which found that 10 (44%) of the mothers in the sample had heard this phrase used, and 31 (65%) of the children had heard this phrase used.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Changes on pre and post tests

There was a significant change on all scales from pre to post test. This was particularly the case for comfort, $t(24)= 5.513$, p< .05, and knowledge, $t(24)= 4.970$, p< .05, but was also the case for the beliefs, $t(24)= 3.428$, p< .05, and inclusivity, $t(24)= 2.149$, p< .05 scales. For the changes in mean scores on these scales from pre to post-test, refer to Table 2 above. As such, the workshop was successful in increasing participants' scores on all measures; meaning that their comfort with, knowledge and beliefs about, and level of inclusivity towards lesbian parents, were all increased as a result of the workshop.

Religiosity

As would perhaps be expected, religiosity was significantly related to levels of comfort in engaging with lesbian parents. A significant negative correlation was found between degree of Religiosity and Beliefs at both the pre and post-test level, however this correlation was higher at the pre-test level, $r(20) = -.81, p < .05$, than for the post-test level, $r(20) = -.54, p <. 05$. That is, the more religious a person reported themselves to

be, the less they scored on the comfort scale. However, the fact that the mean scores for comfort increased significantly in the post-test measure in regards to religiosity (see Table 2) indicates that the workshop was somewhat successful in raising the comfort levels of more religious participants, as is reflected in the fact that the negative correlation between religiosity and comfort went from a strong relationship in the pre-test measure, to a moderate relationship in the post-test measure.

For the inclusivity, $r(20)= -.54, p < .01$, and knowledge, $r(20)= -.59, p < .01$ scales there were significant, moderate to strong negative correlations with degree of religiosity at the pre test measure, meaning that the more religious a person was (at pre test) the less inclusive or knowledgeable about lesbian mothers they were. This same relationship was not found after the workshop, with a weak, non-significant positive correlation between inclusivity and religiosity, $r(20) = .15, p > .05$, and no relationship between religiosity and knowledge, $r(20) = -.03, p > .05$ being found post-workshop.

Relationships between other variables

There was a significant effect for gender on the comfort scale, $t(23) = 4.186, p<.05$, with females ($M1=4.56, SD=0.73, M2=5.95, SD=0.53$) consistently scoring higher than males ($M1=4.30, SD=0.19, M2=5.33, SD=0.14$), indicating that females were more comfortable than males in their interactions with lesbian parents prior to the workshop. There was no similar effect for gender on the other scale scores.

The number of children of lesbian parents participants had engaged with prior to the workshop was also related to comfort levels, with a significant positive correlation between comfort and number of children of lesbian parents taught, $r(22)= .468, p< .05$. Contact was also positively correlated with knowledge, $r(23)= .646, p< .01$, meaning that the more contact a participant had had, the more they knew about lesbian mothers

and their families. In addition, beliefs about lesbian families were also positively correlated with knowledge, both at pre test $r(23)= .634$, p< .01 and post test $r(23)= .643$, p< .01, meaning that the more accurate people's knowledge was about lesbian mother families, the more positive their beliefs about such families were.

Discussion

As indicated in the introduction, this paper sought to blend the reporting of a relatively mainstream approach to programme assessment (i.e., quantitative data analysis), with a critical discussion of sexuality education in regards to lesbian mothers. As will have become apparent, the bridging of these two approach was made possible by the workshop itself, which brought together mainstream concerns over lesbian parenting with a critical approach to understanding the effects of both heteronormativity and homonormativity.

In terms of the findings from the workshop, the relationship between religiosity and degree of comfort in engaging with lesbian mothers was to be expected, given the beliefs many religions hold about homosexuality (particularly the belief that homosexuality is a 'choice' or a sin), and the strong emphasis on heterosexual relationships within many religious institutions. This intersection between religious beliefs and attitudes towards lesbian and gay parents in the context of education has also been found in previous research (e.g., see Robinson, 2002).

Similarly, the disparity with regard to comfort levels of males and females in relation to lesbian parents was to be expected on the basis of previous research on the topic (e.g., see Maney and Caine, 1997). This also echoes findings from previous research examining attitudes towards lesbian and gay parents more broadly (e.g., Massey, 2007; Morse, McLaren & McLachan, 2007), which has consistently found that

men's attitudes are more negative towards such parents than are women's. This previous research suggests that one of the primary factors influencing gender differences in attitudes towards lesbian and gay parents are gender norms and rigidity in terms of beliefs about gender and sexuality. Men, it is suggested, are more likely to adhere to gender norms than are women, given that norms of masculinity are so violently policed (Pascoe, 2007).

In terms of the relationship between knowledge and beliefs, the finding that more accurate knowledge relates to more positive beliefs echoes previous research in terms of attitudes to lesbians and gay men in general (Swank & Raiz, 2010). Such research has suggested that, for many people, negative beliefs are the product of ignorance, and that the presentation of knowledge that challenges stereotypes can result in a shift in attitudes towards marginal groups.

