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Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Families

This article reviews new scholarship on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender families. The past decade witnessed rapid expansion of data and strong research designs. The most notable advance was in studies on variation among mostly planned lesbian comother families. Cumulative evidence suggests that although many of these families have comparatively high levels of shared labor and parental investment, they may not be as “genderless” as previously depicted. Gay men’s diverse paths to family formation and planned parenthood have also been explored, but almost no research studies their children’s experiences. Conceptualizations of sexual orientation expanded to include bisexuals and others, and some understanding of the experiences of transgender people has begun to emerge. Future work should explore relationships among members of the families they create.

In the 1990s, marriages between same-gender partners were not legally recognized anywhere in the world and families formed by gay men, lesbians, and bisexual and transgender people faced considerable opprobrium and intolerance. Researchers were documenting what most social scientists already knew but what much of the public, perhaps inundated by “virtual social science” (Stacey, 1997), did not: that sexual orientations and gender identities per se have almost nothing to do with fitness for family roles

and relationships, including parenting. Many of the studies during this period, reviewed by Patterson (2000) in *JMF*, showed that lesbian and gay couples, parents, and their children averaged at least as high as their heterosexual counterparts in relationship quality, psychological well-being, social adjustment, and parental investment.

Beginning in September 2000, when The Netherlands extended the right to marry to include same-sex couples, the ensuing decade brought significant expansion of legal rights and recognitions. Same-sex marriage became legal in Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Spain, South Africa, Canada, and Mexico City, and in the United States in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Washington, DC. Dozens of other nations and states granted same-sex couples rights associated with marriage via domestic partnerships, civil unions, and the like. A number allowed second-parent adoption by same-sex couples. Of course, homophobia and discrimination are still prevalent, and there was a push back by opponents (e.g., Californians voted to amend the state constitution to limit legal marriage to that between a man and a woman, bans on same-sex marriage passed by popular vote in dozens of U.S. states, and some states passed restrictions to exclude gay men and lesbians from adopting children). Not all of the newsworthy events regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) families were about marriage and adoption. The first “pregnant man,” a female-to-male transgender man who had chosen to keep his reproductive organs during his sex-change operation, gave birth to his baby. A team of scientists at Newcastle University in England announced

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the successful production of sperm from female embryo stem cells.

Accompanying this activity was the rapid expansion of social science research on LGBT family issues in the first decade of the 21st century. Long in coming, many nationally representative data collection projects now include questions that, with some measurement error, allow for the categorical identification of gay male, lesbian, and bisexual (less so transgender) people, partners, and parents (limitations of categorical conceptualizations are discussed later). These include the U.S. Census and many of the surveys conducted by the Census Bureau (e.g., the American Community Surveys and the Current Population Surveys), the General Social Surveys, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, and many other health-oriented surveys. A number of other data collections, such as the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (NLLFS; Gartrell, Rodas, Deck, Peyser, & Banks, 2006), the Atlantic Coast Families Study (Fulcher, Sutfin, & Patterson, 2008), the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (Golombok et al., 2003), and the National Study of Gay and Lesbian Parents (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002), are not random/probability samples in the usual sense but have many other strengths.

Research designs also advanced notably in tracking change over time (e.g., Kurdek, 2008; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen, & Brewaeys, 2003a), matching samples on potentially confounding variables such as route to parenthood (e.g., Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2007; Fulcher, Chan, Raboy, & Patterson, 2002), in-depth observation of family processes (e.g., Bos et al., 2007; Golombok et al., 2003; Sutfin, Fulcher, Bowles, & Patterson, 2008; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen, & Brewaeys, 2002), and cross-national comparisons (e.g., Bos, Gartrell, van Balen, Peyser, & Sandfort, 2008). One of the strengths of this field is that social scientists value and employ diverse methodologies (surveying, interviewing, participant observation, and so on), research designs, and types of data that vary depending upon the discipline involved, the research area of specialty and investigation, and the questions being raised.

This article reviews scholarship on LGBT families produced in the last decade. The majority of work treats families as performed,

interactional, and sources of identity for their members. Research on lesbian mothers (which dominates this scholarship) and their children is reviewed first, followed by work on gay fathers and their children and a section on new developments in studies of LGBT youth. The comparatively rare studies of bisexual and transgender people are also discussed, followed by a brief section on how legal rights affect LGBT relationships. We follow this with a brief discussion of a smaller body of theory-driven scholarship that focuses on how “the family” operates symbolically and as a state institution in the larger culture. We also discuss the implications of these approaches for the possibilities for LGBT families research and suggest that speaking to each other across disciplinary differences will enrich scholarship. Finally, we offer fruitful directions for future research.

LESBIAN FAMILIES, LESBIAN MOTHERHOOD

Most studies of lesbian mothers and their children focus on two broad types: those who gave birth to children in the context of a heterosexual relationship and later formed a single-mother family or lesbian stepfamily and lesbian single or, more often, comothers who chose to have a child or children together through donor insemination (DI) or, less often, adoption. In the former case, the parents are often referred to as the biological mother and stepmother within lesbian stepfamilies. In the latter case they are frequently termed the biological mother and social mother within lesbian comother families. Over the past decade, the weight of research has shifted from unplanned/postdivorce lesbian stepfamilies to planned (mostly DI) lesbian comother families.

The picture painted by recent research is mostly a continuation of a story from earlier research—that families with two lesbian parents (biological, social, or step) exhibited a number of strengths. Research has repeatedly shown that lesbian parent couples have high levels of shared employment, decision making, parenting, and family work, in part in the service of an egalitarian ideology (Dunne, 2000; Fulcher et al., 2008; Patterson, Sutfin, & Fulcher, 2004; Vanfraussen et al., 2003a). Lesbian couples also averaged higher satisfaction with their relationships with each other and with each others' parenting (e.g., Bos, van Balen, & van

den Boom, 2004; Bos et al., 2007). Lesbian DI mothers had a strong desire for children and devoted a great deal of time and thought to choosing parenthood, and they tended to equal or surpass heterosexual married couples on time spent with children, parenting skill, and warmth and affection (Bos, van Balen, Sandfort, & van den Boom, 2006; Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2003; Golombok et al., 2003; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004).

