Where Is the "B" in LGBT Parenting? A Call for Research on Bisexual Parenting

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Introduction

In the context of a growing body of scholarship examining LGBT parenting and families, astonishingly little research has focused on the specific experiences of bisexual-identified parents. In her landmark book on lesbian and gay parenting, Goldberg (2010) notes that bisexual parenting experiences and perspectives are rarely acknowledged and explored, and that in most cases, inclusion of "bisexual" within the acronym "LGBT" is misleading, since when bisexual parents are included, they are simply collapsed together with the lesbian and/or gay parents in research samples, and may only include bisexual people with same-sex partners.

In this chapter, we attempt to address this gap in LGBT parenting research by (a) describing our recent literature search of multiple health and social sciences databases to establish the current state of the research on bisexual parenting; (b) reviewing related research and scholarship that has touched on the experiences of bisexual parents, including two studies conducted by our own team; (c) speculating about some of the key issues and concerns faced by bisexual parents, based on the available data; and (d) identifying key future directions for research in this field. We hope that this chapter will serve to encourage meaningful inclusion of bisexual parents in future research in the field of LGBT family science.

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What Research Exists on Bisexual Parenting?

To establish the state of research in this area, we conducted a systematic literature review. Specifically, we searched the databases Medline, In Process Medline, Embase, CINAHL, PsycINFO, Gender Studies Database, Social Work Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, Social Science Abstracts, and LGBT Life from start dates to August 2011. Keywords used for each database are available from the authors upon request. Of the 422 total abstracts identified in this search, only 7 reported any findings or considerations specific to bisexual parents (see Table 6.1 for a listing of these studies). Below, we will describe the key themes identified in this literature. First, however, we wish to consider the reasons that may underlie the lack of research on bisexual parenting, relative to research on lesbian and gay parenting.

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Table 6.1 Resources identified in a literature search of bisexual parenting and family issues, 2011

Article	Focus	# of bisexual participants	Bi-specific findings
Articles from database searches			
Anders (2005)	Married father of teenage boy discusses the process of coming out to his son, and the boy's acceptance.	First-person account	• Coming out to a teenage child can be a complex and intimidating process, but the son was already aware of his father's sexuality and was very accepting.
Brand (2001)	A Dutch married man and father of two recounts coming out with his wife's encouragement and support, and his exploration of sexuality with another openly bisexual married man.	First-person account	• Doesn't discuss interactions with children or their reaction to his coming out, other than it was extremely stressful to come out to his sons and their girlfriends.
Costello (1997)	Exploring bisexual, gay, and lesbian parents' expectations about their children's sexual identity development and the role they intended to play in that process.	5 self-identified bisexual people (out of 18 participants)	• Suggests that family has less difficulty accepting bisexuality than they would other minority identities when participants come out but are still in a heterosexual marriage or relationship and have children. • One bisexual parent believed his child would grow up to be bisexual because he believes that everyone is bisexual.
Goldberg (2007)	Qualitative study exploring how the adult children of LGB parents negotiate disclosure of their parents' sexual orientation.	2 self-identified bisexual women with bisexual mothers (out of 42 participants)	• No differences noted between bisexual participants and others, but bisexual identity of participants is noted in supporting quotations for the theme "I won't hide (anymore)." • Having had parents who were not out to them made queer children want to come out themselves.
Mallon (2011)	Review of literature and policy related to LGBT adoption.	N/A	• Notes the lack of research on how child welfare agencies manage applications from bisexual people, or bisexual peoples' experiences during the application process.
Murray and McClintock (2005)	Examined whether a parent's nondisclosure of his or her homosexuality or bisexuality negatively affects self-esteem and anxiety in children, as measured in adulthood.	5 raised by bisexual fathers, 2 by bisexual mothers (as per the participant's report of the parent's sexual orientation) (out of 99 participants)	• Mostly collapses bisexual sample with lesbian/gay, including all analyses related to the primary outcomes. • Reports proportion of participants who are themselves sexual minority identified: 43% of the participants raised by bisexual parents and 38% of the participants raised by gay/lesbian parents. • Reports proportion of parents who divorced: 67% of the bisexual and 76% of the gay/lesbian parents.
Steele et al. (2008)	Purpose: to describe the mental health services used by women in the perinatal period and to identify potential correlates of mental health service.	14 self-identified bisexual women (out of 64 participants)	• Participants who conceived through sex with a man reported the highest rates of past year mental health service use and highest rates of unmet need for mental health services.

