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Thirty years ago, the publication of a book like *LGBT-Parent Families: Innovations in Research and Implications for Practice* would not have been conceivable. The fact that such a book now exists, and with such compelling contributions, is an indication of how far the field has progressed. Beginning with the pioneering and innovative scholarship of Larry Kurdek on same-sex couples; Jerry Bigner and Frederick Bozett on gay fathers; Martha Kirkpatrick, Susan Golombok, and Charlotte Patterson on lesbian mothers; and other key scholars, the scholarship on LGBT families has become increasingly prolific and more complex.

Building upon the foundations of this earlier work on LGBT couples and families, as well as the shifting social norms that have allowed new access into hard-to-find populations, scholars have begun to imagine—and explore in depth—the intricacies and diversity inherent in LGBT-parent families. Increasing research attention, for example, is now being paid to LGBT-parent families of color, as well as the role of social class and gender in LGBT-parent

families' experiences. Research has exploded into understudied and truly innovative topics, such as the experiences of youth with LGBT parents who also identify as LGBT, the experiences of LGBT grandparents, and the experiences of LGBT-parent families living in non-Western cultures. Research and practice associated with these topics, and many others, form the basis of this book. In what follows, we revisit the question that guided our vision for each chapter—What do we, and what do we not, know regarding the field of LGBT-parent families?—in the context of the major themes that emerge throughout the volume. We conclude with our assessment of the future of research, theory, and praxis on LGBT parenting, addressing, as well, the value of interdisciplinary and intergenerational collaboration in LGBT family scholarship.

Major Substantive Issues in LGBT-Parent Research: What Have We Learned?

The overview chapters in this volume addressed the major research areas that have been generated over the past three decades. These chapters use a comparative and historical lens to trace the evolution of each of these research areas. Notably, these chapters focus largely on lesbian-mother families, given the relative paucity of work on gay fathering. Chapters 1 and 2 on lesbian-mother families formed post-heterosexual divorce and intentional lesbian-mother families, respectively,

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most sharply illuminate a major shift in the field: Whereas early research was largely conducted on lesbian mothers postdivorce, the current wave of studies has focused on two-mother families formed after the women come out. Yet, it is important to emphasize that studies of lesbian mothers parenting post-heterosexual divorce—as well as lesbian mother step-families—are still a key part of the landscape of LGBT-parent families, inasmuch as some women will inevitably continue to come out and form same-sex relationships post-heterosexual divorce. A question for future research is how the experiences of contemporary women differ from past cohorts of lesbians parenting post-heterosexual divorce. Another question is whether it will be less relevant and meaningful to focus on “coming out” as a discrete and one-time transition. Sexual orientation can be fairly fluid across the life course, particularly for certain subgroups of women (Diamond, 2008). Given new research into fluidity in sexual identities over the life course (Diamond, 2008), and the diverse ways in which women form partnerships and parent with other women, regardless of previous relationship history (Moore, 2011), it is increasingly important to incorporate an understanding of and attention to sexual fluidity in research on lesbian and gay parenting.

As Bos describes in Chapter 2, lesbian-mother families formed through alternative insemination, although a relatively “new” family form, have been the focus of considerable research in the past two decades. This focus is appropriate and warranted, given advancements in reproductive technology (see Chapter 5 as well), and the increased social acceptance of lesbian motherhood. It is notable that, despite being a relatively new area of research, lesbian-mother families formed through insemination are already being studied in several different cultural contexts, and several cross-national comparative studies have been initiated. Yet, as Bos points out, the groups being studied continue to be middle-class to upper-middle-class, White lesbians. In part, this sampling issue may reflect that fewer working-class and racial minority lesbians pursue insemination, as compared to other routes (e.g., adoption, conceiving via heterosexual sex), as emphasized in Chapter 4 by Mezey on deciding to become

parents or remain childfree and in Chapter 9 by Moore and Brainer on race and ethnicity in the lives of sexual minority parents and their children. Indeed, Moore and Brainer point out that middle-class and upper-middle-class White lesbians who support an egalitarian feminism are the most likely to be able to afford insemination; working-class and racial/ethnic minority women, correspondingly, often pursue other methods. Thus, new research should not aim to simply include more racial and social class diversity in studies of lesbians who pursue insemination, but, rather, should look within groups (e.g., working-class lesbians; Black lesbians; Latina lesbians) to see what parenting routes are most common.

