University of Northern Colorado
Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC

Dissertations | Student Work

12-1-2015

All Families Are Unique: Experiences of Lesbian-Parented Families

Rachel Tova Gall
University of Northern Colorado

Follow this and additional works at: https://digscholarship.unco.edu/dissertations

Recommended Citation
Gall, Rachel Tova, "All Families Are Unique: Experiences of Lesbian-Parented Families" (2015). *Dissertations*. 298.
https://digscholarship.unco.edu/dissertations/298

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. For more information, please contact Nicole.Webber@unco.edu.

© 2015

RACHEL TOVA GALL

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

ALL FAMILIES ARE UNIQUE: EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN-PARENTED FAMILIES

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Rachel Tova Gall

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Department of Applied Psychology and Counselor Education
Counseling Psychology

December 2015

This Dissertation by: Rachel Tova Gall

Entitled: *All Families are Unique: Experiences of Lesbian-Parented Families*

has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in Department of Applied Psychology and Counselor Education, Program of Counseling Psychology

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee:

____

Basilia Softas-Nall, Ph.D., Research Advisor

____

Jeffrey Rings, Ph.D., Committee Member

____

Robyn S. Hess, Ph.D., Committee Member

____

Lory Clukey, Ph.D., Psy.D., RN, Faculty Representative

Date of Dissertation Defense June 5, 2015

Accepted by the Graduate School

____

Linda L. Black, Ed.D.
Associate Provost and Dean
Graduate School and International Admissions

ABSTRACT

Gall, Rachel Tova. *All Families are Unique: Experiences of Lesbian-Parented Families*. Published Doctor of Philosophy dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2015.

This study explored the experiences of families with lesbian mothers and elementary school-aged children residing in metropolitan areas of the United States. This phenomenology aimed to transcend comparative and binary research to include the voices of sexual minorities and children. Eight whole-family interviews were conducted in alignment with the study's systemic-constructivist approach. A number of themes emerged from the data that were generally consistent with prior research. Mothers were intentional about the communities in which they surrounded themselves, the process of having children, and having discussions with children about potential discrimination. Participants saw themselves as advocates and were typically out within their communities, garnering generally positive or neutral reactions from others. Families also identified assumptions others had made about them and assumptions they had made about others. Children identified their perceptions of gender roles, and mothers struggled with their beliefs that their children should have male and female influence. Mothers noted the salience of their identity as mothers as opposed to sexual orientation in their day-to-day life. Finally, families experienced a dialectical tension between wanting to be perceived as normal yet finding uniqueness in difference. Suggestions for counseling psychologists include cautioning against

making assumptions of sameness or difference and helping families identify and deconstruct internalized oppressive beliefs. It is recommended that future research include a movement away from comparisons and socially constructed binaries and toward a complex understanding of the diversity of all families so psychologists may be knowledgeable and effective therapists and advocates.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my participants—the families who allowed me into their homes and lives. Thank you for the mugs of tea, thank you for your honesty, and thank you for your willingness to tackle big and even uncomfortable ideas in the comfort of your living rooms.

Dr. Softas, in all the roles you have been in during my time at the University of Northern Colorado—teacher, supervisor, research advisor, dissertation chair—none have been as important as your mentorship. Thank you for nurturing my ideas and interests, challenging me to do my best every step of the way, and for giving me support when I needed it most.

Dr. Rings, thank you for your keen eye for detail as well as your unending support and encouragement. You have often had more confidence in me than I have had in myself. Dr. Hess, thank you for your flexibility and for stepping in in a pinch. Your expertise in working with children was invaluable. Dr. Clukey, thank you for your incredible depth of knowledge in qualitative research and your time a few summers ago helping me jumpstart this process. Geri, thank you not only for your expertise as a peer reviewer but for your mentorship throughout this program. I am proud to follow in your footsteps as a systemic psychologist.

To my incredible friends and sisters by choice, Em and Dayna, your strength, wisdom, and perspective have inspired me during moments that felt like too much. I am honored to have gone through this journey with you and to call you my colleagues.

Thank you to my entire family, whose home base is in Seattle yet is spread out across the world. I have experienced your support in many ways and am proud to continue the legacy of education, *tikun olam*, and advocacy that we value so highly. And especially, to my beautiful mother who has taught me unwavering courage, optimism, and determination in the face of far greater challenges than dissertations.

Finally, to my sweet husband, Dimachka, who has waited with support, humor, and endless encouragement for over a decade for me to be out of school: I am home for good.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION 1

Background and Context
Rationale
Intended Audience
Statement of Purpose
Research Question
Definitions
Limitations of the Study
Summary

II. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 16

Theory
Experiences as Part of a Minority Group
Changing American Attitudes Toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Individuals
Lesbian and Gay Couple Relationships
Parenting and Children in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer-Parented Families
Therapy with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer-Parented Families
Uniqueness and Strengths of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer-Parented Families
Gaps in the Literature
Summary

CHAPTER

III. METHODOLOGY 68

Introduction
Theoretical Framework
Methodology
Researcher Stance
Pilot Study
Research Methods
Ethical Considerations
Rigor in Qualitative Research
Summary

IV. RESULTS 98

Introduction
Within-Case Analysis
Cross-Case Analysis (Emergent Themes)
Intentionality of Parenting Decisions
Advocacy and Visibility
Times Are Changing: Acknowledgment that it is A Different World
Acknowledgment of Biases: Assumptions Are a Two-Way Street
Questioning the Relevance of Gender to Parenting
Normality and Intersectionality: We're the Same, It's Just Two Women
Reflections
Trustworthiness
Conclusion

V. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION 198

Introduction
Overview and Purpose of the Study
Summary and Findings and Relationship with Current Literature
Implications
Limitations
Future Directions for Counseling Psychology Research
Concluding Thoughts and Reflections

REFERENCES 249

APPENDIX

A INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD 263

B RECRUITMENT LETTER 266

C CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH—ADULT/PARENT SIGNATURE FORM 268

D CHILD ASSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH 273

E INTRODUCTION FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS 275

F CLIENT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET 278

G INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 280

H TRANSCRIBER CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH 282

I DEMOGRAPHICS 285

J MANUSCRIPT 288

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE

1. Demographics 286

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In June 2013, the Supreme Court of the United States repealed the Defense of Marriage Act, granting full federal rights to all married couples regardless of sexual orientation (United States v. Windsor, 2013). This civil rights decision was a historic step in setting the stage for further acceptance and destigmatization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) couples and families in American culture. Given the rapidly changing social and political climate and given the increasing comfort of LGBTQ families being out in their communities, increasing amounts of resources must be available to serve this population.

Specifically, counseling psychologists must be knowledgeable about working with this population when they present in therapy. Although research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) families is a growing area, there is still a lack of research examining family systems as a whole as well as understanding the experiences of younger children. Therefore, this research was designed to explore the whole-family experiences of families with same-gender parents and younger children. Gaining a better understanding of the essence of these families' experiences will increase counseling psychologists' awareness and knowledge in working with this population when they present in therapy.

Before exploring the purpose of this study, it is helpful to create a context for understanding by presenting some of the key research related to parenting and caregivers who identify as gay or lesbian. This information provides a framework for establishing the importance of this type of research and the potential benefits for both children and families.