Materials identified from other sources, including reference lists of included articles, Internet searches and consultation with experts			
Blanco (2009)	Part of the "Children in our lives" theme issue of the Bi Women newsletter.	First-person account	• Motherhood as a site for activism, including activism related to bisexual issues. • Examines how the daily realities of parenting can get in the way of active involvement in bisexual community.
Cahill et al. (2003)	Analysis of major U.S. policy issues affected LGBT people, their partners, and children.	N/A	• Bisexual parents face discrimination in child custody and visitation cases, where negative stereotypes about bisexual people are sometimes used to justify denying custody or limiting visitation. Two specific US cases are described in which bisexual parents were denied custody of their children.
Eady et al. (2009)	Draws from a qualitative study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans adoption in Ontario to examine the experience of bisexual parents and prospective parents.	5 families including at least one parent who self-identified as bisexual (out of a total sample of 43 families)	• Bisexual participants anticipated and experienced that workers held stereotypic ideas about bisexuality that called into question their "fitness" as parents. • These experiences complicated decisions about whether or not to disclose their bisexual identities to workers (regardless of their partner status as different sex, same sex, or not partnered).
Firestein (2007)	Identifies key issues relevant to providing counseling to bisexual people.	Data drawn from a survey of over 2,000 self-identified bisexual and polyamorous people	• 38% of respondents reported that they were actively playing a part in raising children or stepchildren.
Gates et al. (2007)	Provides new information on gay, lesbian and bisexual adoption, and foster care from several U.S. government data sources.	Data from the National Survey of Family Growth (identity-based definition of sexual orientation)	• More bisexual than lesbian/gay individuals report a desire to have children. This is true for both men and women. • The authors also provided unpublished data from the same data set, indicating data showing that bisexual women were more likely to have given birth, and bisexual men more likely to have gotten someone pregnant, than their lesbian or gay counterparts, respectively (United States Department of Health and Human Services National Center for Health Statistics, 2002).
Johnson et al. (1987)	Describes parenting desires among a large nonclinical sample of lesbian and bisexual women.	424 self-identified bisexual women (together with 1,921 lesbians)	• 60.6% of bisexual women had considered having a child (58.8% of lesbians). • Bisexual women were more likely than lesbians to consider sex with a man as a potential method of conceiving, and less likely to consider donor insemination. • Only 2% of the total sample reported a successful pregnancy; all successful pregnancies among bisexual women resulted from sexual intercourse.
Lahey (1999)	Human rights, law, and sexuality issues in Canada.	N/A	• Suggests that bisexual identity is less "threatening" to the courts than lesbian and bisexual identity when it comes to custody and access; cites 3 cases in which bisexual parents were awarded custody.

(continued)

Table 6.1 (continued)

Article	Focus	# of bisexual participants	Bi-specific findings
Paiva et al. (2003)	Describes a study of sexuality and reproduction in 250 Brazilian men living with HIV.	38% reported sex with men at some time in their lives (number self-identifying as bisexual not reported)	• Desire for parenthood did not differ significantly between bisexual and heterosexual men.
Richman (2002)	"A study of meaning making and identity construction in child custody cases involving gay or lesbian parents."	N/A	• Describes 3 cases in which a parent petitioning for and trying to retain child custody was or was presumed to be bisexual. • Also notes the extent of erasure of bisexual identities in the family law system.
Ross et al. (2012)	Draws upon data from a mixed-methods study to examine the question of whether the experiences of bisexual mothers are comparable to those of lesbian mothers, with a particular focus on self-reported mental health, stress, and social support.	14 women who self-identified as bisexual; 14 women who reported a sexual minority identity and sex with a man in the past 5 years (incomplete overlap between these groups) out of a total sample of 64 sexual minority women	• Bisexual women reported poorer scores on assessments of mental health, substance use, social support, and experiences of perceived discrimination, relative to other women in the sample. • Differences were particularly pronounced for women who reported sexual activity with men in the past 5 years compared to women who did not. • Qualitative analyses highlighted experiences of invisibility and exclusion.
Wells (2011)	A mother discusses how her concerns as a parent were central in her shift toward a bisexual identity.	First-person account	• Highlights how parenting desires and/or experiences may be important in bisexual identity development.

Why Are Bisexual People Invisible in LGBT Parenting Research?

Before examining the invisibility of bisexual people in LGBT parenting research, it is first necessary to define the term "bisexual" for the purposes of our work. Sexual orientation is typically defined along one or more of the following axes: sexual attraction, sexual behavior, and self-identification (Parks, Hughes, & Werkmeister-Rozas, 2009). As noted by Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, and Michaels (1994), there is often discordance between these three domains: for example, a significant proportion of individuals reporting sexual activity with both men and women do not endorse a sexual minority identity (e.g., Meyer, Rossano, Ellis, & Bradford, 2002).

Bisexuality has been defined and measured in various ways, beginning with Kinsey's famous 7-point scale (within which bisexual individuals would fall between points 1 and 5, depending on the relative frequency of their heterosexual versus homosexual contacts; Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Subsequently, the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (Klein, 1993) was developed to enable a more comprehensive assessment of multiple domains of an individual's sexual orientation (including, but not limited to, attraction, behavior, and self-identification) for one's past, present, and ideal selves. This enabled identification of bisexual individuals on the basis of any one of his seven dimensions (e.g., not only those who self-identify as bisexual but also those who report sexual behavior with or attraction toward both men and women).

In light of the scarcity of research on this topic, we have chosen to utilize a broad definition of bisexuality which includes all those who identify as bisexual and/or who report lifetime attraction toward or sexual experiences with men and women (and for some bisexual people, transgender individuals as well). While we acknowledge that the breadth of this definition limits our capacity to draw specific conclusions, at this stage, we are limited by the extant research. However, wherever possible, we note the definition of bisexuality employed by authors of the original studies included in our review.