Chapter 3 on adoptive families reveals how an even newer research area has taken shape. As a research area still in its infancy, research questions abound regarding lesbian and gay adoptive family formation and experiences. Indeed, lesbian and gay adoptive families are uniquely distinguished by the fact that neither parent is biologically related to her/his child; parents may be of a different race (and potentially culture) than their child; birth parents may be symbolically and/or physically present in the child’s (and adoptive parents’) lives. Of great interest is how family members navigate these diverse issues as they develop. How do they define themselves, develop over time, and nourish their relationships in a broader context that defines families as heterosexual and biologically related?

Further, reflective of its status as a relatively new research area, most of the research on lesbian and gay adoptive families is on lesbian mothers. Gay adoptive fathers are beginning to be studied, although, like lesbian mothers, the samples that have been investigated to date tend to be middle-class and upper-middle-class and White. Yet, U.S. Census data reveal that gay adoptive mothers and fathers are much more racially diverse than existing research has captured: 61% of male same-sex couples with adopted children and 77% of female same-sex couples are racial minorities (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007). Scholars need to become more attentive to this diversity to better understand the multiplicative stresses and strengths that characterize these families.

Themes in Understudied Research Areas: What Are We Learning?

The understudied topic chapters provide insights into “new” research areas and raise a number of exciting questions for future work. Several themes are evident across these chapters, demonstrating the progress that scholars have made in advancing knowledge about LGBT-parent families. Making such inroads into new territory is a long-awaited desire that is now being fulfilled. Over the past several decades, for example, scholars have championed the need to implement the theory of intersectionality into actual research (Crenshaw, 1991; Lorde, 1984); emphasized the need for empirical research to augment personal narratives of parenting experiences (Pollack & Vaughn, 1987); and called for scholars to clarify and elaborate how to define LGBT identities within families (i.e., to get beyond the lesbian and gay family nomenclature) (Allen & Demo, 1995). Many of these early hopes are being fulfilled with answers to the complex dilemmas and questions that inaugurated the field. We now turn to overarching themes in how the understudied topics in this volume are expanding the knowledge in LGBT-parent family research.

Intersectionality

Nearly all of the authors in this volume address the issue of samples restricted to White, middle-class and upper-middle-class lesbians and gay men. But in this book, there are new inroads into expanding knowledge into uncharted territory, in the form of investigations that link sexual orientation diversity with gender, race, class, place, nationality, and other axes of stratification, oppression, and privilege.

In Chapters 9 and 14, the examination of Western non-White lesbians reveals the limitations of concepts such as “same-sex parenting.” Indeed, as these chapters point out, much more expansion is needed beyond the Western world (e.g., to indigenous cultures, non-White cultures), so that individualistic conceptualizations of gender and sexual orientation in the construction

of family relationships are critiqued and thus expanded. In many non-Western cultures, it is clear that same-sex sexual behavior is not synonymous with a homosexual or bisexual orientation; a woman may marry another woman, have sexual relations with her, pass on inheritance rights to the children she bears, but not be defined as a lesbian. Hicks, in Chapter 10, also critiques the reified concepts of gender role and identity that have informed much of the recent theory and research regarding LGBT parenting, thus demonstrating the relevance of a social constructionist perspective on the fluidity of the categories of gender and sexual orientation. The challenge for researchers is not to be constrained by Western notions of homosexuality, coupling, and parenthood, and to expand the depth and breadth of inquiry beyond these constructs, when studying issues related to “same-sex parenting” in non-Western cultures.