Background and Context

For the first time in the 1970s and 1980s, some gay and lesbian parents began ending their heterosexual marriages and seeking custody of their children (Fitzgerald, 1999). Prior to these decades, lesbian and gay parents and their families were an invisible population; virtually no research existed on the topic. Empirical research on children of gay and lesbian parents first appeared in the 1970s due to a need for evidence demonstrating these children were psychologically normal in custody cases. Thus, research in the field of LGBQ family studies was originally designed to demonstrate the fitness of gay and lesbian parents, to mitigate fears their children would be maladjusted, and to dispel popular myths and stereotypes about these parents and their children.

In Patterson's (2006) review of the literature on the outcomes of children of gay and lesbian parents, she concluded that healthy parenting is the most important factor in the psychological health and adjustment of children. She emphasized the importance of the quality of daily interactions and the strength of children's relationships with their parents rather than the sexual orientation of the parents as a meaningful factor. She emphasized that "when children fare well in two-parent lesbian-mother or gay-father families, this suggests that the gender of one's parents cannot be a critical factor in child development" (Patterson, 2006, p. 243).

In general, the research supports a number of findings about LGBQ-parented families. The LGBQ parents display more egalitarian parenting and division of household labor (Jonathan, 2009; Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2005), are better at resolving conflict than heterosexual couples (Gottman et al., 2008), find greater satisfaction, and are more involved in parenting than are heterosexual parents (Schacher, Auerbach, & Silverstein, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Children of LGBQ parents experience lower rates of abuse than do children of heterosexual parents (Gartrell, Rodas, Deck, Peyser, & Banks, 2005) and display greater psychological well-being and more positive family relationships than children from heterosexual parents (Bos & Gartrell, 2010; Golombok & Badger, 2010). Children of LGBQ parents are highly aware of oppression, have a sophisticated understanding of diversity, and see themselves as advocates (Gartrell et al., 2005; Lambert, 2005; Welsh, 2011). These successes are situated within a culture of marginalization and institutional barriers (Kurdek, 2005).

Currently, there is a wealth of comparative research on the topic. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that gay and lesbian parents and their children have no significant differences in psychological health compared to heterosexual families; where there are differences, gay and lesbian parents and their children are generally favored. Lambert (2005) suggested that in light of these decades of research, further studies comparing gay and lesbian families and their children to heterosexual families and their children actually perpetuate homophobia. Instead, she suggested that the uniqueness and strengths of these families be explored.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender couples with children have a long history of experiencing discrimination, marginalization, and controversy. Although

the social and political climate is changing, these families still face restrictions on marriage, adoption, parental rights, foster care, and more (Wald, 2006). Wald (2006) pointed out that "our society does not assess the competence of individuals to become biological parents; no one needs permission to have a child" (p. 382). Yet, arguments abound about the moral superiority of traditional families, the fear that having LGBTQ parents interferes with gender and sexual orientation development, and worry about the psychological maladjustment of their children. These arguments continue to be pervasive in the media and in American society despite a body of research to the contrary. Sexual orientation has been singled out as the sole parental characteristic relevant to attempting to ban these individuals from parenthood (Wald, 2006).

Given the research that exists on the experiences of individuals in marginalized populations and given the overwhelming amount of quantitative research establishing the fitness and psychological health of gay and lesbian parents and their children, this study aimed to qualitatively explore the experiences of these families. By understanding the various journeys LGBQ parents take as they navigate their role as parents, their interactions with institutions and society at large, and their experiences with both prejudice and acceptance, counseling psychologists can develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of their unique strengths, needs, and challenges. Therefore, entire families were interviewed together about their experience being in a LGBQ-parented family during this time of rapid social change.

Rationale

Demographic data collected from the Williams Institute in 2010 indicated there are about nine million LGBTQ Americans: approximately 3.5% of adults in the United States identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; and an estimated 0.3% of adults identify as

transgender (Gates, 2011). The American Community Survey (United States Census Bureau, 2010) found there were approximately 594,000 reported same-gender households in the United States, which means that nationally about 1% of all couple households were same-gender couples. This statistic included married and unmarried couples as well as couples who had civil unions and domestic partnerships. Of these same-gender households, approximately 115,000 reported having children, meaning that about 20% of same-gender households had children in the home. In same-gender households, the origins of children varied more than in opposite-gender households and included, for example, biological children from the current or past relationships, step-children, or adopted children (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

In 2015, these numbers were drastically different. In fact, the number of same-gender households in the United States has doubled to approximately one million (Gates & Newport, 2015). It is likely this reported number will continue to increase given the rapidly changing political climate as individuals become more willing to identify themselves as part of the LGBTQ population due to reduced stigmatization.

It is also likely that the actual number of same-gender households in the United States is underestimated. There are a number of challenges in measuring and even defining the LGBTQ population: should researchers measure their same-gender sexual attraction; their same-gender sexual behavior over their lifetime; or their gender identity, expression, or conformity based on individuals' self-identity? The Williams Institute (Gates, 2011) report discussed how these questions all capture related dimensions of sexual orientation but do not fully define the concept.

In addition, the Williams Institute (Gates, 2011) reported that survey methods impact the willingness of respondents to report potentially stigmatizing identities and

behaviors. Methods that allow more anonymity such as Internet surveys, rather than face-to-face interviews, increase the likelihood of LGBTQ individuals identifying themselves. In addition, the LGBTQ population is unevenly dispersed throughout the country with higher densities on the West Coast and in New England (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Location-based surveys may not capture the actual country-wide demographics.

If a family is in distress or facing challenges, one option they may consider is family therapy. When LGBQ-parented families choose to attend family therapy, counseling psychologists must be prepared to work with this population. Initially, they must be able to demonstrate they are open and knowledgeable about the LGBQ population and help families feel comfortable when they walk into their office. Counseling psychologists must also be able to understand unique issues that may arise when their clients are part of an LGBQ family. For example, counseling psychologists must be knowledgeable about legal issues related to couple benefits or child custody if they live in a state that does not recognize marriage equality in order to provide information and advocate for their clients. Counseling psychologists must also be knowledgeable about working with historically oppressed populations and the effect this may have on their clients. For example, LGBQ parents must go through the process of choosing whether to come out to their child's teacher each year, which may affect their child's experience in the classroom. Other documented and unique issues LGBQ-parented families may bring to therapy include (a) relationship problems with extended family members, as it is common for extended family to acknowledge same-gender couples or their children differently than opposite-gender relationships; (b) issues with co-parenting or blended families if there are children from a previous

relationship; or (c) concerns with discrimination from the child's other parent or from the court in custody arrangements (Linville & O'Neil, 2013). Parents and counseling psychologists may also need to offer help to children regarding how to navigate comments or potential bias from other children.

Most of the available research on LGBQ-parented families focuses on comparing outcomes between children of LGBQ parents and children of straight parents; understanding the experiences of being part of a marginalized population; and describing the individual experiences of LGBQ couples, parents, or their adolescent or adult children. Absent from this research is a systemic focus. Very few studies examine family or couple dynamics or interactions among LGBQ parents and families. Individuals' experiences do not occur in a vacuum; it is important for families to be able to engage in open discussions about their experiences, particularly if they are part of a historically marginalized population (Breshears, 2011). Being part of an LGBQ-parented family is a family identity, not an individual identity. Therefore, it is important to listen to whole families' conversations about their experiences.