The absence of specific investigation into the experiences of bisexual parents is consistent with the relative lack of bisexual-specific research in the areas of LGBT psychology, health, social work, and other social sciences. For example, within the extensive body of research examining mental health disparities associated with minority sexual identities (see King et al., 2008 for a meta-analysis), only recently have studies begun to separate out bisexual individuals from their lesbian and gay counterparts. Importantly, when this is done, most studies show that across specific health outcomes, disparities are most pronounced for the bisexual group, relative to both gay/lesbian and heterosexual comparators (e.g., Goldsen, Kim, Barkan, Balsam, & Mincer, 2010). Indeed, a growing body of evidence suggests that bisexual identity and/or reports of sexual activity with both men and women are associated with poor outcomes across a variety of health indicators (Brennan, Ross, Dobinson, Veldhuizen, & Steele, 2010; Steele, Ross, Dobinson, Veldhuizen, & Tinmouth, 2009). Experience of exclusion from both heterosexual and gay/lesbian communities is one factor that has been postulated to account for these differences (Ross, Dobinson, & Eady, 2010).

This invisibility in research cannot be attributed to small numbers of bisexual people available to participate in research. As Yoshino (2000) has reviewed, all of the major studies of adult sexuality published between 1948 and 1994 found that bisexuality (variously defined on the basis of identity or behavior) is at least as common, or more common, than exclusive homosexuality. Although more recent North American epidemiological research suggests that the relative prevalence of bisexuality versus homosexuality may depend on gender (with bisexuality being more common than exclusive homosexuality among women but not men; see Mosher, Chandra, & Jones, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2004), it is clear that there is not a substantial difference in the prevalence of bisexuality versus exclusive homosexuality in the population as a whole.

Considering the prevalence of bisexuality, and that the little available literature in other disciplines

suggests important distinctions between bisexual and gay/lesbian people, why is there such a striking lack of research in the area of bisexual parenting? We argue that social constructionist theoretical perspectives, both as they apply to the social construction of sexual identities, and to the social construction of family, may be relevant. Social constructionist theory examines how power and other social processes influence the creation of meaning, theories, and common knowledge (Kitzinger, D'Augelli, & Patterson, 1995; Ross et al., 2010). This is in contrast to essentialist paradigms which assume that phenomena such as sexual identities are biologically determined and immutable (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007). In contemporary White European cultures, sexual orientation is typically constructed to be dichotomous in nature, with the only legitimate options being heterosexuality or homosexuality (Barker & Langdridge, 2008). This is a form of structural monosexism (i.e., beliefs, actions, and structures that promote or presume heterosexuality or homosexuality to the exclusion of bisexuality; Yoshino, 2000). This monosexist construction renders bisexuality (a) invisible, (b) irrelevant, and (c) illegitimate. We consider each of these constructions in turn.

The social invisibility of bisexual people and communities has been documented in analysis of media portrayals (Meyer, 2009). With respect to media in the UK, Barker and her colleagues note "that there is very little overt media representation of bisexuality" (Barker, Bowes-Catton, Iantaffi, Cassidy, & Brewer, 2008, p. 145). Indeed, when a character shifts from having different-sex to same-sex relationships (or vice versa), that person's sexual orientation is portrayed as having changed—bisexuality is rarely mentioned, nor does it appear to be considered as an option for characters in film or television. Consider, for example, the award-winning film *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2006) in which the two lead characters are consistently described as gay in media reviews and analysis, despite the fact that both also have female partners.

Qualitative research has captured the implications of this bisexual invisibility as it relates to the experiences of bisexual people. For example, in our study of 55 bisexual people from Ontario, Canada, participants described the extent to which bisexual invisibility contributed to challenges in everyday interactions with important people in their lives, as well as struggles in coming to terms with their bisexual identities (Ross et al., 2010). These experiences are consistent with first person accounts included in some of the earliest anthologies related to bisexuality (e.g., Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1991; Weise, 1992), suggesting surprisingly little shift in the intervening decades with respect to social (in)visibility of bisexuality.

Invisibility of bisexual identity can take different forms depending upon the partnership status of an individual bisexual person. For example, bisexual people with same-sex partners are often invisible as bisexuals, but visible as nonheterosexual and therefore are recognized within the broader lesbian/gay/bisexual community. Bisexual people with different-sex partners, on the other hand, are often invisible both as bisexual and as nonheterosexual. This is particularly the case if they are partnered with someone who identifies as heterosexual or if they participate in normative institutions such as marriage or family building (Ross, Siegel, Dobinson, Epstein, & Steele, 2012). Further, bisexual parents with different-sex partners may experience or perceive exclusion from the lesbian or gay community due to the assumption of "heterosexual privilege"; that is, the assumption that by virtue of their ability to "pass" as heterosexual, bisexual people do not experience discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Implications of this assumption for different-sex partnered bisexual parents are further discussed below.

Bisexual identities are often also constructed to be irrelevant. That is, there is an implicit assumption that the experiences of bisexual people will be the same as those of either heterosexual or gay/lesbian individuals, depending on the sex of their current partner (if they are partnered) (Yoshino, 2000). As described above, this assumption has been noted in LGBT research, wherein bisexual individuals are routinely collapsed into categories with lesbian/gay individuals, as though there is no important conceptual or

theoretical distinction between them (Rodriguez Rust, 2009). Our systematic literature review found that this assumption pervades the majority of research on LGBT parenting, in which bisexual people (particularly those who are parenting with a same-sex partner) are most often collapsed together with gay or lesbian participants, without any analysis of the ways in which their experiences or outcomes may be different. Experiences of same-sex partnered bisexual people are assumed to be the same as those of lesbian/gay individuals, and therefore lumped under the "lesbian/gay" umbrella (Ulrich, 2011). Different-sex partnered bisexual people, on the other hand, are often considered by many in the lesbian and gay community to experience "heterosexual privilege" associated with their different-sex partnerships, which complicates access to support within these communities (Ault, 1994).

