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(In)visible parents? An analysis of the representation of same-gender parenthood in Dutch parenting magazines and the Dutch gay/lesbian press 1970-2010

Cramer, Mary-Frances

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(IN)VISIBLE PARENTS?

An analysis of the representation of same-gender parenthood in Dutch parenting magazines and the Dutch gay/lesbian press 1970-2010

Mary-Frances Cramer

Leiden University

MA History: Cities, Migration and Global Interdependence

Supervisor: Dr. Evelien Walhout

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1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, families headed by same-gender parents have become increasingly visible in many Western societies.¹ Studies have shown that while tolerance towards lesbigay² persons in many European countries has risen over the past decades, this does not always translate to the acceptance of families headed by lesbigay parents.³ Historically, same-gender parenthood has been considered a contradictory concept, both in society at large but also in gay/lesbian communities.⁴ Nowadays an increasing number of children are raised in families headed by same-gender⁵ parents in Western countries including the Netherlands.⁶

The Netherlands was the first country to legalise marriage between same-sex couples in 2001 and generally has the reputation of being a country where tolerance towards homosexuality is widespread.⁷ It is therefore interesting to analyse the depiction of same-sex parented families in Dutch media over a period in which the visibility and acceptance of lesbigay people increased. This thesis analyses the representation of same-gender parenting in Dutch parenting magazines and publications aimed at gay/lesbian readers from 1970-2010.⁸ The central question of this research is: *How was same-gender parenthood represented in the Dutch press during 1970-2010, and how can this representation and its development over time be explained?* Additionally, this thesis compares

¹ Susan Golombok, *Modern Families: Parents and Children in New Family Forms* (Cambridge 2015) 69; Jennifer J. Power et al., 'Understanding resilience in same-sex parented families: the work, love, play study', *BMC Public Health* 10:115 (2010) 1-10, 1.

² The term 'lesbigay' refers to lesbian, bisexual and gay individuals. This term includes bisexual individuals who may also start families with partners from the same gender. In this thesis the terms 'lesbigay', 'gay', 'lesbian' and 'gay individuals/persons/parents' will be used respectively, guided by the literature and primary sources. In the primary sources the terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' were most commonly used.

³ Victoria Clarke, 'What about the children? Arguments against lesbian and gay parenting', *Women's Studies International Forum* 24:5 (2001) 555-570, 555; Judit Takács, Ivett Szalma and Tamás Bartus, 'Social Attitudes Toward Adoption by Same-Sex Couples in Europe', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 45:7 (2016) 1787-1798, 1787.

⁴ Daniel Rivers, "'In the Best Interests of the Child": Lesbian and Gay Parenting Custody Cases 1967-1985', *Journal of Social History* 43:4 (2010) 917-943, 935; Hans Warmerdam and Annemies Gort, *Meer dan gewenst: Handboek voor lesbische en homoseksuele ouders* (Amsterdam 2003) 16-17.

⁵ In the literature the term 'same-gender' is increasingly used, however, 'same-sex' remains the most widely used term especially in less recent literature. In this thesis both terms are used. Moreover, in the literature, various terms are used to refer to households headed by lesbigay parents, including same-sex/gender (parented) families, gay (parented) families, lesbian mother families, gay father families, two-mother families and two-father families. In this thesis, various terms will be used, depending on which term best fits the context.

⁶ Pedro Alexandre Costa, Henrique Pereira and Isabel Leal, 'Through the Lens of Sexual Stigma: Attitudes Toward Lesbian and Gay parenting', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 15:1 (2019) 58-75, 58; Laura Jak, Laura Griffin and Sara Coster, *Movisie - Handreiking lhbtq+emancipatie: regenboogouderschap: gezinnen van nu*, <https://www.movisie.nl/sites/movisie.nl/files/2023-09/handreiking-Regenboogouderschap-gezinnen-van-nu.pdf> (accessed 15-01-24).

⁷ Saskia Keuzenkamp and David Bos, *Out in the Netherlands: Acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands* (The Hague 2007) 7-9.

⁸ This thesis addresses the representation of same-gender parents by analysing how these families were made visible within the primary sources and by identifying the primary discourses surrounding these portrayals.

the depictions of same-gender families in both types of media.

The following sections of the introduction provide an overview of the relevant scholarship and theory on same-gender parenting. The primary sources and methodology are also discussed. Chapter 2 discusses background information regarding same-gender parenthood in the Netherlands, providing context to the empirical chapters. Chapter 3 analyses the representation of same-gender parenthood in Dutch parenting magazines. Chapter 4 looks at the representation of same-gender parenthood in gay/lesbian publications. Finally, the conclusion answers the research question and compares the findings from the empirical chapters. It also addresses how these findings correspond with the existing literature on the topic of same-gender parenthood.

1.1 Historiography

Families headed by same-gender parents are examples of “new families”. British family researcher Susan Golombok has done extensive research on new families, which she defines as those that did not exist or were hidden from society until the latter part of the twentieth century. These families signify a fundamental shift from traditional family structures.⁹ These new families became increasingly visible following the women’s liberation and gay rights movements in the 1970s and the emergence of new reproductive technology such as in vitro fertilisation (IVF) in the late 1970s.¹⁰

A significant portion of the existing research on same-gender families focusses on the social and psychological effects experienced by children raised within these family structures. During the 1970s and 1980s, the majority of lesbigay parents had children from previous heterosexual marriages. Negative attitudes towards same-sex parents were reflected in custody cases in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States.¹¹ As a result of these custody cases and the media attention they received, lesbigay parents became increasingly visible. However, the understanding of the psychological and gender development of children raised by gay parents was limited due to insufficient empirical evidence regarding these aspects. Consequently, the first empirical studies on lesbigay parented families were initiated in the 1970s. As custody cases raised concerns about households headed by lesbian mothers in particular, these studies primarily focussed on divorced lesbian-mother families.¹² Traditionally, sole custody tended to be awarded to the mother. However,

⁹ Golombok, *Modern Families*, 3.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Golombok, *Modern Families*, 33-34; I. H. Fraser, T.A. Fish and T.M. Mackenzie, ‘Reactions to Child Custody Decisions Involving Homosexual and Heterosexual Parents’, *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* 27:1 (1995) 52-63, 53.

¹² Golombok, *Modern Families*, 32, 37-38; Francisco Manuel Montalbán Peregrín, Laura Domínguez de la Rosa and Begoña Márquez García, ‘Lesbian and Gay Parenting: Strategies of Normalization in Spain’, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 11:1 (2014) 20-30, 21.

this was not the case for custody cases involving lesbian mothers, as it was not considered to be in a child's best interest to be raised by a lesbian mother.¹³ Gay fathers had even less chance of being awarded custody as they deviated from the norm regarding both sexuality and gender.¹⁴

Empirical studies compared the psychological development and sex-typed behaviour of children raised by lesbian mothers to those raised by single heterosexual mothers. These studies aimed to assess the impact of the mother's sexual orientation on the social and emotional development of their children.¹⁵ In the 1980s, the rise of assisted reproductive technology expanded options for lesbians to become mothers, leading to a "lesbian baby boom" characterised by a significant increase in openly lesbian women having children.¹⁶ For the first time, female couples could plan their family together after coming out. Many lesbians turned to gay men in this journey, either for sperm donation or to share childrearing responsibilities.¹⁷ Following this lesbian baby boom, studies started to focus on child development and family functioning in planned lesbian mother families.¹⁸ Since then, numerous studies have analysed the social and psychological development of children in families headed by same-sex couples in various countries, continuing into the 2010s.¹⁹ This body of research has found minimal to no notable differences between the parenting skills of lesbian parents and heterosexual parents, or the social and psychological development of their children.²⁰ However, the conviction that children have the right to two parents of the opposite sex remains prevalent in public discourse. This perception is partly based on the belief that the role of a mother and a father is conceptually different, despite no literature supporting this notion.²¹

A significant body of research focusses on the attitudes of (heterosexual) individuals and

¹³ Golombok, *Modern Families*, 33-34.

¹⁴ Fraser et al., 'Reactions to Child Custody Cases', 53.

¹⁵ Golombok, *Modern Families*, 37-38; Charlotte J. Patterson, 'Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents', *Child Development* 63:5 (1992) 1025-1042, 1029.

¹⁶ Golombok, *Modern Families*, 44.

¹⁷ Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York 1991) 175-177.

¹⁸ Golombok, *Modern Families*, 37-38; Charlotte J Patterson, 'Families of the Lesbian Baby Boom: Parents' Division of Labor and Children's Adjustment', *Developmental Psychology* 31:1 (1995) 115-123; A. Brewaeys, I. Ponjaert, E.V. Van Hall and S. Golombok, 'Donor insemination: child development and family functioning in lesbian mother families', *Human Reproduction* 12:6 (1997) 1349-1359.

¹⁹ Stephen Erich et al., 'Gay and Lesbian Adoptive Families: An Exploratory Study of Family Functioning, Adoptive Child's Behavior, and Familial Support Networks', *Journal of Family Social Work* 9:1 (2005) 17-42; Henny M.W. Bos et al., 'Children in Planned Lesbian Families: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Between the United States and the Netherlands', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 78:2 (2008) 211-219; Juliet E. Hart, Jon E. Mourot and Megan Aros, 'Children of same-sex parents: in and out of the closet', *Educational Studies* 38:3 (2012) 277-281.

²⁰ Judith Stacey and Timothy J. Biblarz, '(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter', *American Sociological Review* 66:2 (2001) 159-183, 160; Salvatore Ioverno et al., 'Assessing Prejudice Toward Two-Father Parenting and Two-Mother Parenting: The Beliefs on Same-Sex Parenting Scale', *The Journal of Sex Research* 55:4-5 (2018) 654-665, 655.

²¹ Ioverno et al., 'Assessing Prejudice', 655.

professionals towards lesbian parents in various countries.²² Negative attitudes towards same-sex parenting generally pertain to concerns about the social, psychological and gender development of children raised within same-gender families.²³ Psychologist Victoria Clarke identified several of these anxieties. A common notion regarding children of lesbian parents is that they grow up to be gay themselves or will be confused about their own sexuality.²⁴ This notion is shaped by the belief that homosexuality is either hereditary or contagious, as well as the misconception that gay parents seek to “recruit” their children into homosexuality.²⁵ Children raised by gay parents are also expected to express atypical gender behaviour due to the absence of a male or female role model in their lives. Besides, gay parents are generally perceived to deviate from traditional gender roles.²⁶ This argument is partly influenced by the perception that gay individuals only interact and socialise with people of the same sex.²⁷ Historically, this argument was mostly used against lesbians as they were more likely to be parents than gay men. Moreover, particular anxiety exists about boys growing up without a father figure and the erasure of the importance of fatherhood in society.²⁸ Children of lesbian parents are also expected to experience stigma and rejection from peers based on their parents’ sexual orientation.²⁹ Another concern raised in discourse regarding gay parenting suggests that gay fathers might violate the sexual boundaries of the child.³⁰ No evidence to support these perceptions is found in research but they remain significant in discourse on same-sex parenting.³¹

Multiple studies analysing social attitudes regarding same-sex parenting have linked negative attitudes to general homonegativity. Homonegativity may stem from a dedication to conventional identities that are closely tied to traditional family structures and stereotypical gender roles. Those who want to maintain these identities may perceive same-sex parenting as a violation of traditional and heteronormative family structures.³² The term heteronormativity will be discussed in a later section. As stated, research has shown that while acceptance towards lesbian persons has increased

²² Priscilla Camilleri and Martin Ryan, ‘Social Work Students’ Attitudes toward Homosexuality and Their Knowledge and Attitudes toward Homosexual Parenting as an Alternative Family Unit: An Australian Study’, *Social Work Education* 25:3 (2006) 288-304; Ragnhild Hollekim, Hilde Slaatten and Norman Anderssen, ‘A Nationwide Study of Norwegian Beliefs About Same-sex Marriage and Lesbian and Gay Parenthood’, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 9:1 (2011) 15-30; Costa et al., ‘Through the Lens’, 58-75.

²³ Charmaine N. Morse, Suzanne McLaren and Angus J. McLachlan, ‘The Attitudes of Australian Heterosexuals Toward Same-Sex Parents’, *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 3:3 (2007) 425-455, 427; Clarke, ‘What about the children?’, 563-564.

²⁴ Clarke, ‘What about the children?’, 564-565; Morse et al., ‘The Attitudes of Australian Heterosexuals’, 427.

²⁵ Clarke, ‘What about the children?’, 564-565.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 562.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 563.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 565-566.

³⁰ Morse et al., ‘The Attitudes of Australian Heterosexuals’, 427.

³¹ *Ibidem*, 427.

³² *Ibidem*, 427-428.

in many European countries in the 2000s and 2010s, this is not the case for same-gender parenting.³³ Higher levels of social rejection regarding same-gender parenting compared to homosexuality can be explained by the fact that family life belongs to the social sphere. This makes same-gender families generally more socially visible than an individual's sexual orientation. Across Europe, the levels of acceptance towards same-sex parenting differ, depending on various factors such as gender, age and education.³⁴ Moreover, some studies found that attitudes regarding same-sex parenting depend on the structure of these families. More positive attitudes were reported towards two-mother families than two-father families. This may be explained by gendered discourse regarding parenting which considers women as more nurturing parental figures.³⁵

Scholars have also analysed the perspectives and experiences of gay individuals regarding parenting. In 1991, anthropologist Kath Weston published her influential book *Families We Choose* on the meaning of family and kinship among lesbian and gay individuals in America and their relationship with their family of origin.³⁶ Weston explores the historical notion that associates a gay identity with a rejection of family and kinship. This notion is influenced by presumptions suggesting that gay individuals do not have children or lasting relationships, and alienate their family of origin.³⁷ This perspective intrinsically links family and procreation with heterosexuality, and represents gay individuals 'as incapable of procreation, parenting and establishing kinship ties.'³⁸ Weston illustrates that lesbian and gay families can be understood as chosen families that do not correspond with a strict (heterosexual) model and may include any combination of relations.³⁹ Weston argues that this notion of choice also extends to childrearing, where gay individuals are freer than heterosexuals to experiment in this area.⁴⁰

Following the gay liberation and the lesbian baby boom, more lesbigay people came out and gay families became more visible. These developments sparked an unprecedented interest in lesbigay parenting. Lesbigay individuals no longer had to hide behind a heterosexual façade to be able to raise children. In America, support groups for gay parents emerged in the 1970s. The growing interest in gay parenting during this period was partially reflected in gay periodicals that introduced

³³ Takács et al., 'Social Attitudes Toward Adoption', 1787; BJ Rye and Glenn J. Meaney, 'Self-Defense, Sexism and Etiological Beliefs: Predictors of Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Adoption', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 6:1 (2010) 1-24, 2.

³⁴ Takács et al., 'Social Attitudes Toward Adoption', 1796; Morse et al., 'The Attitudes of Australian Heterosexuals', 442-444; Hollekim et al., 'A Nationwide Study', 29.

³⁵ Ioverno, 'Assessing Prejudice', 655.

³⁶ Weston, *Families We Choose*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 22-23.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 25.

³⁹ Weston, *Families We Choose*, 191; Maureen Sullivan, *The Family of Woman: Lesbian Mothers, Their Children, and the Undoing of Gender* (Berkeley 2004) 30-31.

⁴⁰ Weston, *Families We Choose*, 191.

columns featuring the personal stories of gay parents as well as parenting advice.⁴¹ The notion that same-sex attraction precludes parenthood was increasingly challenged, especially by lesbians who had biological children through artificial insemination.⁴² In the early 2000s, ethnographer Maureen Sullivan analysed the experiences and lives of planned two-mother families in America. Sullivan explored topics such as the selection of the sperm donor and the biological mother, the division of labour and the role of the co-mother in a heteronormative society.⁴³ Influenced by Weston's analysis of the relationship between lesbian individuals and their family of origin, Sullivan also examined the dynamic between two-mother families and their families of origin after the birth of biological children.⁴⁴ Mothers mostly recounted enthusiasm from their families but also noted family members only coming around after the birth of the baby. As same-sex families marked a historical shift, many families of origin had to get used to the idea that lesbian individuals could be (biological) parents.⁴⁵

Research indicates that the link between parenthood and heterosexuality can affect the perception of lesbian parents. Despite the increased visibility of same-gender parenting, lesbian parents often sense that parenthood renders their sexual identity invisible and vice versa.⁴⁶ Gay fathers in particular are often perceived to have two contradictory identities.⁴⁷ Furthermore, discrimination and rejection from the gay/lesbian community may also pose a challenge to lesbian parents, particularly gay fathers. This can partly be explained by gay culture emphasising the importance of freedom and autonomy. Gay fathers might be looked down upon for having failed to escape "the family."⁴⁸ This can make it difficult for gay fathers to articulate and conform to both identities and may also affect bisexual and gay men's choice to parent.⁴⁹ Psychologist Abbie Goldberg examined how adoptive gay fathers approached and negotiated fatherhood. Goldberg found that bisexual and gay men often have to overcome numerous social stigmas in their journey to parenthood and are influenced by dominant discourses surrounding gender and sexuality which affect their decisions. This includes the social discourse depicting mothers as irreplaceable nurturers

⁴¹ Ibidem, 165-167.