Many authors also emphasize the need for more critical attention and insight into the multiple contexts that shape LGBT people’s lives. For example, one’s immediate community context, and the broader legal context (e.g., at the state and federal level) may powerfully influence the experiences of LGBT-parent family members, as Oswald and Holman (Chapter 13) point out. Likewise, one’s experience at work can be instrumental in shaping one’s experience at home and vice versa; indeed, the workplace is an understudied context in the lives of LGBT people and parents, as King, Huffman, and Peddie (Chapter 15) describe. The chapters in this volume also bring together scholarship that demonstrates the intersectionality of rural, working-class LGBT-parent families, whose experiences are often not captured in current research, and yet, like many lesbian and gay men of color, are often engaged in parenting (e.g., Moore & Brainer; Oswald & Holman).

Intergenerational Relationships in Families

All of the chapters that address understudied topics provide some new insight into intergenerational relationships in families that extend a narrow way of viewing family beyond the nuclear family model. Beginning with the way

that families are formed, Mezey in Chapter 4 highlights the class-inscribed nature of lesbian women's decision making about parenthood. Further, her research raises intriguing questions about the need to differentiate between motivation to parent and motivation to be pregnant, and the multiplicative forces and contexts that may influence decision making about both pregnancy and parenting.

Along the lines of the nuances of parenting motivations and decision making, Berkowitz (Chapter 5) advances current scholarship by focusing on gay fathers who decide to have biological children. Granted, surrogacy is the province of highly educated and economically well off, primarily White men, given the often prohibitive cost; but, the phenomenon raises new questions about the nature of nuclear families, and the relative importance of gender versus biology in creating a family.

Chapter 11 on second-generation LGBT persons, Chapter 8 on parents and children in polyamorous parent families, and Chapter 12 on LGBT grandparenting further illustrate the importance of attending to intergenerational relationships within LGBT-parent families. As Kuvalanka reveals, the meaning and experience of being LGBT changes from generation to generation; therefore, adolescents or young adults who identify as LGBT may not necessarily feel as though their LGBT parent(s) fully understand or can relate to their experience. Indeed, one question this chapter raises is the reality that each new generation brings new meanings to defining LGBT identity. Do "labels" have the same meaning for the current generation? Do they "matter" in the same way that they have for previous generations (Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009)? Likewise, Pallotta-Chiarolli and colleagues demonstrate the sensitivity that polyamorous parents must have when considering their children's relationships to individuals and institutions outside the immediate social environment. Of interest is the degree to which parents' and children's concerns intersect or overlap—for example, do parents and children share similar types of concerns about privacy and protecting their families? Do children "take their cue" from their parents in terms of their attitudes and practices related to

disclosure of their families? Finally, Chapter 12 on LGBT grandparenting highlights how a family member's identification as LGBT may affect family members of different generations in different ways: that is, one's child and one's grandchild will likely respond to and experience one's lesbianism in different ways. Much more research is needed that examines these intergenerational relationships, and of course, greater attention needs to be paid to the experiences and familial roles of gay grandfathers, as well as bisexual and transgender grandparents.

Making Bisexual and Transgender-Parent Families Visible

One of the most important contributions of this volume is the current assessment of research and theory about bisexuality and transgender parenting, thus, as Biblarz and Savci (2010) note, loosening the B and T from L and G. The invisibility of the "B" and the "T" in LGBT is taken on by Ross and Dobinson (Chapter 6) and Downing (Chapter 7), respectively. These authors highlight the limitations of the LGBT umbrella to capture the full range of experiences of bisexual and trans parents, and the need for future research to more explicitly and systematically study these populations—especially given the practical and theoretical utility of examining these groups. Ross and Dobinson, for example, point out that bisexual parenting challenges scholars to think more carefully about the research methods used to obtain and define samples (e.g., members of same-sex couples may be lesbian or bisexual; members of heterosexual couples may be heterosexual or bisexual). Downing, on the other hand, shows how transgender parenting has challenged the field not just substantively but also theoretically, in terms of the social construction of gender and sexual orientation. Both, together, point to the emergence of new conceptualizations about identity: for example, Ross introduces the notion of trans bisexual people, thereby complicating static notions of gender identity, gender, and sexual orientation—complexities which need to be addressed in depth in future research.

Research Methods: What Have We Learned?

With increased interest in LGBT families, many methodological questions have arisen, leading to possibilities and challenges in how studies are framed and in the quality of data that are collected. Several chapters in this volume address methodological innovations and new strategies for studying LGBT-parent families.