*Variation Within Lesbian Families:
Challenging Definitions of Egalitarianism*

Variability when children arrive. In a series of mostly longitudinal studies, Kurdek (e.g., 2007) found that lesbian couples without children shared housework more equally than all the other comparison groups, and they usually scored highest on positive dimensions of relationships. Other work found that, similar to heterosexual couples, warmth decreased and conflict increased somewhat among lesbian couples when they transitioned to parenthood (Goldberg & Sayer, 2006), differentiation between partners in childcare (though not housework) and paid employment developed (Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007), and children sometimes had a closer relationship with one or the other parent over the early life course (e.g., Gartrell et al., 2000; Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2008). This kind of research began to complicate (stereo)typical views of egalitarianism, balanced bonding, and power equality in lesbian couples' relationships (Dunne, 2000; Malone & Cleary, 2002), suggesting, unsurprisingly, that the family dynamics of lesbian couples change with the arrival of children and shift further as children age.

Variability by gender of children. Another important research development involved the role of gender of children in lesbian parent families, reflected in Crisp's (2001) humorous title "That Four Letter Word—Sons." Some studies have found that lesbian mothers and couples preferred to have daughters (Dempsey, 2005; Dundas & Kaufman, 2000; but see Goldberg, 2009), and they adopted girls more frequently than did heterosexual couples (Shelley-Sireci & Ciano-Boyce, 2002). In Vanfraussen et al.'s (2003a) study, lesbian mothers who had daughters rated the quality

of their interaction with their child somewhat higher than those who had sons. Similarly, boys in lesbian comother families scored lower than girls in comother families in self-rated feelings of parental acceptance (Vanfraussen et al.). Another study (Bos, Gartrell, et al., 2008) found that both U.S. and Dutch boys (ages 10–11) with lesbian DI mothers were significantly less likely than their girl counterparts to report being open/out to their peers about having a lesbian mother(s). A recent study found that a good number of preadoptive lesbian parents who preferred to adopt a girl did so precisely because they believed boys with lesbian parents would encounter more heterosexism than girls (Goldberg).

Lesbian mothers raising sons may face unique tensions in wanting social and socioeconomic success for their sons when that may mean colluding with cultural ideas of hegemonic masculinity that encourage male achievement but involve the subordination of women. To teach their sons to reject dominant definitions of masculinity risks potentially subjecting sons to ridicule and obstacles in the extrafamily environment. In turn, boys with lesbian mothers may also have more to lose in the way of homophobic abuse by their peers finding out—in threats to traditional heterosexual masculinity—than girls do in threats to traditional femininity.

Variability by race and social class. Within the broad picture of less gendered divisions of family labor and high parental investment in lesbian comother families, a number of intriguing differences have unfolded. Studies have begun to look at the diversity of lesbian parent families. Most of the patterns above describe samples of lesbian families that are disproportionately middle class, White, and highly educated. Analyses of the relatively new national data sets showed that lesbian couples are far more diverse demographically and socioeconomically and dispersed geographically than those who have populated the hitherto small sample studies (Gates & Ost, 2004; Sears & Badgett, 2004; Sears, Gates, & Rubenstein, 2005). For example, lesbian couples living in areas with a relatively low concentration of same-sex couples (e.g., Mississippi, South Dakota, Alaska, South Carolina, and Louisiana) had the highest odds of raising children. Additionally, same-sex couples of color were more likely than their White counterparts to be raising children (e.g., Gates

& Ost, 2008). They were also more likely to live in areas with a high concentration of people with similar race/ethnicities than in areas with a high concentration of same-sex couples (Gates & Ost, 2008).

Moore (2008) suggested that the White, middle-class lesbian parents targeted in most studies to date tended to share a commitment to a particular definition of egalitarianism influenced by second-wave feminism, which sees egalitarianism in relationships as shared paid work, shared housework, and shared childcare. Egalitarian ideology for the Black lesbian stepfamilies she studied was different, however, as these couples emphasized the importance of financial independence, labor-work participation, and sharing the provider role over equal share of housework and childcare. Black lesbian biological mothers in these families did more housework and child-care and in turn were understood to have greater responsibility and power in decision making on issues involving the children. Lev (2008) similarly argued that treating all lesbian families as genderless-egalitarian by default inhibits our understanding of variation in lesbian families and the different dynamics they might entail.

Gabb's (2004, 2005) UK work was among the few convenience samples to include a good proportion of working-class lesbian comothers and their children and found that mother and father roles were generally not shared equally between the two mothers. Mothers were aware that in child-care and playtime their behaviors often divided into feminine and masculine categories. In many cases one mother (frequently the biological mother) played a more maternal role, such as primary caretaker, whereas the other mother (a mix of social mothers and stepmothers) fulfilled a more paternal role.

Variability by biological relatedness. A particularly interesting related development has been research that compares lesbian biological mothers, comothers, and stepmothers. Echoing some of Moore's and Gabb's observations, but in very different contexts (e.g., in The Netherlands and in White, middle-class samples), these studies found that, relative to their partners, lesbian biological mothers had stronger desires for children (Bos et al., 2004), provided more of the primary child-care (Dempsey, 2005; Dundas & Kaufman, 2000; Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002), and

enjoyed somewhat closer relationships with the children (Bos et al., 2007; Dempsey). Almack's (2005) study of 20 lesbian couples in England who planned and had their first child together found that the decision regarding what surname to give to the child lay squarely with the birth mother. This privileged, taken-for-granted status of the birth mother speaks to the all-permeating status of biologism as an ideology not only among heterosexuals but also among lesbians.

Other studies found that children felt more positively about the biological mother than the comother and that this can sometimes give rise to comothers' feelings of jealousy toward the primary parent (Chrisp, 2001; Sullivan, 2004), and unease among comothers with their identity as mother (Gabb, 2005). In some cases the children's behavior "excluded the 'other mother' because she was not 'directly related'" (Gabb, 2004, p. 169).