⁴² Ibidem, 168-169.

⁴³ Sullivan, *The Family of Woman*.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 124-126.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, 126-133.

⁴⁶ Weston, *Families We Choose*, 168-169; Emily Kazyak and Nicholas K. Park, 'Doing family: The reproduction of heterosexuality in accounts of parenthood', *Journal of Sociology* 56:4 (2020) 646-663; Abbie E. Goldberg, *Gay Dads: Transitions to Adoptive Fatherhood* (New York 2012) 168-169.

⁴⁷ Brian J. Dew and Jane E. Myers, 'Gay and Lesbian Parents: No longer a Paradox', *Adultspan Journal* 2:1 (2000) 44-56, 49-50; Frederick W. Bozett, 'Gay Fathers: Evolution of the Gay-Father Identity', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 51:3 (1981) 552-559, 552-553.

⁴⁸ Dew and Myers, 'Gay and Lesbian Parents', 49-51; Bozett, 'Gay Fathers', 559; Weston, *Families We Choose*, 198.

⁴⁹ Dew and Myers, 'Gay and Lesbian Parents', 50; Bozett, 'Gay Fathers', 559.

in a child's life.⁵⁰ Research on bi+⁵¹parents has been relatively scarce over the years.⁵² This both reflects and reinforces bisexual invisibility in society and (academic) research.⁵³ However, research has shown that the majority of LGB parents are bisexual.⁵⁴ In recent years, studies on bisexual parents have increased.⁵⁵

Compared to social scientific and anthropological research on same-gender parenting, historical research on this topic is scarce. In *Female Husbands*, historian Jen Manion recounted the lives of female husbands; people assigned female at birth who lived as men and married women in the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth century in Britain and the United States.⁵⁶ Regarding parenthood, Manion concludes that accounts of female husbands rarely addressed children. If a female husband had children from a prior marriage, this could be used to delegitimise their manhood. However, little emphasis was placed on the neglect of their maternal duties. Manion notes that this suggests that female husbands were judged by the standards and expectations of manhood which thus affirmed their gender. This finding illustrates that notions of gender influence perceptions of parenthood.⁵⁷

In *Radical Relations*, Daniel Rivers, a historian of LGBT communities in the twentieth century, traced the history of lesbian parenting in America from the postwar era to the 2000s.⁵⁸ Rivers specifically focussed on how these families challenged the belief that the American family is by definition heterosexual, but also how this notion was central to the prejudice gay parents faced. This is for example illustrated by the number of custody cases that involved gay parents. Before the liberation era, gay parents attempted to avoid discovery as they understood that exposure would likely result in the loss of their parental rights.⁵⁹ As gay parents became more visible during the liberation era in the 1970s, the risk of exposure and loss of custody also increased. Rivers illustrates

⁵⁰ Goldberg, *Gay Dads*, 28, 53, 59-60; A. Oren and A. Ben-Ari, 'Between Abnormal "Otherness" to Groundbreaking "Uniqueness": The Family-Construction Process of the GLBT Family', *Journal of Homosexuality* 67:11 (2020) 1603-1624, 1609-1610.

⁵¹ Bi+ is an umbrella term for individuals who experience attraction to more than one gender identity.

⁵² The current research analyses portrayals of same-gender parents. It is however important to note that not all parents portrayed in the selected items may have identified as gay or lesbian if they did not explicitly mention their identity. However, no individuals featured in the primary sources explicitly identified as bisexual.

⁵³ Jorge Gato, Sara Santos and Anne Marie Fontaine, 'To Have or Not to Have Children? That Is the Question. Factors Influencing Parental Decisions Among Lesbians and Gay Men', *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 14:3 (2017) 310-323, 320; Costa et al., 'Through the Lens', 70-71; Marie Delvoe and Fiona Tasker, 'Narrating Self-Identity in Bisexual Motherhood', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 12:1 (2016) 5-23, 6-7.

⁵⁴ Ellen Davenport-Pleasant and Susan Imrie, 'How Do Bi+ Mothers' Talk with Their Children about (Their) Bisexuality+?', *LGBTQ+ Family: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 18:4 (2022) 319-338, 319.

⁵⁵ Davenport-Pleasant and Imrie, 'How Do Bi+ Mothers', 319-338; Rowan Haus, *The Bisexual Parent Advantage: How Bisexual Parents Overcome Stigma and Excel at Parenting* (Dissertation Doctor of Philosophy, University of California 2023).

⁵⁶ Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (Cambridge 2020).

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 197, 258-259.

⁵⁸ Daniel Winunwe Rivers, *Radical Relations: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers and Their Children in the United States since World War II* (Chapel Hill 2013).

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 1-4.

that between 1967 and 1985, gay parents lost more custody battles than they won. During this period, the majority of these custody cases involved lesbian parents who had left heterosexual marriages.⁶⁰

According to Rivers, these custody cases demonstrated the investment of the American state in keeping the family heterosexual. Courts claimed that it was in a child's best interest to be raised in a heterosexual family. This was reinforced by the widespread notion that being raised by lesbian parents would negatively affect children. Custody cases made this assumption, expressed by judges and the media reporting on these cases, more visible. However, it also highlighted the struggle of lesbian and gay parents. This led to a larger resistance movement that challenged heterosexual attitudes in the American family structure.⁶¹ In the 1980s, the increasing number of lesbian parents who had children through artificial insemination and adoption faced new forms of social discrimination. Consequently, social and legal recognition of lesbian parents became a major focus of American gay rights activism during the 1980s and 1990s.⁶²

The media both reflects and constructs meaning. How a specific group is represented in the media influences the public perception of that group.⁶³ Additionally, exposure to individuals from an outgroup through the media can reduce prejudice towards those outgroups. Media representation of LGBTQ+ individuals and families can thus reduce negative attitudes, especially among those who have limited interpersonal contact with these groups in everyday life.⁶⁴ Scholars have extensively analysed the representation of LGBTQ+ individuals in various media outlets. However, analyses of how same-gender families are represented in the media are limited. This is for example the case for representation in parenting magazines.⁶⁵ Parenting magazines have been used to examine the construction of parenthood within these periodicals, often focussing on gendered messages.⁶⁶ Some of these studies have included a brief analysis of the depiction of same-sex families. An analysis of

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 53-54.

⁶¹ Ibidem, 77-79.

⁶² Ibidem, 173-174, 214-215.

⁶³ Angela Theresa Ragusa, Social Change in the Media: Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Trans and Queer (GLBTQ) Representation and Visibility in *The New York Times*: A Critical, Qualitative Social-Historical Content Analysis of *The New York Times* (Dissertation Doctor of Sociology, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University 2003) 24-25.

⁶⁴ Allyson L. Snyder, James Alex Bonus and Drew P. Cingel, 'Representations of LGBTQ+ families in young children's media', *Journal of Children and Media* 17:1 (2023) 154-160, 155-156.

⁶⁵ Jamie Landau, 'Straightening Out (the Politics of) Same-Sex Parenting: Representing Gay Families in US Print News Stories and Photographs', *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26:1 (2009) 80-100, 81.

⁶⁶ Candice Leonard, Illusions of change: An analysis of the fatherhood discourse in *Parents Magazine*, 1929-1994 (Dissertation Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology, University of New Hampshire 1996); Rachel M. Schmitz, 'Constructing Men as Fathers: A Content Analysis of Formulations of Fatherhood in Parenting Magazines', *Journal of Men's Studies* 24:1 (2016) 3-23; Jennifer M. Greve Spees and Toni Schindler-Zimmerman, 'Gender Messages in Parenting Magazines: A Content Analysis', *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* 14:3-4 (2003) 73-100.

the American periodical *Parents Magazine* found that same-sex families were hardly represented in this magazine around 2010, while depictions of the family on television and in film increasingly included same-sex families.⁶⁷

Researcher Jamie Landau analysed the representation of lesbian families in American news stories and photographs.⁶⁸ As has become clear from the literature, studies on lesbian parenting largely focus on the well-being of their children. This corresponds with Landau's findings. She illustrates that news stories and photographs tend to emphasise how the children of lesbian parents are heterosexual and conform to conventional gender norms. Additionally, these children are depicted as social experiments as it is emphasised that they were conceived 'via untraditional heterosexual acts of procreation.'⁶⁹ Landau also notes that stories depicting children of gay parents often revolve around whether and how they disclose their parents' sexuality, suggesting that these children are burdened with a shameful secret. According to Landau, this illustrates a paradox: while children of gay parents may be perceived as different to those raised by opposite-sex parents, they might also be regarded as equally "normal" if they are heterosexual and conform to typical gender conventions. This implies that same-gender parented families are considered acceptable as long as the children raised in these families grow up heteronormative.⁷⁰

1.2 Theoretical framework and hypothesis

The literature on same-sex parenting illustrates that the concepts of family and parenthood are intrinsically linked to heterosexuality. Central to this association is the concept of heteronormativity. Since its introduction in 1991, the term heteronormativity has increasingly been used in the literature. The term has multiple uses and meanings.⁷¹ Heteronormativity can be defined as: 'an ideology that promotes gender conventionality, heterosexuality and family traditionalism as the correct way for people to be.'⁷² Three binary opposites that constitute heteronormativity can be identified. Firstly, the gender binary privileges persons who conform to gender stereotypes above those who do not. The sexuality binary denotes heterosexuality as normal and demonises other sexual behaviours. Finally, the family binary identifies biological and legal ties as "genuine" family

⁶⁷ Stephanie Baumer, *Media Construction of American Families: A Content Analysis of Images from Parents Magazine* (Master thesis in Mass Communications, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville 2015) 44.

⁶⁸ Landau, 'Straightening Out', 80-100.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 90.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, 85, 95-97.

⁷¹ Joseph Marchia and Jamie M. Sommer, '(Re)defining heteronormativity', *Sexualities* 22:3 (2019) 267-295, 267, 289.

⁷² Ramona Faith Oswald, Libby Balter Blume and Stephen R. Marks, 'Decentering Heteronormativity: A Model for Family Studies' in: Vern L. Bengtson eds., *Sourcebook of Family Theory and Research* (California 2005) 143-165, 143.

and considers other forms or relations as “pseudo”.⁷³

Heteronormativity is mobilised and reproduced in everyday life through social messages and routine activities, as well as through media discourse. For example, in media, families headed by opposite-gender parents are the main point of reference. As the literature illustrates, concerns regarding same-sex parenting tend to stem from anxieties that children raised within these families will display behaviour that deviates from the heteronormative norm in the future. Moreover, people tend to make assumptions about others through a heterosexual lens.⁷⁴ Lesbian people may be interpreted as heterosexual when they are alone with their child, while they are less inclined to be viewed as parents when they are together with their same-gender partner or appear to have a non-conforming gender presentation.⁷⁵ The significance of heteronormativity is thus evident in the individual experiences of lesbian parents as well as in attitudes towards same-sex parenting. The primary hypothesis of this thesis assumes that the concept of heteronormativity influences the portrayal of same-gender parenting in parenting magazines and the gay/lesbian press.

This thesis analyses and compares the representation of same-gender parenting in Dutch parenting magazines and periodicals aimed at gay/lesbian audiences during 1970-2010. This analysis aims to contribute to the literature in several ways. It contributes to the field of twentieth-century (Dutch) LGBTQ+ history where parenting and family are less explored topics. Additionally, this thesis fills an academic gap by analysing parenting magazines, a source that has not yet been extensively explored in LGBTQ+ historical research or Dutch historical research in general. Considering the link between procreation and heterosexuality, and the consequent historical notion that assumed that a lesbian identity was incompatible with family and parenthood, this research provides relevant insight. It explores whether this notion was present in Dutch parenting magazines and the gay/lesbian press during 1970-2010.

1.3 Primary sources

Two Dutch parenting magazines were analysed: *Ouders van Nu* and *Kinderen: maandblad voor ouders*. Both were published monthly and were aimed at (expectant, prospective) parents. They covered topics including pregnancy and childbirth, child development and parenting advice. They mostly focus on the period spanning from pregnancy to toddlerhood. *Ouders van Nu* has existed

⁷³ Oswald et al., ‘Decentering heteronormativity’, 144-146.

⁷⁴ Stevi Jackson, ‘Gender, Sexuality and Heterosexuality: The Complexity (and limits) of Heteronormativity’, *Feminist Theory* 7:1 (2006) 105-121, 108, 114; Stephanie N. Webb, Jill M. Chonody and Phillip S. Kavanagh, ‘Do We Think Children Need a Mom and Dad?: Understanding How Gender Ideology Impact Attitudes Toward Same-Gender Parent Family Rights’, *Journal of Homosexuality* 65:10 (2018) 1351-1371, 1352-1353.

⁷⁵ Kazyak and Park, ‘Doing family’, 658; Goldberg, *Gay Dads*, 169.

since 1967.⁷⁶ For this thesis, the volumes 1970-2010 were analysed. *Kinderen* was first published in 1979 and continued to exist until 2015. The volumes 1979-2010 were analysed. It can be assumed that parenting magazines were largely targeted at heterosexual readers during this period.

Six gay/lesbian periodicals were analysed, two of which were specifically aimed at lesbian and bisexual women. *SEK* was a monthly magazine published by the COC, a Dutch organisation that has been advocating for the rights of LGBTQ+ people since 1946. It was a follow-up from *Seq* that was first published in 1967.⁷⁷ The first edition of *SEK* was published in 1971 and continued until 1992. *SEK* aimed to highlight the similarities between heterosexuals and homosexuals and wanted to tie in with everyday life.⁷⁸ *XL* was the successor of *SEK*. Its first issue was published in 1992 and continued under this name until 2002. The magazine appeared 11 times a year. *Amarant* is a magazine that is part of the organisation, Groep 7152, which was first started in 1971 by two women who wanted to connect and interact with other lesbian and bisexual women. They sought to create a support group for these women since many experienced isolation after coming out.⁷⁹ The magazine appeared between four to eight times a year from 1971-2013. In 2013 the magazine moved online.

Homologie was a scientific and cultural magazine first published in 1978. Articles in this periodical tended to be intellectual and academic in nature.⁸⁰ The periodical appeared every two months until 1997. *Gay Krant* was first published in 1982. During this time, commercial gay magazines were becoming increasingly popular and the monthly *Gay Krant* reflected this trend. The magazine reached a large audience of mostly gay men. It was not affiliated with any pre-existing organisation and covered topics concerning various aspects of the gay movement.⁸¹ *Zij aan Zij* first appeared in 1992. From the start, the magazine aimed to highlight the voices of lesbian women and was the only counterpart of *Gay Krant* in the 1990s. As well as lesbian women, the periodical is also explicitly aimed at bisexual women.⁸² The magazine appeared six to eight times a year. In 2017 *Zij aan Zij* published its last printed issue and it has been an online magazine ever since.

These periodicals were selected based on their target audience, as well as factors such as the

⁷⁶ Ouders van Nu - Over Ouders van Nu, <https://www.oudersvannu.nl/over-ouders-van-nu/> (accessed 03-04-2023).

⁷⁷ Jasmijn ter Haar, With Pride IHLIA - Eerste Nederlandse homo-en lesbische tijdschriften, <https://withpride.ihlia.nl/story/eerste-nederlandse-homo-en-lesbische-tijdschriften/> (accessed 05-04-2023).

⁷⁸ Ter Haar, 'Eerste Nederlandse'; Evert van der Veen, 'Papier en Passie: tijdschriften als sociale organisaties' in: Petra Schedler and Judith Schuyf eds., *Homoseksualiteit in beeld* (Utrecht 1989) 66-94, 77.

⁷⁹ Martien Sleutjes, With Pride IHLIA – Groep 7152, <https://withpride.ihlia.nl/story/groep-7152/> (accessed 09-12-2023).

⁸⁰ Jack van der Wel, With Pride IHLIA – Homodok, <https://withpride.ihlia.nl/story/homodok/> (accessed 05-04-2023); Mattias Duyves, 'Bij de meerderjarigheid van homostudies: Nederlandse sociologen over homoseksualiteit 1965-1985', *Sociologische Gids* 32:5-6 (1985) 332-351, 342.

⁸¹ Van der Veen, 'Papier en Passie', 81, 83.

⁸² *Zij aan Zij* - Oosten, Maria van (1959), <https://www.zijaanzij.nl/encyclopedie/bekende-namen/658/oosten-maria-van-1959/> (accessed 05-04-2023).

time period they covered and their research availability. *Ouders van Nu* and *Kinderen* were the main parenting magazines in the Netherlands during 1970-2010. Combined, the selected gay/lesbian periodicals cover the period that this thesis focusses on. Furthermore, they targeted various audiences within gay/lesbian communities, offering a diverse perspective on the representation of same-gender parenting in the community's printed press. The author has translated titles, quotes and other content from the analysed sources from Dutch to English, aiming to maintain the closest possible meaning in the translation.

1.4 Method

As various archives have been used to gain access to the selected periodicals, different methods have been used to select and analyse relevant articles. Every available issue of *Ouders van Nu* and *Kinderen* between 1970-2010 was manually analysed at the Dutch National Library (KB). During this process, particular attention was given to the cover and the table of contents of each issue to identify whether any articles potentially pertained to same-gender parenthood. As more volumes were analysed, it became clear that relevant items tended to be found in certain recurring columns. General advice columns were also scanned for references to same-sex parenting.

