

Canadian Journal of Family and Youth, 9(1), 2017, pp 175-179
ISSN 1718-9748 © University of Alberta
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Pearlman, S.F. (2012). Mother Talk: Conversations with Mothers of Lesbian Daughters and FTM Transgender Children. Brantford, ON: Demeter Press.

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Sarah Pearlman's book, "Mother Talk," is a compilation of interviews with mothers of lesbian daughters or FTM transgender children. The book is an anthology of stories of twenty-four mothers from all over the world. Twelve were mothers of lesbian daughters and twelve were mothers of daughters who were transitioning or intending to transition. Pearlman's initial intention for this book was to be a collection of mother's stories about their relationships with their daughters, but it turned into a scholarly book. Pearlman found participants for her study through advertisements at Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) meetings and other online sources dedicated to trans and homosexual families. The book is divided into six sections that outline the major themes felt by the mothers being interviewed. The central theme of the book is the obstacles that are faced by the mothers and their daughters, and how their relationships continued to grow as the daughters went through a life changing experience.

Due to the nature of the study, Pearlman posted advertisements for participants to contact her. She was looking for mothers of lesbian or transgender daughters. After the initial contact, mothers that could not be interviewed in person were sent The Confidentiality and Questions Statement, Introductory Statement, and Interview Questions Guide. The mothers were asked to tape their stories, respond to all questions and send the tape back. Pearlman proceeded to "construct a narrative or story about a time that changed [the mothers] lives" (p. 3). There were a variety of participants that came from all walks of life with an assortment of family upbringings.

The questions in the questionnaire were for the most part open-ended about the mothers experience with their daughters and any activism they were involved with.

Pearlman discovers through the interview processes that the central feelings were of “sorrow, loss, and shame as what others, if they knew, would think of them as parents” (p. 5). Many of the stories displayed illustrated that mothers were grieving for a lost child. Although their daughters were not necessarily gone, the likelihood of grandchildren, bridal showers, and wedding celebrations were. The shift in sexual orientation from the daughters also had an effect on the mother’s sexuality with their significant others. Interestingly, most of the mothers interviewed were not in complete shock about their daughter’s lesbianism. Several mentioned that their daughters “had been tomboys during childhood and adolescence” (p. 5). Even when the daughters announced their coming out, many mothers hoped it was a phase and “they hadn’t met the right man and that they would eventually return to heterosexuality” (p. 5). This thought was a coping mechanism that was used by many of the mothers interviewed.

During the time of the interviews (2000-2001), homosexuality was not as socially accepted as it is currently. Civil movements were increasing and the availability of information due to the Internet and media allowed homosexual relationships to be welcomed. Most mothers questioned their parenting and wondered what went wrong, either inside or outside the womb. This exercised “psychological theories that family relationships, especially mothers, caused homosexuality” (p. 6). Most viewed their daughter’s homosexuality as negative and frantically tried to find reasoning behind the shift in sexual orientation. These feelings however, were short lived and mothers became more concerned with the safety of their daughters. Since society is not fully accepting of lesbian and transgender individuals, their health and wellness is potentially at

risk. Mothers feared that others would not be as accepting as themselves and others their daughters associated with.

Pearlman's interviews with mothers of FTM daughters were eye opening. All of the mothers that were interviewed for her study eventually accepted their daughters' transition. Similarly to the mothers with lesbian daughters, most experienced grief, devastation and shame. In almost all twelve interviews of FTM mothers, the most difficult aspect was the change in pronouns. One mother of a transgender daughter explained that adjusting to the new pronouns were the most difficult part of the transition. For most of their daughter's childhood and adolescence, her peers referred to her as a her, and suddenly she became a he within a year (pp. 41-42). Many had to convince themselves that the mother-daughter relationship was gone. They also had to develop a new relationship with their son. It was easier for mothers to refer to their transitioning daughter as transgender or as their new given male name. The mothers had accepted their daughter's change, but developing a connecting relationship with a son was their new challenge.

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) helped many of the families of lesbian and transgender daughters. This was the main support group discussed because advertisements for the study were placed in PFLAG meetings. Mothers stated that support groups such as PFLAG and similar meetings were beneficial in emotional and mental guidance (pp. 145-146). Transgender and lesbian daughters also were more confident in their families who attended meetings because it allowed them to have a better understanding of the situation. The meetings allowed families to ask questions they were not comfortable discussing with their daughters.

The most memorable and interesting story in Pearlman's book is Marie's. The story stood out from the rest because Marie's lesbian daughter had a child, and Marie was able to become a grandmother. This story was near the end of the book and I feel it helped shine a light on the future of homosexuality. Today, society is more accepting towards homosexuality and children being raised by two mothers or two fathers. The nuclear family is slowly disappearing as the norm. Another interesting aspect of the story was that "if [Marie] knew then, when [she] was a young woman what [she] knows now, [she] would have been a lesbian" (p. 191). The story goes on to tell how men and women are on two separate planets, and their understanding of homosexuality is completely different. It is also interesting and important to note that many, if not all of the mothers presented in this book followed a religion. Many of the religions stated have negative views towards homosexuality and isolate individuals who wish to transition. The religions identified were: Unitarian, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Reform Judaism, and Jewish Humanist. However, the mothers were able to set aside their beliefs for the happiness of their daughters. Their daughters' happiness was most important to them.

In Pearlman's preface she states that she is a lesbian herself and when she came out to her own mother, their relationship diminished. By hearing stories from other mother's perspectives, it helped her understanding of her own mother's grief. Pearlman's intentions for the book are to allow other mothers to relate and understand the disconnection. This book contributes greatly to the field of gender studies, on a scholarly and personal level. The intended readership of this book is any individual interested in this field, or by mothers looking for guidance and support of others in similar situations. However, any audience can enjoy this book and its contributions to the field of gender studies. It sheds a light on real struggles existing in society related to gender

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identity. The stories included in this book provide valuable insight to familial issues of transgender and lesbianism.

Pearlman's book is structured well and divided into sections that describe the general emotion being felt by the mothers. As I read through the sections I noticed many of the stories were repetitive in their outcomes. Although all the stories were extremely influential, it would have been interesting to see stories from mothers who were not as accepting. I also found some of the stories were hard to read because of the formatting. Since Pearlman used open-ended questions to maintain conversations, her attempt to compile all relative information seemed cramped. Recommended improvement for this book would be to follow a different structural pattern to allow for an easier read. Overall, I found Pearlman's book motivational, powerful, and educational and I would recommend it to any interested individual.