With respect to the social construction of bisexuality as illegitimate, those who do not fit into heterosexual or lesbian/gay categories are constructed to be in some way abnormal, unhealthy, or unstable. For example, there is a pervasive belief that bisexuality exists only as a transition stage to a "true" lesbian/gay identity (Firestein, 1996), and research in psychology and other fields has long perpetuated the lack of legitimacy of bisexual identities (see Brewster & Moradi, 2010 for critiques of some of this work). In a telephone survey examining attitudes toward various marginalized or politicized communities, Herek (2002) found that probes regarding attitudes toward bisexual people yielded more negative affect than those regarding almost any group, including people with AIDS, lesbian and gay people, and people of various racial and ethnic minority groups.

Monosexist constructions of bisexuality as an illegitimate sexual identity, taken together with social constructions of family that prioritize the heterosexual, nuclear family model, may contribute to stigmatizing assumptions about the "fitness" of bisexual people as parents. Two common assumptions about bisexuality in particular may conflict with social constructions of family in this manner. First, the assumption that bisexual people are unable to maintain long-term monogamous relationships, together with the assumption that polyamory is in some way damaging to children, may produce the conclusion that bisexual people will be unable to model healthy relationships for their children (see Chap. 8, for a discussion of experiences of polyamorous parents). Others have examined the ways in which the constructs of "family" and "parent" are desexualized (Oliver, 2010), to the extent that sexual minority parents might bear "an additional layer of scrutiny of their parenting, that of being (presumably) a sexually active adult while parenting" (Weber, 2010, p. 381). Common constructions about bisexuality position this orientation as overly sexualized, to the degree that healthy, committed relationships are considered impossible or undesirable for bisexual people (Ulrich, 2011). As a result, the identity of "bisexual parent" appears to sexualize the notion of family, offending those who purport to operate in defense of "family values." For example, in our qualitative study of the experiences of bisexual people applying for adoption, one couple described the concerns of adoption workers about who would be caring for the children while a polyamorous bisexual woman married to a man spent time with her female partner (Eady, Ross, Epstein, & Anderson, 2009).

Second, the prevailing belief that bisexuality is a transitional identity and therefore that bisexual people are psychologically unstable or immature, together with assumptions that individuals with mental health challenges are unable to parent appropriately (Nicholson, Sweeney, & Geller, 1998), may call into question the mental "fitness" of bisexuals to parent. We observed this assumption in action at a recent workshop on LGBT adoption, when workers stated that based on their training, they understood bisexuality to be a transition stage and so would have concerns about whether a bisexual-identified person would be "mature" enough to be a suitable candidate for adoption.

These assumptions must be considered in the context of a hostile social environment, which historically (and in some regions, currently) has dictated a need for research aiming to "prove" the adequacy of LGBT people as parents to assist in custody cases, access to adoption and fertility

services, and other political battles. As Epstein (2009) has discussed, 30 years ago, the vast majority of lesbians who sought custody of their children in the courts lost; many more likely relinquished custody to avoid having to go through the courts. Recently, proponents of Proposition 8 in the state of California drew heavily upon (unsubstantiated) fears about the impact of same-sex marriage on the well-being of children (Bajko, 2010; Langbein & Yost, 2009). In such an environment, researchers might have concern (whether conscious or not) that investigations about bisexual parents, constructed as psychologically unstable and sexually deviant, might uncover data suggesting "inadequate" parenting by members of LGBT communities—results that could have dangerous political consequences. However, both scholars and community activists have called for a shift in research paradigms away from those which construct differences as deficits, and toward models that explore and celebrate the ways in which LGBT people may parent differently from our heterosexual counterparts (e.g., Epstein, 2009; Goldberg, 2010; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). As we challenge monosexist social constructions about bisexual identity, research exploring the unique issues and experiences of bisexual parents is warranted, and truly overdue.

What Do We Know About the Experiences of Bisexual Parents?

In this section, we draw from the six studies identified in our literature review, two recent relevant studies conducted by our team, six additional sources identified through consultations with bisexual community leaders and academics, and the results of a broader Internet search of non-peer reviewed material, including books, first person accounts, and community newsletters. Based upon these diverse data sources, we speculate about some of the key issues and experiences of bisexual parents that may be worthy of additional research. We have organized these ideas into the following themes (a) statistics regarding the number of bisexual parents; (b) outcomes in children of bisexual parents; (c) disclosure of bisexual identity; (d) experiences of bisexual people with systems and supports; (e) health and well-being of bisexual parents; and (f) relationships between parenting/parenting desires and bisexual identity development. Below, we discuss each of these themes in turn.

Statistics Regarding the Number of Bisexual Parents

One of the earliest studies to report specific findings about bisexual parents examined parenting desires among bisexual women and lesbians recruited in a nonclinical setting (Johnson, Smith, & Guenther, 1987). The authors found that more than 50% of each sexual orientation group had considered having a child since identifying as lesbian or bisexual. The preferred means for having a child differed between the two groups, with lesbians more likely to favor adoption or donor insemination and bisexual women more likely to consider intercourse with a man. However, in this early study, only 2% of the participants reported success in having a child at the time that they were surveyed.