Earlier items from the gay/lesbian press have mostly been accessed via the online database Gale Archives of Sexuality and Gender. *SEK* from 1976 to 1988, *Homologie* from 1978 to 1997 and *Gay Krant* from 1982 to 2000.⁸³ Articles from *Amarant* from 1978 to 2010 were viewed at the KB. Items from *XL* (1992-2002) were viewed at IHLIA, a Dutch LGBTQ+ heritage archive in Amsterdam. Articles from *SEK* from 1988 to 1992 and *Gay Krant* from 2000 onwards were also viewed at IHLIA. Volumes of *Zij aan Zij* from 1995-2000 were accessed at the KB, while items from 2000 onwards were obtained at IHLIA. Both Gale Archives and IHLIA have a search word function to find relevant material. Various keywords have been used to find relevant articles.⁸⁴ These keywords include the Dutch translations of terms such as 'gay fathers', 'lesbian mothers', 'gay parenthood', 'duo-mothers' and 'duo-fathers'. The chosen keywords represent the terms and concepts that were expected to be used in items about same-sex parenthood.

The selected items have been analysed using a form of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis examines the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used.

⁸³ Gale Archives contains only parts of these volumes, and not every year mentioned here is accessible. Besides, it does not have any of the volumes from the early 1970s. Therefore, the IHLIA catalogue was used to determine whether relevant items can be found in these periodicals in the years that are inaccessible via Gale Archives.

⁸⁴ Used keywords: homo(seksuele)-ouders(schap), lesbische moeder(s), homo(seksuele)-vader(s), duo/mee-moeders, duo/mee-vaders, kindwens, adoptie, roze-ouderschap, Orpheus (+kinderen), draagmoeder, echtscheiding, gezin + homo, gehuwde + homo, biseksuele + ouders, twee + moeders, twee + vaders.

It also considers what beliefs, ideas and messages are communicated through language. Language plays an important role in the construction and representation of one's identity.⁸⁵ The manner in which same-gender parenting is predominantly portrayed and discussed within the selected items offers an insight into the prevailing perceptions that existed surrounding this topic in Dutch gay/lesbian circles and society at large during 1970-2010. Guided by the literature on same-gender parenthood, dominant depictions and discussions apparent in the selected items were identified and categorised. These prevalent themes shape the structure of the empirical chapters of this thesis.

The used sources and methods may have certain limitations. As not every periodical was analysed in the same way, there is a slight inconsistency in the kind of items that have eventually been selected for this thesis, depending on the source. Shorter items that (briefly) mentioned same-gender parenthood were generally more notable in the periodicals that were searched manually. The use of keywords to simultaneously scan multiple periodicals often resulted in numerous items. Therefore, shorter and less relevant items were generally dismissed in this approach. However, as the parenting magazines were analysed manually and resulted in fewer relevant items compared to gay/lesbian publications, these shorter items are arguably more significant in the analysis of parenting magazines. Furthermore, some relevant items may have been missed. Keywords such as 'mother' 'father' and 'child' have not been used separately as this resulted in an excessive number of irrelevant items. However, the use of a broad range of other keywords has minimised the risk of missing significant items. Lastly, several issues of *Ouders van Nu* were unavailable for analysis.⁸⁶ As this thesis focusses on the dominant portrayals of same-gender parenthood in various periodicals, these limitations are not expected to affect the overall conclusion of this thesis.

⁸⁵ Brian Paltridge, *Discourse Analysis: An Introduction* (London 2022) 2, 7, 27.

⁸⁶ The issues of *Ouders van Nu* from April to December 1985 were missing as well as the entire volume of 1986. The issues of February 1977, October 1988 and November 1988 were also missing.

2. Same-gender parenthood in the Netherlands

This chapter aims to contextualise the findings of this thesis by providing a brief overview of the key developments regarding same-gender parenting in the Netherlands during 1970-2010.

During the 1970s, lesbian and gay individuals became more visible and accepted in Dutch society, partly as a result of the sexual revolution.⁸⁷ Following this increased tolerance, fewer lesbigay people felt pressured to hide their identity by entering into a heterosexual marriage. As a result, the number of lesbigay individuals who became parents through heterosexual unions decreased. Consequently, a gay identity came to be increasingly understood as incompatible with parenthood.⁸⁸ Furthermore, during the 1970s, gay communities frequently challenged conventional heterosexual norms such as marriage, joint homeownership and starting a family.⁸⁹ This view shifted with second-wave feminism which introduced birth control and abortion rights, giving (heterosexual) women more agency regarding motherhood. Additionally, the introduction of reproductive technology such as artificial insemination removed the inherent connection between parenthood and heterosexual relationships. As a result, more lesbian women started embracing motherhood and an increasing number of lesbian couples used artificial insemination to become mothers.⁹⁰

As in several other Western countries, discussions about same-gender families increased in the Netherlands during the 1980s and 1990s.⁹¹ In 1986, the Dutch family council (Gezinsraad) published a study called 'Children with homosexual parents.' This was one of the first Dutch studies on gay parented families and aimed to contribute to the discourse surrounding children raised in these families, while also aiming to improve social attitudes towards gay parenting.⁹² The study predominantly drew on literature from the United States. It reported common findings from studies on the well-being of children with gay parents.⁹³ For example, the study concluded that the psychological development of children with a lesbigay parent was not any different from those growing up in families headed by opposite-sex parents.⁹⁴

In the late 1990s, Dutch researchers Hans Warmerdam and Annemies Gort published their book *Meer dan gewenst*, featuring interviews with lesbigay parents and their children.⁹⁵ It informed

⁸⁷ Gert Hekma, *Homoseksualiteit in Nederland van 1730 tot de moderne tijd* (Amsterdam 2004) 114-116.

⁸⁸ Warmerdam and Gort, *Meer dan gewenst*, 16-17; Hekma, *Homoseksualiteit in Nederland*, 172.

⁸⁹ Warmerdam and Gort, *Meer dan gewenst*, 17; Hekma, *Homoseksualiteit in Nederland*, 172-173.

⁹⁰ Warmerdam and Gort, *Meer dan gewenst*, 18-19; Anja Meulenbelt, 'Inleiding' in: Idem, *Het kind en het badwater: Over veranderend ouderschap* (Amsterdam 1993) 7-18, 8-9.

⁹¹ Maaïke de Klerck, *Lesbies moederschap: literatuurstudie naar geschiedenis, vormen van lesbies moederschap, de lesbische opvoedingssituatie* (Groningen 1985) 33.

⁹² T. Kras, *Kinderen bij homoseksuele ouders* (Den Haag: Nederlandse Gezinsraad 1986) 1.

⁹³ Ibidem, 4-5, 12-14.

⁹⁴ Ibidem, 29-30.

⁹⁵ Warmerdam and Gort, *Meer dan gewenst*.

prospective lesbian parents about the various pathways through which they could become parents and the legal aspects of same-sex parenthood at the time. This book reflects the increased interest of lesbian individuals in becoming parents during the later part of the twentieth century. Furthermore, during this period the organisation Meer dan Gewenst was founded. This organisation connects and guides LGBTQ+ people who want to become parents.

Donor insemination

Women in same-sex relationships can start a family through a range of means. They may jointly raise children born through donor insemination (DI) or opt to co-parent with a single (gay) man or a homosexual couple. Additionally, they can adopt or foster. DI is one of the most common methods used by female same-sex couples.⁹⁶ This section therefore primarily focusses on the developments and discussions in the Netherlands regarding this procedure.

In the Netherlands, lesbian couples have been using DI since 1977.⁹⁷ The use of DI by both lesbian and single women ended the secrecy that had surrounded the procedure when it was predominantly used by opposite-sex couples.⁹⁸ New reproductive technology sparked discussions regarding new families, especially those created through IVF. This also prompted a reconsideration of the consequences of established reproductive methods such as DI. These discussions primarily focussed on the question of who should have access to this technique. In 1986, the health council published a report concluding that it would be in the child's best interest if new reproductive methods were limited to intended parents in traditional family structures.⁹⁹ Dutch feminist author Anja Meulenbelt and developmental psychologist Mark M. Terwogt emphasised how the emergence of these discussions coincided with the increased use of DI by lesbian couples. These discussions were clearly motivated by concerns about the continuity of the traditional biological family.¹⁰⁰ Following these debates, studies examining the influence of a present father on a child's development were re-evaluated. This revealed that there was no legal justification for differentiating between various family structures. Furthermore, studies concluded that families in which biological and social parenthood do not coincide would generally benefit from transparency about the lineage

⁹⁶ Golombok, *Modern Families*, 50-51.

⁹⁷ De Klerck, *Lesbies moederschap*, 51.

⁹⁸ J.K. de Bruyn, 'Maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen rond KID', *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Klinische Chemie en Laboratoriumgeneeskunde* 26:5 (2001) 313-328, 310.

⁹⁹ Trudie Knijn, 'Op zichzelf teruggeworpen? Variatie, verantwoordelijkheid en de zorg voor kinderen' in: Anja Meulenbelt ed., *Het kind en het badwater: Over veranderend ouderschap* (Amsterdam 1993) 75-92, 80-81.

¹⁰⁰ Meulenbelt, 'Inleiding', 13-15; Mark Meerum Terwogt, 'De KID- discussie en een herbezinning op het vaderschapsconcept' in: Anja Meulenbelt ed., *Het kind en het badwater: Over veranderend ouderschap* (Amsterdam 1993) 39-48, 39-41.

of the child if this information is available.¹⁰¹ Consequently, discussions about reproductive technology increasingly focussed on the importance of transparency regarding a child's lineage.¹⁰² As a result of this shift, the removal of sperm donor anonymity appeared on the political agenda in the late 1980s.¹⁰³ Opponents of this policy were concerned that this would lead to a reduction in the number of available donors.¹⁰⁴ An advocacy group representing the interests of those who opposed the plan proposed two initiatives to prevent an immediate removal of anonymous donors. A donor passport was created. It provided details about the donor, along with a character description and an explanation addressed to the child. Furthermore, parents could opt to either select an anonymous or partially anonymous donor. The latter consented to recorded information being provided to the child when they turned 16.¹⁰⁵ In June 2004, a law was enacted which removed lifelong anonymity for donors.¹⁰⁶

Adoption

Men in same-sex relationships can become fathers through several routes. Historically, gay men have mostly become fathers as a result of having children in previous heterosexual relationships. Only in recent years have children been growing up in planned two-father families. Numerous of these families have been formed through adoption. Some gay men choose adoption to avoid the involvement of other carers in their children's lives. Others attach importance to establishing a biological link with their children and therefore opt for co-parenting, where they share parenting responsibilities with a lesbian couple or a single woman. Another option is surrogacy.¹⁰⁷ Until 1994, surrogacy was illegal in the Netherlands at which time the law changed making only commercial surrogacy illegal.¹⁰⁸

Since the 1970s, unmarried couples in the Netherlands, including same-sex couples, have been able to foster children.¹⁰⁹ From the late 1970s, cohabiting couples increasingly gained legal rights similar to those of married couples. However, several legal distinctions persisted regarding

¹⁰¹ Knijn, 'Op zichzelf teruggeworpen?', 80-81.

¹⁰² Ibidem.

¹⁰³ M.C. Ploem and W.J. Dondorp, 'Wet donorgegevens kunstmatige bevruchting: van geslotenheid naar openheid', *Tijdschrift voor Gezondheidsrecht* 37:5 (2013) 434-448, 437.

¹⁰⁴ Golombok, *Modern Families*, 93-94; De Bruyn, 'Maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen', 310.

¹⁰⁵ De Bruyn, 'Maatschappelijke ontwikkelingen', 310-311.

¹⁰⁶ Ploem and Dondorp, 'Wet donorgegevens', 439-440.

¹⁰⁷ Golombok, *Modern Families*, 165-169.

¹⁰⁸ Sylvia Dermout et al., 'Non-commercial surrogacy: an account of patient management in the first Dutch Centre for IVF Surrogacy, from 1997 to 2004', *Human Reproduction* 25:2 (2009) 443-449, 443.

¹⁰⁹ Kees Waaldijk, 'Small change: how the road to Same-Sex marriage got paved in the Netherlands' in: Robert Wintemute and Mads Andenaes eds., *Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Partnerships: A study of National European and International Law* (London 2001) 437-464, 441.

parental rights. Until 1986, unmarried partners could not have joint authority over their children and when this law changed this option was initially denied to same-sex couples. Moreover, until 1998, only married couples could adopt a child.¹¹⁰ During the 1990s, discussions emerged regarding adoption by individuals or same-sex couples. In 1995, the secretary of state published a document stating that adoptive parents no longer had to be exclusively selected among heterosexual couples.¹¹¹ However, Wereldkinderen, a Dutch adoption institution as well as other mediators were opposed. They doubted whether deviating from the traditional family structure in multiple ways would benefit a child. Moreover, opponents anticipated that countries of origin would be hesitant to place children with same-gender couples.¹¹² In April of 1998, it became possible for heterosexual cohabiting couples as well as individuals, to adopt a child even if this person was living with a partner of the same sex. Via the latter construction, same-sex couples could adopt children.¹¹³

On April 1st 2001, same-sex marriage was legalised in the Netherlands.¹¹⁴ In addition, it became possible for same-sex partners to adopt a child from the Netherlands, as well as become a second parent by adopting their partner's biological child.¹¹⁵ However, an Adjustment Act specified that international adoption would remain limited to married opposite-sex couples and individuals, as authorities in the child's country of origin would not allow adoption by same-sex couples.¹¹⁶ Since 2009, same-sex couples can adopt internationally. However, this is still dependent on whether the country of origin allows adoption by same-sex couples which is not often the case. For a long time, only the United States allowed adoptions by same-sex couples.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Ibidem, 441-442.

¹¹¹ René Hoksbergen, *Kinderen die niet konden blijven: zestig jaar adoptie in beeld* (Soesterberg 2011) 355-356.

¹¹² Ibidem.

¹¹³ Waaldijk, 'Small change', 446; Hoksbergen, *Kinderen*, 360.

¹¹⁴ Waaldijk, 'Small change', 437.

¹¹⁵ Ibidem, 438, 450.

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, 453.

¹¹⁷ Parlement.com, - Regels voor adoptie gaan met de tijd mee, https://www.parlement.com/id/visk3x3i0ixm/nieuws/regels_voor_adoptie_gaan_met_de_tijd_mee (accessed 15-06-2023).

3. The representation of same-gender parenthood in parenting magazines

This chapter discusses the representation of same-gender parenthood in the Dutch parenting magazines *Ouders van Nu* and *Kinderen* during 1970-2010. The selected articles are initially discussed chronologically, however, as the representation of same-gender parenthood increases, the items are discussed thematically. Every item that concerned same-gender parenthood in either parenting magazine was taken into account. 20 items from *Ouders van Nu* and 9 items from *Kinderen* were eventually selected and analysed for this chapter.

The (non-)visibility of same-sex parenthood 1970-1990

No discussions on same-sex parenting were found in issues of *Ouders van Nu* from the 1970s. Among articles focussing solely on childcare, some articles discussed topics that reflected changes in society such as articles about divorce and step-parenthood. In addition, some articles discussed emancipation and women working outside of the home. However, articles discussing alternative family models or divorce did not address the topic of same-sex parenthood.

As the parenting magazines were analysed manually, it was noted that not many articles discussed homosexuality in general. In 1978, two articles that discuss homosexuality can be found. Both items appeared in a recurring column called 'Man-Woman'. This column primarily focussed on the challenges that young parents encountered. Topics regarding sexuality would be discussed in this column. In April, an article with the headline: 'But why does a homosexual marry?' appeared in this particular column.¹¹⁸ As the title suggests, the article specifically discussed homosexuality within a marriage. The author Rob Geensen, who had previously been involved with the COC, asserted that while open discussions about this particular topic had increased as homosexuality had become less taboo, prejudices persisted. He observed the importance of matrimony in society, even as alternative forms of cohabitation gained popularity. Geensen asserted that as a consequence, many homosexual people felt pressured to marry. Another factor that could influence this decision was the wish to have children. Geensen thus affirmed that gay individuals may indeed have or want children.

The article did not offer any advice to readers in similar circumstances. Additionally, no mention was made of the impact this kind of situation may have on children, despite the article appearing in a parenting magazine. While the item referenced a publication on this particular topic, it did not mention Orpheus, an organisation founded in 1969 that supports individuals navigating

¹¹⁸ Rob Geensen, 'Maar waarom trouwt een homo dan?', *Ouders van Nu* (April 1978) 51-53.

homosexuality within a heterosexual marriage.¹¹⁹ This seems to suggest that the author and/or the editors may not have considered this topic one that directly affected their readers. The second article centred on women discovering same-sex attraction.¹²⁰ The author Gemma Naninck argued that women having a same-sex relationship alongside their heterosexual marriage could give them more freedom. Additionally, she emphasised that women discovering same-sex attraction did not automatically imply that they considered leaving their marriage and family. Thus, in comparison with the previous article, this one portrays homosexuality within a marriage as less of a significant issue. This may be explained by the different views and attitudes towards male and female (homo)sexuality.

