



Summary findings of reports on parents and sons

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Table of contents

<i>Parent report summary</i>	2
Trends in the distribution of themes and categories by parent type	2
Trends in the distribution of themes and categories by family type	4
<i>Son report summary</i>	6
Trends in the distribution of themes and categories by family type	6
<i>Discussion</i>	7
<i>References</i>	8

Parent report summary

This report presents the highlights of our in-depth analysis of parents' and sons' interviews. It is not exhaustive; it focuses primarily on evidence for a relation between reported parents' level of reflection and the degree of *buy-in* to parental authority and values exhibited by their sons. *Buy-in* is a term we borrow from current leadership theory, which describes two types of leadership. The first is *transactional* leadership in which followers are motivated by a system of punishment and rewards. The second, is *transformational* leadership, in which leaders motivate followers by inspiring them to embrace the leader's values and goals—*buy-in*. Transformational leaders increase buy-in by listening to their followers, inspiring them to embrace the leader's goals and values, and by effectively modeling these values. They are also avid and reflective learners and encourage reflection and development in their followers. Transformational leadership is considered to be more effective than transactional leadership in most leadership situations. See Bass (1985) for a more complete definition of these two forms of leadership, and Popper and Mayseless (2003) for a recent comparison of transformational leadership and good parenting practices.

Trends in the distribution of themes and categories by parent type

Parent type did not have a large impact on the content of the interviews. For the most part, *birth mothers* and *other parents* spoke about the same kinds of things in approximately the same proportions. However, there were some important differences in reports of parenting style, discipline, and morality, as shown in Tables 1 and 2 below. Table 1 shows all of the relevant categories endorsed by more birth mothers than other parents¹. Table 2 shows all of the relevant categories endorsed more by other parents than birth mothers.

It is immediately apparent from the data presented in Tables 1 and 2 that birth mothers exceeded other parents in the number of categories they dominated, arguably indicating more reflectivity about parenting on the part of birth mothers than other parents. In addition, most of the categories into which birth mothers' responses were more frequently coded (Table 1) can be thought of as transformational. These are [learning](#), [reflectivity](#), [values](#), and [modeling](#).

¹ Categories in which there were fewer than three responses in both groups, or in which differences were smaller than 20% were not included in any of the tables.

Table 1: Parenting style, discipline & morality: Categories endorsed by more *birth mothers* than *other parents*

Category	Birth mothers		Other parents		X ²
	Number	%	Number	%	
Describes determining whether it is appropriate to step in and resolve a given conflict	3	10.00	0	0.00	
Reports seeking advice on discipline	9	30.00	4	13.33	
Reports seeking advice on parenting	12	40.00	4	13.33	5.46
Reports teaching son right from wrong	15	50.00	8	26.67	
Reports teaching son that it is important to try to understand other people's perspectives and feelings	22	73.33	15	50.00	
Reports teaching son by setting an example	7	23.33	3	10.00	
Total	68		34		

The results presented in Table 2 are difficult to interpret because there are only two items. However, the category, "reports talking through problems with son," indicates some degree of **power sharing**.

Table 2: Parenting style, discipline, and morality: Categories endorsed by more *other parents* than *birth mothers*

Category	Birth mothers		Other parents		X ²
	Number	%	Number	%	
Describes the importance of moral context for teaching son	0	0.00	3	10.00	
Reports talking through problems with son	15	50.00	21	70.00	
Total	15		24		

Trends in the distribution of themes and categories by family type

Family type had an important impact on the content of the interviews. Although, for the most part, lesbian parents and traditional parents spoke about the same kinds of things, the proportions sometimes differed significantly. Overall, lesbian parents reported more considerations, suggesting greater reflectivity on the part of lesbian parents compared to traditional parents. Moreover, many of the categories endorsed by more lesbian than traditional parents align with the transformational leadership model. These include **sharing power**, encouraging **development**, focusing on **values**, encouraging **reflectivity**, **modeling**, and **learning**.

Table 3: Parenting style, discipline & morality: Categories endorsed by more lesbian than traditional parents

Category	Lesbian		Traditional		X ²
	Number	%	Number	%	
Describes fairness as doing to others what you would want done to you	7	23.33	3	6.67	
Describes importance of good behavior in the home and the world	6	20.00	2	3.33	
Describes morality as of central importance	4	13.33	1	0.00	
Describes the importance of moral context for teaching son	3	10.00	0	10.00	
Describes the importance of strong/ clear guidelines	11	36.67	3	0.00	
Reports being an indulgent parent	3	10.00	0	3.33	
Reports compromising/ negotiating with son	6	20.00	1	6.67	
Reports creating lesson's for son from everyday events	7	23.33	2	0.00	
Reports requiring son to apologize to people he has done wrong	4	13.33	0	6.67	
Reports seeking advice on discipline	11	36.67	2	16.67	7.95
Reports seeking advice on parenting	11	36.67	5	26.67	
Reports talking through problems with son	28	93.33	8	10.00	27.78
Reports teaching son by setting an example	7	23.33	3	26.67	
Reports teaching son concern for others	16	53.33	8	36.67	
Reports teaching son fairness	14	46.67	11	16.67	
Reports teaching son how to solve his own problems	11	36.67	5	50.00	
Reports teaching son that it is important to try to understand other people's perspectives and feelings	22	73.33	15	0.00	
Reports teaching son that life is not always fair	4	13.33	0	0.00	
Reports teaching son that stealing is bad	4	13.33	0	10.00	
Reports teaching son to express/ understand his feelings	14	46.67	3	46.67	9.93
Reports trying to share parenting	25	83.33	14	6.67	8.86
Total	218		86		

