

'Lesbians Are Good Mothers'
 Film Pleads Case of Homosexual Parent

By NADINE COHODAS (staff writer for the Raleigh "News and Observer")
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CHAPEL HILL -- There was nothing unusual about the movie scene -- a young mother cuddling her little boy and reading him a poem.

The circumstances behind that scene, though, were different.

The woman, who is divorced, is a lesbian. She has kept custody of her son only after a bitter struggle with her husband and the constant threat of court action to take the boy away.

Along with seven other women, she agreed last year to be part of a film showing, as a press release said, that "Lesbians are mothers... lesbians are good mothers." The film--"In the Best Interests of the Children"--was shown Thursday night (Nov. 10) at the University of North Carolina Law School. More than 130 people came to see it, perhaps 20 of them men.

The movie's title is taken from the language in child custody laws in effect in most states. Custody decisions are to be made, the laws say, "in the best interests of the children."

Elizabeth Stevens and Frances Reid, two of the three women who made the film, were on hand at the UNC showing to answer questions. The pair is part of the California-based Iris Feminist Collective.

By design, they explained, the film was constructed as a free-flowing interchange with the eight mothers, their children, a social worker and an attorney who specializes in domestic work.

It is not a documentary, the film makers said, but is intended to help people realize that a woman's sexual preference does not determine whether she can be a good mother. The point is emphasized throughout, as each family is featured at home during a routine day.

"I think about being a mother," one of the women says. "I never think about being a lesbian." She asks her son what his friends think about her. "It doesn't bug them," he answers. "Most of my friends are pretty cool...If my friends won't accept my mother for what she is, forget 'em."

Camille Legrand, the attorney featured in the film, said that "a lesbian who is public has very little chance of winning a custody case, but if a woman is willing to change her lifestyle for the purpose of a custody case her chances are much better." Ms. Legrand added that fathers who win custody from their ex-wives frequently have given the children back to their mothers. "The point to the father was winning and not having the children," she said.

Ms. Stevens said that the effort to help lesbian mothers win custody suits is costly and difficult. "We are raising money to win custody and we're losing," she said. Only two percent of the lesbian mothers who fight for custody win, she added, while about 95 to 98 percent of heterosexual mothers win custody.

The situation for homosexual fathers is even worse, she added. "They are lucky if they have visitation rights."

The movie, which cost \$18,000 to make, has been shown at public libraries in other parts of the country and is scheduled to be shown on public television as well, Ms. Stevens said.

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