In the 1980s, articles discussed various forms of alternative families, especially single parenthood. Another topic that often reoccurred was IVF. This reflects the increased use of reproductive technology during this time. The 1980s is considered the period of the lesbian baby boom which was followed by increased research on two-mother families. This is, however, not widely reflected in parenting magazines. One reference to research regarding same-sex parenthood can be found in May 1984. In a brief item, researchers studying homosexuality at Utrecht University requested homosexual women and men with children, as well as those planning to have children, to get in contact.¹²¹ Commissioned by the COC, their study was to conclude whether these parents would benefit from having a special interest group.

In 1989, a personal story of a couple appeared in a column which covered stories of troubled marriages or relationships. These stories were told from the perspective of psychologist Willeke Bezemer who counselled these couples. This particular story was about 'Frits' and 'Ilse'. Frits had recently discovered his attraction to men and initially wanted to combine this new aspect of his life with his old life with Ilse.¹²² Bezemer asked them to make a list of their wishes regarding their relationship and family. Concerning parenthood, Bezemer explained: 'If Frits was going to contemplate his life as a homosexual, how was he going to navigate fatherhood?'¹²³ This statement suggests that according to Bezemer, Frits continuing life as openly gay was going to influence his perspective on fatherhood and/or affect his ability to be a father. This perception alludes to the common notion that being a lesbian parent is a contradictory identity. Furthermore, Bezemer recounted one of Ilse's outbursts during the sessions in which she accused Frits of influencing their son's sexual orientation. This denotes another common prejudice regarding gay parents. Following this, Bezemer pointed out to Ilse that Frits is a child of heterosexual parents, implying that the

¹¹⁹ Orpheus – Ontstaan, <https://orpheusnederland.nl/organisatie/ontstaan/> (accessed 09-06-2023).

¹²⁰ Gemma Naninck, 'Lesbisch als symbool', *Ouders van Nu* (September 1978) 51-53.

¹²¹ Eds., 'Wat voor post is er?: Homoseksualiteit en ouderschap', *Ouders van Nu* (May 1984) 36.

¹²² Marjan van Marle, 'Het verhaal van Ilse en Frits', *Ouders van Nu* (December 1989) 29-33.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, 33.

sexuality of a parent does not influence that of their child. Bezemer thus actively dismissed this misconception regarding gay parents. She mentioned that the couple went to a meeting of Orpheus. However, the article provided no further information about the organisation for readers who may have identified with the couple's situation. During the 1970s and 1980s, no explicit portrayals of established families headed by same-gender parents were found, either through divorce or other pathways. However, the abovementioned items did briefly mention gay parenting, therefore illustrating to readers that same-sex attraction was not incompatible with being a parent.

The increasing visibility of same-sex parenthood in the 1990s
Compared to the previous decades, the visibility of same-sex parenthood in parenting magazines increased in the 1990s. This was especially evident regarding the visibility of lesbian mothers. In the 1990s, several items can be found in which lesbian mothers were mentioned, reflecting the inclusion of lesbian motherhood in the periodicals. For example, in the advice section of *Ouders van Nu* in 1993, the findings of an American study on children with lesbian mothers were published.¹²⁴ The item reported that the study found minimal differences between children raised in same-sex families compared to those raised in heterosexual families. Additionally, it noted that daughters of lesbian mothers did not show an increased probability of identifying as gay themselves. The inclusion of this item signifies that the editors deemed it relevant for the periodical's readership.

During the analysis of the parenting magazines, particular titles were examined closely to establish whether they mentioned or included lesbigay parents. This was for example carried out for articles addressing reproductive technology and letters from readers on this topic. Positive results would indicate a rising trend in the inclusion of same-sex parents in contexts where such representation would be relevant. This method resulted in a few findings. In 1994, *Kinderen* published an item answering legal questions regarding unmarried parents. This included a question sent in by a lesbian mother inquiring about the possibility of her girlfriend obtaining parental authority over her child.¹²⁵ The following year, *Ouders van Nu* published an article on artificial insemination, noting that in some cases this procedure could also be provided to single and lesbian mothers.¹²⁶ Similarly, in 1996, a reader asked women with experience of using a sperm donor to write to her, stating that these women could either be single or lesbian.¹²⁷

In 1997 the reader's post section in *Ouders van Nu* featured a letter written by a lesbian couple. In this letter, the women conveyed that the periodical was both interesting and relevant to

¹²⁴ Margot Jamnisek ed., 'Ouders Vragen: Nieuw onderzoek naar kinderen van lesbische ouders', *Ouders van Nu* (October 1993) 98.

¹²⁵ Eds., '10 vragen over ongetrouwd ouderschap', *Kinderen* (January 1994) 28.

¹²⁶ Yolande de Best, 'Het laatste nieuws over K.I.', *Ouders van Nu* (September 1995) 100.

¹²⁷ Eds., 'Het Netwerk', *Ouders van Nu* (May 1996) 111.

them but that they would appreciate a regular focus on lesbian women who want to have children, as this journey to parenthood is unique. They wrote:

[...]It would be appreciated if your magazine regularly focusses on lesbian women who want to become mothers. By doing so, readers will be exposed to this and we hope that with your help, societal acceptance will proceed more easily and more quickly.¹²⁸

The women referred to the numerous applications for sperm donors by lesbian couples at a hospital in Amsterdam, stating that this indicated a growing trend of children being born into families headed by lesbian mothers. The women implied that the magazine was not representative of contemporary society. In their letter, the women did not explicitly emphasise the importance of the representation of lesbian mothers for readers like themselves, but rather the role that such representation could play in fostering tolerance and acceptance of lesbian motherhood in heterosexual society. Perhaps, the women did not expect many other (prospective) lesbian mothers to read *Ouders van Nu*. Additionally, they might have thought their letter was more likely to be printed if they emphasised the positive impact the magazine could have.

Personal stories and family portraits

Most articles in *Ouders van Nu* and *Kinderen* in which same-sex parenthood was represented can be found in two types of columns: personal stories and family portraits. Families headed by lesbian parents started appearing in these columns from the 1990s onwards. Most of these portrayals featured families headed by two mothers.

Personal stories are a common characteristic of parenting magazines. Both *Ouders van Nu* and *Kinderen* featured columns sharing personal stories that often revolved around situations considered unconventional and therefore interesting, touching and maybe even shocking. The stories in these columns did not include any photos of the people involved. Furthermore, in some of the articles, the names of the people involved were left out or changed. Arguably, this style emphasised that these stories covered potential taboo subjects. While these columns did not have a question-and-answer structure, it can be assumed that the editorial team provided the interviewees with potential aspects to address. Family portraits are another style of article in which depictions of same-sex families can be found in the 1990s and 2000s. Compared to personal stories, these articles

¹²⁸ Eds., 'Wij zijn lesbisch en willen dolgraag kinderen', *Ouders van Nu* (June 1997) 12.

appeared more personal as they featured photos of the families in question. These items tended to be shorter than personal stories and also did not have a question-and-answer structure. Family portraits also tended to highlight those families that could be considered unconventional.

In the 1990s, only a few personal stories were found that revolved around the breakdown of a marriage due to a partner's same-sex attraction. In 1994 *Ouders van Nu* printed a story about a woman who fell in love with another woman when she was pregnant. She eventually left her husband and shortly after the birth of her daughter, her girlfriend moved in with her.¹²⁹ This is the only depiction found of a blended same-gender family after divorce. The story primarily focussed on the woman's unconventional family dynamic rather than the breakdown of her relationship with her husband. This is reflected by the woman expressing: 'Maybe we are not a model family, but the basis is solid. We are a happy family. This is what is right!'¹³⁰ This article has a positive tone. Neither the woman's sexuality nor her new family situation is portrayed as a problem. The woman concluded by stating that she did not expect everyone to understand her story but that some readers may recognise and relate to it. The article noted that responses to the story could be submitted to the editors, suggesting that the woman was open to corresponding with readers in similar situations.

In 1999, the column 'Story of a relationship' featured the story of a married couple, with the husband in a relationship with another man. This relationship column was also from the perspective of psychologist Willeke Bezemer.¹³¹ This story primarily centred on the breakdown of the relationship. The husband wanted to be able to explore his homosexual feelings but his wife did not accept her husband being in a second relationship alongside their marriage. However, the man's same-sex attraction is not framed as a major issue. This is also illustrated by the mother stating that the children need their father and that his sexual orientation is irrelevant to them. Furthermore, she recounted a remark from a friend who questioned whether she still felt comfortable leaving the children in the care of her husband. Referring to the incident she expressed her indignation, stating that she does not believe a homosexual father would harm his children just because of his sexuality.¹³² The comment of the friend alludes to the assumption that gay fathers pose a danger to their children. The mother thus dismissed this negative perception about gay fathers. Like previous items on this topic, the article did not refer to Orpheus.

All other selected items featured in either column portrayed intended lesbigay parented families. This illustrates that the representation of blended same-gender families with children from a previous marriage was limited. The stories that centred around the breakdown of a marriage due

¹²⁹ Mariska Keus, 'Héél persoonlijk', *Ouders van Nu* (September 1994) 65.

¹³⁰ Ibidem.

¹³¹ Willeke Bezemer, 'Verhaal van een relatie', *Ouders van Nu* (July 1999) 85-86.

¹³² Ibidem, 86.

to same-sex attraction mostly centred around the couple involved rather than on what the family structure may look like in the future. The lack of these portrayals may be attributed to the perception that these families were considered unconventional not only because they were formed through divorce, but also because of the sexuality of the (step)parents. Additionally, parenting magazines generally featured stories of parents with young children which may have posed a limitation for a number of blended families, including those headed by same-gender parents. Furthermore, as Geensen discussed in his article, awareness of homosexual feelings within a marriage remained stigmatised. This may have prevented these families from wanting to be showcased.

Planned two-mother families

Most personal stories and family portraits that featured same-sex families portrayed planned lesbian families. A number of recurring topics were addressed in these items. As the literature illustrates, historically, lesbian parents have been viewed as a contradiction. This sentiment is evident in several personal stories from two-mother families as they expressed how their sexuality influenced their path to parenthood. The family of 'Jacqueline' and 'Lia', featured in *Ouders van Nu* in 1994, was the earliest family portrait of a same-gender family found in the parenting magazines.¹³³ Jacqueline stated:

When I was younger I used to want like six children. But when I realised that I was a lesbian, the opportunity to have children of my own became less feasible and I gave up on that idea. Later, when I met Lia, I really did want children, but I did not want to be the biological mother. I had closed that chapter.¹³⁴

In 1998, mother 'Patricia' recounted that her parents did not expect her to have children when she brought home a girlfriend.¹³⁵ In 1999, *Ouders van Nu* printed the story of 'Saskia' and her partner 'Jacqueline'. The introduction of her story read: 'Saskia (33) always expected to have a child by the time she was 25. With a man. Nothing out of the ordinary... Until she fell in love with a woman and still wanted to have a child.'¹³⁶ Saskia described that upon revealing her relationship with a woman, her mother expressed that she still hoped to have grandchildren. She continued: 'For me, being in a

¹³³ Eds., 'Gezin 94: vijf gezinnen, vijf portretten', *Ouders van Nu* (December 1994) 73.

¹³⁴ Ibidem.

¹³⁵ Brigitte Donders, 'Verhaal van een moeder', *Kinderen* (April 1998) 89.

¹³⁶ Ina van Wijngaarden, 'Soms gaat het anders', *Ouders van Nu* (December 1999) 73-76, 73.

lesbian relationship did not signify that my path to having children was closed [...].¹³⁷ In a story from 2006, a mother reflected on never having considered the possibility of being a lesbian simply due to her strong desire to become a mother.¹³⁸ These examples illustrate that several lesbian mothers both held and encountered the assumption that a lesbian identity was incompatible with parenthood.

Many (prospective) mothers addressed the apprehensions they had to overcome in their journey to deciding whether to become mothers, particularly those concerning the well-being of their (future) children. This includes concerns about bullying at school and the impact of growing up without a father figure. Notably, in several narratives, the women highlighted what they believed they could offer a child, despite these concerns. Many expressed having had the realisation that they could provide love and warmth to a child and emphasised that they were making a conscious decision. For example, Saskia stated:

We were sure about one thing: our child will be inundated with warmth and love, not only from us but also from our family and friends. For us that was the decisive factor to go through with it [having a child].¹³⁹

In a family portrait from 1996, mothers 'Moniek' and 'Ine' stated:

However, we were convinced that we had enough 'baggage' which we could give to our child to be able to deal with this [growing up without a father]. Together we had something to offer. A warm family. A stable home. What a child needed according to us, was two people who could offer safety, harmony and security. Those two people could be a man and a woman, two men or two women.¹⁴⁰

These narratives demonstrate a sense of relief, excitement and confidence which can be attributed to lesbian individuals overcoming internalised doubts about their capabilities to parent as a result of heteronormative discourse.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Ibidem.

¹³⁸ Martine Schlingmann, 'Soms gaat het anders', *Ouders van Nu* (May 2006) 52-53.

¹³⁹ Wijngaarden, 'Soms gaat het anders', 73.

¹⁴⁰ Monique Nelis, 'Geen gewoon gezin, maar een tikkeltje anders: Moniek en Ine: Niet één maar twee moeders', *Kinderen* (September 1996) 78-83, 79.

¹⁴¹ Goldberg, *Adoptive Dads*, 31.

In all the selected interviews featuring planned two-mother families, the women used or were planning on using donor insemination. The choices they made regarding this are therefore recurring topics in these interviews. Some interviewees discussed this in more detail than others. It is striking that many mothers emphasised the importance of knowing their child's roots, not only for themselves but also for their children, leading them to choose a known donor. This also suggests that many of the women were aware of the discussions and concerns regarding DI that arose in the Netherlands from the mid-1980s onwards. Several mothers selected donors from their inner circle and some women chose their (partner's) brother as a donor. The women who chose the latter option highlighted the significance of this biological connection. For example 'Patricia' and 'Maaike' (1998) noted that choosing Maaike's brother as a sperm donor could secure a favourable legal position for Maaike as the non-biological mother.¹⁴² Jacqueline and Lia (1994), chose Jacqueline's brother as a donor. They stated: 'We knew from early on that we wanted a known donor. Children should know where their roots lie.'¹⁴³ They also emphasised that this arrangement allows the women to recognise themselves in their children while also making Jacqueline's mother the biological grandmother of their children.

In 2003, *Ouders van Nu* published a story with the provocative headline: 'My brother is my child's father.'¹⁴⁴ In this interview, biological mother 'Aletta' explained that she wanted their child to have biological connections to her partner 'Pauline', therefore choosing Pauline's brother to be a sperm donor. The women asserted their intention to disclose to their child that their uncle acted as a sperm donor: 'A child has the right to know where they came from.'¹⁴⁵ They also emphasised the significance of Pauline's father being biologically connected to his grandchild. The references to the biological link of the children with both grandparents seem suggestive of the importance that is generally placed on the biological connections within family relationships. This is particularly interesting when considering the work of Weston and Sullivan who explored the implications of lesbians having babies through artificial insemination for their families of origin.¹⁴⁶ However, in these cases, the child has a biological connection to both mothers and therefore grandparents, a phenomenon not addressed by the mothers featured in the work of these researchers.

Saskia and Jacqueline (1999) opted against selecting a donor from their personal circle to avoid the risk of the donor wanting to be involved in their child's life. However, by using a partially

¹⁴² Donders, 'Verhaal van een moeder', 89

¹⁴³ Eds., 'Gezin 94', 73.

¹⁴⁴ Elvera van het Klooster, 'Soms gaat het anders', *Ouders van Nu* (July 2003) 49-51.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 49.

¹⁴⁶ Weston, *Families We Choose*, 185-188; Sullivan, *The Family of Woman*, 124-129.

anonymous donor, they ensured that their child could access information about the donor in the future.

We have made this choice for our child, not for ourselves. We do not see the donor as a father; for us, it was solely about the sperm donation, for which we are grateful. From the hospital we have received a letter with some details about him: information about his appearance and his job. At least that is something.¹⁴⁷

In 2006, a short feature in *Kinderen* covered the story of 'Jessica' and 'Natasja', who were in the process of trying for a baby. To find a sperm donor, they posted a notice on two websites. Jessica recounted the research she and her partner had conducted regarding DI: 'From the literature we have read, we know that it can be very important [for the child to know who its biological dad is] because otherwise there is a chance the child might experience psychological problems.'¹⁴⁸ They emphasised, however, that they did not want the donor to be involved in their lives in any way: 'If we had read that bringing up a child without a dad would be harmful we would have dismissed our wish to have children. We think the interests of our child should be the most important thing.'¹⁴⁹ This item included a reference to the website of Meer dan Gewenst. A somewhat guarded tone can be detected in this particular article. This may be because the prospective mothers were aware of the prejudices that exist towards families with no father figure. This is also reflected in the fact that the names of the women were fictitious. A few items featured mothers who opted for completely anonymous donors or did not explicitly state what choices they made regarding this. It can, however, be concluded that most two-mother families featured in these magazines were those that opted for either a known or a partially anonymous donor. As stated, this might be because lesbian mothers were aware of the prejudice and discussions surrounding anonymous donors. Those who made different decisions may have wanted to avoid negative reactions which exposure in a magazine could provoke.