Also notably absent are the voices of younger children who have not yet reached adolescence. Children of all ages have opinions and experiences that are valid and important; in general, younger children are often not asked about their experiences. Children in LGBQ-parented families may have had unique experiences that children of the majority culture have not.

Therefore, this research aimed to provide a more well-rounded understanding of the experiences of LGBQ-parented families to better inform counseling psychologists working with this population. In summary, the rationale for this

research includes the necessity for counseling psychologists to be knowledgeable advocates and allies for the increasing number of LGBQ-parented families that will present in therapy. In addition, the rationale is also to add to the current literature given that there is a paucity of qualitative research that gives a voice to younger children as well as systemic research on LGBQ-parented families.

Intended Audience

The ethical codes for all types of mental health professionals require a level of cultural competence and knowledge of working with diverse populations. The results of this study will have implications for practice for counseling psychologists who work with non-traditional families or with parents or children from these families. Both the American Psychological Association (2004) and the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (2005) have issued position statements that indicate their affirmation and support of LGBQ parents and families, their dedication to healthy relationships of all types, and that the psychological adjustment of children is unrelated to parental sexual orientation.

This area of research has implications for counseling psychologists working with and advocating for LGBQ families. Research on children of gay and lesbian parents contributes to public debate and legal decision-making (Patterson, 2006). Counseling psychologists need to be knowledgeable of the research and developmental implications of marginalized client populations in order to be advocates. Lambert (2005) noted that there is an absence of studies on LGBQ parents and their children in counseling-specific journals and urges researchers to make this knowledge accessible to a larger portion of the population.

Individuals in the helping professions must acknowledge the incredible diversity of families. When counseling psychologists encounter families who are struggling, they need a working knowledge of the issues these diverse families will bring to therapy and the way these unique issues contribute to the psychological functioning of the family system as well as the individuals. Counseling psychologists must also have a sense of the common factors that contribute to the health of families, parents, and children. As Lambert (2005) stated, "Knowledge of these diverse families and their ability to competently raise psychologically healthy children becomes a tool for intervention, prevention, and advocacy efforts on multiple levels" (p. 50).

Statement of Purpose

This work followed the recommendations of Clarke (2002), who encouraged researchers to aim to transcend this comparative research of examining difference and sameness. She questioned whether sexual orientation is even a meaningful research variable and if it is, whether it is valuable to give up the search between sameness and difference given that discussions of sameness may invalidate the uniqueness inherent in these families, while discussions of difference may either be attributed to cultures of oppression or to inherent qualities within the individual. Findings of "no difference" have been helpful in challenging the assumptions of the courts and result in safeguarding LGBQ rights. Interest in understanding uniqueness may be misinterpreted and take away from the "common humanity" of LGBQ individuals and heterosexual individuals. Clarke stated that "if we reject sameness and difference discourse we may be discarding one of our most powerful resources" (p. 217).

Clarke (2002) suggested that we use both sameness and difference to further LGBQ political interests and do this without perpetuating oppression. From a constructivist perspective, Clarke argued that investigating sameness and difference is not an "interesting question;" rather, what is interesting is how LGBQ parents are constructed as different and what social and political interests are served by this construction. Ultimately, arguments of either sameness or difference may serve to maintain existing sociopolitical power structures and serve to perpetuate oppression. Instead, she suggested asking the question, why and how are LGBQ parents oppressed, and how can we change that?

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of families with LGBQ parents and their elementary school-aged children. These individuals are part of a historically marginalized population and a minority group, so they have had unique experiences in society that heterosexual parents and their families have not had or necessarily even thought about. When these families are in distress and present in counseling, it is crucial that counseling psychologists understand what it is like to be part of a minority group as well as understand the experiences of these families to be as effective and knowledgeable as possible.

Overall, the purposes of this research were as follows:

1. To help counseling psychologists who work with families understand LGBQ-parented families' experiences so they can be knowledgeable and effective therapists and allies.
2. To add to the field of knowledge about the lived experiences of LGBQ-parented families by systemically exploring the topic with whole families.

3. To add to the field of knowledge about the lived experiences of LGBQ-parented families by giving voice to younger children.

Research Question

Q What are the lived experiences of families with same-gender parents and elementary school-aged children given that they are members of a marginalized group?

Definitions

Prior to presenting the background literature on this topic, it is helpful to define a number of terms used in the literature and throughout this paper. The following definitions have been adapted from Dermer, Smith, and Barto's (2010) descriptions. To effectively work with and advocate for the LGBQ population, counseling psychologists must familiarize themselves with the language used to define and discuss these concepts.

Empowerment. The process in which subordinate groups attain greater decision-making power and greater access to resources as well as in which members of the dominant group share power and control.

Heterosexism/heteronormativity. A systematic process of privilege toward heterosexuality based on the notion that heterosexuality is normal and ideal. It also includes the presumption that everyone is heterosexual unless there is evidence to the contrary.

Internalized homophobia. Negative feelings about one's own homosexuality resulting from stigmatized status. It entails accepting the dominant society's prejudice against sexual minorities and turning those values and attitudes inward even if the individual is fighting against societal stereotypes.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ). The acronym LGBQ will be used throughout. This stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer. The terms lesbian, gay, and bisexual describe an individual's sexual orientation, that is, whom they are attracted to primarily (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, n.d.). A more common acronym, LGBTQ, is typically used which includes the term transgender. The term transgender refers to a state where an individual's gender identity (their sense of being male and/or female) does not match their assigned gender at birth (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, n.d.). In this study, the inclusion criteria were based on the parents' sexual orientation, not gender identity. Therefore, parents with any variety of gender identity or expression were invited to participate as long as they identified as LGBQ parents.

Lesbian-parented families. This term refers to families with children who are parented by lesbian mothers. The terms "same gender-parented families" and "LGBQ-parented families" is used similarly but also includes families parented by gay fathers.

Minority stress. The stress, sense of being overwhelmed, and exhaustion experienced with coping with the constant bombardment of negative or uninformed attitudes from society.

Oppression. The exercise of power to disenfranchise, marginalize, unjustly ostracize, or remove power from particular individuals or groups. Often, discrimination is repeatedly integrated into societal institutions and may be intentional or unintentional.

Privilege. The benefits, advantages, and immunity from prejudice afforded to members of the dominant group. The benefits of privilege are a birthright. This status may or may not be inside of an individual's awareness.

Systemic. The understanding that humans are embedded in many different circles of influence and relationships. These different systems affect individuals' behaviors and interactions in a reciprocal and continuous manner (Gehart, 2010).

Limitations of the Study

As a qualitative study, the purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of participants richly and in depth. Qualitative and phenomenological research seeks to provide perspective rather than truth and to explore the uniqueness of the participants as well as the meaning they attribute to their experiences (Ponterotto, 2005). Qualitative research does not seek to generalize information (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, the information gained from these interviews may or may not be representative of the experiences of members of LGBQ-parented families as a whole. My intent was that counseling psychologists reading this research will choose which parts of this research, if any, apply to their counseling practice.