More recent data suggest that many bisexual people have, or want to have, children, and indeed that bisexual men and women may be more likely than gay men or lesbians to have children. For example, in a survey of over 2,000 bisexual people (all of whom also identified as polyamorous), 38% reported actively playing a part in raising children or stepchildren (Firestein, 2007). These numbers are consistent with data from the National Survey of Family Growth, in which both bisexual men and women were more likely than their gay and lesbian counterparts to report that they desired children (Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007) and that they had given birth (44.8% of bisexual women vs. 34.9% of lesbians) or gotten someone pregnant (26.6% of bisexual men vs. 15.8% of gay men) (United States Department of Health and Human Services National Center for Health Statistics, 2002). Finally, a study of 250 Brazilian men with HIV found that there was no difference between the

bisexual and heterosexual men in their sample with respect to their desire to father children: Just under half of the total sample reported that they wished to have children in the future (Paiva, Filipe, Santos, Lima, & Segurado, 2003). Thus, available data indicate that at least as many bisexual people as gay/lesbian people have children or desire to parent.

Outcomes in Children of Bisexual Parents

There is a vast body of literature examining a variety of outcomes in the children of lesbian and gay parents (Tasker, 2005). This research has primarily been used to demonstrate that children raised in families headed by same-sex couples are "just like" those raised by heterosexual families, to protect the custody rights of lesbian and gay parents in the courts and support adoption rights and access to assisted reproduction services. Children of bisexual parents appear to have been largely left out of this dialogue: They may be invisible among both those families presumed to be lesbian- or gay-parent led, and those families presumed to be heterosexual led. In an article reviewing considerations for those who might encounter LGBT parents in the family court system, Tye (2003) notes the lack of specific research on the children of bisexual (as well as transgender) people, concluding that studies identified in his review "that have specifically included bisexual or transgender categories have shown no significant differences that would negatively affect parenting capacity" (p. 94).

Children of bisexual parents are likely to be affected by heteronormative systems, such as schools (Sears, 2005), as well as homophobic reactions to disclosure of a parent's sexual orientation (Snow, 2004), just as children of gay and lesbian parents are. Although we were not able to identify any research exploring the school experiences of children of bisexual parents specifically, research on the experiences of children of LGBT parents more broadly suggests that school-aged children who bully others on the basis of parental sexual orientation do not have a sophisticated understanding of these concepts: Children may experience violence and harassment on the basis of any perception that they or their families deviate from sexual or gender norms, regardless of whether or how they actually do (Epstein, Idems, & Schwartz, 2009). While more research is needed, it is likely that children of bisexual parents share many of the same anxieties as children of lesbian/gay parents. In particular, the children may have concerns regarding the potential discovery of their parents' sexual orientation, resulting assumptions about their own sexual orientation, and bullying or harassment that they may then experience.

Our search identified only two studies reporting data related to outcomes in children raised by bisexual people; both specifically examining the actual or anticipated sexual identity of children raised by bisexual parents. In the first, Costello (1997) conducted a qualitative study to examine how LGB parents conceptualize their children's sexual orientations. Of her total sample of 18 participants, 5 identified as bisexual. The overall conclusion of this study was that LGB parents are "willing [to] actively … foster a sexual identity different from their own" (Costello, 1997, p. 63) in their children, and there is no indication in the author's argument that this conclusion is likely to differ depending on the specific sexual orientation of the sexual minority parent. However, only 1 of the 18 participants reported anticipating that their child was likely to not be heterosexual; this bisexual father expressed that he expected that his daughter would be bisexual, as he considered this to be the universal, essential sexual orientation.

The second study to report on the sexual orientation of children raised by bisexual parents was conducted by Murray and McClintock (2005). These authors studied the outcomes in adult children of LGB people who had concealed their sexual orientation during the participants' childhoods. Of the 36 participants who reported an LGB parent, 7 reported having at least one bisexual parent (7 bisexual fathers and 2 bisexual mothers). Only a few of the outcomes presented in this study are reported separately for participants with bisexual versus lesbian or gay parents. However, the authors do report the proportion of

participants who are themselves sexual minority identified (43% of the participants raised by bisexual parents and 38% of the participants raised by gay/lesbian parents). No statistical significance testing was conducted, as this was not a primary outcome of interest in this study.

Although the body of research examining outcomes in children of lesbian and gay parents has been rightly critiqued for its focus on establishing similarities with children raised by heterosexual parents (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001), it is curious that the children of bisexual parents are largely invisible in this debate. This omission could be because the presumed "danger" to children is implicitly understood to be associated with same-sex sexual behavior, rather than sexual minority identity, thus rendering the parent's specific identity irrelevant. Perhaps as a result of this assumption, much of the research on LGBT parenting has focused on the structure of the couple relationship (i.e., same sex), rather than the specific sexual orientation of the partners. As discussed below, it may also be that bisexuality less frequently arises as an issue in the courts, perhaps due to parents' strategic choices about how to present their identities (e.g., opting for a better-understood lesbian or gay identity, rather than a socially contested bisexual one). However, as indicated by the emerging literature on strengths of children raised by lesbian and gay parents (Goldberg, 2007; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001), there may be advantages to being raised by bisexual parents that are worthy of study. For example, in one first-person account, the daughter of a bisexual father describes herself as knowing more about the world and being more open-minded than her friends, as a result of her father's sexual identity (Jones & Jones, 1991). Additional research with the children of bisexual parents, drawing upon a lens that explores and celebrates potential differences associated with being raised by a bisexual parent, would be of interest.