As Gabb (Chapter 21) demonstrates, the richness of in-depth, small-scale samples are demonstrated in what can be learned through the complex data collection methods allowed by qualitative research paradigms. These “deep” accounts and insights are only possible when using the creative kinds of approaches that Gabb describes, and are still so necessary when investigating understudied populations or not yet understood populations. Indeed, it is no coincidence that many of the chapters about understudied research rely heavily on data collected through qualitative methods; gaining insight into little explored phenomena such as the experiences of LGBT children with LGBT parents, or the experiences of transgender-parent families, requires methods that allow for flexibility, nuance, and depth.

Yet at the same time, new quantitative methods are also emerging that hold exciting promise for capturing the complexity in LGBT-parent families. For example, Smith, Sayer, and Goldberg (Chapter 20) outline a range of exciting and innovative approaches to handling various statistical issues that arise in studying LGBT couples and families. And yet, the continued challenge facing the field is that these methods are often not taught in graduate programs, and workshops that teach statistical methods such as multilevel modeling are expensive and still not widely available. More widespread training and knowledge of these methods is necessary, in that it will help to eliminate or decrease the “file drawer problem” whereby studies that use less-than-ideal methods to analyze data from same-sex couples and families are rejected or simply not submitted to top- and middle-tier journals in the field.

A different methodological challenge was raised by Russell and Muraco. They emphasize

that large-scale population-based data sets can be mined to answer questions related to same-sex couples and parenting; yet, measures of sexual orientation are inconsistent across surveys and often do not capture all dimensions of sexuality (e.g., attraction, behavior, identity), thus limiting the ability to answer questions of interest. At the same time, the bigger challenge is perhaps not the limitations of these data sets but the reality that these data sets have not, as of yet, been sufficiently utilized to analyze data relevant to same-sex couples and families. Perhaps scholars who study LGBT couples and families but who lack familiarity with these data sets can partner with scholars who have expertise in working with these data sets. Such collaborations have the capacity to be mutually fulfilling and productive.

Applications: What Have We Learned?

The implications and applications of research on LGBT-parent families matter. The series of cutting edge clinical and applied chapters in this volume address the role of therapists and educators in the lives of today’s LGBT-parent families. These chapters (namely, Chapters 16, 17, and 18) highlight key issues for researchers to attend to in their work, which are salient in the lives of LGBT-parent families. For example, Chapter 16 highlights the new “normativity” of family building for sexual minorities, which may change the focus of therapy from “can we become parents?” to “when, with whom, and how will we become parents?” Chapter 17 raises the issue that there may be more than two “parents” in LGBT-parent families, a reality that may need to be negotiated and renegotiated in the clinical context at various points during the parenting life cycle. The clinical issues that are raised in these chapters bring light to the new opportunities and challenges posed in this “brave new world” of LGBT family building (Stacey, 1990).

The applied chapters also offer a number of practical “tools” to assist LGBT-parent families and their advocates in navigating the varied settings in which they live their lives. For example, as Byard and Kosciw point out, schools play an important role in the lives of LGBT family

members, and there are increasingly a large number of resources to help schools create inclusive environments for families, as well as resources for LGBT family members wishing to advocate for their families. Likewise, Shapiro provides knowledge and resources that can assist LGBT-parent families in navigating the ever-complex legal climate. As evident in Telingator's and Lev and Sennott's case studies, it is important for practitioners who work with LGBT-parent families to allow children to define their complex families from their own frame of reference, a perspective that might differ from their primary set of parents.

Conclusion

The research on LGBT-parent families is diverse in terms of approach and method. Although we, and many of the volume's contributors, have pointed to the need to gain more representative samples, we do not wish to send the message that we regard this as the hallmark of success or the most important goal for future research. Rather, we should embrace a diversity of approaches and types of knowledge, valuing, and not ghettoizing, qualitative research and small samples. We take the approach that both qualitative and quantitative approaches are important, and that both small and large samples are valuable. Different methods capture different levels and types of family complexity, and yield different insights.