Another topic raised in several interviews was the presence of a paternal figure in the lives of children in two-mother families. This pertains to another common concern regarding same-gender parenting. In 1996, Moniek and Ine's family portrait read:

¹⁴⁷ Wijngaarden, 'Soms gaat het anders', 74.

¹⁴⁸ Monique van Klaveren – van Hoogstraten, 'Verhaal van een moeder', *Kinderen* (March 2006) 7.

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem.

Moniek and Ine find it important that Vincent is occasionally around men. This is the reason they requested Vincent to have a male teacher at school. And every now and then he gets to sleep over at one of Moniek's brothers.¹⁵⁰

In 2006, Jessica stated:

But a guy in the house is not necessary, there are enough men in our lives that can do 'boys activities' with our child. For example, my dad loves football so he will play football with his grandson- or daughter.¹⁵¹

Only two items which explicitly depicted lesbigay multi-parent families were found. One was found in *Kinderen* in 1998 and was part of a family portrait series.¹⁵² The item was brief but included a photo of the whole family: two mothers, two fathers and two children. The mothers 'Yvonne' and 'Yvet' explained that while they had always known they wanted children together, they did not want to use an anonymous donor. When they met 'Peter' and 'Hein', who also wanted children, they constructed a plan to bring up a child between the four of them. Through DI they have two children who each have a different set of biological parents. They all live together and the children spend half of the week at their mothers', while the other half is spent with their fathers.

In 2009, *Ouders van Nu* featured the story of 'Sandra' with the headline: 'I want a child but I am a lesbian and single.'¹⁵³ Compared to other lesbian mothers featured in the parenting magazines, this item stands out as it centred on a single lesbian woman who wanted an active father for her child. She stated: '[...] I absolutely want a father for my baby. Through my work in education, I know that a father figure is important for children's development. And where I live I see that single mothers have a hard time.'¹⁵⁴ She placed an advert in a gay periodical which resulted in a response from a gay couple with whom she eventually had two children. This story centred on Sandra and did not feature the perspective of the fathers. However, she described a co-parenting arrangement in which both sets of parents seem to have an equal role in caring for the children. Sandra recounted going to a meeting of Meer dan Gewenst, and a link to their website can be found at the end of the

¹⁵⁰ Nelis, 'Geen gewoon gezin', 79.

¹⁵¹ Ibidem.

¹⁵² Mirjam Luijten, 'De nieuwe gezinnen van Nederland: twee vaders en twee moeders die samen twee kinderen hebben', *Kinderen* (October 1998) 22.

¹⁵³ Femke van den Berg, 'Soms gaat het anders', *Ouders van Nu* (July 2009) 30-32.

¹⁵⁴ Ibidem, 31.

item.

In 2008, *Kinderen* printed an interview featuring singer Suzanne Klemann and her partner Minka.¹⁵⁵ It is the only article found in the two parenting magazines which featured a celebrity parent with a same-sex partner. This is interesting given that celebrity parents tend to be a prominent feature in parenting magazines. Compared to other selected items, this interview had a question-and-answer structure. During the discussion about the birth, the interviewer inquired whether Suzanne ever wished that she had been the one giving birth. This question signifies the interest surrounding the distinction between biological and non-biological motherhood, which was also evident in several other interviews. For example, many mothers addressed how they decided who was going to be the biological mother (first). Factors such as desire, age and career influenced this decision, however, many of the interviewees emphasised that it was a straightforward decision. Those couples who touched upon this topic emphasised that the distinction was hardly relevant. For example, in 2006, 'Pauline' expressed that her partner 'Elke' was able to sympathise with her during the birth. She noted that Elke does not feel she missed out on anything by not being the one to give birth to their child.¹⁵⁶

Several interviewees addressed the reactions from the outside world. Most of the (prospective) mothers received positive reactions. Pauline and Elke expressed that people around them do not always understand their family dynamic. They also conveyed that strangers have approached them asking intimate questions:

Oddly, many people want to know how a lesbian couple managed to get pregnant. Complete strangers at school or in the supermarket ask about the practicalities of the conception. That is quite an intimate question, but apparently, many people do not realise that. We do not make a big deal of it and explain that we used artificial insemination.¹⁵⁷

Saskia (1999) mentioned that she and her partner only encountered positive reactions. They also highlighted their positive experience at the hospital, noting that they did not feel like an exception as they were surrounded by many other lesbian couples with the same wish.¹⁵⁸ In contrast, Pauline and Elke had less favourable experiences at hospital meetings. They expressed: 'It feels odd to involve so

¹⁵⁵ Aleida Bos, 'Zangeres Suzanne Klemann over het eerste jaar als moeder', *Kinderen* (January 2008) 8-11.

¹⁵⁶ Schlingmann, 'Soms gaat het anders', 53.

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁸ Wijngaarden, 'Soms gaat het anders', 74.

many strangers in such a personal decision like starting a family.¹⁵⁹ They note that their psychologist wanted to know everything about them. Pauline described:

That meeting left me with mixed feelings. It is of course very important that you can offer children a stable home. On the other hand, it has something unjust. Heterosexual couples never have to go through such an examination. They can do whatever they want [...].¹⁶⁰

The couple emphasised that their journey to parenthood is different from that of opposite-sex couples. They imply that they had to explain and justify their decision to have children, simply because they are a same-sex couple. This illustrates the inherent association between parenthood and heterosexuality. Saskia also addressed this in her interview by emphasising the heteronormative nature of parenting discourse.

We do notice, of course, that the whole world is structured around heterosexuality but we are not the kind of couple that gets angry about this. Like any other couple, we eagerly read every magazine about children and parenting, although we sometimes find it regrettable that it is automatically assumed that the partner is a male.¹⁶¹

As stated, two-mother families were predominantly visible in columns that depicted relatively unconventional stories. This in itself reflects that both parenting magazines were heteronormative, as simply the setup of same-gender families appeared to be considered atypical. Moreover, articles frequently referred to the husbands or male partners of (expectant) mothers. Additionally, mothers featured in the magazines were often introduced alongside the name of their male partner. Therefore, examining the names of partners also served as a method of analysing portrayals of same-gender parents. This resulted in two relevant items. In October of 1999, *Kinderen* published a feature on older mothers. One of the mothers showcased in this interview was 'Julie', who was expecting a child with her female partner 'Marina'.¹⁶² Julie mentioned how she and her partner extensively discussed donor options. She does not reveal which decisions they eventually

¹⁵⁹ Schlingmann, 'Soms gaat het anders', 52.

¹⁶⁰ Ibidem, 53.

¹⁶¹ Wijngaarden, 'Soms gaat het anders', 74.

¹⁶² Janneke Staats, 'Moeder worden na je veertigste', *Kinderen* (October 1999) 13-18, 17.

made, considering this a private matter between them and their child. In July 2003, *Ouders van Nu* published a photo series featuring new fathers. Among the fathers, there was one mother portrayed. The text alongside the photo read: 'A new mother – but did not give birth to her second child herself.'¹⁶³ These items stand out compared to other articles as their main focus was not on the fact that these mothers were part of two-mother families. It shows the magazines' willingness to represent these families outside of columns that highlight unusual narratives. It is an example of representation that affirms the existence of same-gender families without placing the main focus on the sexual orientation of the parent(s). Landau regards this as a positive development in the representation of same-gender parents.¹⁶⁴

Planned two-father families

Only two articles featuring planned two-father families were found. Both of these were published in 2009. One of these can be found in *Ouders van Nu* and was part of a column centred around three "different" families.¹⁶⁵ Similar to other family portraits, this item featured a photo of the two fathers, 'Roy' and 'Jaap', with their child, 'Max', whom they adopted from the United States when he was one month old. The item is relatively brief and mostly focussed on the adoption procedure. Roy stated: 'For gay couples that want to have children, there are few options. Especially as we wanted sole custody and not a co-parenting arrangement, so we opted for adoption [...].'¹⁶⁶ They briefly touched on the many surprised but positive reactions they received. They also emphasised that as they lived in Amsterdam, they were not concerned about their family standing out.

In *Kinderen*, the couple 'Jerremey' and 'Jacy' were featured, who were expecting their first child via surrogacy. The article featured photos of the couple and their surrogate 'Janneke'.¹⁶⁷ The story of Jerremey and Jacy shows similarities to other selected interviews. For example, the couple mentioned the doubts they had before deciding to become parents:

'But we did not know what it would be like for a child to grow up with two dads', Jerremey states. 'What are you doing to a child? Will it not be bullied? On the other hand: what is

¹⁶³ Bianca Bartels, 'Verse Vaders', *Ouders van Nu* (July 2003) 32-37, 34.

¹⁶⁴ Landau, 'Straightening out', 96-97.

¹⁶⁵ Eveline Vink, '3 gezinnen: gewoon anders', *Ouders van Nu* (April 2009) 97-101, 98, 101.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁷ Mirjam Luijten, 'Jerremey & Jacy krijgen een kind via een draagmoeder', *Kinderen* (April 2009) 78-81.

more beautiful than a child that is welcome. You see a lot of children who do not get enough love, while we have so much love to give.¹⁶⁸

They described some initial issues they faced regarding the surrogacy procedure. They also revealed that Janneke would not be involved in their daughter's upbringing. They asserted that they were open to the possibility of Janneke and their daughter forming a bond in the future, should they both want to do so.

Besides the multi-parent family mentioned previously, these were the only other features that specifically centred on two-father families. These items thus featured autonomous two-father families. Personal stories or interviews with co-parenting two-father families were not found, despite this being a common way for gay men to become fathers, especially before options such as adoption and surrogacy became (more) accessible.¹⁶⁹ The lack of items depicting two-father families may be explained by the perception of parenting magazines as mainly catering to mothers. This could have made it less appealing for two-father families to be portrayed in these periodicals, especially during a time in which the acceptance of these families was likely still expanding. Additionally, as research has shown, discourse regarding the significance of a maternal figure in a child's life can be influential on gay men.¹⁷⁰ Such sentiments regarding gender may have influenced two-father families, particularly those created through divorce or a co-parenting arrangement. These portrayals would have excluded the active mother(s) which could have been considered controversial. Finally, for a long time, adoption and surrogacy were not widely accessible to prospective bisexual and gay fathers in the Netherlands. This is mirrored by the fact that the only items which featured these pathways to parenthood were published in 2009.

The visibility of same-sex parenting in the 2000s
As has become clear from this chapter, most depictions of same-gender parenthood in parenting magazines were found in the 1990s and 2000s. However, there was no notable increase in the representation of same-sex families in the 2000s compared to the 1990s, despite the legislation of same-sex marriage in the Netherlands in 2001, and the increased tolerance of homosexuality continuing into the 2000s. Besides a brief notice in the news section of *Ouders van Nu* in 2001 stating that same-sex couples could now adopt Dutch-born children, no further discussion about the

¹⁶⁸ Ibidem, 78.

¹⁶⁹ Weston, *Families We Choose*, 175-177.

¹⁷⁰ Oren and Ben-Ari, 'Between Abnormal "Otherness"', 1609-1610; Goldberg, *Gay Dads*, 53-54.

implications of marriage equality for same-sex parenting was found.¹⁷¹

In January 2008, *Ouders van Nu* published the results of a recurring online poll in the corresponding column in the magazine. In response to a poll stating: 'Gay parents are just as capable of raising a child', 78% of the 281 online voters agreed with the statement.¹⁷² The opinion of three parents was published alongside the results. One of these parents was a gay father who highlighted the advantages of his children having four parents, noting that inquiries regarding the biological parents were the only drawback. This item thus briefly depicts a two-father family through co-parenting. Another parent also agreed with the statement but emphasised the importance of a child knowing their background. The third parent emphasised that the differences between men and women are reflected in a child's upbringing. She expressed that children with two fathers may struggle to interact with women in the future as the mother is the most important person in a child's upbringing. Thus, this mother held prejudice towards two-father families in particular, which seemed to be influenced by beliefs about gender. Within the parenting magazines, this is the only selected item in which a negative message regarding same-sex parenting was expressed directly.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates that among same-gender families, planned two-mother families were most frequently portrayed in the parenting magazines *Ouders van Nu* and *Kinderen* during 1970-2010. These portrayals mostly appeared in columns centred around unusual stories and families. The representation of same-sex families and the topics that were addressed in these items mirror the developments surrounding same-sex parenting in the Netherlands at the time. From the second half of the 1990s onwards, there were no more stories of relationship breakdowns as the result of a partner's same-sex attraction. This shift can be attributed to the increasing tolerance towards homosexuality in the Netherlands during this period. Fewer lesbigay individuals may have felt pressured to hide their identity. During the 1990s, there was a growing representation of intended two-mother families. This trend reflects the rising number of female couples planning families together which took off with the lesbian baby boom a decade earlier. In contrast, planned two-father families did not appear until the late 2000s.

Most portrayals of same-sex parenting were made visible through interviews with lesbigay parents, in particular lesbian mothers. Many mothers addressed the decisions they made regarding donor insemination and the role of a (biological) paternal figure in their children's lives. It is striking that most mothers featured in these periodicals opted for known sperm donors and emphasised the

¹⁷¹ Nicolette Kuijlaars eds., 'Nieuws: Twee mannen en een baby', *Ouders van Nu* (June 2001) 112.

¹⁷² Monique Heist and Manja van der Wees eds., 'Wat vind jij?', *Ouders van Nu* (January 2008) 7.

importance of their children knowing their background. These matters play a significant role in discussions regarding new families and same-gender parenting. It is likely that many interviewees indirectly responded to these debates. Mothers who opted for (partially) anonymous donors may have been less comfortable sharing their stories in mainstream parenting magazines. This is further exemplified by the use of fictional names for some interviewees. The occurrence of these topics confirms that debates surrounding same-sex parenting frequently pertain to the well-being of children raised within these family structures. Landau argues that the focus on children of lesbian and gay individuals reiterates that these families fall outside the heteronormative framework which privileges 'biological inception by intercourse between a male and female.'¹⁷³ Heteronormative norms were thus significant in these periodicals, even though they were largely implicit. This is also illustrated by the fact that representation of same-sex parented families was primarily found in columns that highlighted unconventional narratives. Additionally, the language in many articles expressed the unspoken assumption that families are generally heteronormative.

However, this chapter shows that same-sex parented families were affirmed in these parenting magazines. This is important considering the prevalent notion that views a gay identity as incompatible with parenthood, and the largely heterosexual readership of these magazines. Interviews with same-gender parents were generally optimistic. The few unfavourable remarks that were expressed tended to be dismissed within the same item. However, it is striking that these were generally made regarding gay fathers.

¹⁷³ Landau, 'Straightening out', 90.

4. The representation of same-gender parenthood in the gay/lesbian press

This chapter analyses the dominant representation of same-gender parenthood in the Dutch gay/lesbian press during 1970-2010. Around 100 items were selected across six different periodicals. The portrayals are discussed collectively and in thematic order. As various periodicals were analysed, not every portrayal of same-sex parenting can be discussed. The selected sources are generally longer articles in which same-gender parenting is one of the main topics. For example, news items covering (political) developments related to lesbigay parenting were not selected, as many of these developments were addressed in other more extensive articles. The specific items highlighted in this chapter are those that represent a recurring topic regarding same-gender parenthood within these periodicals and/or are relevant in the context of the broader literature.

The challenges of lesbian motherhood

No in-depth discussions on lesbigay parenting were found in the 1970s. In *Amarant*, a periodical for lesbian and bisexual women, several references to motherhood were identified. Many of these were found in items covering discussion sessions on topics such as feminism and homosexuality. During this period, lesbian motherhood was primarily mentioned in the context of lesbian mothers who had children from previous heterosexual relationships. For example, during one meeting in 1978, participants discussed the complexities of disclosing their sexuality to parents, spouses, and children. Participants also considered relationships between married and unmarried women. The attendees suggested that unmarried women should be willing to contribute to the care of their partner's children. Respondents also stated that in these situations, children often posed more of an issue than the woman's husband.¹⁷⁴ These kinds of discussions were characteristic of Groep 7152 and their accompanying periodical *Amarant*, as they provided a welcoming space for married women confronted with same-sex attraction without pressuring them to divorce.¹⁷⁵

Various personal contributions also addressed the challenges of lesbian motherhood. In a letter, published in 1980, one reader described that following her divorce and entering a relationship with a woman, she had to fight for the custody of her child. Her family questioned her ability to be a good mother.¹⁷⁶ This illustrates that coming out as a lesbian could instantly undermine the perception of a woman's parenting ability. In another contribution from that same year titled: 'I am actually just a mother who happens to love women', a mother described how she waited a long time

¹⁷⁴ Marion, 'Diskussie middag over homofilie', *Amarant* 7:4 (1978) 9-11.

¹⁷⁵ Vilan van de Loo, *De vrouw beslist: de tweede feministische golf* (Wormer 2005) 125-128.

