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Transgender-Parent Families

As part of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community, transgender individuals encounter many of the same challenges in developing families as lesbian and gay individuals do, such as societal discrimination and legal recognition. However, transgender parents face unique concerns and issues that differ significantly from lesbian and gay parents. For instance, transgender parents often encounter various forms of transphobia, medical pathologization, and lack of adequate health-care services. Furthermore, within this broad context of systemic discrimination, the timing of transitioning from one's gender assigned at birth to one's self-identified gender influences family development and process. For example, depending on whether an individual transitions before having children or when they are already parents will impact how children relate to their parents' transgender identification. For individuals who transition in the midst of parenting, their developmental process of "coming out" occurs alongside their partners' and children's own developmental progressions. Thus, in such contexts, all family members interactively adapt to

interpersonal and intrapersonal changes in the midst of one parent transitioning.

Although a growing body of empirical research has begun to explore issues and concerns relating specifically to transgender individuals (e.g., Hines, 2007; Newfield, Hart, Dibble, & Kohler, 2006; Pinto, Melendez, & Spector, 2008; Sanchez & Vilain, 2009), very little empirical work has examined transgender-parent families. Personal autobiographical accounts (e.g., Boylan, 2003) and theoretically and clinically informed literature (e.g., Lev, 2004) have shed light on the complexities of family development and process within transgender-parent families. For instance, as transgender individuals transition from their gender assigned at birth to their self-identified gender, they often experience major shifts in their intimate relations and family life (Hines, 2006a; Lev, 2004). Furthermore, developing one's transgender identity, and coming out as transgender, is a unique process often entailing name changes, medical changes, bodily changes, and gender expression changes (Hill, 2007). Studying transgender-parent families is therefore particularly complex given the diversity of gender identities that may be included under the rubric of "trans." For the purposes of this chapter, the term "trans" will be used as an umbrella term to encompass a broad range of gender-variant identities and expressions [e.g., male to female (MTF), female to male (FTM), transsexual, transgender (Lev, 2010)].

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In the current chapter, I review the limited literature on trans-parent families, exploring individual and family processes that may occur in the context of trans-parent families. Drawing on research and theory from across a variety of disciplines, areas for future research are highlighted throughout. Focus is given to examining the following four areas (a) how trans-parent families may destabilize traditional notions of normative gendering within family relationships, (b) how discrimination may impact trans individuals and their families, (c) how “transitioning” within the context of a previously heterosexual or same-sex relationship may shape identity and family formation for trans parents, their partners, and their children, and (d) how issues of social location with regard to race, class, and geography may shape the experience of trans-parent families.

Redefining the Heteronormative Family

In considering how trans-parent families transgress the heteronormative nuclear family ideal, queer theory and theories on intersectionality are particularly useful theoretical frameworks for addressing the particularities of trans-parent families (e.g., Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Warner, 2004). Through deliberate resistance to stable identity categories, queer theory provokes a rethinking of the very social categories of how people define themselves (Warner, 1993). Queer theory also emphasizes the transgressive power of resisting normative gender and sexuality (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 2005). An intersectionality framework emphasizes how intersecting social constructs such as socioeconomic status, race, and geographical location shape individual subjectivities (Cole, 2009). Thus, within the context of trans-parent families, an intersectionality framework can help to move beyond a focus on defining the trans experience or trans-parent experience to a more dynamic focus on the diverse developmental processes and contextual factors shaping trans-parent families. Thus, attending to processes of transitioning (Hines,

2006b) and processes of identity and family development within specific contexts provides for a nuanced understanding of diverse trans subjectivities and their family members.

In considering trans-parent family development, it is important to consider how different gender identifications of trans individuals (e.g., MTF, FTM, gender queer) may uniquely shape family formation and processes (Tye, 2003). For example, an FTM parent’s transitioning to a male identity may provoke a rethinking of what it means to engage in “mothering” and “fathering” within the family, which in turn may shape how children construct their own masculinity and femininity. How parenting practices and family formations are created, socially accepted, and marginalized may differ depending on whether one identifies as MTF, FTM, or gender queer. Further, contextual factors, such as race, class, and geographic location, shape how trans people develop and experience their gender identities either prior to becoming parents or within the context of parenting.