In addition, I developed this study based on my perspective, my culture, and my worldview. It is possible my views are different from my participants' or my readers' views. I have certain biases that will be discussed to the best of my abilities; those biases may have come into play throughout the data collection phase during interviews, throughout my analysis of the data, or throughout my writing. For example, the parents of a family I interviewed during the pilot study for this project were neutral about marriage equality. This was surprising to me and discrepant from my worldview; it is likely the participants sensed my reaction.

To overcome this limitation, I went through a number of self-checks during the research process. The first of these self-checks was to bracket my experience—the task of minimizing interpretations from the researcher to fully describe the experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas (1994) explained that when researchers are able to be receptive and open, they are more able to see things as they are. He described the purpose of bracketing as inhibiting and disqualifying all commitments to previous knowledge and experience in order to see the actual nature and essence of things. Therefore, my goal was to perceive information freshly and naively, as if for the first time, as much as possible.

In the methodology section, I describe my own values and biases in order to understand and then bracket my experiences to overcome this limitation. In addition, bracketing was a constant process for me during the interview process as well as the data analysis. I revised and adapted my questions as needed during the interview to fully immerse myself in my participants' experiences. Finally, I had others review my interview questions, emergent themes, and data analysis for bias.

Another limitation of this study was the effect of social desirability (Edwards, 1957). Rather than answering questions from their own unique perspective, participants may have wanted to answer questions in a manner that would be viewed favorably by others. Specifically, they may have wanted to appear a certain way to myself as the interviewer, potential readers, or to family members who were present. Because interviews were conducted with whole families, each participant may have been wondering what I was thinking or what members of their families were thinking during the interviews. My hope is that once participants began to feel comfortable with me and the research process throughout the course of the interview, they became

more immersed in the questions and in reflecting on their own experiences rather than being concerned about social desirability toward me or their families.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the rationale for my research, which includes the increasing number of LGBQ-parented families, the need for knowledgeable counseling psychologists to work with members of this population who present in therapy, to add to the body of family systems-oriented qualitative research on LGBQ-parented families, and to give a voice to younger children. I discussed that the intended audience for this research is counseling psychologists who work with families. I described the purpose of this research—to explore the experiences of families with LGBQ parents and elementary school-aged children in order to help counseling psychologists become knowledgeable and effective with this population. The research question was presented as well as definitions of relevant terms that are used throughout this dissertation. I discussed limitations of this research: the fact that due to the nature of qualitative research, the findings may not be generalizable; the fact that my personal biases and worldview may influence my analysis of the data; and the potential of social desirability factors impacting the content of participants' interviews.

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Interest in the topic of LGBQ parents and their children has grown substantially. A recent content analysis of lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB)-related articles in couple and family therapy journals showed a 238% increase in articles from 1996 to 2009 (Hartwell, Serovich, Grafsky, & Kerr, 2012). Although this is a large increase, the actual percentage of LGB articles in couple and family journals is now 2%. Because most couple and family therapists report that approximately 10% of their practice consists of LGB individuals, this demographic is still underrepresented in the literature (Hartwell et al., 2012).

Authors of the recent content analysis found that early research focused on examining the causes of homosexuality, how to assess homosexuality, measuring attitudes toward homosexuality, and research on acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (Hartwell et al., 2012). Current and emerging areas of research include therapy with LGB clients, LGB mental health, substance use, supervision and training, and sexual minority adolescents. In addition, approximately 43.9% of articles from 1996 to 2009 were theoretical, 39.3% were quantitative, 13.3% were qualitative, and 2.9% were mixed methods (Hartwell et al., 2012).

In general, LGBQ family-focused research (a) is mostly outcome-based and comparative between LGBQ parents or their children and their heterosexual

counterparts; (b) describes the experiences of oppression among historically marginalized populations; and (c) describes the experiences of LGBQ couples, parents, and adolescents or adult children of LGBQ-parented families. A growing body of literature is qualitative and seeks to explore individualized experiences of these parents or their children. Yet, very few qualitative family studies have involved systemic interviews with multiple family members (Eggenberger & Nelms, 2007). In addition, there is finally a solid body of research on a variety of topics in lesbian and gay populations. However, research on bisexual, transgender, intersex, polyamorous, and other sexual identities and orientations is still lagging behind.

This chapter first describes the theoretical lenses being used to understand the current literature on LGBQ-parented families. Then, a review of the literature is presented that includes research on the experiences of oppression in individuals from marginalized groups, research on LGBQ couple dynamics, research on LGBQ individuals as parents, and research on the children of LGBQ parents and their relationships. This chapter also includes research relating to LGBQ-parented families presenting in family therapy, research exploring the unique strengths of members of LGBQ-parented families, and highlight gaps in the current literature.

Theory

First, it is important to state the theoretical lens I used to inform the design and analysis of my research as well as the framework to understand the review of the literature. I have chosen three distinct theories: systems theory, relational-cultural theory, and intersectionality theory. Because this research was conducted with family members, a systems theory approach was chosen in order to emphasize the importance of looking at individuals within the context of their relationships. Systems theory is a

holistic approach that understands the interactions and relationships between individuals at many levels, from parent–child subsystems to society's broader impact on personal relationships.

In addition, because this research was conducted with a minority population, relational-cultural theory was chosen due to its focus on social justice and the importance of relationships in the experience of privilege and oppression. Relational-cultural theory is a feminist-based systemic theory that places a strong focus on how the dominant culture impacts the development, mental health, and lived experiences of members of minority groups.

Finally, intersectionality theory was additionally utilized as it addresses individuals' multiple identities. Intersectionality theory is a developmental theory that aims to understand the interaction and impact multiple identities have on an individual. Although this research focused on families' experiences of their sexual orientation, it is important to take into account their other identities that impact their own development, worldview, and relationships in order to view participants from a more holistic perspective.

Systems Theory

Systems theory provides the theoretical foundation for all family therapy models. It is based in cybernetics theory, which examines how closed systems, such as a family, self-correct to maintain homeostasis when given corrective feedback (Bateson, 1972). From a systems theory perspective, the family will re-calibrate to maintain normalcy once a change is introduced into the system.

In addition, systems theory describes how the meaningful unit of analysis is the relationships between individuals, rather than the individuals themselves. An

individual cannot be viewed in isolation from the systems they lie within, whether the system of interest is the family unit, a school, a neighborhood, or a culture. Systems theory views the nature of influence as reciprocal and interrelated. Therefore, one individual's behavior cannot be understood without understanding the factors which influence the behavior and the context in which that individual resides (Gehart, 2010). Viewing an individual's distress as originating from outside factors, such as dysfunctional family patterns, societal standards, or oppression, destigmatizes and liberates individuals.

Gehart (2010) described a number of assumptions of basic family systems theory. First, it assumes one cannot not communicate and that all behavior is a form of communication. If a behavior does not make sense, systems theory states that the answer lies in understanding the part of the environment to which the individual is reacting. Another assumption of systems theory is that all behaviors serve a purpose. The purpose of any behavior is to allow the family to maintain homeostasis or normalcy. Finally, the last assumption of systems theory is that therapeutic change involves altering the interaction patterns within the entire system rather than altering something inherent within one individual.