Negotiating identities and social positions. Lesbian motherhood is a negotiated identity between the marginalized position of lesbianism and the mainstream and esteemed position of motherhood (Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999). The different experiences of biological mothers, social mothers, and stepmothers are reflected in the different negotiation techniques employed by each group. Research showed that especially White, middle-class, coparent DI couples pursued having the social mother legally adopt the children in the service of offsetting her nonbiological relatedness and reducing the salience of biology to others, such as the nonbiological grandparents (Hequembourg, 2004). These couples consciously sought to avoid using language and making distinctions with the children and others that invoked biology. In contrast, lesbian stepfamilies struggled over the relative parenting rights of the biological mother and stepmother. The continuing presence of the father and paternal grandparents also made it harder for lesbian stepmothers to establish a parent identity (Hequembourg; Hequembourg & Farrell). Couples assigned important parts of the child-care work, such as feeding and bathing the baby, to the comothers to support their identities as mothers (Hequembourg & Farrell). Even so, new research suggested that stressors induced by unequal biological, legal, and social statuses in relation to their children placed lesbian comothers at somewhat greater risk of splitting up (Andersson, Noack,

Seierstad, & Weedon-Fekjaer, 2006; Gartrell et al., 2000, 2006; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen, & Brewaeys, 2003b).

Abusive lesbian relationships. In the past decade, another emerging area of research has been on abusive lesbian relationships. This work split open commonsense understandings of abuse as having a clear abuser-victim divide where gender is used as the most reliable category of differentiation between the two. Interviews with lesbians who identified as victims or perpetrators of abuse, as well as with service providers, revealed that feminist organizations tended to overlook the particularities of lesbian abusive relationships (Ristock, 2002). Service providers were more likely to respond to abused women if they conformed to stereotypes of "good, innocent victim" who, by definition, were expected to embody "respectable femininity," and many lesbians who have been abused did not fit these assumptions, in particular if they were angry, had used violence themselves, or were larger or less feminine than their partners.

Research also showed that a simplistic abuser-victim split, which was explicitly sought by service providers, could not contain many lesbian dynamics. For instance, Ristock (2002) found that some of the lesbian women who identified themselves as abusers revealed stories of racist verbal abuse by their "victim" partners but reported that they had never considered these remarks to be abusive. Abusive relationships proved even more complicated in the context of lesbian mothering, where children's relationship to each mother/partner, whether children were born into the relationship, and whether children lived with the couple were also important factors. For example, women who eventually worked things out were more likely to have children born into the relationship than a were women who had not (Hardesty, Oswald, Khaw, Fonseca, & Chung, 2008). Abusive lesbian relationships posed difficulties to existing frameworks used by service providers and challenged assumptions those frameworks made about gender and power (Hassounh & Glass, 2008).

Children of Lesbian Parents

With an eye toward producing data that can inform legal and policy decisions on LGBT people's access to marriage, parenting, custody,

adoption, assisted reproduction technology, and related rights and privileges, research on outcomes for children with LGBT parents (mostly L) has intensified over the past decade. Although the claim that there are no differences at all or that parents' sexual orientations do not matter for any aspects of children's development is unsustainable (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001); children raised by lesbian parents (mostly comothers) have been found across a large number of tests to be generally similar to children raised by heterosexual parents on dimensions of psychological well-being, peer relations, and social and behavioral adjustment. These included parents' and teachers' ratings of behavioral problems in 5- to 12-year-old children (Bos et al., 2007; Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, Peyser, & Banks, 2005; Golombok et al., 2003; MacCallum & Golombok, 2004); 8-year-old children's play narratives that measured the quality of family interactions, parent-child relationships, and children's adjustment (Perry et al., 2004); and 10- to 12-year-old children's level of self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and feelings of social acceptance (Bos et al., 2006; Vanfraussen et al., 2002). MacCallum and Golombok's study included assessment of the data on children's socioemotional development by a child psychiatrist who did not know which children had lesbian comothers and heterosexual parents, and still found no differences. Five- to 10-year-old children's perceptions of peer acceptance and relationships with peers were not significantly different depending on whether they were living with lesbian mothers or heterosexual parents (Golombok et al.; MacCallum & Golombok). In studies of 7th- to 12th-grade adolescents, researchers found no differences by gender mix of parents in ratings of quality of relationships with peers, support received from friends, time spent with friends, number of friends, and the presence of a best friend (Wainright & Patterson, 2008). Also, no differences were found in adolescents' depression; self-esteem; school connectedness; grade-point average; tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use and abuse; and delinquent behavior (Wainright & Patterson, 2006; Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004), nor in adolescents' odds of having had sexual intercourse, age at sexual initiation, and number of sexual partners (Davis & Friel, 2001; Wainright et al.).

The areas of children's gender and sexual behavior and preferences remained understudied, but a few findings of differences have

been observed. Echoing Tasker and Golombok's (1997) finding that young adult daughters with lesbian mothers were more likely to have had a homoerotic relationship or attraction, Bos et al. (2006) found that, at an earlier, preadolescent stage (around 10 years old), daughters conceived through DI by lesbian comothers had a less firmly heterosexual identity than comparable daughters from heterosexualized two-parent families who were conceived conventionally.

Findings so far suggest that lesbian parenting or sexual orientation per se is not strongly linked to differences (or a broadening) in children's gender repertoires. The preferences of 4- to 6-year-old boys and girls for traditionally masculine and feminine activities and occupations did not vary between lesbian comother and heterosexual parent families (Fulcher et al., 2008). In one study (Bos et al., 2006), girls in planned lesbian families actually had lower aspirations to traditionally masculine occupations, but few differences were found on most of the other dimensions of gender development.

Fulcher et al. (2008) found that children's activity preferences were less gendered in families where the parental division of labor was less gendered (i.e., more equally shared by both parents). Because (especially White, middle-class) lesbian coparent families averaged more egalitarian divisions of parental labor, this may have been an indirect pathway by which parental sexual orientation came to influence children's gender attitudes and behaviors.

In a recent innovative extension of this "indirect pathways" model (Sutfin et al., 2008), lesbian comothers of 10-year-olds were found to decorate their boys' and girls' bedrooms and provide them with toys that were less stereotypically masculine and feminine than the decorations and toys provided by their heterosexual counterparts. They were also less concerned that their children conformed to traditional gender behaviors. In turn, children with parents (gay or straight) who held less gender-stereotypical attitudes and who provided less gender-stereotypical physical environments had less gender-stereotypical attitudes themselves (e.g., toward boys playing with dolls or wearing nail polish and girls having short hair or playing football). Thus, parental sexual orientation may work through more proximate determinants—parental division of labor, parental gender attitudes, the physical

environment parents set up for children—to affect the development of children's gender repertoires.