Trans people transgress gender normative notions that one’s masculine or feminine gendering is a “natural” expression of one’s biological sex. In doing so, they destabilize dominant constructions of “maleness” and “femaleness” as inherent characteristics of men and women. Trans parents, in particular, are uniquely positioned to challenge hegemonic gender practices deeming certain partnering and parenting behaviors as inherently “masculine” and “feminine” (Ryan, 2009). Trans individuals most directly transgress normative gender identity development, and as a result, they may be particularly invested in developing parenting relationships in ways that do not rely on gendered norms for constructing divisions of labor.

For instance, in a qualitative study of 10 FTM trans people, Ryan (2009) explored how previously identified lesbian women may uniquely define and practice “fathering.” Ryan emphasized how some of the FTM individuals in her study did not rely on traditional notions of masculinity and fathering which are often enacted by men in heterosexual relationships (Ryan, 2009). However, Ryan asserts, despite potentially feeling

liberated from normative gendering in shaping parenting practices, some trans men may fear being perceived as less authentically male as a result of not being able to procreate through heterosexual sex with their female partners (Ryan, 2009). Such instances demonstrate the complex ways in which gender may be uniquely constructed, and deconstructed, within the context of trans-parent families.

Furthermore, as a result of experiencing discrimination by families of origin, trans individuals may construct families in ways that do not rely on biological kinship relations (Maguen, Shipherd, Harris, & Welch, 2007). For instance, Maguen et al.'s (2007) study of disclosure practices of 156 trans individuals begins to address some of the ways in which trans people may structure family relations that extend beyond biologically related kin. Their findings indicated that trans participants (86% of which were MTF) were more likely to disclose their gender identity to friends and intimate partners before disclosing to family of origin (particularly siblings and mothers). Participants actively developed support networks and chosen families that consisted of personal friends and loved ones who were identity affirming. Thus, similar to gay- and lesbian-parent families, trans-parent families may expand traditional notions of the family by developing new support networks that function as "families of choice" (Oswald, 2002; Weston, 1991). However, unlike gay and lesbian individuals, finding a social support network that can become a chosen family may be particularly difficult for trans people given the prevailing stigma, marginalization, and discrimination that trans people face—even from within the LGBT community (Ryan, 2009). Moreover, FTM individuals tend to "pass" as men more easily than MTF individuals "pass" as women (Lev, 2004). Thus, FTM people who easily fit within the male/female binary may experience less societal stigma, more support from families of origin, and less of a desire or need to create chosen families.

Further, understanding how trans parents' gender identities shape children's experiences can help shed light on how children navigate their

own developmental processes in relation to their parents. Given trans parents' potentially greater openness to a diversity of gender presentations and behaviors, they may be particularly open with regard to gender role expectations for their children (Ryan, 2009). For instance, Ryan's study of 10 FTM trans parents highlighted how trans men actively resisted prescribing gender normative rules for their children (Ryan, 2009). Thus, trans parents may be particularly attuned to allowing their children to explore a variety of masculine and feminine behaviors and expressions as their children develop their own gender identities. Conversely, however, children within trans-parent families may feel particularly pressured to conform to traditional notions regarding male and female gendering to legitimate the healthy and "normal" functioning of their family (Lev, 2010). Thus, rather than subverting gender norms, children may experience pressure from their social environment, parents, and peers to conform to gender normative behavior (Lev, 2010).

Lastly, just as trans parents must negotiate decisions regarding coming out to people who may not be aware of their trans status, decisions regarding when and to whom to come out may be particularly salient to children of trans parents. Depending on the extent to which the trans parent is openly and visibly trans will impact how children negotiate such disclosure practices. For instance, in contexts where the trans parent is visibly gender variant or gender non-conforming, children may have less agency as to the timing and contexts in which coming out about their trans-parent family status is initiated. Future research is needed that explores how trans parents and partners openly or more subtly provide messages to their children as to how to negotiate such processes of disclosure regarding the trans-parent status. Overall, a greater understanding of various family dynamics and processes within trans-parent families can help speak to the unique ways in which trans parents, and their partners and children, construct potentially novel notions of what it means to be a family outside of the heteronormative, gender normative nuclear family ideal.