In addition, Bateson (1972) described first- and second-order cybernetics that provide an epistemological basis for the way therapists work with families (Gehart, 2010). First-order cybernetics approaches lean toward a positivist epistemology where the therapist takes an outsider approach and determines what they believe will be helpful for the family. Second-order cybernetic approaches lean toward a postmodern/ constructivist approach to truth (Gehart, 2010). The presence of an outsider, such as a therapist or researcher, actually creates a new therapist-family system, wherein the

therapist has entered the system and attempts to understand how the family coconstructs their own unique truths within their system. These truths are defined as family rules and values, what is "normal" within the family, and how the family should interact.

For the purposes of this research, a second-order cybernetics approach, also described as a postmodern/constructivist approach, was taken to attempt to fully understand, without bias, the lived experiences of LGBQ-parented families. Gehart (2010) identified three assumptions of the postmodern/constructivist approach to family therapy. One assumption of the postmodern approach is that an individual's experience of reality and what one believes to be true is shaped primarily through language and relationships. In addition, the postmodern approach assumes the language-based labeling of what is considered a "problem" is an interactive process that occurs at a local level as well as at a societal level.

Traditional family systems models that assume the problem is situated within the family are not appropriate when working with LGBQ families (Adams, Jaques, & May, 2004). The impact of the dominant culture must also be taken into account in recognizing the influence of the current political climate, the presence or absence of social and familial support, the experience of marginalization, and internalized homophobia (Adams et al., 2004; Gottman et al., 2008).

Relational-Cultural Theory

I chose a theory that combines the constructs of systems theory and social justice—relational-cultural theory. Relational-cultural theory emerged from the idea that traditional, individually-based counseling theories do not sufficiently address the experiences of individuals in marginalized groups (Comstock et al., 2008).

Relational-cultural theory was originally developed in the 1970s after the publication of Jean Baker Miller's (1986) popular book, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. Relational-cultural theory was developed as a feminist theory that highlighted the importance of relationships in human development rather than the traditional focus in psychology on individuation and autonomy that pathologized the experiences and value systems of differing individuals (Comstock et al., 2008). Relational-cultural theory is consistent with other feminist theories emerging in the 1970s (e.g., Gilligan, 1982) in its focus on power and privilege, contextualism, collectivist values, and protesting rigid gender roles.

Relational-cultural theory has been expanded to include a focus on examining culture-based relational disconnections among all humans (Comstock et al., 2008). A core assumption of relational-cultural theory is that all individuals long for authentic belonging, acceptance, and inclusion. In addition, the experiences of shame, isolation and loneliness, oppression, and microaggressions are relational violations assumed to be experienced frequently by members of marginalized populations. These experiences are considered to be at the core of human suffering.

Relational-cultural theory is a collaborative and egalitarian theory that states that the idea of connectedness is at the heart of emotional well-being and healing. When individuals experience empathy, responsiveness, and connection, they experience a deeper connection with others that bridges cultural differences, gives a sense of self-worth, and imbues a sense of increased vitality for life (Comstock et al., 2008). This requires vulnerability on the part of each individual in the relationship.

If an individual from an oppressed group has previously experienced a relational trauma such as isolation or shame, they may be hesitant to be vulnerable in a

relationship—a phenomenon called the central relational paradox (Comstock et al., 2008). Individuals may engage in self-silencing and experience alexithymia (the inability to define or express one's emotions), depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues as a result of these experiences (Frey, 2013). The understanding of how personal and private experiences of individuals and the greater sociopolitical climate intersect to impact individuals' mental health is a cornerstone of relational-cultural theory (Frey, 2013). Counseling psychologists must be aware of the cultural and systemic dynamics that underlie the experiences of individuals from marginalized groups and must bring this knowledge into session. In addition, relational-cultural theory challenges therapists to be reflexive and examine their own strategies for multicultural connection and disconnection in order to work more effectively with their clients.

Finally, another reason I chose relational-cultural theory is that it is a theory of counseling and development that transcends and complements other more traditional models of counseling. Because it uses a meta-theoretical approach, it can easily complement other counseling theories; yet it adds an additional lens of multicultural competence, power dynamics, and the importance of relationships and interpersonal connection. A growing body of relational-cultural theory-specific research in addition to well-documented research on multicultural competence supports the importance of using a social justice lens for psychological research, teaching, and practice. Given that my research focused on the experiences of LGBQ couples and their families, a systemic-, feminist-, and multiculturally-informed approach was of the utmost importance. Traditional models of systems theory have not taken into account the impact of oppression on mental health or the impact of cultural diversity or oppression

on healthy family systems. In alignment with relational-cultural theory and intersectionality theory, it is assumed that our culture's heteronormative assumptions have impacted all families in some way.

Intersectionality Theory

An emerging area of research is intersectionality theory, which attempts to understand the complex impact multiple identities have on an individual. Intersectionality theory takes into account the reciprocal influence of various identities on each other: age, race, ability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, spirituality, and other demographic and identity information (Crenshaw, 1991). Until recently, especially in the LGBQ literature, individual identities were discussed but not multiple minority status, for example, identifying as both African American and lesbian or as both gay and deaf (Nabors, 2012). Intersectionality theory has informed social justice and activism, research methodology, and theories of psychological development.

Intersectionality theory is a theory of identity development that focuses on an individual's awareness of how an individual's various identities inform and enhance each other (Warner & Shields, 2013). Social identities cannot be studied independently nor can they be studied without understanding the power relationships among social groups (Warner & Shields, 2013). Although an individual has his or her own fluid and unique identity, identity is actually viewed as a synthesis of the relationships among his or her various social groups. Each identity informs the other. One critique of intersectionality theory is that it sets up false boundaries between identities and social groups; the idea of having multiple discrete identities may actually be more fluid and complex (Warner & Shields, 2013). Different social groups

are often defined by the dominant culture rather than by the members of the group (Nabors, 2012).

Some individuals report feeling invisible and experiencing stigma due to their membership with one or more cultures and report often having to choose which identities to make apparent and which identities to conceal in order to preserve membership in one of these groups (Nabors, 2012). For example, Nabors (2012) described a young Latino gay male who does not come out to his family in order to preserve those relationships to the detriment of his relationship with the gay community who value coming out. As a result, he feels alienated from both his family and the gay community.

For children, the systemic process of socialization into their culture begins very early. This process occurs in each of their social groups and may at times conflict. Ecklund (2012) described a case in which a young boy with Korean parents and strong Christian beliefs presented in therapy due to symptoms of anxiety and his parents' distress over his gender nonconformity. Through therapy, it emerged that he was quite distressed over conflicting values between his various identities—his family's primary identities as Korean and Christian-held traditional views on gender identity. He felt rejected by his peers and ashamed of the way he looked in relation to his ethnic features as well as disliking his masculine features. As a young child, he had already internalized societal oppression based on his gender nonconformity, religion, and ethnicity. The therapist was able to work systemically with him to help his parents understand and accept him as well as to help him explore his intersecting identities in therapy.