Kane's (2006) research on parents' responses to their children's gender nonconformity was unique in interviewing heterosexual, gay male, and lesbian parents. She found that even though most parents welcomed, and sometimes encouraged, gender nonconformity among their young daughters, they had a more complex reaction to their sons' gender nonconforming behaviors. Most of the parents of sons were comfortable with certain stereotypically feminine qualities in their sons, such as domestic skills, nurturance, and empathy, but their responses to their sons' interest in icons of femininity (e.g., Barbie dolls, nail polish) ranged from not enthusiastic to overtly negative. Kane argued that homosexuality never coming up in interviews about gender nonconformity of daughters yet it coming up in responses to their sons "suggests how closely gender conformity and heterosexuality are linked to masculinity" (p. 163). Further, although heterosexual mothers, gay fathers, and lesbian parents voiced a concern about how the boys would be treated by the larger society as the reason for why they worried about boys' feminine behavior, heterosexual fathers linked their concerns to their own personal responsibility and masculine competence.

New research from The Netherlands and Belgium supported earlier evidence (e.g., Bozett, 1989; Mitchell, 1998; Tasker & Golombok, 1997) that children with lesbian mothers were modestly more likely than those with heterosexual parents to experience homophobic teasing about their family configuration or their own sexuality, sometimes in the form of exclusion by peers and gossip (Bos & van Balen, 2008; Vanfraussen et al., 2002). The NLLFS in the United States found that by age 10, 43% of children had experienced teasing and ridicule about the sexual orientation of their mothers (Gartrell et al., 2005, 2006). Rivers, Poteat, and Noret (2008), however, found no differences in UK adolescents' experience of more serious bullying and victimization by sexual orientations of parents, nor did Wainright and Patterson (2006) for adolescents in the U.S. Add Health survey.

In an important innovation, the first cross-national study on these issues (Bos et al., 2008, comparing the United States and The Netherlands) found that U.S. 10- to 11-year-old

children with lesbian DI comothers were significantly more likely than their Dutch counterparts to say that kids had said mean things to them about their mother(s) being a lesbian, and U.S. children were less likely to be out to their peers about having a lesbian mother. The U.S. lesbian mothers were also significantly more likely than the Dutch mothers to report that their children had behavioral problems and felt anxious and depressed. Reasonably ruling out a number of alternative explanations, the authors speculated that the more tolerant climate and greater cultural acceptance of LGBT people and families in The Netherlands relative to the United States could partly account for the differences they observed.

Finally, an interesting study of adult children with LGB parents (Goldberg, 2007) extended earlier work (Mitchell, 1998; O'Connell 1994) in finding that the adult children felt that they were more tolerant and open-minded as a result of their growing up with LGB parents. This may have been the legacy of processes started much earlier in the life course. Four- to 6-year-old boys and girls being raised by two mothers were more tolerant of gender nonconformity in boys than their counterparts with heterosexual parents (Fulcher et al., 2008), and Belgian 10-year-old boys and girls with lesbian mothers were significantly less likely than those with heterosexual parents to feel that their own sex was superior to the other sex (Bos et al., 2006).

GAY MALE FAMILIES, GAY FATHERHOOD

The past decade saw more research on gay fatherhood than the one before it, but much less than the volume devoted to lesbian motherhood. Like the lesbian motherhood scholarship, work on gay fathers shifted from studies of gay men who became parents in the context of heterosexual marriages or relationships to planned gay parenting, where out gay men chose to become parents through adoption, foster care, traditional surrogacy (the surrogate uses her own eggs), gestational surrogacy (the surrogate plays host to an embryo produced by in vitro fertilization), or coparenting with (most often) a lesbian woman or couple (e.g., Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Gianino, 2008; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Lewin, 2006; Mallon, 2004; Stacey, 2006).

The new research on gay male families fell into two broad categories: (1) studies of

the process by which gay men conceptualize and then actualize becoming fathers and how fatherhood changes them and (2) studies of family processes among gay fathers (often couples) raising children. Gay men who chose to become parents simultaneously "challenge conventional definitions of masculinity and particularly paternity and even dominant gender and sexual norms of gay culture itself" (Stacey, 2006, p. 30). Although most men in one study initially thought coming out as gay meant that they would forever be childless, fathers (and some nonfathers) went through turning points in their lives—experiences with children (nieces, nephews, cousins, and others), the death of a loved one, seeing another gay couple adopt a child, a partner's ultimatum—that activated a procreative consciousness or discovering wanting children some day (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Peterson, Butts, & Deville, 2000). Sociohistorical shifts in definitions of families have also helped free gay men to have the thought that they can be both gay and father children (Berkowitz, 2007). Most men were aware of both general prejudices against their becoming fathers—the possibilities of people thinking they were pedophiles, that they would bring up gay children, that their kids would get harassed at school, and so on—and the various legal barriers imposed by the state. In another study, gay male couples who adopted children moved from a preadoption focus solely on the couple relationship, to "picking up and putting down" (Gianino, 2008, p. 213) the idea of pursuing parenting for a period of time, to then overcoming negative stereotypes about gay parenting to initiate a process of adopting a child.

Stacey (2006) analyzed the variety of paths to parenthood for a sample of gay men living in Los Angeles. On the "passion-for-parenthood" continuum most gay men fell between the poles of "predestined fathers" and "parental refuseniks" (p. 49). Predestined fathers sometimes pursued parenthood at the cost of parting with a partner who was unwilling to become a parent. The paths to fatherhood also varied according to the resources available, given the expenses of surrogacy and the fact that gay men usually do not make the top of donation agency lists. Somewhere in between these options were others such as independent, open adoptions, and individually negotiated coparenting arrangements with women, mostly lesbians, who were interested in male sperm

donors who were willing to be a part of the children's lives (Stacey).