Disclosure of Bisexual Identity

Disclosure of bisexual identity may be a primary issue that distinguishes experiences of bisexual parents from those of their lesbian and gay counterparts. Unlike heterosexual and gay/lesbian identity, bisexual identity cannot be presumed based on the gender of one's current sexual or romantic partner. As such, invisibility of bisexual identity is a challenge faced by many bisexual people, regardless of whether they are currently in a same-sex or different-sex relationship (if they are partnered). A consequence of this invisibility is the need to explicitly disclose one's bisexual identity to anyone in one's personal or social circle one wishes to make aware. In the family and parenting context, this might include one's partner, children, and members of the child's social circle (e.g., the parents of friends, teachers, or daycare personnel), among others.

One of the primary relationship concerns of bisexual people relates to issues around disclosure of bisexual identity to partners and potential dating partners (e.g., McClellan, 2006; Ross et al., 2010). As a result of the commonly held belief that bisexual people are incapable of committed, monogamous relationships, such disclosure may spur insecurities about fidelity and may discourage potential dating partners from pursuing the relationship (McClellan, 2006). In the context of same-sex partner relationships, disclosure is further complicated by the biphobia that exists within some pockets of the broader lesbian and gay community (Yoshino, 2000): Some bisexual people have reported being turned down even for a first date solely on the basis of their bisexuality (Ross et al., 2010). Similarly, disclosure in the context of different-sex partnered relationships can be challenging as a result of homophobic or biphobic attitudes and beliefs on the part of heterosexual-identified partners or potential dating partners (Li, Dobinson, & Ross, 2012). As a result of these challenges, some bisexual people may choose not to disclose; however, partner support of bisexual identity has been cited by bisexual people as an important factor in maintaining a state of emotional well-being (Ross et al., 2010). For example, in his first-person account of coming out as bisexual in the Netherlands, Brand (2001) describes the key role of the support of his wife in his coming out process. Strategies for and implications of disclosure

and nondisclosure of bisexual identity to partners merit additional research; of particular interest will be whether and how parenting or desire to parent may affect these experiences.

Some first-person accounts (e.g., Anders, 2005) describe positive experiences of disclosure of bisexual identity to older (i.e., preteen and teenaged) children. We could identify no research exploring experiences of bisexual parents disclosing or wishing to disclose their identity to younger children. For monogamous bisexual people, disclosure of identity to young children may be challenging depending on the child's developmental stage: While many young children can quite easily understand differences in family constellations (i.e., families with two mommies, two daddies, or other combinations relevant to LGBT-led families), the concepts of romantic partnerships or sexual identity may be more difficult to grasp, particularly if one's story of bisexual identity also requires the child to understand a temporal sequence (i.e., having had partners of another gender sometime in the past). Further, while excellent age-appropriate resources are available to assist in discussions about lesbian- and gay-led families [e.g., children's stories such as *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson, 2005)], we are aware of no such resources discussing bisexual parent-led families. Research is needed to understand experiences of disclosure of bisexual identity of a parent from the perspective of both parents and children.

Like many lesbian, gay, and trans parents, bisexual parents may also wish to disclose their identity to other important figures in their children's lives, including teachers or childcare providers. We could identify no research that has specifically examined experiences of bisexual people in this regard. Although research and resources are available that purport to speak to issues for "LGBT" parents (e.g., Ryan & Martin, 2000; Youth Leadership and Action Program of COLAGE, 2003), these presume that the experiences of bisexual parents (and in many cases, trans parents as well) will simply echo what is known about the experiences of lesbian and gay parents. While bisexual parents likely share with lesbian and gay parents the impact of societal homophobia and heterosexism on these disclosures, they may additionally be affected by common monosexist attitudes and beliefs, as described above. Research is needed to understand these experiences, and particularly to examine whether experiences might differ depending on whether parents are same-sex partnered, different-sex partnered, multiple partnered, or not partnered. For example, do same-sex partnered bisexual parents feel it is necessary or desirable to disclose their bisexual identity, when by virtue of its composition their family is already read as queer? How do different-sex partnered bisexual parents experience having their children's teachers, their children's friends' parents, and so on, assume them to be heterosexual? How do race, class, and other marginalized identities additionally interact with these issues to influence decisions about disclosure?

Our literature review identified two empirical studies examining experiences of disclosure for bisexual parents. Neither of these studies examined experiences of bisexual parents disclosing their identities to their children or others in the parenting sphere; rather, they both considered the extent to which parenting or family experiences might have an impact on experiences of disclosure in other settings. In the study by Costello (1997) described above, the analysis of participants' narratives related to coming out to their families of origin includes a quote from a bisexual-identified participant who came out to her parents to prepare them for a forthcoming episode of the *Geraldo* show on bisexuality, on which she was to appear. Costello speculated as follows:

> Unlike all the other subjects, she came out in the context of a marriage to a person of the opposite sex. She was already 35 and the mother of a 2-year-old child. Much of the threat to parental values which undergirds the coming out trauma was thus attenuated in her case, which would explain why her parents may not have reacted with much distress to her announcement of bisexuality. (p. 72)

As such, Costello (1997) speculates that the experiences of bisexual people coming out to their families of origin may be influenced by the extent to which they conform to socially constructed notions of family (being married to a different-sex partner, with children).