Experiences as Part of a Minority Group

The Experience of Oppression

Historical oppression in the field of psychology. Historically, individuals from the majority culture in the field of psychology have contributed to the oppression of LGBTQ individuals as well as to the oppression of other minority groups. Mental health is defined by the majority (Nabors, 2012). Early in the field, this was evidenced by the use of craniology and phrenology to demonstrate that women and non-White races had smaller or misshapen heads or undeveloped areas of their brain (Guthrie, 1998). The rise of intelligence testing and the search for a singular construct of intelligence aimed to highlight differences between racial groups. This battle has continued from World War I to the book, *The Bell Curve,* in the 1990s (Herrnstein & Murray, 1996).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders historically included homosexuality as a mental disorder; however, the diagnosis was removed in 1973 due to the influence of the Kinsey reports, Stonewall riots, and Dr. John Fryer's masked petition to the American Psychological Association (Drescher, 2012). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders–IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) listed gender identity disorder as a diagnosis. However, changes were made in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders–V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) to reflect that the condition must be associated with clinically significant distress as well as changing the name to gender dysphoria.

Current societal oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer individuals. Overall, stigmatized groups currently suffer in a number of ways. Throughout American history, stigmatized groups have experienced reduced access to

employment, housing, marriage, education, and adequate political or social representation (Wald, 2006). There have been either a lack of laws to protect their basic human rights or laws that exist to specifically exclude minority groups from the basic human rights that others get to enjoy. By excluding sexual orientation in human rights legislation, the door has been left open for discrimination (Harper & Schneider, 2003). For example, employers can fire LGBTG individuals, sexual orientation may be taken into account in child custody cases, and housing may be restricted. Just in the past few decades, the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy prevented LGBTQ individuals from being out in the military, the Defense of Marriage Act defined marriage as a heterosexual privilege, LGBTQ individuals have been legally prevented from adopting children, and anti-sodomy laws aim to restrict adults from private consensual sexual acts (Harper & Schneider, 2003).

Stigmatized groups have less access to health care than non-stigmatized groups, and doctors may not be educated on issues LGBTQ individuals bring, especially in terms of sexual health. The LGBTQ individuals have fewer resources available to them in terms of doctors and mental health professionals who are trained in unique issues experienced by their population, especially in rural or conservative areas (Holman & Oswald, 2011). For example, especially in a rural or conservative area, it can be extremely difficult to find a psychotherapist who specializes in family therapy for gay male-parented households. It may be difficult for a transgender individual to find a doctor who specializes in transgender health to prescribe hormones or for a lesbian couple to find a sex therapist to help with sexual desire discrepancy issues they are experiencing in their relationship. The LGBQ individuals have a unique experience of their minority status as sexual orientation is not a visible identity.

In general, individuals with minority identities are able to find support in their families- and communities-of-origin (Nabors, 2012). Unfortunately, experiencing family and community support may not be the case for LGBQ people as they have concealable stigmas (Nabors, 2012). They may face homophobia from their families and must decide when or if to come out. Closeted LGBQ people experience more stress-related symptoms than LGBQ individuals who are out (Harper & Schneider, 2003). Closeted LGBQ individuals may experience constant vigilance to avoid disclosing details that may reveal their sexual orientation, LGBQ-related activities, or dating; subsequently, they may appear withdrawn or isolated to their friends, family, or coworkers. The stress of maintaining an undisclosed identity can be overwhelming.

The decision to come out is potentially problematic as well. Depending on the individual's family situation, they may risk being kicked out of their home, especially as a teenager, and they may risk victimization or violence (Harper & Schneider, 2003; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2008). Depending on their minority status in other demographic areas such as age, race, or ability status, the existence of their potentially multiple minority statuses may impact how their coming out is received by members of these groups (Nabors, 2012). They may need to be out in one community but not another or they may be stigmatized by their ethnic or religious group.

Location is also a factor in the decision to come out. In one study, LGBT parents living in rural areas reported experiencing less connection and social support than their metropolitan counterparts (Power et al., 2014). These authors noted that living in a rural area can increase anxiety about negative public reaction to coming out.

Impact of oppression on mental health. The LGBTQ individuals have higher rates of mental health concerns due to the effect of minority stress. Members of minority groups experience more stress, more depression, more substance use, and more posttraumatic stress disorder than members of the dominant group (Nabors, 2012). In general, LGBTQ individuals seek mental health services at higher rates than the general population (Cochran, Sullivan, & Mays, 2003). Both lesbians and gay men show greater rates of anxiety and substance use than do heterosexual individuals. Gay men also experience higher rates of depression and psychological distress (Cochran et al., 2003).

In addition, the levels of harassment and violence against members of the LGBTQ community, particularly youth, are staggering. For example, LGBTQ youth are seven times more likely than heterosexual students to be threatened with a weapon at school, a third of LGBTQ students have missed an entire day of school in the last month due to feeling unsafe, and LGBTQ youth are four times as likely as heterosexual students to have attempted suicide (Lambda Legal, n.d.). About 20% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ, indicating they are highly overrepresented in the homeless population and feel rejected by their families (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2008). They are also more likely to be physically and sexually abused before and after becoming homeless and are at higher risk for substance use and suicide (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2008).

Recently, rates of mental health issues among LGB individuals increased over a period of a few years when same-gender marriage bans were instituted in certain states (Hatzenbuehler, McLaughlin, Keyes, & Hasin, 2010). Specifically, there was a 36.6% increase in mood disorders, a 248.2% increase in generalized anxiety disorder,

a 41.9% increase in any alcohol use disorder, and a 36.3% increase in psychiatric comorbidity. Notably, there were no significant increases in rates of mental health issues among heterosexual individuals living in these states. Among LGB individuals in states that did not have amendments banning same-gender marriage, there was more than a 20% decrease in mood disorders and no increases in other mental health issues (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010).

Stigma Management

Nabors (2012) described a number of stigma management strategies LGBQ individuals employed when faced with discrimination: Some individuals moved away to a less stigmatizing environment, some waited to come out until going to college, and some had a close relationship with a mentor to assist in navigating relationships. The author described how gay men of color may stay in the closet, move away from their communities of color, or use similar strategies to develop pride in both their sexual identity as well as their ethnicity. These individuals used strategies such as activism, volunteering, becoming more resilient and empowered, and educating family and friends about acceptance.

One qualitative example of a community intervention to reduce stigma was Shpungin, Allen, Loomis, and DeloStritto's (2012) feminist intervention conducted to raise awareness about the problem of silencing of marginalized groups in American society including LGBQ individuals. They described examples of silencing including people with less privilege being cut off or interrupted, being treated as a stereotype, lacking appropriate accommodations for their lifestyle, being personally attacked on the basis of their non-majority opinion, or experiencing members of the majority

group remaining quiet during or after an attack. These attacks were described as either covert microaggressions or overt aggression.

Shpungin et al. (2012) designed a theater-based intervention to use storytelling techniques to combat oppression. They noted some challenges with oppressed groups speaking up for themselves. These challenges and obstacles included the speakers feeling burdened with having to "teach" others; putting themselves in a position of vulnerability by disclosing their anger or pain; or putting themselves in a position where they could be dismissed, critiqued, or questioned. The authors stated that anti-oppression work has been criticized for perpetuating stereotypes of oppressed groups being "whiny" or angry, which served to silence marginalized groups even more (Shpungin et al., 2012).