Research has also found that gay male kin formation more generally is complex and unsettles stereotypes about gay male sexuality (Stacey, 2004, 2005, 2006). For instance, the practice of gay male cruising (looking to pick up sexual partners in public places such as bars and parks), which disrupts conventional family norms and practices, opened up possibilities for various kinship ties and domestic arrangements. Stacey (2004) came across both very conventional heteronormative-like families (e.g., breadwinner/homemaker) as well as families that comprise several gay men living in the same household, most of whom had met each other through cruising. Yet even in the most heteronormative-like arrangements, couples did not have the usual hierarchy that values paid work over homemaking; in fact, paid work was seen as a compromise that took the working partners away from spending time with their children. Cruising as a common form of meeting other gay men also resulted in ties that crossed class, racial, and national boundaries much more strongly and often than one finds in heterosexual family arrangements. This, coupled with the fact that gay men most of the time did not embrace ideals of heteronormative masculinity and hence were "more likely than their macho brothers to pursue educational, creative, or aesthetic sources of gratification" (Stacey, 2005, p. 1929), often times opened up possibilities for them to achieve upward social mobility.

The gay male couples (disproportionately White and middle class) in the National Study of Gay and Lesbian Parents (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002) coparented more equally and compatibly than the averages observed in studies of heterosexual parenting couples. They shared or divided child-care and housework in ways very similar to the lesbian comothers in the same study. That is not to say labor was shared equally in absolute terms; as in the lesbian couples (where biological mothers took on more of the childrearing), in the gay father couples one partner tended to do more housework and childrearing than the other. Silverstein, Auerbach, and Levant (2002) used the term "degendered parenting" because personal choice, aptitude, and fairness rather than gender guided the division of labor in their sample of gay cofather families.

Gay cofathers who had a child within the relationship had the highest rate of being

open about their families to their child's friends' parents and extracurricular teachers and coaches (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002). They also had the highest levels of use of positive discipline techniques and were much less likely to spank their children relative to percentages observed in studies of heterosexual couples and, surprisingly, even than the lesbian coparents in the same sample. Many studies indicated that when two gay men coparented, they did so in ways that seemed closer to that of women (lesbian and heterosexual) than to married heterosexual men (Brinamen, 2000; Mallon, 2004; Schacher, Auerbach, & Silverstein, 2005; Stacey, 2006). The relative parenting strengths of gay cofathers are not surprising in that these are men who were willing to persevere through the many challenges, obstacles, and expenses to have a very wanted child together.

Children of Gay and Bisexual Fathers

No research that we are aware of directly studies the coresidential sons and daughters of gay fathers. Barrett and Tasker (2001) took a step in this direction by asking 101 gay (92) and bisexual (9) male parents about their children's experiences (most of their 179 children were born within heterosexual marriages). Gay fathers were asked how their eldest child felt about their sexual orientation on 21 dimensions. The fathers described their daughters as significantly more sympathetic and supportive than their sons. Fathers also believed that having them as a gay or bisexual male parent was highly beneficial in helping their children have tolerance of other people, but here again fathers felt the effect occurred more so for their daughters than for their sons. In contrast, fathers felt that having them as a gay or bisexual male parent was more beneficial to their sons than to their daughters in helping their children's acceptance of their own sexuality.

LGBT YOUTH AND FAMILIES

The work above focuses on having lesbian and gay and, rarely, bisexual parents (as far as we know there are no studies of children who had transgender parents). A second body of work studied LGBT youth, most all of whom had presumptively heterosexual parents. This work explored issues such as the process of a youth's

coming out, the unique risks faced by LGBT youth, and factors that reduced those risks.

Research on LGBT youth is a complicated matter. Shall researchers pay attention to self-identification, or same-sex attractions or romantic feelings toward a peer of the same sex to determine who qualifies as subjects in a study? Shall they take into consideration the frequency of these in comparison to the frequency of attractions to others of a different sex? Of course, these are valid questions for the adult population as well. For adolescents, however, sexual identification is less likely to have fully formed, so those selected for inclusion based strictly on sexual identity barely represent the youth who might have same-sex desires, fantasies, attractions, and so on (Savin-Williams, 2001). When adolescents were asked about what they found relevant when trying to identify "sexual minority" status, sexual behavior and self-identification were less significant than sexual attraction (both the cognitive idea of attraction as well as physical indicators), and being or desiring, or both, to be in a committed relationship (Friedman et al., 2004).

One study of presumptively heterosexual parents' awareness of their children's LGB orientation (trans youth were not included in the study) found that youth whose parents were aware were similar to youth whose parents were unaware in socioeconomic status, age, and racial background (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005). They differed, however, in several ways: Youth whose parents were aware were more likely to identify as gay or lesbian than as bisexual, which potentially points to the fact that bisexuality may be more complicated as an "identity." They also were aware of their sexual attractions at younger ages, and they were more gender atypical as children than youth whose parents were not aware. At the same time, although youth with aware parents reported more verbal abuse in the past, they also reported less internalized homophobia, less fear of future parental victimization, and more current family support (D'Augelli et al.). Bos, Sandfort, de Bruyn, and Hakvoort (2008) found in a Dutch sample of 13- to 15-year-olds with same-sex attraction that good social relationships with peers and especially with fathers buffered against the children's having higher risks of poor school performance and poor mental health.

The complicated developmental trajectories of discovery of same-sex sexual attractions

and preferences over the course of childhood and adolescence have received some attention, where first awareness of same-sex attraction, first same-sex sexual contact, and first disclosure to significant others all proved to be important life course events (Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman, & Armistead, 2002). Outness (or degree of disclosure about gender identity or sexual preferences or orientation) has been found to be associated with less psychological distress (Morris, Waldo, & Rothblum, 2001), but disclosure has not necessarily become easier. Giertsen and Anderssen (2007) studied Norwegian lesbians' rates of coming out to parents and others over the period 1986–2005. Although lesbians in the more recent period tended to come out at an earlier time in their lives, the weight of the evidence did not support the hypothesis that it would be easier to come out now than in the earlier period.

Gay male and lesbian youth were also considered alongside bisexuals (and sometimes transgender youth) in a large, clinical- and social work-oriented literature that focused on the causes and consequences of coming out and family acceptance or rejection (e.g., Gorman-Murray, 2008; Heatherington & Lavner, 2008). Very little of this research directly studies the heterosexual parents of LGBT youth.