Impact of Discrimination on Partnering and Parenting

Trans individuals develop their identities and families within the context of micro- as well as macro-level societal discrimination and stigmatization (Devor, 2002; Lev, 2004; Maguen et al., 2007). Trans individuals face unique forms of discrimination and transphobia due to transgressing normative gender identities and expressions (Spade, 2007). Specifically, trans people face legal discrimination, lack of health-care services, employment discrimination, and lack of general societal acceptance (Hill, 2007; Shelley, 2008; Tye, 2003). For instance, with regard to employment discrimination, it is estimated that 13–56% of trans people have been fired, 13–47% have been denied employment, and 22–31% have been harassed, verbally or physically (Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Ho, 2007). Not only do they face greater stigmatization than gay and lesbian individuals, but they may also be at a greater risk for hate crimes, particularly ones that are seriously assaultive (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2001). For example, Kuehnle and Sullivan's (2001) study of 241 gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals' experiences of victimization indicated that MTF transgender individuals sustained more serious personal injuries as compared to lesbian and gay individuals.

Societal Discrimination

Trans parents, in particular, may experience unique forms of societal discrimination depending on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Similar to previous generations of gay men who viewed coming out as antithetical to parenthood (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007), marginalizing discourses and practices may prevent some trans individuals from seeing parenthood as a realistic option despite their desires to become parents. Those individuals who do pursue parenthood may encounter various forms of discrimination. For example, Ryan's (2009) qualitative study of 10 FTM parents illuminated how some

FTM parents, who identified as queer or as gay men, had to navigate homophobia as well as transphobia. In this way, they experienced marginalization based on both their sexual orientation and gender identification.

Understanding the impact of societal marginalization on family formation and development is particularly important given that experiencing discrimination may impact psychological well-being and mental health (Bockting, 2009), which in turn, may impact relationship satisfaction, parenting, and children's well-being (Short, 2007). Of particular interest is how children being raised within the context of trans-parent families may be impacted by discrimination related to their parents' gender identity. Research that sheds light on the impact of discrimination and bullying on children of gay and lesbian parents (see Goldberg, 2010) provides a helpful context for understanding the potential consequences of stigmatization of children within trans-parent families. For instance, Bos and Gartrell's (2010) study on the impact of homophobic stigmatization on 78 adolescents of lesbian parents suggests that although stigmatization was associated with more behavior problems, these problems were negated when adolescents had positive and close relationships with their mothers. Such findings are important to consider when studying trans-parent families. For instance, children growing up within the context of trans-parent families may experience stigmatization based on their parents' nonnormative gender identity. How much children confront such stigma will depend on both their unique social context and how visible and out their parent is as trans. However, experiencing stigmatization alone may not lead to any negative impact on children's well-being if the parent-child relationship remains strong and supportive. Further, depending on whether or not children are in relatively LGBT affirmative environments (schools, neighborhoods, communities, states) will impact the extent to which children confront discrimination based on their parents' gender status. Future research is needed to explore how children may be impacted by possible stigmatization and marginalization, examining the ways in which trans-parent families may work to buffer the effects of personal and societal discrimination.

Institutionalized Discrimination

Institutionalized forms of discrimination may impact trans-parent families as well. For instance, individuals who have transitioned prior to becoming parents and are currently partnered in same-sex relationships may have to contend with discriminatory legal laws within states which prevent same-sex couples from coadopting (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007). Such stressors regarding legal parental status may have implications for the mental health of both trans parents and their partners. Research on same-sex parent families suggests that there are negative mental health effects of needing to be concerned with one's parental legal rights (Shapiro, Peterson, & Stewart, 2009). Within the context of trans-parent families, an MTF prospective adoptive parent who has chosen to pursue adoption with her female partner may not be able to coadopt their child at the time of placement as a result of heterosexist laws in states which prohibit coadoption by same-sex couples. Thus, some trans parents may be concerned about their legal parental rights, particularly in contexts where they are not biologically related to their child, and such concerns may in turn lead to worse mental health outcomes. Future research is needed that explores how supportive legal environments for trans-parent families may impact the overall mental health and well being of parents.