In some nonmetropolitan areas, LGBTQ parents reported that their sexual orientation generally did not matter or was not salient in their interactions in private or public areas (Holman & Oswald, 2011). However, they described that their interactions with organizations related to their sexual orientation were often negative. They desired improved sexual orientation-specific organizational policies related to education, health care, employment, and family services.

Changing American Attitudes Toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Individuals

The United States is at a turning point in civil rights history, and the political and social climate is rapidly changing. The Supreme Court's repeal of a key part of the Defense of Marriage Act in June 2013 has allowed federal marriage benefits for married same-gender couples (United States v. Windsor, 2013). Although the Supreme Court stopped short of issuing a federal mandate for marriage equality and

continued to leave marriage equality up to the determination of each state, this ruling indicated that attitudes are becoming more progressive, and resources for LGBTQ individuals are expanding. In the first draft of this writing, in August 2013, 13 states and Washington, DC had marriage equality for same-gender couples. A year and a half later, as of March 2015, same-gender couples in 37 states plus Washington, DC had the freedom to marry, and over 72% of the United States population lived in a state that recognizes marriage equality (Freedom to Marry, Inc. n.d.).

A recent Gallup poll (Jones, 2013) showed that 47% of Americans now think that individuals are born gay or lesbian, while 33% believe that homosexuality is due to external factors such as upbringing or environment. Gallup has been conducting this poll since 1977 when only 13% of Americans said that individuals were born gay or lesbian. Across demographic categories, support for "being born" gay or lesbian has increased except for older Republicans and weekly church attenders. The Gallup poll also showed that Americans' support for marriage equality had solidified above 50%, and about three-quarters of Americans said they knew someone who had come out to them.

In addition, attitudes are also changing among youth. At an American high school recently, two young men were voted "cutest couple" by their senior class (Taylor & Meehan, 2013). A student posted the yearbook photo on her website, saying, "First time in my school history a same sex couple has ever been able to run for this category, not to mention winning it. So proud of them, and my school" (Taylor & Meehan, 2013, para. 3). Within 24 hours, the photo and story were "shared" online nearly 100,000 times. After an article was written about it by *The Huffington Post*, the two boys wrote a response saying, "When we started dating a

year [ago], the thought of a photo of us traveling throughout the world would be a bit frightening, but now we are proud to be part of the LGBQ community" (Taylor & Meehan, 2013, para 5).

Lesbian and Gay Couple Relationships

Relationship Satisfaction and Stability

Relationship satisfaction and stability in LGBQ and heterosexual relationships are perceived similarly based on objective measures as well as self-report (Gottman et al., 2003; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Dr. Larry Kurdek (2005) conducted decades of longitudinal research and wrote extensively on gay and lesbian couples. He found that gay and lesbian couples were just as satisfied with their relationships as were heterosexual couples, dissolved their relationships at an equal or slightly increased rate than did their heterosexual counterparts, and, in general, had similar factors predicting relationship quality as heterosexuals such as personality traits, communication patterns, and conflict resolution styles (Kurdek, 2005).

Kurdek (1998) explored differences in gender socialization and how this impacted lesbian, gay, and heterosexual relationships. His longitudinal research supported a number of hypotheses based on gender role socialization: (a) because women are socialized to be more relationally oriented, lesbians should show greater intimacy in their relationships; (b) because men are socialized to be more independent, gay men should show greater self-sufficiency in their relationships; (c) because each gender is socialized in different ways to approach conflict, both gay men and lesbians should be better at conflict resolution due to approaching conflict from similar styles; and (d) due to the lack of societal support or infrastructure for LGBQ relationships,

there should be fewer barriers to relationship dissolution due to less societal pressure to remain together.

Research also supported that lesbians and gay men may be more comfortable breaching gender norms in their relationships. Solomon et al. (2005) found that some gay men could be more nurturing and were more able than heterosexual men to sense when their partners were disturbed about something. In other studies, gay men reported that their nonconformity to traditional gender roles allowed them to develop more nurturing connections (Jonathan, 2009). Due to issues around gender socialization, some gay men experienced anxiety around emotional closeness; however, long-term couples struggled less with this (Jonathan, 2009). Kurdek's (1998) longitudinal research supported the notion that both lesbian couples and gay male couples reported higher levels of autonomy in their relationships despite his prediction this would be higher in gay male couples only based on gender role socialization. Also in agreement with Kurdek's research, some research (Jonathan, 2009) showed that lesbian couples were especially likely to value closeness and intimacy, used effective communication strategies, and maintained awareness of issues regarding power and equality.

Regarding intimacy, Gottman et al. (2003) found in a longitudinal study that lesbians also tended to want more physical affection in their relationships; whereas, gay men tended to want more verbal validation in their relationships. Peplau and Fingerhut (2007) described a number of differences in sexual satisfaction and frequency between gay men, lesbian women, and heterosexual individuals. In general, gay men reported engaging in sex most frequently and lesbians engaged in sex least frequently; heterosexual couples fell somewhere in the middle. Considerable research

has been dedicated to speculating about reasons for this discrepancy, which might result from differences in gender socialization, sex differences in sexual desire, or methodological problems around defining sex only in terms of penetration. Regarding sexual exclusivity, gay male couples did not generally report that monogamy was important in their relationships, reported that they desired and engaged in extradyadic sex more frequently than did lesbians or heterosexuals, and did not report that relationship satisfaction was related to sexual exclusivity. Lesbians often had slightly less desire for monogamy than did heterosexual men who had slightly less desire for monogamy than did heterosexual women.

Overall, gay men and lesbians do not differ meaningfully in their strength of relationship or relationship quality compared to heterosexual married partners (Kurdek, 1998). It is important to note that LGBQ couples' successes in relationship satisfaction and stability are situated within the context of institutional barriers such as lack of governmental support for gay and lesbian relationships (Kurdek, 2005). Kurdek (1998, 2005) also reported that although LGBQ couples perceive less support from their families, they experience more support from friends. In addition, when relationships end, gay men and lesbians are more likely than heterosexual couples to remain friends with their ex-partners and to continue to view them as part of their extended family (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Weston, 1991).

Relationship Conflict

Some research has suggested differences in some areas of gay and lesbian couple dynamics compared with heterosexuals during conflict. When interacting, both distressed and non-distressed lesbian and gay couples were physiologically and affectively similar to heterosexual couples (Gottman et al., 2003). Gottman et al.

(2008) found that gay and lesbian relationships had more positive startup when discussing conflict. Not only was their affect more positive when initiating conflict discussions, there was also less belligerence, domineering, fear, tension, whining, and sadness. In addition, gay and lesbian couples in conflict displayed more humor than did heterosexual couples and were able to maintain positive affect further along into the conflict.

Gay men were less successful at repair attempts when the interaction became negative (Gottman et al., 2008). Other studies found that gay male couples experienced more role flexibility in relationships and showed less rigid demand/withdraw patterns than did heterosexual couples (Jonathan, 2009). In addition, some lesbian couples may have difficulties with emotional fusion that leads them to avoid talking about controversial issues; however, long-term lesbian couples struggle less with this (Jonathan, 2009).