As this volume has documented, the field of LGBT-parent families has grown significantly over the past several decades. What does the future hold, then? What new questions are on the horizon? Do we continue to build on, even replicate, the foundation of studies that we have built; or do we begin to ask new questions, going into uncharted territories, and exploring the "messiness" of families' lives?

Indeed, there are many messy, but altogether exciting and innovative, questions that scholars can, and perhaps should, be asking and addressing, at this point in time. For example, there are new data showing that when intentional lesbian mother families split up, children often report feeling closer to, and often reside with, their biological mother (Gartrell, Bos, Peyser,

Deck, & Rodas, 2011). Certainly, the uneven legal terrain for biological versus social mothers has implications for these dynamics. But, perhaps scholars should also be probing how societal notions about biology play into these post-dissolution dynamics. How and why do children prefer the biological mother over the social mother, in some cases? Similarly, studies could more closely probe and investigate parents' reasons for seeking biological parenthood. Do some women want to be pregnant because they understand it will allow them greater "power" in a situation where the couple breaks up?

Another interesting and somewhat related question is the degree to which, and the ways in which, gender identity may influence decision making about pregnancy. For example, to what extent do masculine or butch-identified sexual minority women shy away from becoming pregnant because it is dissonant with their gender identity; and, under what conditions do they pursue pregnancy? Additionally, how might pregnancy change or alter a butch-identified woman's sense of gender identity and identity in general? Indeed, Epstein (2002) argued that butch-identified lesbian mothers in general—and those who are pregnant in particular—reconfigure what it means to be butch and broaden the range, depth, and meaning of the butch experience.

These and other interesting and provocative questions may be avoided, however, because of concerns about how the pursuit of such questions, and the data that are obtained, might be viewed by both "insiders" (other scholars who study LGBT-parent families) and "outsiders" (i.e., antigay politicians and researchers). That is, "pro-gay family" scholars and activists may be concerned about how the telling of such stories may be used to discriminate against LGBT-parent families, and the "antigay family" camp may indeed use controversial data to argue against LGBT rights. But our perspective is that we cannot avoid wading into these deeper waters—otherwise, we come to a polarized standstill whereby the field cannot move forward with telling the more complicated and nuanced stories with our data, thus demonstrating the inherent complexity of people's lives. In turn, many of the benefits of studying people, where

they are—benefits that include adding to the body of empirical science and improving policy and education—are lost.

Finally, a pressing and related question that remains, and which should continue to dominate scholars' thinking as they pursue their research in this area, is: Who are we doing this research *for*? Some scholars likely believe that scholarship on LGBT-parent families should be driven by a desire or goal to improve marginalized peoples' lives. But, is there no room for basic research in this area—research that is not “activist” in nature but which is aimed to explore, for example, whether theories of human development or family processes can be applied to, and hold up in, LGBT-parent families? We argue for an inclusive approach, whereby diverse approaches and goals are respected, emphasizing a healthy science that is tempered by a concern for the outcomes of real people's lives.

Indeed, it is notable that many of the chapters share a common theme of highlighting what the understudied population under investigation wants us to know about them. By asking understudied and marginalized populations such as these what they want scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and the lay public to know about them, researchers communicate a respect and curiosity for the group's experiences, as well as possibly generating more meaningful and innovative data. For example, what does it really mean to be a daughter of working-class lesbian parents in a school where most of the other children have more affluent parents? That is, in what ways does being from a lesbian-parent family, alongside of social class disadvantages and other forms of discrimination, “disadvantage” a child's experience and position with her peers? We encourage researchers to continue to ask their participants what they believe are the most relevant issues in their lives, and what is important for scholars, policymakers, and the lay public to know about them.

We can imagine a future where these competing discourses can actually live side by side. We can imagine scientific collaborations among and between people who embody these diverse discourses, who can, together, produce richer

knowledge that helps us to understand what is actually going on in people's lives. We can imagine application of this research to a wide range of settings, including educational, therapeutic, and policy arenas. As we look ahead to the future, we are excited by the innovations and possibilities that are emerging, and we welcome both new and seasoned scholars to help define the path that lies before us.

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