Goldberg (2007) conducted a qualitative study with 42 adults raised by LGB parents, to investigate their experiences of disclosure of their parent's sexual orientation. Of the sample of 42 women, 2 were raised by a bisexual mother. One of the themes of the study was "I won't hide (anymore)," wherein participants reported that having had their parents not disclose their orientation, or ask the children not to disclose about their parents' identities, during childhood, motivated them to disclose about their families and avoid secrecy as adults. A quote from a bisexual participant raised by a bisexual mother is provided in support of this, although the theme is also supported with data from participants with parents of other orientations. Taken together, these data suggest that research is warranted to examine whether and how the parenting and family relationships of bisexual people may affect their decisions to disclose and experiences of identity disclosure for both parents and children.

Experiences of Bisexual People with Systems and Supports

We could find little literature examining the implications of disclosure of bisexual identity within social structures and systems related to child care and child rearing. With respect to legal and child custody matters, Cahill and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute (2003) note that "bisexual parents face discrimination in child custody and visitation cases, where negative stereotypes about bisexual people are sometimes used to justify denying custody or limiting visitation" (p. 74). The authors went on to describe a 2001 custody case from Mississippi, in which custody was awarded to the heterosexual father instead of the bisexual mother, and "the morality of the mother's lifestyle" (p. 75) was noted as one important factor in the judge's decision. In the Canadian context, Lahey (1999) suggests that bisexual parents do not face the same barriers in custody and access that lesbian and gay parents often do. She described three cases in which a parent's bisexuality was a consideration in a custody decision, and in all three cases custody was awarded to the bisexual parent (two mothers and one father). She concluded that bisexual identity may be perceived as "less threatening" (p. 134) by the courts, relative to a lesbian or gay identity. As Richman (2002) notes, however, bisexuality is considered much less frequently than homosexuality in the family courts. Based on her review of the legal literature Richman reports: "Even when a litigant self-identified as bisexual, she or he was thought of and treated as homosexual" (p. 301).

Mallon (2011) has recently noted the lack of research examining experiences of bisexual people in the adoption system. However, experiences in our Canadian study of adoption by bisexual-identified people suggest that stereotypes and beliefs about bisexual parents may create significant, though not insurmountable, barriers for them in their attempts to prove their worth as parents or potential parents (Eady et al., 2009). For this secondary analysis of our study of 43 LGBT individuals or families who had adopted or applied to adopt a child in Ontario, we examined in depth the interviews of the 5 participants who identified as bisexual, to identify key themes and experiences. Taken together, these narratives suggest that many adoption workers have little understanding about bisexuality and bring common negative or stereotypical beliefs and assumptions to their encounters with bisexual potential parents. In particular, the dual assumption that bisexual people are not capable of committed, monogamous relationships and therefore cannot create a stable home for a child was both experienced and anticipated by these participants as they negotiated the child welfare system. For example, one participant, a single bisexual woman, opted not to disclose her past male partners and to identify herself as lesbian throughout the adoption process, anticipating that her adoption worker would believe these stereotypes about bisexuality, and as such would be more supportive of her if she believed her to be a lesbian.

There is also a lack of research examining the extent to which bisexual people experience a community of parenting support. Some bisexual people may feel discomfort in predominantly heterosexual parenting spaces, due to concerns

about homophobia or heterosexism. However, they may also find LGBT-specific parenting spaces, if they are available in their communities, to be unwelcoming. For different-sex partnered bisexual people, receiving peer support from same-sex parents may be challenging due to a lack of shared experiences, for example, with respect to methods of conceiving a child or experiences negotiating the school system as an in/visibly queer family. Further, bisexual parents with different-sex partners may experience or perceive a lack of community among lesbian or gay parents due to the assumption of "heterosexual privilege," as described above. In particular, lesbian and gay people, as well as some service providers, may think that different-sex partnered bisexual parents do not require or merit accommodations that attempt to address concerns related to sexual orientation (e.g., LGBT-specific parenting programs and resources). The extent to which bisexual parents access parenting supports within both LGBT and heterosexual parenting communities requires further research, including research to determine whether parents' current partner status (same sex, different sex, none, or multiple) is a determinant of perceived or received support.

Health and Well-Being Among Bisexual Parents

We could identify no literature other than that published by our own team (Ross et al., 2010; Steele, Ross, Epstein, Strike, & Goldfinger, 2008) that has examined the health or mental health of bisexual parents. Steele et al. (2008) examined patterns of mental health service utilization among a sample of 64 sexual minority women who were currently attempting to conceive a child, pregnant, or parenting a child less than 1 year of age. Approximately 22% of the sample identified as bisexual. Although most analyses in this study involved pooling all of the sexual minority women, the authors examined mode of conception as a potential predictor of mental health service utilization. These analyses revealed that participants who conceived through sex with a man (regardless of their sexual identity) had the highest rates of past year mental health service use (57.1% vs. 37.1% for those who conceived with the aid of a sperm bank and 15.0% for those who conceived via a known donor). Women who conceived through sex with a man also reported the highest rates of unmet need for mental health services (35.5% vs. 17.6% and 25% for women who conceived via a sperm bank and known donor, respectively).