Legal regulations may further impact trans-parent families in the context of separation and child custody disputes (Lev, 2004; Ryan, 2009). Similar to gay and lesbian individuals who may lose custody of their children due to heterosexist discriminatory laws that do not recognize same-sex unions, trans people may find themselves in similarly unsupportive legal terrain. The legal landscape for child custody cases with trans parents is still relatively uncharted territory in terms of established precedent (Ryan, 2009). However, trans individuals are at risk in custody cases given the lack of explicit laws in the USA declaring that a parent's transgender status should not be considered a factor in determining child custody. Ironically, one partner's transitioning

may actually help previously identified same-sex couples to access heterosexual privilege in divorce cases. For instance, in the context of a previously identified lesbian relationship, legally changing one's sex to male may actually lead to a swifter and easier divorce in states that do not recognize same-sex marriage (Conant, 2010). Future research is clearly needed that examines how discriminatory legal and social environments impact the viability of relationship dissolution in the context of trans-parent families.

Transitioning During Parenthood

Families in which one parent transitions in the midst of parenting encounter unique challenges and dynamics as partners and children navigate the shifting gender identification of one parent. Much of the extant research on transitioning within the contexts of relationships has focused primarily on partnered relationships, rather than parenting relationships (e.g., Samons, 2009). Trans individuals who transition within the context of parenthood face unique concerns and developmental processes with regard to coming out to their partners and children (Lev, 2004). Further, although some individuals transition to a uniquely gender-variant or outwardly visible trans presentation, other trans people are more concerned with "passing", with the ultimate goal of fitting within the male/female binary (Lev, 2004). For those individuals who wish to identify as men and women, their nonnormative gender identity development may not be visibly obvious to others post-transitioning. Trans men, in particular, may have an easier time being visibly "read" as male by others and may even choose not to disclose their trans identity to their children (Ryan, 2009). Thus, children may not necessarily be aware of their parents' transitioning if their parents transitioned prior to becoming parents and chose not to come out to their children. It is yet unclear how disclosing one's transgender identification, as well as the timing and pace of a parent's transitioning, might impact children's adjustment.

As trans individuals develop their gender identities and expressions, interpersonal tensions may

emerge in the context of intimate relationships (Hines, 2006a; Lev, 2004). Trans people may experience initial rejection, anger, hurt, or confusion by partners and family members who are non-accepting of or uncomfortable with their developing gender identity (Lev, 2004). Such challenges in relationships and support have implications for overall well-being. For instance, research suggests that the greater number of individuals that trans people come out to regarding their trans identity, the greater level of social support they may experience, which in turn can have implications for increased perceptions of well-being (Maguen et al., 2007). Significantly, in Maguen et al.'s (2007) study, the majority of participants disclosed their transgender identity to spouses and friends first before turning to other more distant personal relationships. Such findings highlight how intimate and close relationships may play a particularly important role in providing social support for transgender individuals throughout their transitioning. Within the trans-parent context, such social support may be all the more necessary in buffering the negative effects of marginalizing discourses and practices that stigmatize trans-parent families.

Within the discipline of sociology, Hines' (2006a) study of transgender practices of partnering and parenting relationships begins to shed light on how transitioning may be interpersonally negotiated within intimate and familial relationships. Through in-depth case studies of three transgender individuals, Hines qualitatively explored how transitioning impacts partnering and parenting relationships. Although Hines' focus was only on three individuals (drawn from a larger study consisting of 30 trans adults, most of whom were not parents), her study begins to address the complexities of how trans identity construction may be enacted within the contexts of intimate relationships. In particular, her analysis suggests changes in gender presentation and identification may provoke changes in sexual desire and intimacy. For instance, one trans participant in Hines' study felt increasingly comfortable with his body post-transitioning and thereby felt more interested in developing a satisfying sexual relationship. Further, Hines' analysis

indicated that developing nonnormative gender (and sexual) identities allowed some participants to move beyond stereotyped gender roles as they began to develop more equal relationships. Within the family context, specifically, Hines' analysis highlights how transitioning within the context of parenting may not only help affirm the transitioning partner's identity, but also facilitate an increase in authentic and open communication between the trans parent and child. Thus, as intimate relationships are renegotiated, couple dynamics may shift, which in turn may impact parent-child interactions. Hines' study illustrates how participants perceived transitioning less as an individualized process, and more as a family process. That is, decisions concerning disclosure, name changes, and gender presentation were considered in relation to concerns and care for the children's needs and adjustment (Hines, 2006a).