Topics explored in the clinical literature (a thorough review of which is beyond the scope of this paper) included harassment and victimization experienced by children in everyday life and in institutional settings and their effects on internalized homophobia, binegativity (or self-hate among bisexuals), transnegativity, youth's alcohol and drug abuse, suicidality, depression (e.g., Morrow, 2004), and homelessness (e.g., Hunter, 2008). The availability and effects of different kinds of social support (e.g., Wright & Perry, 2006) and best therapeutic and counseling approaches were also explored (for a review, see Crisp & McCave, 2007).

Although research that focused on problems faced by LGBT youth, such as high suicide rates, came from an exceptionally well-meaning place (helping youth), it tended to overlook differences within groups. In an important critique of research on sexual-minority youth, Savin-Williams (2001, 2005) showed that not all LGBT youth are at risk and explored factors that distinguish between those who are at risk and those who are not. He argued that the tendency to narrowly define sexual-minority adolescents

based on identity rather than same-sex attraction and other factors contributed to an image of gay youth pathology and problematic behavior that may not be fully consistent with the data.

TRANSGENDER PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

Academic research on transgender people and their family relationships is almost nonexistent. Because transgender people are undergoing a gender identification change, their families have to adjust to having a relative of another gender, and hence transgender people undergo a very different kind of coming out (Israel, 2006). These issues are obviously vastly different than one's child, partner, or parent coming out as gay and point out the need for research in this realm while complicating the idea of LGBT families as an umbrella term.

Transgender youth (sometimes referred to as gender variant youth) face a number of unique challenges in a context where few formal or informal sources of social support exist for them. Parents tended to react with alarm when their children engaged in extreme gender nonconforming behaviors (Kane, 2006) and children, confused about their parents' alarm, often tried to please parents by gender conforming at the cost of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006). Trans youth have experienced abhorrent treatment and rejection by mental health professionals who have tried to correct their "gender identity disorder" with brutal aversion therapies intended to produce gender conformity (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Mallon & DeCrescenzo), though some practitioners who know about transgender issues have worked to develop more transaffirming therapies. Trans youth who came out often faced crises throughout their family systems. Once out, developing a sense of realism about their new gender became extremely important and an urgent need developed "to match one's exterior with one's interior" (Mallon & DeCrescenzo). In addition to social avenues to reduce dissonance (changing behavior, mannerisms, sartorial styles, etc.), hormone replacement therapies, gender transition therapies, and gender transition surgeries were among the medical forms of assistance. Scholars have been critical, however, of the medical establishment's and state's involvement in constructing and policing transgender identity by making surgery or hormone

treatment requirements for granting identification papers or change of gender identity on the official records of transgender people (Spade, 2008) and pointed out the hierarchies this creates by distinguishing between the "fully trans" and "not trans enough."

Transgender people had a number of health issues associated with transitioning, including short- and long-term side effects of various medical therapies, yet as a group they were underinsured and faced a number of other barriers to accessing good health care, including the inhibitory effects of their past experiences of harassment and abusive treatment by doctors and nurses (Donovan, 2002; Williams & Freeman, 2007). These kinds of pressing issues have occupied the small existing literature, such that less work has been done studying transgender people in the context of the more traditional areas of family studies research, such as their dating behavior and formation of intimate relationships in adulthood, issues around their having children, parenting behaviors, and children's experiences with transgender parents, family/work relationships, and so on.

BISEXUALITY

When bisexuals are included in studies, they tend to be collapsed with gay men and lesbians. Reviving a conversation about bisexuality (e.g., Kinsey), which was somewhat aborted as bisexuality came to be viewed by many as a temporary stage or as gay men or lesbians having heterosexual sex, Rust's (e.g., 2001) work on the meanings of bisexual identity exposed limitations to the categorical conceptualization of sexual orientation as consisting mostly of two types: homo- and heterosexual. Especially when definitions of sexuality went beyond sexual encounters and included romantic attractions, objects of fantasies, and so on, studies found that individuals often did not fit neatly into monosexual categories (e.g., Rust, 2000; Savin-Williams, 2005).

New longitudinal work by Diamond (e.g., 2009) suggested that bisexuality was both a solidly third type of sexual orientation that for many women did not eventually transition to a lesbian or heterosexual identity over a 10-year period and that it was reflective of a heightened capacity for sexual fluidity at least in the early adult life course. Other research showed that many sexual minority teenagers preferred

bisexual identities over gay and lesbian identities and rejected categorical conceptions of sexuality (Savin-Williams, 2005).

One such identity was “mostly straight” (Morgan & Thompson, 2006; Thompson & Morgan, 2008). In a sample of college women, 20% identified as mostly straight as against exclusively straight, bisexual, mostly lesbian, or lesbian. Evidence that mostly straight constituted a distinct sexual identity for some women was that women who identified as such had patterns of sexual fantasies, attractions, and behaviors that were statistically significantly different from exclusively straight, bisexual, and lesbian women (Thompson & Morgan). Specifically, mostly straight women were significantly more same-sex oriented in their sexual attractions and sexual fantasies than exclusively straight women but significantly less so than bisexual women and lesbians.

Very little family research in the past decade paid special attention to bisexuals. Research on bisexual college students (Sheets & Mohr, 2009) found that support from family and friends had positive effects on life satisfaction and reduced feelings of binegativity. Unfortunately, this study relied solely on self-identification to measure bisexuality. A study of familism and bisexual Latino men defined bisexuality somewhat more broadly as having had a history of bisexual experiences or a sexual encounter with both a man and a woman at least once in the past 2 years (Muñoz-Laboy, 2008). It found that because of tight family connections, bisexual Latino men usually experienced their bisexuality outside of the domain of their families. Family support came at the cost of not sharing their intimate lives with their families.

Unfortunately, research on bisexuality has not fully connected with family research, and so a number of core questions remain unanswered. For example, how do parents react differently when their children adopt bisexual versus gay or lesbian or more or less fluid sexual identities? Are bisexual women and men who have children more or less likely to have them with same-sex or other-sex partners? How is the experience different? How do parents and children navigate relationships when bisexual parents shift from a different-gender relationship to a same-gender relationship?