The categories that are endorsed by the traditional parents do not align with the transformational leadership style as well as the categories endorsed by the lesbian parents. One category can be thought of as indicative of **reflection**, and a second category is indicative of a concern with **values**. A third category is indicative of the transactional style—**rewarding**.

Table 2: Parenting style, discipline & morality: Categories endorsed by more traditional than lesbian parents

Category	Lesbian		Traditional		X ²
	Number	%	Number	%	
Reports considering experience with own parents when deciding what kind of parent to be	11	36.67	16	53.33	53.33
Reports having a relaxed parenting style	2	3.33	8	16.67	16.67
Reports not pushing son	0	0.00	3	36.67	36.67
Reports rewarding son for good behavior	0	0.00	3	10.00	10.00
Reports that son is being raised with a religious morality	1	6.67	5	26.67	26.67
Reports that son learns about moral issues at school/ from peers/ from siblings	0	0.00	11	10.00	10.00
Total	14		46		

Son report summary

Trends in the distribution of themes and categories by family type

This summary report focuses on the relative amount of **buy-in** exhibited by sons of lesbian and traditional parents. For the most part, sons of lesbian and traditional parents spoke about the same kinds of things in approximately the same proportions. However, there were important differences between these two groups of sons, as shown in Tables 5 and 6. Table 1 shows all of the relevant categories endorsed by more sons of lesbian than traditional parents. Table 2 shows all of the relevant categories endorsed by more sons of traditional than lesbian parents. Eight of 9 categories in Table 5 are highlighted in red, compared to 1 out of 7 in Table 6, indicating that sons of lesbian parents provided more reasons for adhering to parental authority and values—*buy-in*. Moreover, 3 categories in Table 6 (highlighted in blue type), indicate that sons of traditional parents were more likely to consider **deviating from parental authority** or values.

Table 5: Assertions about authority, promises, and lying: Categories endorsed by more sons of lesbian than traditional parents

Category	Lesbian		Traditional	
	Number	%	Number	%
Children should obey parents even when they are unfair.	4	26.67		
Children should obey their parents because it shows respect.	4	26.67		
It is unfair when a child upsets a parent.	5	33.33	1	5.88
Lying is wrong.	6	40.00	1	5.88
Parents should treat children right.	4	26.67	1	5.88
Parents have an obligation to keep promises.	12	80.00	5	29.41
Punishment can be fair even if child thinks it is unfair.	5	33.33		
Sneaking away is wrong because it could worry the mother.	9	60.00	5	29.41
You should obey your parents because they have good reasons.	10	66.67	5	29.41
Total	59		18	

Table 6: Assertions about authority, promises, and lying: Categories endorsed by more sons of traditional than lesbian parents

Category	Lesbian		Traditional	
	Number	%	Number	%
It is more important for children to keep a promise than for parents.			3	17.65
It's okay to break a promise if the other person won't know.	5	33.33	10	58.82
It's okay to disobey once you have done what you were supposed to do.	1	6.67	9	52.94
Parents have authority because they are in charge of the house.	1	6.67	4	23.53
Parents must only ask reasonable things of their children.	5	33.33	11	64.71
The purpose of parental authority is to raise good children/adults.			3	5.88
Whether or not you should keep a promise depends on some specific situation.			4	23.53
Total	12		44	

Discussion

Overall, the results of our analysis of parent and son interviews provides evidence that:

1. Birth mothers appeared to be more reflective about parenting than other parents.
2. Birth mothers more frequently endorsed transformational qualities than did other parents, including learning, reflectivity, values, and modeling.
3. Lesbian parents appeared to be more reflective about parenting than traditional parents.
4. Lesbian parents more frequently endorsed transformational qualities than did other parents, including sharing power, encouraging development, focusing on values, encouraging reflectivity, modeling, and learning.
5. Sons of lesbian parents demonstrated more evidence of *buy-in* than sons of traditional parents.
6. Sons of traditional parents demonstrated a greater willingness to violate parental authority or values than the sons of lesbian parents.
7. A relation between transformational parenting and buy-in is supported by these findings.

References

Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: The Free Press.

Popper, M., & Mayseless, O. (2003). Back to basics: Applying a parenting perspective to transformational leadership. *Leadership Quarterly*, 41-65.