Such qualitative empirical findings support Lev's (2004) clinically informed model of transgender "family emergence" (p. 271) whereby families go through four primary stages of family development (a) discovery and disclosure, (b) turmoil, (c) negotiation, and (d) finding balance. Lev's model highlights that transitioning within a family context may indeed entail periods of distress or family turmoil; however, families can actually grow deeper and stronger as the trans parent is fully integrated into the family. Indeed, having partner involvement throughout the transitioning stage may have positive outcomes for transitioning (Blanchard & Steiner, 1983), and therapists and medical practitioners can help facilitate support between partners throughout transitioning within a family context. Such support would help alleviate the personal distress that trans people may face who delay transitioning due to fears of rejection by their partners or losing their children (Lev, 2004; Lewins, 1995).

Previous research that has examined transitioning within the context of intimate relationships often has focused on MTF individuals within the context of previously heterosexual relationships (e.g., Samons, 2009). Thus, in terms of understanding partner experiences of transitioning, the perspectives and concerns of heterosexual-identified wives have often been

emphasized rather than a more comprehensive exploration of a variety of relationships, partnering experiences, and gender identifications. Clinically focused literature and medical/therapeutic practices have tended to assume that in the case of MTF individuals who are married to women, with or without children, divorce is an inevitable outcome of transitioning (Lev, 2004; Samons, 2009). Such assumptions can lead clinicians to prematurely encourage couples to separate rather than fully exploring possible areas of relationship growth and change.

Any expectation of divorce or separation as an inevitable or necessary result of transitioning prematurely assumes that trans people cannot sustain (the same) intimate relationships throughout and after transitioning (Lev, 2004). Indeed, maintaining relationships through transitioning is not only a possibility but also a reality which many researchers and clinicians have failed to recognize and support within medical and therapeutic contexts (Lev, 2004). Clinically informed literature has begun to shed light on the potential positive aspects of transitioning within the context of intimate relationships (e.g., Samons, 2009). Although transitioning within the context of a relationship, and particularly a parenting relationship, may be stressful on the relationship, partners have shown resiliency and support throughout transitioning processes (Samons, 2009). Indeed, clinicians who are knowledgeable about and sensitive to transitioning experiences and trans issues may play a crucial role in helping partners and children adjust to the trans parent's gender identification (Lev, 2004). However, isolation and lack of services may be significant stressors impacting transitioning experiences (Joslin-Roher & Wheeler, 2009). Thus, empirical research as well as clinically informed research has consistently emphasized the importance of social support and contextual factors that shape how transitioning impacts partnering and parenting relationships.

In the context of relationships where one partner transitions during the course of the relationship, non-trans partners may go through unique identity shifts as they negotiate their partner's transitioning. For example, a qualitative study of

nine lesbian-, bisexual-, and queer-identified partners of transgender men indicated that non-trans partners often engaged in a process of self-exploration following their partner's transitioning (Joslin-Roher & Wheeler, 2009). Some lesbian women felt the need to reevaluate their own identification as lesbians after their partners came out as trans men (Joslin-Roher & Wheeler, 2009). Given that many trans men may transition within the context of lesbian relationships, female partners may have to reconcile their sexual orientation identification as lesbian or queer as a result of their partner's shift to a male identity. Lesbian-identified women may thereby find themselves publicly situated within a heterosexual binary within which they do not personally identify (Lev, 2003). Thus, it is conceivable that such shifts in identity may be further complicated within the context of parenting. For example, in situations in which one parent transitions in the midst of parenthood, both parents and children may need to adjust to the shifting social positioning of the family at large (e.g., the shift from a same-sex parent family to a heterosexual-parent family).

Thus, just as non-trans partners adjust to their partners' transitioning, children ultimately go through interpersonal and intrapersonal changes as well as they understand and renegotiate their parents' gender identity. Significantly, how children negotiate their parents' transitioning may differ dramatically depending on the child's developmental age. For instance, a 5-year-old child will clearly have a different experience of a parent's transitioning compared to a teenager. Preliminary research suggests that younger children may have the easiest time adapting to their parents' shift in gender identity (White & Ettner, 2004). White and Ettner's (2004) study of therapists' ratings of children whose parents were in the midst of transitioning indicated that, compared to preschoolers, adolescents had the most difficult time adapting to their parents' transitioning. Adolescents may be particularly attuned to societal norms that stigmatize transgender parents. Furthermore, their parents' transitioning may more acutely evoke feelings of loss as they renegotiate their trans parents' shifting gender

identity. Importantly, trans people who are adapting well to transitioning, and whose partners and children are also adapting well, may not be in therapy; thus, their experiences may not be captured by such research that is derived from within a clinical context.