LEGAL RIGHTS AND LGBT RELATIONSHIPS

A literature on how legal rights and statuses were experienced by LGBT families also emerged this decade, coincident with its many changes in laws and policies that directly affected LGBT families. One of the first studies in this area (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004) used a novel research design (it compared gay male and lesbian couples in Vermont who had civil unions with gay male and lesbian couples in their friendship networks who did not, and it also compared these groups with their married heterosexual siblings) to reduce selection effects and isolate the potentially unique effects on relationships of the civil union legal status. Few significant differences were found between gay male and lesbian couples in civil unions and their counterparts not in civil unions regarding divisions of family labor, home ownership, and social support from friends and family, with the exception that lesbians and gay men in civil unions were more “out” than other lesbian and gay male couples. In a 3-year follow-up, same-sex couples not in civil unions were more likely to have ended their relationships than same-sex couples in civil unions (Balsam, Beauchaine, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2008). Other research showed that among cohabiting same-sex couples, those who chose to legalize their relationship or hold a commitment ceremony had been together for a longer period (Oswald, Goldberg, Kuvalanka, & Clausell, 2008), suggesting a reciprocal association between relationship duration and legal status.

Similarly, research found few significant differences between couples who had engaged in different kinds of legal unions (marrieds in Massachusetts, domestic partnerships in California, and civil unions in Vermont; Rothblum, Balsam, & Solomon, 2008). A comparison between Canada (where same-sex marriage is legal) and the United States suggested that an important variable affecting relationships may be whether certain legalized forms of committed relationships were available to LGBT people, regardless of whether couples choose to engage in them (Shapiro, Peterson, & Stewart, 2009). For example, lesbian mothers in the United States reported more family worries (e.g., “my child being accepted in his or her peer group,” “someone challenging my partner’s rights to our children”) than lesbian mothers in Canada (married or not).

Another major way in which gay and lesbian parents entered legal arenas was through second-parent adoption. Many couples in one study found that their cases were treated like a stranger adoption and found the experience difficult and sometimes humiliating (Connolly, 2002). Couples engaged with the law in different ways throughout the processes: They sought second-parent adoption (before the law); at times they manipulated the process to their benefit, such as postponing their case when they encountered an unsympathetic judge (with the law); and they resisted offensive procedures and people (against the law; Connolly). Couples who had separated were more likely to share custody if the second parent had previously adopted the child (Gartrell et al., 2006).

The distribution of legal rights over the past decade was in great flux. Second-parent adoption rights were granted in some states, denied in others. Same-sex marriage in California and Maine was legalized and then revoked. Domestic partnership and civil union options grew somewhat at the same time that many states enshrined bans on the marriage of same-sex couples in their constitutions. This context of uncertainty and rapid change in law has made the task of delineating the effects of law on LGBT families especially difficult.

FAMILY AS A SYMBOLIC ARENA

Most of the studies we have reviewed treat families as interactional and as a source of identity (an approach sometimes called “doing family”). This approach produces insight into how partner and parenting dynamics, relationships with families of origin and destination, and individual and family life course trajectories are negotiated by LGBT people. Some recent, theory-driven work coming from a more macro and critical perspective situates the family as partly a state institution through which the boundaries and meanings of citizenship and belonging are defined and as an arena that is simultaneously constituted by and constitutive of symbols and meanings that circulate around gender, culture, sexuality, socialization, and the self. In this section we review a sample of this work—particularly the scholarship that addresses the implications of these conceptualizations of the family for the larger body of LGBT families research.

Although some scholars of the family have been pushing for a recognition of the plurality of kinship and familial arrangements that people have (and calling for the use of the term “families” instead of “the family”), critiques coming from queer studies question whether “queer” and “family” are compatible concepts at all. Butler (2004), for example, asked whether kinship is not “always already heterosexual” when she looked into the gay marriage debate in France, where under PACS (civil partnerships), gay and lesbian couples were allocated most of the same rights and benefits as heterosexual married couples but not the right to adopt children. The argument in France against LGBT people raising children was that childrearing is the cornerstone for the transmission of culture and that heterosexual parents are crucial for the child to learn the symbolic order because they provide both a male and a female referent. The argument was that heterosexuality lay at the very heart of cultural transmission and cultural purity, which, in turn, placed the figure of the child at the very heart of anxieties about cultural purity and transmission. In light of the gay marriage debate both in the United States and France, Butler questioned whether we can create alternative forms of recognition and what it meant for the state to have monopolized sources of recognition available to its citizens. Studying the differences in the logic of homophobia between the early 1990s antigay rights campaigns and the 2004 anti-gay-marriage campaigns, Stein (2005) showed how the target of these campaigns shifted from (masculine) gay men to (fatherless) lesbian-headed families. Arguments for the “best interest of children” insisted on the need for fathers and male role models. This helped to establish lesbian mothers as the new target of these campaigns.

Edelman (2004) also took issue with the political uses of “the child,” and what he termed “reproductive futurity.” He argued that traditional Western politics tend to be predicated on the concept of “making the future a better place,” and the child works as the symbolic image of that future. As queers are symbolically separated from the act of reproduction, “queerness names the site of those not fighting for children” (p. 3), and queerness is positioned as a “relentlessly narcissistic, antisocial, and future-negating drive.” Queers were positioned as a threat to the child and to the future the child belongs to.

Instead of trying to seek recognition within an order that places queers in opposition to “the social” and to the future, Edelman (2004) called for a refutation of that very order by queer subjects. Similarly, focusing on what kind of a social order queers might belong to, Halberstam (2005) pointed out that queer lives often fall outside of “heteronormative time.” That queer temporality falls outside of the “birth-marriage-reproduction-death” sequence inevitably locks queers into an extended adolescence in heteronormative eyes, given that marriage and reproduction are seen as important steps into adulthood. This seeming logic of “queers are to straights what adolescents are to grown-ups” (Halberstam, back cover) is also facilitated by queer culture being positioned as a subculture and the general understanding that a subculture is something one eventually grows out of to join the mainstream culture.

This scholarship explores the political implications for queer subjects of the deeply entrenched symbolic place held by “the family.” Whereas many push for acceptance of the multiplicity of family forms, the critics question whether such acceptance is possible within a social order where so many layers of heteronormativity are so deeply enmeshed in the very concept of family.