¹⁷⁶ Gemma, 'Ingezonden brief', *Amarant* 9:4 (1980) 7-8.

to end her marriage and live as a lesbian.¹⁷⁷ An important reason for this were her responsibilities as a mother. She emphasised the importance of being accepted as both a partner and a mother. Additionally, she articulated that being a mother distinguished her from other lesbians in the women's movement. This mother's narrative shows that being a lesbian mother could be experienced as a conflicting identity. A similar statement can be found in an advert for a new paper (*Moederkrant*) dedicated to lesbian mothers in 1981.¹⁷⁸ The advert stated: 'Being a mother and a lesbian appear to be mutually exclusive in this society, however, we exist and I find myself increasingly compelled to make that known....'¹⁷⁹ These examples illustrate that some lesbian women faced challenges identifying as both a mother and a lesbian. This was not only evident in mainstream society but also within lesbian communities. The introduction of an article in *SEK* published in 1984 read:

In the heterosexual world, constant criticism prevails, asserting that raising children without a father is detrimental. Challenges that arise in the upbringing are all too easily attributed to the lack of someone or something to identify with. But our lesbian-feminist sisters are not perfect either. In their eyes, societal changes are only attainable by minimising time spent on household duties, let alone spending it on children.¹⁸⁰

This quote highlights how lesbian motherhood was considered controversial both in heterosexual and gay/lesbian circles. The author of the article, Minka Jansen, questioned why the lesbian-feminist community disapproved of women who consciously choose motherhood. According to Jansen, these women are most capable of introducing their children to the right moral values. Jansen recounted her experience at a lesbian event, highlighting the minimal presence of children at this event.

As the situation stands now, many lesbians are afraid to admit that they either have children or would like to have them. [...] Lesbian organisations do not take into account that children might come along. It is as if being a lesbian and having children is at odds with each other and by validating this idea we are confirming one of the dominant social prejudices against us.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Jannie, 'Lesbisch moederschap', *Amarant* 9:5 (1980) 7-9.

¹⁷⁸ Eds., 'Moederkrant', *Amarant* 10:1 (1981) 8.

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁰ Minka Jansen, 'Kinderen van Nu, Volwassen van Morgen', *SEK* 14:1 (1984) 24-25, 24.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem, 25.

Jansen described that lesbians who did bring their children to this particular event had to contend with aggression and criticism from other lesbians. Jansen's experience illustrates that in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a belief in Dutch lesbian circles that being a lesbian and a mother was mutually exclusive. She also seems to imply that this notion reinforces the stereotype that being gay entails rejecting the family.

Similar notions can also be found in personal interviews with lesbian mothers. In 1983, *Homologie* published a feature on lesbian motherhood in which four lesbian mothers discussed their family setup.¹⁸² A single mother discussed the reactions she had from the lesbian community, stating:

I have noticed that some women reject me because I have a child. Motherhood does not align with their mindset, according to them you will no longer have any energy for the women's movement and you are conforming to an oppressive system.¹⁸³

In 1987, *SEK* published an article in which the authors argued that IVF prioritises biological parenting and therefore undermines alternative forms of parenthood including adoption and fostering.¹⁸⁴ It also marginalises individuals with no children as well as lesbigay and heterosexual persons caring for non-biological children. In response to the 1986 report from the health council which asserted that it was in a child's best interest to be raised in a traditional family structure, the authors emphasised that IVF should be accessible to lesbian and single women. They noted that opponents of anonymous donors primarily targeted this group rather than married opposite-sex couples using DI. This statement reiterates the perception that opponents of new family structures feared the disappearance of the traditional family.

In numerous personal interviews with lesbian mothers, the role of the non-biological mother was a recurring topic. In an interview in 1983, a lesbian couple expecting a child through DI discussed their involvement with a support group for lesbian mothers in Amsterdam. This particular article was one of the first personal features of planned two-mother families found in the analysis of the gay/lesbian press. This is arguably reflected in the women's experience in this group. Here they mostly met divorced mothers, some of whom were in a lesbian relationship. One of the mothers stated:

¹⁸² Karen Hillege, 'Lesbische moeders: de zwangerschap, de meemoeder, de opvoeding', *Homologie* 5:2 (1983) 20-23.

¹⁸³ *Ibidem*, 23.

¹⁸⁴ Jeanette van Beuzekom and Evelien Eshuis, 'Moeders: offensief voor een ander ouderschap', *SEK* 17:2 (1987) 4-6.

I do find that difficult at times. They [women in the support group] do have children within this relationship but they had a different starting point. I cannot fully relate to their situation. I had hoped that I would meet more women in a similar situation to us. I am yet to meet a woman in my situation, another co-mother.¹⁸⁵

A similar notion was expressed in an interview in 1988 with 'Laetitia', a lesbian mother and co-mother.¹⁸⁶ Laetitia described how becoming a co-mother prompted her to consider having children of her own. Both Laetitia and her partner fulfil the role of a biological and non-biological mother. She described the ongoing challenge of navigating their situation, noting the lack of representation available to them. Consequently, she and her partner started a group for lesbian mothers and co-mothers, recognising the need for support and contact. She explained how many co-mothers find it challenging to navigate heterosexual assumptions in public, unsure whether to simply conform to these assumptions or correct them. These narratives demonstrate that in the 1980s, two-mother families were a relatively novel and unique family construction. Furthermore, the limited representation of these families made the experiences of co-mothers particularly challenging.

The challenging and novel situation of two-mother families was also evident in an article in *Homologie* in 1989, which covered the first Dutch custody case involving a sperm donor attempting to gain parental rights.¹⁸⁷ The author interviewed Anke van Dijke, a member of a group for lesbian mothers. The sperm donor initiated a custody case on the grounds of biological paternity and the emotional connection he built with the child during visits to the family. Van Dijke highlighted how the case relied on heterosexual norms in society, illustrated by the donor claiming he had just as much right to be heard as the non-biological mother of the child. Furthermore, he implied that a lesbian relationship could not be compared to a heterosexual marriage. Van Dijke asserted that a similar case would not have the same impact on an opposite-sex couple. She noted that this case illustrated the invisibility of lesbian relationships in society which complicated the interpretation of the relatively new role of the co-mother. She encouraged public debate regarding this topic and highlighted the importance of the gay/lesbian community in this discussion, noting that the combination of motherhood and a lesbian identity was not widely appreciated in these circles. 'There are large groups within the gay community (men and women) who associate motherhood with

¹⁸⁵ Hillege, 'Lesbische moeders', 21.

¹⁸⁶ Marieke Kroneman, 'Lesbische moeders: zoeken naar de juiste vorm', *SEK* 18:4 (1988) 4-5.

¹⁸⁷ Karel IJsel, 'De donorzaak: is het conservatief om kinderen te willen?', *Homologie* 11:5 (1989) 20-23.

traditionalism, conservatism, an escape... you name it.’¹⁸⁸

In the mid-1990s, another legal case received attention in the gay/lesbian press. In 1996 *Homologie* interviewed ‘Loret’ and ‘Yvet’, one of two lesbian couples who started a trial case in 1995, fighting for adoptive rights for non-biological mothers in same-sex relationships.¹⁸⁹ The women explained their wish to secure equal rights for non-biological mothers regarding their children, pointing to the ease with which heterosexual couples could do this. They also expressed that by becoming mothers they have become less recognisable as a lesbian couple, especially when one of them is alone with their child. They described how they had entered a new stage of coming out by having children, as they constantly found themselves in predominantly heterosexual contexts. The following year, *Gay Krant* interviewed the second lesbian couple involved in the trial case.¹⁹⁰ By this point, the court had ruled that equal juridical rights could not be granted to both mothers. The couple emphasised the importance of people acknowledging families like theirs for them to be seen as any other family.

In 1998, *Amarant* featured the story of an anonymous woman who lost custody of her children back in 1972 due to her sexuality.¹⁹¹ The mother referred to a thesis on lesbian motherhood, expressing that she wished such studies existed when she needed to defend herself in court. This particular item suggests that attitudes regarding lesbian motherhood had evolved in the Netherlands over the years. Arguably, this is also conveyed through the limited number of articles found on custody cases involving Dutch lesbigay parents with children from a heterosexual relationship. However, as demonstrated in this section, custody cases involving sperm donors were taking place in the 1990s and were reported on in the gay press. These cases exemplified how legal matters had not yet caught up with the reality of same-gender parenting and the new dimensions these families introduced.

The items discussed in this section show that part of the discourse surrounding lesbian mothers in the 1980s and 1990s addressed the various challenges they faced. These challenges were partly due to the perception that a lesbian mother represented a contradictory identity. This notion existed not only in mainstream society but also in lesbian(-feminist) circles. Lesbian (co-)mothers also addressed their marginalised legal and social position in a heteronormative society. This was made particularly challenging by the lack of representation of two-mother families. Lesbian mothers therefore emphasised the importance of representation to increase their visibility and acceptance in society. The increase of planned lesbigay families thus appeared to coincide with new forms of social

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁹ Marleen Slob, ‘Van wie zijn de kinderen?': Proefproces duomoederschap’, *Homologie* 18:1 (1996) 12-14.

¹⁹⁰ Remko de Kok, ‘Lesbische ouderparen proberen via rechtelijke macht ouderschap af te dwingen: “Soms wordt me gezegd dat ik niet zo somber moet zijn, maar ik wil veiligheid creëren”’, *Gay Krant* 18:342 (1997) 7.

¹⁹¹ Eds., ‘Ingezonden: een te laat onderzoek’, *Amarant* 27:4 (1998) 23-24.

prejudices which corresponds with River's observation regarding lesbian families in America in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁹²

The growing representation of same-sex parenthood
In the 1980s, numerous items illustrate the growing inclusion of the topic of parenthood in the gay/lesbian press. This is for example reflected in announcements for weekends away for children with a gay parent, as well as for lesbian women with children. Additionally, references to support groups and organisations for lesbian mothers can be found.¹⁹³ These items were aimed at lesbian women who already had children and those who aspired to have children, reflecting the lesbian baby boom. In 1989, *Amarant* printed an advertisement for a discussion event on same-sex parenting, stating that the increased public debate regarding this topic showed a demand for this event. The item stated that in the years prior, lesbian people had realised that raising children had become less closely associated with the traditional family due to reproductive technology and changing views on parenthood. This event aimed to highlight the needs of lesbian parents with a particular emphasis on the juridical aspects of same-sex parenting.¹⁹⁴

More extensive articles also illustrate the growing interest and dialogue regarding same-sex parenthood in both gay/lesbian circles and society at large. A number of these articles were written in *Gay Krant* by sociologist Rob Tielman, who specialised in gay/lesbian emancipation. For example, in 1986, Tielman addressed the increased recognition of gay parenting, asserting that while this was not a new phenomenon, a significant shift was marked by the fact that gay parents were now open about their sexuality.¹⁹⁵ Tielman stated that same-sex parenthood could be considered a key indicator of society's tolerance towards homosexuality, suggesting that those who did not view homosexual individuals as equals would likely struggle to accept gay parents. He also highlighted the importance of gay parents actively engaging with the outside world to improve perceptions of same-sex parenting. 'Surveying, analysing and combatting discrimination are prerequisites for same-sex parenthood.'¹⁹⁶ In addition, Tielman pointed out that throughout history, there have been instances where the gay community abandoned one another. He expressed that while this situation had improved in recent times, gay parents still faced distrust and suspicion not only from heterosexual individuals but also from members of gay/lesbian communities. Tielman asserted: 'There is not one

¹⁹² Rivers, *Radical Relations*, 173.

¹⁹³ Eds., 'Lesbies en progressief', *Homologie* 4:3 (1982) 5.

¹⁹⁴ Eds., 'Over de rechtspositie van homoseksuele ouders', *Amarant* 18:3 (1989) 27.

¹⁹⁵ Rob Tielman, 'Homoseksueel ouderschap', *Gay Krant* 7:3 (1986) 33.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

gay lifestyle that is the right one, there are many, and same-sex parenting is one of them.¹⁹⁷

A growing interest in same-sex parenthood is also evident through the increasing number of interviews featuring same-sex parented families from the mid-1990s onwards, many of which included photos of the family members in question. In these interviews, several parents commented on the evolved visibility and acceptance of same-gender parenting compared to when they started their journey to parenthood.¹⁹⁸ This indicates a shift in attitudes towards same-sex parenthood in the preceding years. During this period, more accounts of gay fathers can be found. One of these was published in 1995 as part of a series in *XL* in which members of same-sex families shared their experiences. In this interview 'Paul', a gay father of two, emphasised the importance of this particular series as a form of representation for other prospective lesbigay parents, recounting a similar experience when he was younger.¹⁹⁹ A similar statement was made by 'Sjoerd' in an interview in *Homologie* in which multiple lesbigay parents were featured.²⁰⁰ After watching a programme on alternative families he decided to respond to an advert from two lesbian women looking for a father on the sidelines. Both Paul and Sjoerd touched upon the reactions they received from other gay men. Paul stated:

I received positive reactions from everyone. The funny thing was that gays were the least enthusiastic. Perhaps because they thought 'Must I now decide whether I want children or not' [?] [...]. As well as a lot of nice reactions I also got comments such as: 'I would not want to do that to a child, having a gay man as a father.' That was astonishing. It made me realise there was still a lot of self-hatred among gays.²⁰¹

Sjoerd claimed that some gay men attempt to suppress their childlessness by rebelling against family life, and pointed to the notion that gay individuals who become parents are disloyal to the gay community.²⁰² However, Sjoerd and his partner 'Jaap' mentioned that they had not personally experienced any hostility after they became fathers.

In 1997, *XL* published an article exploring the increasing involvement and interest of lesbigay

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁸ Vera Goedhart, 'Sommige vrouwen willen maar een ding', *Homologie* 16:4 (1994) 4-7; Annelies Stijn, 'Hoe gevoelig ligt de anonieme donor?: KI-tiener Vera van Leeuwen: 'Ik vind het gewoon, gewoon'', *Gay Krant* 16:283 (1995) 12.

¹⁹⁹ Karin Broer, "U bent zeer vruchtbaar", *XL* 4:11 (1995) 28-29.

²⁰⁰ Hans Warmerdam, "Ik heb het gevoel dat ik uit mijn beide moeders kom': Homoseksueel ouderschap tussen droom en daad', *Homologie* 17:3 (1995) 4-7.

²⁰¹ Broer, "U bent zeer vruchtbaar", 28-29.

²⁰² Warmerdam, 'Homoseksueel ouderschap', 6.

individuals in traditionally heterosexual realms, such as marriage and parenthood.²⁰³ The author questioned whether this signified the completion of the emancipation process. Several prominent people active in the gay/lesbian community shared their opinions on this matter. Historian Judith Schuyf argued that gay people had conformed to the heterosexual norm instead of the other way around, therefore deeming the sexual revolution unsuccessful. Activist Paul Verstraeten expressed his understanding of the declining emphasis on individualisation within the gay/lesbian community, stating that no one wants to be an outsider. Hans Warmerdam, an expert on lesbigay parenting, asserted that legally securing familial affairs did not equate conforming to heterosexual norms. He also emphasised that a gay identity had never been synonymous with childlessness, but that gay parents had simply become more visible in recent years. Warmerdam considered gay parenting a form of activism in itself, explaining:

Two gays who are raising a child, this is confrontational for many people. In that sense, it is definitely a form of activism. For the average Dutch person, it is easier if gays and lesbians are easily recognisable, for example at Gay Pride. [...] In that case, acceptance of the other is easy. But once you become their mirror reflection, it becomes very confrontational.²⁰⁴

As these examples illustrate, the visibility of lesbigay parenthood increased in the 1980s and 1990s. This was especially the case for planned same-sex parenthood. This increased visibility was accompanied by discussions about same-gender parenting in the gay/lesbian press. These discussions illustrate the prevailing link between parenthood and heterosexuality which some individuals in gay/lesbian circles aimed to uphold.

Children raised in same-sex families

Articles focussing on the children of lesbigay parents emerged from the 1980s onwards. As illustrated in the literature, discussions about same-gender parenting frequently pertain to concerns about the development and well-being of children raised in these families. Items in the gay/lesbian press appeared to respond to these concerns by focussing specifically on the experiences of these children. Furthermore, these articles demonstrate a growing interest in the implications of these family

²⁰³ Coert Bruel, 'Verheteroseksualiseren wij?', *XL* 6:5 (1997) 44-45.

²⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 45.

structures for the children who are part of them.

In the 1980s, several interviews with children of gay parents born of a heterosexual relationship were published. For example, in 1987, *Gay Krant* spoke to Marga Weijers, one of the founders of a support group for young people with a lesbigay parent.²⁰⁵ The introduction stated that most challenges faced by children of gay parents stem from ignorance and prejudice towards homosexuality and from the experience of their parents' divorce. The support group aimed to address these issues by educating institutions and caregivers, while also arranging weekends where young people can talk about these matters. Weijers shared her own experience of having a gay father, describing that at one point she felt uncertain of her sexuality but had no one to confide in. She expressed that society seemed unaware of the existence of gay parents. The reporter interviewed several children who were involved in the support group, noting that most of the ones willing to talk had not faced many difficulties regarding their situation while those who did, felt less inclined to discuss them.²⁰⁶

In the 1990s, several articles focussed on the lives of children who were born within planned same-sex families, more specifically within two-mother families. For example, in 1994, *XL* published an article about children raised by lesbian mothers.²⁰⁷ The introduction stated:

We are not going to talk about artificial insemination, self-insemination or anonymous donors. We are not going to talk about legal matters or guardianship. We are not going to talk about any of that but will allow children to speak about their lives in a same-sex family.²⁰⁸

This statement indicates that discussions regarding same-sex parenting tended to address these matters. The article drew on Mieke Jonkman's study on children raised within gay parented families. This was one of the first studies to do so as, previously, many children had been too young to make statements about their living situation. Jonkman observed a great deal of openness within two-mother families, concluding that their children were not more secretive compared to children raised within families headed by opposite-gender parents. The study and the article both concluded that

²⁰⁵ Peter Hijmans, 'Jongeren met een homoseksuele ouder: 'Angst weerhoudt je erover te praten'', *Gay Krant* 8:12 (1987) 25.