Importantly, how one identifies in terms of gender and sexual orientation may have quite different psychological, relational, and family consequences. For instance, within the context of a heterosexual marriage, a previously identified heterosexual man may, post-transition, identify as a lesbian woman. In doing so, she has repositioned her gender identification while remaining partnered with a woman (Lev, 2004). Further, within the heterosexual/homosexual binary, she has also shifted her sexual orientation identification. Such a change may have significant personal and family consequences as she proceeds to identify as a lesbian within a sociocultural context that continues to marginalize, stereotype, and discriminate against lesbians. Raising children within the context of a lesbian-parent relationship context may entail unique challenges (e.g., discrimination) and benefits (e.g., more flexible work/family divisions). On the other hand, within the context of a previously lesbian relationship, one partner may transition from a female to a male gender identity and in doing so shift the relationship to a more socially accepted status as heterosexual (Ryan, 2009). Thus, the overall family dynamics, as well as social acceptance of the family, may change depending on the parents' particular type of trans identification. Children may, therefore, find that they are negotiating a shift from a more stigmatized family status (same-sex parent family) or, on the other hand, to a more visibly heteronormative family formation (with a mother and father). However, if the trans parent transitioned in a context in which community members are aware of the transitioning, trans-parent families that have been repositioned within the heterosexual binary may not garner the heterosexual privilege typically afforded heterosexual couples. Thus, future research is needed to explore how a shift in gender and sexual orientation identification of a trans parent impacts overall family dynamics and societal acceptance.

Race, Class, and Social Context

The processes of transitioning and identifying as transgender within a family context may differ significantly depending on one's social positioning with regard to such variables as race, socioeconomic status, and geographical location. The process by which transitioning and living transgender become recognized, accepted, and refuted is contextually situated at an individual and relational level as well as at a larger socio-institutional level (e.g., employment possibilities, health-care needs, and community acceptance). For instance, trans individuals who lack adequate social support, legal recognition, and general societal acceptance may be at risk for greater mental health issues. Newfield et al.'s (2006) study of 446 FTM participants indicated that trans participants who had received hormone therapy had significantly higher quality of life scores compared to those who had not received testosterone. However, mental health providers and medical practitioners can act as gatekeepers, preventing individuals from receiving the hormone treatment that they request (Tye, 2003). Indeed, overt discrimination by health-care providers may prevent trans people from receiving appropriate care (Tye, 2003). Sex-reassignment surgery, in particular, can be very costly and without insurance companies covering such procedures, trans individuals may not be able to seek the services they request. In contrast, within the Netherlands sex-reassignment surgery is covered by state health insurance (Tye, 2003), thereby helping to facilitate transitioning for individuals regardless of socioeconomic status. Thus, if insurance companies do not reimburse for treatments within the USA, only those individuals who have the financial means to pay for such treatments will receive adequate care. Individuals from a lower socioeconomic status may therefore have a more difficult time developing a self-affirming gender identity, which has consequences for overall psychological well-being and family well-being (Newfield et al., 2006).

Such issues accessing adequate health care as a result of medical gate-keeping or low financial

means have significant implications for trans-parent families. For instance, trans parents who lack economic resources, but desire a full transition to a male or female identity, may ultimately present as more gender ambiguous than they would otherwise desire. Such barriers to health care, which may put them at greater risk for psychological distress, may, in turn, impact their partnering and parenting practices as well as their children's overall well-being. Thus, a huge area for empirical research entails examining how socioeconomic status may impact trans-parent families. Clinically informed literature suggests that class barriers that make transitioning too cost-prohibitive may have negative consequences for both the trans parent and overall healthy family development (Lev, 2004). Empirical research is needed that explicitly examines working-class trans-parent families. Such research could help elucidate the intersections of class and nonnormative gendering within trans-parent families.