THE PAST 10 YEARS

We see the major advances in LGBT family studies over the past decade as follows: (1) Research moved beyond mostly White middle-class depictions of lesbian couples and began to explore the substantial diversity within these families across many dimensions of family structure and social location; revealing this diversity challenged the homo/hetero binary and what was perhaps an overly unified picture of lesbian families. (2) Pioneering research began to unpack the diverse pathways to gay male family formation and the diverse types of families gay men formed, and a literature began regarding planned gay fatherhood. (3) A nascent literature on bisexuality, sexual fluidity, and transgender people initiated some understanding of people who do not fit (or refuse to fit) into one of two categories; this literature suggested that earlier work went too far in presupposing that sexual self-identification was the only important aspect of people’s sexuality. (4) On most all of the social and psychological dimensions that

mattered for children’s adjustment and achievement, research continued to accumulate that children raised by lesbian comothers did as well as or better than those raised by heterosexual parents. (5) Timidity about covering controversial issues (e.g., abuse in relationships, breakup rates, inequalities between partners, differences in children’s gender and sexual repertoires, and so on) declined; we can speculate that recognition that differences are not deficits (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001) and an interest in research that could serve the community began to outweigh worrying too much about what anti-gay advocates might latch onto from the literature.

Directions for Future Research

An important direction for future research is to loosen B and T from L and G and conduct more independent studies on family relationships and processes for bisexual and transgender people over the life course. For example, trans men and trans women find themselves in situations where they are asking family members to call them by a new name, change the gender pronoun they use to refer to the trans member of the family, treat them as a daughter instead of a son (or as a son instead of a daughter), and introduce them to friends accordingly. Parents’ investment in the gender of a child can go so far as to have parents experiencing the transition as a loss (sometimes death) of a son or daughter they used to have. This feeling speaks volumes to the powerful role gender plays in parents’ relationships to their children. Trans people also establish (or have to reestablish) relationships with their partners; they have children, balance work and family, and so on. We hope that the next decade will see creative research in these areas.

Some very important research has begun prying open the gay and lesbian versus heterosexual categorical dichotomy to consider the wider range of sexual preferences and orientations that people actually choose, but so far it has been mostly limited to women, so the exploration of sexual fluidity (or fixedness) in men is fruitful terrain for future research. Moreover, the dating and couple relationships of bisexuals have received almost no attention. For individuals who have intimate and sexual relationships with both men and women, how are the relationship dynamics of having a partner of the same sex different from or similar to having a partner of the other sex,

and what kinds of adaptations or transitions are involved in passage from one to the other? Also, family structures, processes, and relationships that include bisexual or more sexually fluid parents and their children have hardly been explored. Most of the past decade's work on bisexuality has been on young people, leaving open the question of whether conclusions may have changed had researchers had data on middle-age and older people and longer life course trajectories.

Our review revealed that, although significant progress has been made, there is still little research on LGBT families of color and on LGBT families across the socioeconomic spectrum. The research that has been done suggests some reconsideration of common suppositions about what egalitarianism and sharing mean across LGBT families in different social locations. We also know little about the unique family processes that may unfold when families are subjected to both the concomitants of racism and of homophobia.

Recent research found that in families with two mothers, biological mothers may enjoy some modest advantage in their relationships with children. Differentiation between biological and other mothers was most visible in a study of U.S. African American lesbian two-mother families and in a UK sample that had a good number of working-class lesbian mothers, whereas White, middle-class lesbian comothers in one study took conscious actions to inhibit the children's and others' privileging of the biological relationship. Thus, research needs to explore whether the amount of differentiation that occurs by comothers' biological relatedness to the child depends on the family's position in the social structure. Obviously, if so, research needs to ask why.

Finally, if some biological advantage does exist in lesbian comother families, is it socially formed by the preexisting beliefs and biases of the comothers themselves and/or by the subtle privileges bestowed the biological parent by friends, family members, grandparents, social policy, the legal system, and so forth, or is it something else? For example, Hequembourg (2004) applied Cherlin's (1978) incomplete institutionalization theory—originally developed to understand role uncertainty and relationship conflicts in heterosexual-parent stepfamilies—to analyze patterns that seemed to

be roughly similarly shared by lesbian stepfamilies. These interactions between gender mix of parents, biological relatedness, and relationship status to children in the context of incomplete institutionalization are an important area for future exploration.

Recent research suggested that lesbians and their sons may face unique challenges that lesbians raising daughters do not face. Is this indicative of a more general tendency for greater ease in parenting and parent-child relationships within parent-child couplings of the same sex? Is it indicative of a modest ease in parent-daughter relations that does not exist in parent-son relations regardless of the parent's gender or sexual orientation? Where do gay fathers fall, and sons and daughters of gay fathers? All of this needs to be further researched.

There is almost no research on children living with gay fathers. Filling this gap is important for understanding contemporary family diversity, and it would aid the scholarly effort to disentangle the implications of the sexual orientations as against the genders of parents for children's development. Gay fathers are male of course but not heterosexual, so comparative studies of gay fathers and the children they are raising would push knowledge forward on the distinctive effects of heterosexuality plus masculinity vis-à-vis their separation.

Evidence is strong that children raised in gay parent families enjoy high levels of psychological well-being and social adjustment, but less is known about their gender repertoires and sexual orientations. To date, no studies have tracked a large sample of children raised by gay and lesbian parents well into adulthood to know what their sexual identifications become. The rise in the number of planned lesbian and gay parent families over the past two decades has produced a large cohort of children who are growing up, giving researchers in the next decade the opportunity to study these children in adulthood.

Research in the next decade will also benefit from extending the cross-national studies that Bos and Gartrell have begun, because this can help clarify the role of societal contexts and family- and individual-level variables in shaping the patterns of relationships between members of LGBT families. Overall, LGBT families research will benefit from being in touch with the broader symbolic and institutional aspects of family, kinship, parenting, and

childhood. The sociopolitical and historical contexts under which our research is taking place are indispensable in making sense of the LGBT families we study. In return, scholarship on LGBT families will tell us not only much about these families but also much about heterosexual parent families and, at the same time, reveal continuity and change in the social, cultural, and political dimensions of our societies.

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