Mother-talk: Conversations with mothers of lesbian daughters and FTM transgender children, written by Sarah F. Pearlman and recently published by Demeter Press, is a major tour de force. Already considered a founding mother of the lesbian psychology movement for her work with the Boston Lesbian Collective, culminating in the seminal publication entitled *Lesbian psychologies: Explorations and challenges* (1987), Pearlman has once again established herself at the vanguard of an emerging sexual minority area – mothers' reactions to lesbian daughters and daughters who are transitioning to male.

I have been privy to the development of this effort from about the mid-point. Sarah J. Pearlman and I were faculty within the clinical psychology doctoral program at the University of Hartford for many years (she is currently Associate Professor Emeritus). I had the privilege of reading mothers' transcripts she'd gathered in the 1990s (lesbian daughters), and watched as she recruited mothers and finalized the narratives in the 2000s (female to male transitioning daughters).

For many years, I admired Sarah Pearlman from afar. As a young lesbian just coming out during the conservative Reagan era of the 1980s, I voraciously read everything I could get my hands on about lesbianism. Much of what was available was excrutiatingly pathologizing and pathetic. Imagine my delight in first reading *Lesbian psychologies*! It didn't portray us as doomed, but rather documented the many challenges we faced, mostly due to societal discrimination. She was my hero, and one of the major reasons I eventually landed at the University of Hartford in the early 2000s.

Not surprisingly, Pearlman's current effort once again fills a huge gap in the literature – rarely if ever are mothers explicitly asked about their experiences with their lesbian daughters, let alone with daughters who are transitioning to male. Clearly, Pearlman's work is a must-have that has important implications for both mental health providers and researchers.

Most relevant to service providers, the narratives contained herein provide a wealth of information about mothers' adjustment, bereavement processes, and ―acceptance timelines" related to daughters' disclosures of sexual minority status. Accounts of lived experience are clearly relevant to providers who deal with these issues within clinical practice. Similar to Ritch Savin-Williams' approach, Pearlman documents a rich array of mothers' responses to a child's disclosure – the crucial difference being that Pearlman focuses exclusively on lesbian and/or FTM daughters, a population that was often marginalized in Savin-Williams' writings in favor of gay sons.

These narratives also contain deep, rich, and broad information about mothers' lived experiences that researchers may utilize in order to operationalize the most salient issues. For example, Pearlman identified a set of domains that the narratives reflected – devastation, loss (including bereavement), and eventual reconnection that progressed across time. In addition, other domains were noted that includes looking back (making sense of their daughters' adolescence), other challenges besides sexual minority status (not the only issue), and personal budding social activism as a result of daughters' disclosures. Pearlman thus provides a ready-made heuristic for researchers when designing questionnaires, surveys, or structured interviews with parents and/or daughters dealing with sexual minority status. Finally and perhaps most importantly, Pearlman explicitly outlines her reasons for conducting narrative research with mothers across two decades – her own experiences with coming out as a lesbian to her mother, and her continued efforts to understand her mother's negative reactions. In the finest feminist tradition, Pearlman provides full personal transparency while pursuing this topic, noting the impact it has had on her and the insights she has gained.
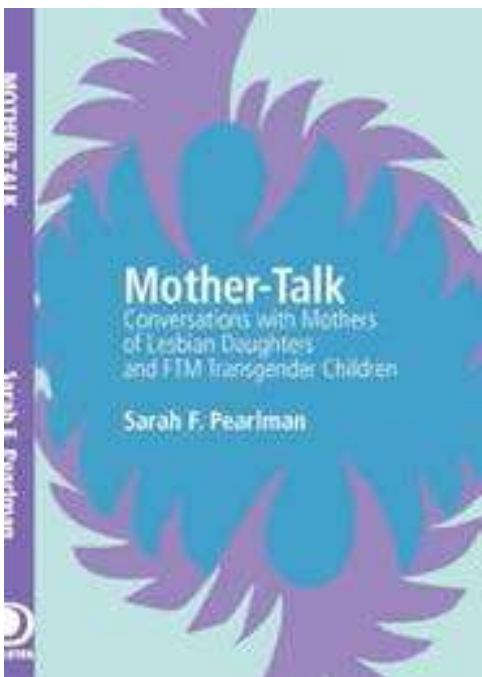
The only real drawback to the results herein is that sampling was constrained – that is, the mothers who responded to recruitment efforts where those who were comfortable enough with the topic to openly discuss their daughters' sexual minority status. Clearly *not* included were those mothers who had rejected their daughters, who were currently ashamed of their daughters and/or the topic in general, or who

otherwise refused to talk about these issues with a researcher. However, this sampling problem seems to be part and parcel of every attempt we've made at obtaining information about sexual minorities – whether it be related to sexual minorities themselves or family members. It appears that as long as societal discrimination and personal shame is attached to sexual minority status, these sampling limitations will continue to be a problem. All in all, however, the information contained herein constitutes a major contribution to the literature and to our overall understanding of how sexual minority status impacts people's lives, mothers and daughters alike. Pearlman is once again to be commended for leading the way.

Reviewed by
Kathy McCloskey

Mother-Talk:

Conversations with Mothers of Lesbian Daughters

and

FTM Transgender Children

by Sarah F. Pearlman

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Sarah F. Pearlman was selected by the American Psychological Association Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues as the recipient of the 2011 Award for Distinguished Professional Contributions. Employed for many years as an Associate Professor in the Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology at the University of Hartford, Sarah is now Associate Professor Emeritus. She lives in Boston and is active in LGBT elder organizations.