Racial identity and marginalization might uniquely intersect with nonnormative gendering within the context of trans-parent families. Theorizing about "the" transgender experience may risk marginalizing people of color whose experiences may not be captured by such presumably all-inclusive categories (Roen, 2001). Indeed, for certain racial or ethnic groups, one's racial identity, rather than gender identity, may be more salient within certain contexts (Roen, 2001). Roen's (2001) case study of three gender liminal¹ Maaori individuals in New Zealand suggested that some trans people may resist identifying with medical discourses on transsexuality to maintain traditional cultural values. Thus, racial and cultural minorities may uniquely reconcile tensions between their racial, cultural, and gender identities as they develop gender nonconforming identities. Further, transitioning may have quite different ramifications and meanings (both at the individual subjective level and societal level), depending on how that individual is

positioned racially and socioeconomically. For instance, Mezey's (2008) ethnographic study of lesbian women's coming out experiences and perceptions of parenthood indicated that coming out to families of origin was easier for those lesbians with race and class privilege, which, in turn, made it easier for them to decide to become parents. Prospective trans parents may feel similarly restrained or emboldened to become parents given race and class positioning. For instance, racially marginalized and lower socioeconomic status trans people may be less likely to disclose their trans identity to family members and thereby gain their support which would make deciding to parent easier. Future empirical research is needed, however, to explore how racial minority status and socioeconomic status interactively influence levels and types of social support for trans individuals. Thus, research that utilizes an intersectionality perspective is particularly needed to fully address such issues of race and class in shaping trans-parent family development.

Attending to issues of race, class, and socio-cultural positioning will help elucidate the unique experiences of trans-parent families within specific social contexts. Further, across research on trans people and their families, issues of geography typically remain unspoken beyond acknowledgment of country or regional context. Internet-based research, which has the potential to derive samples from quite diverse geographical regions, suggests that trans people are very much developing their lives, support networks, and families within rural as well as urban contexts (Newfield et al., 2006). As Halberstam (2005) emphasized in her theorizing of queer and trans identities, the notion that rural environments are inevitably hostile environments for nonconforming individuals eclipses a broader range of desires and choices regarding how trans people choose to live within different contexts. Thus, beyond merely developing a research sample that is geographically diverse, research is needed that centrally considers the impact of geographical location on trans-family development. For instance, recent research on gay and lesbian individuals and families suggests the importance of understanding how geographical location, and

¹Roen intentionally uses the term "gender liminal" rather than "transgender" given that transgender theorizing has often eclipsed the experiences of racial minorities who are gender nonconforming.

rural contexts in particular, shape sexual minority experiences of belonging and family (Oswald & Culton, 2003). Creating affirming social environments for trans-parent families, however, may be particularly difficult given the greater stigmatization of trans individuals who must contend with prevailing normative discourse regarding parenting and family.

Conclusion

Trans-parent families are currently transgressing normative notions of family formation. Similar to research on same-sex parent families, research that explores how gendered divisions of labor are enacted within trans-parenting contexts has the potential to illuminate family processes that radically expand dominant perceptions of traditional mothering and fathering. For example, this work could explore how trans parents and their partners construct their children's gender in ways that may draw on and subvert normative gendering. Although little empirical work has examined trans-parent families, relevant empirical research as well as clinically and theoretically informed literature on trans individuals and parents has begun to shed light on the unique factors shaping trans-parent family development. Trans people and their families are creating and sustaining families within the context of systemic discrimination. Such discrimination may impact trans-parent families differently depending on the availability of social support as well as the specific social context within which they live. For instance, having a close network of family and friends may help to buffer the potential negative psychological impact of marginalizing discourses and practices regarding trans-parent families. Importantly, there are also an increasing number of support resources for trans-parent families and their children [e.g., the KOT (Kids of Trans) resource guide, which was developed by COLAGE, an organization developed by and for people with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer parents; Canfield-Lenfest, 2008]. Future research that elucidates family processes and development can help provide greater visibility and validation to

trans parents as well as their partners and children. Further research is needed that moves beyond the clinical context and utilizes theoretical approaches and research methods that examine a diversity of gender identifications, as well as race, class, and sociocultural factors that shape trans-parent families.

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