

Book Reviews

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Pearlman, S.F. (2012). Mother Talk: Conversations with Mothers of Lesbian Daughters and FTM Transgender Children. Bradford, ON: Demeter Press.

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Sarah Pearlman's book, "Mother Talk: Conversations with Mothers of Lesbian and FTM Transgender Children," is a synthesis of different perspectives of mothers living in mostly the United States but others from Canada and Australia. In this synthesis, Pearlman has used the words of the mothers that were interviewed in 1990 and 2000-2001 with few corrections made in order for the interviews to be read properly. There are varying perspectives of each interview on how the mothers handled themselves to how the daughters, either lesbian or FTM transgender, told them. Every mother was asked the same questions in order to identify the same concerns and show how everyone's experiences are different. In order to allow for the whole experience and the underlying theme Pearlman views the interviews from, she organizes the interviews into themes but keeps all interviews separate.

Pearlman had altered the interviews to make them more clarified for the readers of the book without taking away any aspect of the experience. The interviews first start out as how the daughter had told them, progressing through their experience, and how they feel when the interview was taking place. A lot of similarities were shown for mothers of lesbian and of FTM transgender children and how they coped with the information. There was a large number of transgendered children that had identified as lesbian before their transition; this brought them to similar experiences with the mothers of the children who had just come out as a lesbian showing very minimal differences for the children who came out as just transgender as well. As mothers

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of lesbian to transgender children had expressed, Lois, the mother of a transgender child had questioned herself as a mother and felt like it was something she had done in order for this to happen (p. 161). She was not the only mother who had felt this and it seems like the majority of the mothers had expressed this when their children first told them about whom they really are.

In addition to the experiences, the mothers all discussed whom they told and whom they did not tell, this being one of the questions. The similarities with this question were the mother's hesitation to tell their own parents and whether or not it was a good idea. Variety of responses had come from their parents and surprisingly many had responded better than the mothers did when their children told them. One interview that shows this acceptance the best is when the mother, Karen, had told her father and his response was "I feel so sorry for her. How horrible it must have been wanting to be one thing and to be something else" (p. 40). This addresses the concern many people have about the older generation of individuals and their views on the world; there still was a lot of older parents that had not been accepting but to see older parents that were shows a different side to the earlier decades when coming out was seen as a taboo. Pearlman seems to add this question in order for readers to be more aware of the differing opinions of the generations in order to show the slow progression of more acceptance and the outliers of their generation.

Pearlman describes how the interviews went and the amount of differences mothers can show, though she was not able to get mothers that were more hostile towards their children and had not actively pursued these individuals because they are not part of a network of lesbian and/or transgender groups. Many of the mothers were part of a network, one specifically called PFLAG, which is a group designed for parents of either gay or transgender children. This group shows differences in mothers where most of them found the help they needed in them and some

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did not find the group to be helpful. Interestingly, mothers did not find the support they needed within the group of individuals dealing with the same matter; as the mother named Mariam had stated, the group did not help because they were not understanding what she was going through with her family and her culture where it also is not so easy to just accept and move on (p. 69). It had shown opposite effects for mothers like the ones where the group had changed their whole life and they became advocates for PFLAG and other organizations. Marie, one of the mothers shows that even people who do not know anything about lesbian or transgender people and haven't been educated, can still become very accepting and can learn these terms and what they mean. She became part of the community and explained her journey, becoming advocates for the group and speaking up at meetings to fight for the rights of gay and transgender people (p. 190-192). This expresses different ways that Pearlman wanted to include for dealing with the issues even if it takes a long time to take a stride forward.

Another issue that the book introduces is the separation of relationships and the safety concerns for many lesbian and transgender individuals. This is illustrated through many mothers' concerns for how the outside world will treat their child and the violence that the society faces towards gay and transgender individuals. Many mothers had looked to God in order to express their concern about the many people who decide to isolate their child's lives from their own because of their identity. With this coming from the family of the child, the mothers wondered who else would love their child if they did not. A mother named Sara said "I can't imagine anything worse than that. I just can't imagine how a parent could shut their mind down to a child just because of their sexual orientation" (p. 34). This expresses how many of the parents felt about the love of their child, and the support that needs to be given so that the child feels safe in a world where there is still violence, even murder, towards peoples' true selves they choose to

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express. This is still an issue in today's world, even though the interviews were in 1990 and 2000-2001, showing how important it is to make sure a child feels safe even when their expression goes against the beliefs of parents and others.

Pearlman's intentions for this book and the way it has been structured was to educate many on the difficulties that mother's did face, and the way mothers understood this process from many walks of life. Various theoretical frameworks that will find this book useful are teachers, PFLAG group members, other organizations advocating for the support of LGBTQ communities as well as the parents, and students in post-secondary interested in studies related to gender and sexuality.

Although Pearlman has taken these interviews in order to collect accounts of the feelings mothers have towards the experience of learning that their daughter is a lesbian or is a FTM transgender individual, her book serves multiple functions other than a different perspective. Other disciplines that may benefit from her book are sociology, psychology, anthropology, education, women's studies, sexuality studies, gender studies, feminist studies, and coping studies, as well as many individuals who are looking for a different perspective on how a book is written. I found "Mother-Talk: Conversations with Mothers of Lesbian Daughters and FTM Transgender Children" a very interesting read; it had elements in a book I have never seen before. It was very informative of ongoing issues and what people face today, as well as an educational tool for many persons outside of the disciplines discussed above. The one thing I found limiting was the lack of commentary of Pearlman throughout the interviews. I would recommend this book to anyone wanting to hear real life accounts, and anyone else looking for a good read.