In terms of the overall change produced by the workshop, in previous workshops run by the first author and colleagues (Fell, Mattiske & Riggs, 2008; Riggs & Fell, 2010) students at times seemed very challenged by the idea that children of lesbian mothers might do better than children of heterosexual parents. Given the constituency of the participant groups in these previous studies (i.e., almost exclusively heterosexual), this is perhaps not surprising. Yet this most recent, and substantially different, iteration of the workshop achieved similarly positive outcomes to the previous workshops, but without so extensively focusing on comparative research. Our hypothesis as to why this might be the case is that the workshop reported here was successful precisely because of its critique of homonormativity *alongside* a critique of heteronormativity. Whilst (dominant group) students can typically accept that social norms lead to discriminatory practices (and hence the former must be addressed in order to end the latter), when discussion of differences between heterosexual and lesbian families are made, this at

times appears to be a bridge too far for some students. In other words, whilst the majority of students can accept in the abstract that heteronormativity is unjust, when it is applied to concrete examples (that may reflect something of their own lives, such as in the heterosexual privilege questionnaire or in comparative research findings from heterosexual and lesbian families) they become caught in denial of their complicity, rather than being able to remain focused on *social* (rather than individual) norms, and the way such norms have negative impacts for all people (see Britzman, 2007, for more on this).

Of course we are not arguing *per se* that the focus on homonormativity in the workshop let students 'off the hook' for their location within a heteronormative social order. Rather, in its resistance to representing lesbian mother families as 'model minorities', the workshop reported here more clearly depicted how *all* people living in heteronormative (and racially ordered, gendered and classed) social contexts fundamentally exist in a relationship to social norms, even if said norms impact negatively upon their lives. The example of homonormativity renders this clear, then, by highlighting that whilst it may be the product of heteronormative modes of inclusion for non-heterosexual people, it nonetheless is about categories of haves and have-nots. To refuse the 'model minority' status for lesbian mother families is not to deny the discrimination they face, then, but rather to position them at the intersections of complex networks of power that, in many instances, privilege as much as they disadvantage.

Importantly, we must emphasise here that the points raised above are only conjecture about why the latest iteration of the workshop might have been successful. As we mentioned in the introduction, this paper is a commentary not simply on how to do an intervention, but on what counts as an intervention. Whilst we feel that the

workshop reported here represents a novel way of undertaking sexuality education about lesbian mother families, the mode of assessing the workshop is entirely standard. We maintain, nonetheless, that there is great utility in presenting a critical framework alongside a mainstream mode of assessment (indeed, it is the latter to which policy makers and educators may take notice, and which may result in workshops such as that reported here being taken up as standard practice in the education of future teachers). All the same, future research on this topic should consider alternate ways of assessing *how* education students come to develop knowledge about lesbian mother families. This may take the form of encouraging students to undertake journal writing about their own understandings of lesbian mother families, or for group work undertaken as part of the workshop to form part of the assessment of the workshop itself (something that was applied to a previous iteration of the workshop, see Riggs & Fell, 2010). And of course, and as has been undertaken in previous Australian research (Pennington & Knight, 2011), interviewing students about their understandings of lesbian mother families has an important ongoing role to play in challenging both heteronormativity and homonormativity.

To conclude, then, the argument and findings presented in this paper indicate one potential way of undertaking sexuality education, one that moves away from a simple critique of heteronormativity, and which instead locates all groups that cohere around a given sexual identity within a relationship to both broader social norms, as well as the norms *within* that group. Such an approach, it is argued, moves beyond simply 'adding on' sexual minorities to existing approaches to education, at the same time as it resists holding sexual minorities up as exemplars. Instead, it engenders an approach to sexuality education that is centrally concerned with the production of norms in all forms, and with helping students to develop critical skills for interrogating norms.

Acknowledgements

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[i] The term 'model minority' is extrapolated here from its original use in reference to Asian American communities. In its original use, it described the high levels of achievement amongst some Asian American students in comparison to white American students. Critiques of the term (e,g., Li and Wang, 2008) emphasise the fact that defining any group as a 'model minority' constructs inclusion in terms of adherence to a liberal norm of success (where there is assumed to be an equal playing field upon which achievement is simply a matter of individual merit). Furthermore, critiques of the term have suggested that the stereotype of the 'model minority Asian student' fails to acknowledge the diverse experiences of all Asian Americans, and instead instantiates a new norm to which all Asian Americans must aspire. Applying the concept to lesbian mother families, then, is intended to highlight how the inclusion offered to such families is premised upon the achievement of successful outcomes (as frequently reported in social scientific research), and how this creates new norms that are both stereotyping and exclusionary.