In a subsequent analysis of the same data set, we examined the mental health and social support of the 14 bisexual-identified participants and the 14 participants who reported sex with men in the past 5 years [there was some, but incomplete, overlap between these two groups (Ross et al., 2012)]. Bisexual-identified women reported significantly poorer scores on instruments assessing overall mental health, anxiety, and relationship satisfaction, relative to other sexual minority women. Women who reported sex with men in the past 5 years similarly reported poorer scores on assessments of overall physical health, overall mental health, depression, anxiety, drug use, social support, and perceived discrimination. Qualitative interviews were also conducted with five bisexual-identified women and eight women who reported sex with men in the past 5 years (these women endorsed a variety of sexual identities; most commonly bisexual, Two-Spirit, and queer). Examination of the interview data highlighted experiences of invisibility and exclusion, which may contribute to the observed poor health outcomes. In particular, women who were partnered with men described the complex emotions they experienced in response to their experiences as passing for a "normal" heterosexual, nuclear family in the context of pregnancy or parenting. It may be that different-sex partnered bisexual women are particularly likely to experience invisibility and exclusion from the broader LGBT community, which in turn may have important implications for their mental health.

The findings of these two studies are consistent with research indicating that bisexual people in the general population typically have poorer health and mental health outcomes than those of people of other sexual orientations (e.g., Goldsen

et al., 2010; Hughes, Szalacha, & Mcnair, 2010; Tjepkema, 2008), as well as research identifying the early parenting years as a time of risk for mental health problems in predominantly heterosexual samples (Yonkers, Vigod, & Ross, 2011). Qualitative research suggests that experiences of invisibility and exclusion may contribute to the mental health disparities experienced by bisexual people (Ross et al., 2010). However, research is required to examine how this is experienced specifically in a parenting context, as well as how experiences of poor health and mental health may be related to parenting decisions and experiences for bisexual people (e.g., choosing whether or not to have children in the context of poor physical or mental health; implications for health-related quality of life among bisexual parents).

Parenting and Bisexual Identity Development

Finally, there is some evidence, albeit very limited, that parenting and parenting desires may play a role in bisexual identity development or sexual activity for some sexual minority women. For example, one bisexual participant in a mixed-methods study of sexual minority mothers by Ross et al. (2012) described her present choice to be in a primary relationship with a man as being predominantly about her desire to have children. In a first-person account in a community newsletter, Wells (2011) described how her desire to connect with someone committed to nurturing her child led her to shift away from her previous lesbian identity to consider potential male partners. In another issue of this same newsletter, a bisexual mother described how motherhood acts as an important site for her political activism: Concern about the world her daughter would grow up to inhabit, as well as a desire to educate her about social justice issues, led her to become more involved than she might otherwise have in various activist and advocacy activities, including activities related to queer and bisexual issues (Blanco, 2009). At the same time, she considered the extent to which the daily realities of parenting can reduce one's involvement in and connection to bisexual communities. The extent to which other bisexual women, as well as bisexual men, experience these same advantages and challenges of parenting in relation to bisexual community involvement requires study.

Where Do We Go from Here? Future Directions

In summary, our systematic literature review has identified a striking lack of research on the experiences of bisexual parents. Further, our review of the broader literature suggests a number of potential issues and concerns that may be unique to or differentially experienced by bisexual parents. Research specifically attending to the experiences of bisexual parents is therefore warranted. While this will ideally take the form of studies specifically focused on research questions relevant to bisexual parents and family issues, we also encourage researchers working in the area of LGBT parenting more broadly to identify opportunities to contribute to this body of knowledge. In particular, we encourage researchers to include sufficient numbers of bisexual parents in their studies to permit for stratified analyses, to identify issues that are unique to bisexual parents. Also, greater representation of bisexual parents in future research may reveal potentially interesting and important differences between bisexual parents and other sexual minority (e.g., lesbian/gay identified) parents.

We have identified here several important areas for future research on bisexual parenting and family issues. However, it will be necessary for such research to carefully consider the diversity of experiences encapsulated within the umbrella of bisexual identity or experience. For example, some bisexual people (like some heterosexual, lesbian, and gay people) may conceptualize family in ways that run counter to the socially constructed nuclear family model. In other words, some bisexual people may choose not to marry or have children; may raise children to whom they are not biologically related; or may raise children in the context of alternative family forms, such as polyamorous families. The extent

to which choices in this regard are related to personal constructions of bisexual identity is worthy of study. This means that examination of the ways in which bisexual identity informs beliefs and decisions about family and parenting is an important area of study, including among those bisexual people who are not parenting in the traditional contexts typically captured in parenting and family studies research.

Critical in future research will be consideration of the further diversity within the broad category of bisexual parents, and careful definition/description of who is included within the category of bisexual. For example, we have defined bisexuality very broadly to include those who identify as bisexual, and those who report attraction to and/or sexual activity with both men and women; the experiences of individuals who do endorse a bisexual identity versus those who do not may differ. Experiences of male, female, and trans bisexual people are similarly likely to differ significantly based on socially constructed ideas about gender and parenting, as well as gendered notions of sexuality. As noted above, partner status of bisexual parents may also determine their experiences in important ways. Intersections with other important identities, including race, class, and ability, among others, will shape the ways in which bisexuality affects parenting and family experiences. It is notable that very few of the first-person accounts about experiences of bisexual parenting have taken up these important intersections (see Jones & Jones, 1991 for an exception). Consideration of these complex and rich intersections will help to illuminate the breadth of parenting and family experiences within the bisexual community.

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