²⁰⁶ Ibidem.

²⁰⁷ Karin van Herwijnen, "Is dat een papa': kinderen over hun leven met lesbische moeders', *XL* 3:10 (1994) 26-27.

²⁰⁸ Ibidem.

children in these families thrive and that the sexual orientation of their parents is of marginal importance compared to parent-child contact.

In 1995, *Gay Krant* ran an article on Vera, a teenager with two mothers, referring to her as part of the first generation of children conceived through DI.²⁰⁹ Vera expressed that she does not feel any different from her peers as her family is all she has ever known. She also noted that she is not curious about her donor. Her mothers emphasised the importance of transparency towards the children and the broader community in order to be perceived and accepted as any other family. In the same year, another interview featured the 33-year-old Conny, who was raised by two women after her mother divorced her father. Conny also emphasised the importance of her mother's transparency regarding her identity and their family dynamic, treating it as normal. Conny expressed that she was frequently confronted with prejudices regarding her sexuality.²¹⁰ Multiple children of lesbian parents expressed having encountered the misconception that they are gay because of their parents' sexuality.²¹¹ Several children stated that they are also attracted to people of the same gender, pointing out that they have to explain to others that this is not a consequence of their upbringing.²¹² Some children pointed to the benefits of growing up and experiencing that there is more than a life that fits within heterosexual norms.²¹³ Articles focussing on children of lesbian parents generally had a positive tone and did not depict children who faced significant challenges due to their family situation.

Similar to the article that drew on the study by Jonkman, several other articles referenced studies on the influence of being raised in same-sex families on children. Some featured insights from experts in the field. This suggests that concerns regarding the well-being of children of lesbian parents were prevalent and deemed relevant to discuss. In 2004, *Gay Krant* published an article on children raised by gay parents, referencing various studies on this topic.²¹⁴ The article stated that most children were unwilling to be interviewed for this particular item out of fear of being stigmatised. The children did not have an issue with their parents but did fear reactions from the outside world. The article mostly focussed on various strategies of disclosure that children may use to tell others about their family situation. One lesbian mother featured in this article highlighted the

²⁰⁹ Stijn, 'Hoe gevoelig ligt de anonieme donor', 12.

²¹⁰ Remko de Kok, 'Drieëndertigjarige Conny werd opgevoed door lesbisch paar: 'Ik ben tenminste goed terecht gekomen, dat kan niet ieder kind uit een heterorelatie zeggen'', *Gay Krant* 16:292 (1995) 7.

²¹¹ Warmerdam, 'Homoseksueel ouderschap', 7; Tanya van der Spek and Liorah Hoek, 'Kinderen van lesbische moeders vertellen', *Zij aan Zij* 9:4 (2000) 26-28, 28.

²¹² Van der Spek and Hoek, 'Kinderen van lesbische moeders', 27; Saskia Hameeteman, 'Ik ben heel trots dat mijn moeder haar hart heeft gevolgd', *Zij aan Zij* 16:6 (2007) 8-10, 9-10.

²¹³ Hameeteman, 'Ik ben heel trots', 9; Willie Draaijers, 'Kinderen met een homo-ouder: het is opeens heel anders', *SEK* 19:1 (1989) 10-11.

²¹⁴ Raymond Unico, 'Opgroeien in een gay home: 'Ik wil mijn twee moeders en anders niets'', *Gay Krant* 25:505 (2004) 17-19.

importance of coming out and being open about one's situation to both children and others, viewing this as a way to become visible. The article emphasised that no studies have indicated any negative consequences of being raised by a lesbian parent. In the same year, *Zij aan Zij* published an article about same-gender parenthood.²¹⁵ The author spoke to Anne-Marie Thus, the chairperson of the organisation Meer dan Gewenst. She stated:

Prospective parents find it important to see what others are doing so they do not have to always reinvent the wheel. But people are also curious about how children of same-sex parents experience their upbringing. That is why we regularly invite young people to share their experiences. Parents want to know what challenges children face. [...]. Will your children have friends at school or will they be excluded? Will they miss a role model if there is no father?²¹⁶

This quote reflects the interest of prospective lesbian parents in the well-being of children raised in same-gender families. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of a network providing support and information to (prospective) lesbian parents. The article also referenced several international studies on the well-being of children raised by same-gender parents, asserting that same-sex parents generally do not have to worry as the results are positive. The author asserted that research emphasises the importance of confidence in children with gay parents. A parent can stimulate this by a transparent and positive attitude towards their sexual orientation and contact with similar families. The author also spoke to a few experts on this subject, including Hans Warmerdam, who asserted that homophobia affects children of same-sex parents. He explained: 'The inherent heterosexual structure in our society renders homosexuality invisible. This changes very slowly. Children often want to be just like everyone else, so they sometimes find their family situation quite challenging.'²¹⁷ A spokesperson of an organisation that supported children with gay parents, expressed that its popularity reflected the need for such an organisation and noted that primarily children born into opposite-sex families participated in their events.²¹⁸

As this section shows, a considerable number of the selected items centred on children of lesbian parents, either through personal accounts or informative articles that drew on studies concerning the well-being of these children. This illustrates that this topic was considered relevant to

²¹⁵ Marian Vleerlaag, 'Wil het kind jou ook?', *Zij aan Zij* 13:5 (2004) 6-9.

²¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 6.

²¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 9.

²¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

the readers of gay/lesbian periodicals. These articles touched on topics such as the children's sexuality, whether they disclosed their situation to peers, and whether they faced stigmatisation. Landau observed similar themes in her analysis of same-gender families in mainstream media. She considered these topics repetitions of homophobic and heteronormative notions, as they assess the negative implications of gay parenting.²¹⁹ However, the discussion of such matters in the gay/lesbian press arguably had different objectives such as informing and maybe even reassuring (prospective) same-sex parents.

Two-mother families

In many of the selected items, the issue of the biological father is raised. Articles on this topic appeared to respond and contribute to the societal discussions that were happening at the time. In 2000, *XL* published an article which featured a proponent and an opponent of the anonymous donor, who shared their perspectives on their stances.²²⁰ As a proponent, Hans Warmerdam asserted that concerns regarding anonymous donors only seemed to arise when there is no judicial or social father involved, such as in cases where two women use DI. He also questioned the notion that both a man and a woman are essential for a child's identity formation. Philosopher Maja Pellikaan-Engel opposed the use of anonymous sperm donors. She argued that the interest of the child should always take precedence, noting the child's right to know and be raised by their biological parents where possible, as established in UN treaties. According to Pellikaan-Engel, anonymous sperm donation is a system in which the various people and experts involved 'deliberately create individuals with fewer human rights'.²²¹ Warmerdam thus highlighted the influence of heteronormative conventions in this discussion, while Pellikaan-Engel's argument resonated with the notion that growing up in a heteronormative family is in a child's best interest. Both perspectives represented widespread arguments in the discussion regarding new families and sperm donation.

Many two-mother families who shared their experiences in the press also addressed the biological father of their children. In an interview in 1994, a lesbian couple expressed:

²¹⁹ Landau, 'Straightening Out', 91.

²²⁰ Hans Warmerdam and Maja Pellikaan-Engel, 'Het betrekkelijke belang van het kind: zes argumenten tegen anonieme spermadonatie', *XL* 9:6 (2000/2001) 18-21.

²²¹ *Ibidem*, 21.

Society makes such a big deal of the unknown father! Initially, we thought let us solve that problem by choosing a donor who is not actively involved in fatherhood, but whom the child can reach out to if they ever wish to.²²²

Ultimately, this couple found the prospect of using a known donor too uncertain. Instead, they chose an anonymous donor, stating that once their child was born they did not know what they were worried about. Some mothers expressed similar sentiments, explaining that a known donor appeared too precarious and they preferred to avoid involving another party in their family dynamic. Other mothers emphasised wanting to be able to answer their own as well as their children's questions about the identity of their father. Two examples were found of women who initially sought a donor within their family circle but whose attempts ultimately proved unsuccessful.²²³

In a family portrait in *XL* in 2000, two mothers expressed that after the birth of their first child, people did not address the fact that they were two women with a child but did acknowledge that there was no man. They stated: 'They [people] were inclined to approve when it became clear that an identifiable man was in the picture'.²²⁴ They also described that their initial discretion regarding this matter changed, stating: 'If you are not open about this, you ultimately become very vulnerable.'²²⁵ In 2003, two mothers sharing custody with two fathers stated: '[...] We receive a lot of positive reactions. Having a known father scores favourably with most people. They consider this a good solution [...].'²²⁶ These quotes illustrate the value people attach to a known father figure in the lives of the children raised in two-mother families. In the same interview, two other mothers expressed: 'For us, the anonymous donor was the most suitable option, just like for 99% of infertile heterosexual couples [...].'²²⁷ They asserted that as their children are raised by two people who make the decisions, their family closely resembles other families. They also noted that conservative and religious circles react positively towards them, likely because they are married and form a stable family. However, they did receive some negative reactions regarding the fact they chose an anonymous donor, noting that this disapproval becomes less apparent once they explain that they did not choose this route for convenience's sake.²²⁸

Most lesbian mothers featured in the selected interviews opted for autonomous parenting. This was the case for those who chose an anonymous donor but also for those with known donors.

²²² Goedhart, 'Sommige vrouwen', 5.

²²³ Goedhart, 'Sommige vrouwen', 7; Warmerdam, 'Homoseksueel ouderschap', 7.

²²⁴ Marcel Hansink, 'De Liefde: nieuw leven', *XL* 9:1 (2000) 19.

²²⁵ Ibidem.

²²⁶ Marian Vleerlaag, "Wij hebben lekker twee mama's!", *Zij aan Zij* 12:5 (2003) 12-15, 15.

²²⁷ Ibidem, 13.

²²⁸ Ibidem.

Several mothers in co-parenting constructions stated that the biological father(s) had a limited role in the childcare.²²⁹ Furthermore, multiple mothers referred to paternal role models in the lives of their children.²³⁰ One lesbian mother recounted a colleague asking whether her daughter was also going to become a lesbian as she never encountered men. This mother emphasised that men did not have to be present in a child's immediate environment but could be observed through various channels including television.²³¹ These narratives illustrate that concerns regarding two-mother families were primarily centred around the presence of a known (biological) father in these children's lives. These concerns relate to heteronormative ideals such as traditional gender roles and biological connections.

From the second half of the 1990s onwards, various informative articles appeared in publications aimed at lesbian and bisexual women. Many of these articles included expertise from professionals in either the medical or legal field. Furthermore, many of the experts featured in these items were lesbigay parents themselves. As they possessed professional and maybe even personal experiences regarding same-gender parenting, such experts may have been considered as more understanding of the readership of these periodicals and therefore more trustworthy. In 1995, *Amarant* published a themed issue on lesbian motherhood, with its introductory article drawn from a book on lesbian and single motherhood.²³² The authors noted the changing perspectives on lesbian motherhood, observing that it was perceived as less contradictory compared to preceding years, both within lesbian subcultures and wider society. The article provided brief information on topics such as donor selection, biological and social motherhood, and dealing with prejudice. Other articles in this issue comprised of interviews with lesbian mothers in which they discussed their decisions and experiences regarding their journey to motherhood. In one of these articles, one couple addressed the negative reactions they received from friends and family. One of the couple's parents found it particularly challenging to accept their daughter's sexuality as well as the couple's decision to have children. However, once the child was born, their attitude improved. This mirrors narratives from lesbian mothers who were interviewed by Sullivan.²³³ It was notable, however, that references to the birth families of lesbigay individuals were limited in the selected items.

In the 2000s, several informative articles were found in *Zij aan Zij*. In 2000, the periodical published an interview with 'Charlene' and 'Esther', who were planning on having a baby through

²²⁹ Karin Broer, 'De luxe van twee keer moeder zijn', *XL* 4:10 (1995) 28-29; Paul Hofman, 'Moeder zijn: 'Het is een soort blind daten'', *Gay Krant* 25:522 (2004) 22-23.

²³⁰ Hillege, 'Lesbische moeders', 22; Hameeteman, 'Ik ben heel trots'.

²³¹ Goedhart, 'Sommige vrouwen' 5.

²³² Anke van Dijke and Linda Terpstra, 'Kiezen voor kinderen vanuit een lesbische leefsituatie', *Amarant* 24:1 (1995) 10-12.

²³³ Anneke Hickendorff, 'De kindwens is inmiddels zo groot dat, dat wat eerst belangrijk was, niet meer zo belangrijk is', *Amarant* 24:1 (1995) 15-17; Sullivan, *The Family of Woman*, 124-144.

reciprocal IVF.²³⁴ They explained that they did not want a third party involved and felt that this procedure allowed them to bring a child into the world together. The article included a contribution by Ineke de Hondt, a family law expert. She asserted that the current legal framework could not yet accommodate the possibility of a child having two biological mothers and that this situation gave rise to a different perspective on legal motherhood. In 2003, an article highlighted the various decisions involved in pregnancy within a lesbian relationship, primarily addressing the choice between a known and an anonymous donor.²³⁵ The article included the experiences of two lesbian couples who each made a different decision. Additionally, it featured the perspectives of several sperm donors who explained their motivation for wanting to be donors. They expressed wanting to bring offspring into the world without taking on the role of father, while also wanting to assist women in fulfilling their wish of becoming mothers. A lawyer and lesbian mother, associated with Meer dan Gewenst, briefly discussed the present status of several legal aspects relevant to two-mother families, including the fact that using an anonymous donor was no longer an option.

In 2008 *Zij aan Zij* and *Gay Krant* collaborated on an article about the potential challenges associated with using a sperm donor. It was specifically aimed at female couples who wanted to use a known donor who would have limited involvement in the care of the child.²³⁶ As this article appeared in two different periodicals, this topic was deemed relevant for various audiences. The story primarily focussed on the issue of conflicting interests between both parties and also featured the personal stories of a lesbian couple and a sperm donor, whose names were fictitious. The article emphasised the importance of establishing clear desires, agreements and boundaries between both parties to avoid any misunderstanding. The couple stressed: 'We hope that female couples carefully consider having children. You really need to think about everything and ask thorough questions if you are going to use a known donor.'²³⁷ It also included advice from legal expert, H el ene Faasen, also connected to Meer dan Gewenst.

Representation of adoptive lesbian motherhood was limited. This topic was addressed in the context of the non-biological mother adopting a partner's child but was seldom explored in cases where neither mother had biological ties to the child. In 2006, *Zij aan Zij* ran an article focussing on the experiences of several lesbian stepmothers.²³⁸ No photos were included in this article and some of the names were fictitious. The article featured advice from both Anne-Marie Thus and Henny Bos,

²³⁴ Liorah Hoek, 'Dubbel moederschap: kunnen twee vrouwen samen een kind krijgen', *Zij aan Zij* 9:2 (2000) 10-14.

²³⁵ Marian Vleerlaag, 'Samen kinderen krijgen: wil je een zaadje of een vader?', *Zij aan Zij* 12:2 (2003) 6-9.

²³⁶ Arvid van Boekel, 'E en baby drie opvoeders?', *Zij aan Zij* 17:5 (2008) 6-10; Arvid van Boekel, 'Zaaddonatie: tegengestelde belangen: Rol homodonor botst met moederrol lesbopaar', *Gay Krant* 29:597 (2008) 6-15.

²³⁷ *Ibidem*, 9.

²³⁸ Barbara Schilthuis, 'Als jouw nieuwe geliefde al moeder is: Wil ik met deze kinderen oud worden?', *Zij aan Zij* 15:7 (2006) 28-31.

a researcher of lesbian motherhood. It also referred to Meer dan Gewenst for further (legal) information regarding same-sex step-parenthood. A few articles, most of which were published in the late 2000s, addressed lesbian foster families. These items also included observations from foster organisations. One article highlighted the need for more lesbian foster families, explaining that these families are especially beneficial to children who have had negative experiences with men.²³⁹ As has become clear throughout this chapter, the representation and discourse regarding same-sex parenthood over the years mostly focussed on lesbian mothers, especially planned lesbian motherhood. As lesbian couples have been able to use artificial insemination since the mid-1970s, this is unsurprising. Informative articles in periodicals aimed at lesbian and bisexual women predominantly pertained to topics relevant to female couples who planned on using donor insemination.

Two-father families

During the 1970s and 1980s, few articles depicted gay father families. Brief references to gay fathers were mostly found in the context of married gay men who shared their experiences. Some of these accounts briefly touched on whether their children were aware of their sexual orientation and how they responded to the news. However, as previously discussed, discourse about blended two-mother families and the challenges they encountered was more prominent than discussions surrounding blended two-father families. This might be because children typically remain in their mother's (full-time) custody following a divorce rather than their father's, regardless of sexuality.²⁴⁰ Moreover, conventional notions about motherhood may have led to a greater willingness among (divorced) lesbian mothers to share their experiences in the gay/lesbian press compared to gay fathers. Additionally, prevailing notions regarding parenthood in gay circles may have prevented gay fathers from sharing their experiences. As stated, in the 1990s, intended gay fathers became more visible, often sharing custody with a single mother or a lesbian couple and playing an active or secondary role in their child's life. Brief accounts of fatherhood could also be found in items featuring notable figures in the gay community. For example, in 1992, researcher Theo Sandfort observed that while lesbian women were increasingly finding ways to raise children together, the process remained more complex for gay men. He noted his and his partner's lack of rights regarding the children they co-parented with a lesbian couple.²⁴¹ Two years later, aids activist Peter van Rooyen who raised a child with his partner and the child's mother, noted that same-sex parenthood was not yet perceived as

²³⁹ Klazien Laansma, 'Veilige plek in een vrouwengezin: een kind van een ander', *Zij aan Zij* 16:1 (2007) 16-18.

²⁴⁰ Rivers, *Radical Relations*, 112.

²⁴¹ Kees Neefjes, 'Het Beloofde Land', *Homologie* 14:3 (1992) 21-23.

normal. He recounted people questioning his wish to be a father, noting that such inquiries are rarely directed at heterosexual individuals.²⁴²

Similar to interviews featuring lesbian mothers in co-parenting arrangements, articles focussing on gay fathers in similar setups also revolved around a single parent or parenting couple. In 1998, *XL* featured 'Arijan', a father who shared custody of his children with their mother. He cared for the children half of the week, noting that this arrangement sometimes evoked surprised reactions from others.²⁴³ In his interview, Paul noted that his children predominantly stayed at their mother's house and always spent the night there, emphasising the importance of providing children with a stable and peaceful environment. Interestingly, although Paul mentioned his partner, he did not explain his role in childcare. The interview focussed exclusively on Paul and featured a photo of him and his children.²⁴⁴ In his interview, Sjoerd stated: 'Jaap and I intentionally chose for Thom to be raised by both his mothers. We as fathers have an additional role, about five to ten per cent of the time.'²⁴⁵ This may again denote the influence of gendered discourse regarding parenting which depicts mothers as naturally suited to parenting.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, research has shown that lesbian mothers who opt for known donors or a co-parenting arrangement tend to desire limited paternal involvement in their family dynamic. The involvement of a biological father could be perceived as a threat to the status of the non-biological mother and the general stability of the family.²⁴⁷ Many of the mothers featured in the selected sources remarked on the limited involvement of the biological father.

Only two items were found in which all parents were featured within the same item. In 1996, *XL* featured mothers 'Yvonne' and 'Jet', and fathers 'Peter' and 'Hein', who would also appear in *Kinderen* two years later.²⁴⁸ The fathers described how people respect their active involvement in half of the upbringing. The second portrayal also highlighted the active role of the fathers in their children's lives.²⁴⁹ Other portrayals of two-father families were mostly of those formed by fostering. In 1994, *Gay Krant* featured two fathers who had fostered around 30 children.²⁵⁰ They noted the importance of a person whom a child can identify with, stating that this is why they only fostered

²⁴² Kees Neefjes, 'Portret van Peter van Rooyen', *Homologie* 16:5 (1994) 26-27.

²⁴³ Marcel Hansink, 'De Liefde: Arijan Doeser (36), Els (3) en Rhea (1)', *XL* 7:1 (1998) 11.

²⁴⁴ Broer, "U bent zeer vruchtbaar", 28.

²⁴⁵ Warmerdam, 'Homoseksueel ouderschap', 6.

²⁴⁶ Oren and Ben-Ari, 'Between Abnormal "Otherness"', 1609-1610; Goldberg, *Gay Dads*, 53-54.

²⁴⁷ Deborah Dempsey, 'Gay male couple's paternal involvement in lesbian-parented families', *Journal of Family Studies* 18:2-3 (2012) 155-164, 156.

²⁴⁸ Karin Broer, "Het blijft een avontuur", *XL* 5:1 (1996) 28-29.

²⁴⁹ Vleerlaag, "Wij hebben lekker twee mama's", 15.

²⁵⁰ Remco de Kok, 'Ton voedde met zijn vriend dertig kinderen op: 'een homo- of lesbopaar kan prima pleegzorg bieden'', *Gay Krant* 15:250 (1994) 11.

teenage boys, preferably gay boys. In 2008, *Gay Krant* interviewed two foster fathers.²⁵¹ They recounted that when they first started fostering, their sexuality caused some challenging situations. Their capabilities were questioned and when things went wrong, the blame was swiftly placed on their sexual orientation. In addition, they described how some biological parents initially expressed disapproval of their children being placed with them, although many of them would eventually come around. They also addressed the reactions from others, expressing a lack of support from fellow gay individuals who accused them of conforming to heterosexual norms.

In 2001, *Gay Krant* spoke to a family of two fathers with a son born through surrogacy.²⁵² The non-biological father was in the process of officially adopting his son. The article partly focussed on second-parent adoption which had just become legal, in addition to the legalisation of marriage for same-sex couples and the possibility for them to adopt children born in the Netherlands. In 2008, a two-father family formed through egg donation and surrogacy were featured in *Gay Krant*.²⁵³ The fathers explained wanting to raise their child without other parties involved, therefore opting for this route. They described using an American organisation for this procedure. They also addressed the reactions they received, recounting surprised responses as they underwent the procedure twice. This resulted in four children, which some considered extravagant.

Few articles featuring adoptive two-father families were found. In 2003, *Gay Krant* published an article on adoption, featuring a number of (prospective) gay fathers.²⁵⁴ The introduction stated:

Six foreign children, all from the American state of Pennsylvania, have found their way into a total of four Dutch gay or lesbian families. That is all. No more successful cases of intercountry adoption by gay or lesbian couples are known.²⁵⁵

The article featured a gay couple who adopted from the United States. The men recounted the rejections they had from Dutch adoption agencies based on their sexuality. Eventually, they found an agency in Pennsylvania prepared to help them. They opted for a closed adoption, where the biological parents do not require information about the adoptive parents, as biological parents generally prefer their children to be placed in a traditional family structure. The article also featured

²⁵¹ Noelia Romero Cabrera, 'Twee vaders onderscheiden', *Gay Krant* 29:590 (2008) 16-17.

²⁵² Marjolein de Meijer, 'Kinderen bij twee vaders of twee moeders: meer dan gewenst: Jermain (13): 'Nu word het allemaal nóg echter'', *Gay Krant* 22:438 (2001) 25-27.

²⁵³ Rits de Wit, 'Pappa en pappie: Jaap en Ernst zijn wettelijk de enige ouders van hun vier kinderen, die genetisch aan hen beiden en aan elkaar verwant zijn', *Gay Krant* 29:594 (2008) 32-33.

²⁵⁴ Adri van Esch, 'Buitenlandse adoptie: jarenlang hopen op een kind', *Gay Krant* 24:482 (2003) 20-24.

²⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, 21.

two gay men who were in the midst of the adoption procedure. They addressed the challenges they faced, including costs, waiting lists and issues related to their sexuality. The article also provided general information and resources regarding adoption by same-sex couples.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates that the topic of same-gender parenthood was addressed in various ways in the gay/lesbian press during 1970-2010. From the 1980s onwards, the representation of lesbian parenting increased which was particularly the case for planned two-mother families. Articles informing and guiding (prospective) lesbian parents constitute a significant portion of the selected items. These items emerged from the 1990s onwards and were primarily aimed at lesbian and bisexual women. This reflects the lesbian baby boom that took off in the 1980s and 1990s. The topic of the sperm donor was frequently addressed in items discussing lesbian motherhood. These articles appeared to reflect and respond to the debates surrounding new families and the question of the absent father which were prevalent at the time. Furthermore, several items highlighted the challenges two-mother families could potentially encounter, encouraging female same-sex couples to make carefully considered decisions regarding DI. Articles depicting two-father families, many of which also provided advice for (prospective) gay fathers, emerged from the 1990s onwards. This arguably reflects the increased tolerance of gay fathers along with the expanded legal options such as adoption and surrogacy in this period.

A number of informative articles focussed on the children in lesbian families. Additionally, several interviews with children of same-gender parents appeared in the gay/lesbian press. These items seemed to (indirectly) respond to dominant concerns that existed regarding same-gender parenthood. The inclusion of these items shows that this topic was considered relevant for the readerships of the various periodicals, indicating an increasing interest of lesbian individuals in parenting. Additionally, this illustrates that a significant portion of the discourse surrounding same-gender parenthood in the gay/lesbian press was conveyed through items that focussed on the lives of children raised within same-gender families. This affirms Landau's argument asserting that this is a prevalent way through which understanding of same-sex parenting is communicated.²⁵⁶

The discussed items demonstrate that discourse regarding same-gender parenting in the gay/lesbian press was varied. Positive and negative aspects were highlighted. Several items highlighted the marginalised legal and social position of lesbian parents. Additionally, same-gender parenthood was a debated subject in the gay/lesbian press, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. This

²⁵⁶ Landau, 'Straightening Out', 85.

highlights that the concept of family was strongly associated with heterosexuality. Opponents of lesbian parenting considered this an adherence to heterosexual norms. Meanwhile, supporters emphasised the importance of increasing the visibility of same-gender families in heterosexual society, and the role that gay/lesbian communities should play in this. This group thus aimed to challenge the notion that considered lesbian parenting contradictory. Both messages were conveyed through personal interviews as well as longer feature articles. However, items that highlighted the experiences of lesbian parents and provided prospective parents with information on achieving parenthood, demonstrate that support for lesbian parents increasingly appeared in many gay/lesbian periodicals over the years.

5. Conclusion

This thesis analysed the representation of same-gender parenting in Dutch mainstream parenting magazines and the gay/lesbian press during 1970-2010. Furthermore, it analysed how this representation can be explained and the significance of heteronormative notions within this portrayal. This chapter will answer these questions as well as compare the findings in the two types of media.

An important concept in the literature on same-gender families is the historical notion that views lesbian parenting as contradictory, which has previously been explored by American scholars Weston and Rivers.²⁵⁷ Families headed by lesbian parents were represented and affirmed in both mainstream parenting magazines and the gay/lesbian press. Thus, these periodicals did not convey this particular notion. However, the discourse within the portrayals of same-gender families in both types of periodicals illustrates and confirms that this notion did indeed exist within both Dutch gay/lesbian circles and society at large, especially during the late twentieth century.

Several similarities and differences can be identified in the representation of lesbian parenting in both forms of media. Among same-gender families, two-mother families were the most prominently represented group in both types of periodicals. Items focussing on two-mother families frequently covered topics such as the choice of the biological mother and sperm donor, and the experience of the nonbiological mother. These topics are consistent with Sullivan's study on two-mother families.²⁵⁸ The representation of two-father families was limited. This was especially the case in parenting magazines. Furthermore, within these periodicals, few depictions of gay fathers in a co-parenting arrangement appeared. As stated, this may have been influenced by the assumption that a parenting magazine is primarily targeted towards women. Additionally, traditional and gendered notions about parenthood also may have influenced the decision of gay fathers to be featured in mainstream media, especially an outlet dedicated to parenting. This would correspond with studies on gay father families, such as Goldberg's analysis, which found that gendered discourses can shape gay men's decisions regarding parenthood.²⁵⁹

The development of the representation of same-sex parenthood in both types of media can be attributed to the progression of relevant advancements regarding lesbian parenting, such as reproductive technology and changes in law. Discussions on gay parenting in the 1970s were limited in both types of periodicals. The visibility of and discourse concerning lesbian motherhood was

²⁵⁷ Weston, *Families We Choose*; Rivers, *Radical Relations*.

²⁵⁸ Sullivan, *The Family of Woman*.

²⁵⁹ Goldberg, *Gay Dads*, 53-54.

evident in both types of media from the 1980s onwards and became relatively widespread in the 1990s. This trend mirrors the lesbian baby boom observed in various Western countries, which was characterised by an increasing number of female same-gender couples using artificial insemination. Portrayals of autonomous two-father families formed through adoption and surrogacy began to emerge in the 2000s. This development reflects the corresponding legal changes regarding these pathways to parenthood and the increasing acceptance of two-father families in society.

Heteronormative notions influenced the coverage of topics regarding same-gender families in both types of periodicals. However, these notions were predominantly conveyed in an indirect manner. In many of the selected items, families headed by lesbian parents were implicitly depicted as deviating from heteronormative standards. Articles featuring two-mother families frequently addressed the conception of their children and whether a paternal figure was present in their lives. These topics allude to concerns regarding the importance of biological family ties and gender non-conforming behaviour. Editors and interviewees appeared to want to engage with the discussions and concerns that existed regarding these families. Furthermore, lesbian parents may have wanted to avoid criticism by clarifying the decisions they made. These findings align with the large body of research on attitudes regarding same-gender parenthood by scholars such as Clarke, who highlighted that many considerations regarding same-gender parenthood involve concerns about how non-heteronormative family structures may affect children.²⁶⁰ The emphasis on the otherness of lesbian parents illustrates that family was closely linked to heterosexuality within these periodicals. As Rivers pointed out, this association was central to the prejudice same-sex parents could encounter. A similar sentiment was indirectly conveyed in these periodicals, particularly through personal narratives of lesbian parents about their experiences in everyday life.

A significant portion of the discourse that surrounded the depictions of same-sex parenthood was thus focussed on the children of lesbian parents which was conveyed either directly or indirectly. The focus on the (biological) paternal figure of children in items featuring two-mother families is an example of this. Items directly focussing on the children of lesbian parents through interviews or informative articles were exclusively found in the gay/lesbian press. As previously indicated, this finding is consistent with Landau's observation that insight into same-sex parenting is predominantly conveyed through discourse regarding the implications of being a child raised by gay parents.²⁶¹ Landau argues that this portrays children as the primary concern of households headed by same-sex parents, reducing the relevance of these families to only their impact on their children.²⁶² Furthermore, the focus on the "how" of same-sex parenthood marginalises children of lesbian

²⁶⁰ Clarke, 'What about the children'.

²⁶¹ Landau, 'Straightening Out', 85.

²⁶² *Ibidem*, 85, 90.

parents and therefore reaffirms heteronormative standards by portraying these children as other.²⁶³

Various differences between the portrayals in the two types of periodicals can be attributed to their target audience as well as their general characteristics. The selected items from parenting magazines primarily consist of interviews with lesbian parents themselves. These items were relatively short and arguably mostly aimed at human interest. This notion is supported by the types of columns in which portrayals of same-sex parents generally appeared. Depictions of same-sex parenting in the gay/lesbian press appeared in various styles of articles. Many of these were in-depth items focussing on this topic. Items in these periodicals appeared to engage with ongoing discussions surrounding same-sex parenthood in society. Furthermore, a significant portion of articles in these periodicals was aimed at educating (prospective) same-gender parents. Articles that discussed the conception of children with lesbian parents or addressed studies regarding their well-being could legitimise these children as a controversial subject matter. However, they could also provide advice and reassurance to (prospective) lesbian parents.²⁶⁴ The target audience is significant to consider here as this likely influenced the interpretation of these portrayals. Extensive articles specifically aimed at providing same-gender couples with information on how to become parents were not found in parenting periodicals. However, this does not imply that articles on child rearing, sperm donation, or reproductive technology that appeared in these periodicals were not useful to same-gender couples. These attributes can also account for the differences in tone between items concerning same-sex parenthood in both types of periodicals. Articles in the gay/lesbian press addressed the potential challenges that lesbian parents may encounter, encouraging prospective parents to make well-considered choices. In contrast, items regarding same-gender parents in parenting magazines generally had an optimistic tone and emphasised overcoming challenges.

As discussed, items concerning same-gender parenthood in both types of media implicitly addressed prevalent concerns regarding lesbian parenting. However, few directly negative perspectives on same-gender parenthood were shared in mainstream parenting magazines. In the gay/lesbian press, however, negative attitudes towards same-sex parenting within gay/lesbian circles were frequently addressed, either directly or through accounts shared by lesbian parents. Same-gender parents were accused of conforming to heteronormative standards. Gay fathers, in particular, mentioned encountering such remarks. This is consistent with previous studies on same-sex parenthood which highlighted the rejection that gay fathers in particular might face from individuals within the gay community. In contrast, supporters of same-sex parenthood aimed to minimise the association between parenthood and heteronormativity. The numerous informative articles aimed at

²⁶³ *Ibidem*, 89-90.

²⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 90-91.

(prospective) lesbian parents indicate the contribution of the gay/lesbian press to the increased representation of same-gender parenthood as well as to the visibility of organisations and networks supporting same-gender families in Dutch gay/lesbian circles.

This thesis has illustrated how same-gender parented families were represented in Dutch mainstream parenting magazines and the Dutch gay/lesbian press. Heteronormative notions were apparent in both types of periodicals. In parenting magazines, these notions were mostly implicit. As these periodicals primarily comprised brief items, further research could illustrate how portrayals of same-gender families in other Dutch mainstream press outlets, such as newspapers or women's magazines, compare to those in mainstream parenting magazines. This can also provide an interesting comparison to Landau's analysis of American news stories. Furthermore, an analysis of the representation of families headed by transgender parents can offer another relevant perspective on heteronormative discourse regarding families headed by LGBTQ+ parents in Dutch media.

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