One unique, documented area in which some LGBQ couples experience conflict is when there are discrepancies in levels of outness between partners (Jonathan, 2009). Differences in levels of outness can be a source of stress, conflict, and lack of validation. When faced with a conflict around outness, LGBQ couples may engage in power struggles. The less out partner may feel pressured by the more out partner, the more out partner may feel limited or controlled, and the out partner may also threaten to out the other (Jonathan, 2009).

Division of Power and Labor

Gottman et al. (2008) stated that gay and lesbian relationships may operate on different principles related to power and affect. They suggested that this may be due to the fact that gay and lesbian couples do not experience the traditional gender

hierarchies heterosexual couples do. Studies have also supported the idea that the partner with the most financial, educational, and social resources has more power in a relationship regardless of sexual orientation. These effects are less clear in lesbian relationships and more pronounced in gay male relationships where job prestige is important and more privilege is afforded to the partner who makes more money (Jonathan, 2009; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).

One of the ways LGBQ relationships differ most significantly from heterosexual relationships is in their division of labor (Kurdek, 2005). In fact, sexual orientation has been found to be more predictive of an egalitarian division of labor than is income (Shechory & Ziv, 2007; Solomon et al., 2005). The LGBQ couples have no expectations of division of household labor based on gender roles and, therefore, have more flexible and egalitarian relationships (Jonathan, 2009). Lesbian partners are more likely to share tasks, while gay male partners are more likely to have each partner specialize in a particular task (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Although division of labor may not be exactly equal, lesbian women and gay men negotiate these roles more overtly in their relationships than do heterosexual couples and aim to divide chores based on the interests and ability of each partner (Kurdek, 2005). It is important to note that the participants in the above studies of division of labor are predominantly White—one study suggests that Black biological mothers take on significantly more household chores (Moore, 2008).

Along with the egalitarian division of household labor, LGBQ partners are more likely to try and maximize both partners' careers (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). They also hold more shared responsibility for the maintenance of their relationship (Solomon et al., 2005). When successfully navigating issues around power, LGBQ

couples assume that they will be carrying equal weight; have regular discussions evaluating their relationship; actively seek resolution after a conflict; and communicate about fairness, respect, and equality (Jonathan, 2009). Creating and maintaining equality, intimacy, and attunement in their relationships is an active, ongoing process for these successful LGBQ couples.

Parenting and Children in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer-Parented Families

An overwhelming amount of comparative research has been conducted to establish the fitness of gay and lesbian individuals as parents, originally designed to alleviate concerns for the court in custody cases (Patterson, 2006). Biblarz and Stacey (2010) recently updated their 2001 review of the literature of gender differences in parenting. They explained that entrenched in our societal values is a consensus that children raised by both a mother and a father develop more successfully. However, they noted that married heterosexual fathers typically scored lowest on ratings of parental involvement and skills, and average differences slightly favored women over men as parents in terms of skills and parental involvement.

In addition, Bergstrom-Lynch (2012) stated in the United States LGBTQ individuals have historically raised children in the context of heterosexual relationships. Only in the 1980s and beyond have LGBTQ individuals been able to raise children in out relationships without the fear of their children being removed from the home (Bergstrom-Lynch, 2012). Overall, the gender of parents has minor significance for children's psychological adjustment and social success, and parenting skills are not dependent on gender (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). Despite the lack of differences shown in the research, one of the greatest dilemmas faced by LGBQ

couples is the societal belief that children need two parents of the opposite sex (Long, Bonomo, Andrews, & Brown, 2006).

Lesbian Mothers

In general, lesbian parents are more common than are gay male parents, and lesbian mothers tend to be more actively involved in daily parenting than many fathers in heterosexual families (Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Subsequently, lesbians report greater co-parenting satisfaction than do heterosexual couples and report that they want and have more egalitarian parenting and division of work responsibilities (Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Lesbian partners may experience some competition, with biological mothers typically assuming greater caregiving roles and experiencing more intimacy with their children (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). Still, lesbian mothers fare somewhat better than heterosexual parents on measures of parenting success and involvement (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). In a longitudinal study of children raised in lesbian-headed families, Golombok and Badger (2010) found that their young adult children experienced greater psychological well-being and more positive family relationships compared with young adult children from heterosexual-parented homes.

One Dutch study (Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, & Sandfort, 2004) found that lesbian mothers generally perceived little stigmatization, rejection, and did not experience internalized homophobia. When these mothers did experience minority stress, they reported they felt like they had to defend their position as a mother more strongly and their feelings of parental stress increased. In fact, children's behavioral problems also increased when mothers experienced minority stress and societal rejection in the form of people asking "annoying questions" and gossiping about their

sexual orientation. In addition, the authors reported no differences between the stress experiences of lesbian biological mothers and social/adoptive mothers.

In addition, motherhood is a respected role in American society. Although lesbian women may face stigma or oppression based on their sexual orientation, they also fulfill a valued role when they become a mother. Motherhood may lead lesbian mothers to feel more connected in society (Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999). Similarly, Ben-Ari and Livni (2006) reported that being a lesbian mother is experienced to be easier in society than to "just" be a lesbian. Participants felt that after having a child, society was more accepting of their relationship.

Gay Fathers

More research on LGBQ parenting has been conducted with lesbian mothers, and the research carried out with gay fathers is largely qualitative (Power et al., 2012). Power et al. (2012) acknowledged the challenges in collecting demographic data around gay male parents; many are in nontraditional parenting arrangements where they may be donor fathers, have children from a previous heterosexual relationship, have arrangements where they do not care for their child day-to-day, or have one or more co-parents.

Biblarz and Stacey (2010) acknowledged that a common stereotype in the gay community is that gay men "shouldn't" want children. When these male couples choose to adopt a role as a primary caregiver, they are choosing a role that has stereotypically been female. In addition, gay men's social relationships may change drastically after they become parents, with some individuals distancing themselves from their gay, non-parent friends and instead seeking support from other parents who are largely heterosexual (Power et al., 2012). When gay men become parents, they

report becoming more connected to their families of origin, which is notable considering they may have experienced prejudice from their families when they initially came out (Power et al., 2012).

Schacher et al. (2005) conducted focus groups with gay male parents. They observed that gay men were faced with what they described as "heterosexist gender role strain," a phenomenon that occurs when gay men violate stereotypical masculine gender role norms and choose to become parents. For some of these men, internalized homophobia interfered with their ability to take on a fathering role, and they wanted to reconcile these conflicting identities. In addition, they often felt conflicted about their previous primary role as breadwinner and the resulting decline in social status they experienced by becoming the primary caregiver.

These men explained that they were frequently questioned about where the mother of their children was. They experienced battling against cultural biases that preferred to see women in caretaking roles and felt a need to prove themselves as a "super parent" as a result. As gay men, they experienced discrimination in their experiences with adoption; many men were advised to list themselves as "single" on adoption applications rather than saying they were a gay couple (Schacher et al., 2005).

In general, the men in this focus group (Schacher et al., 2005) rejected common wisdom that women are more naturally suited to parenting. Instead, they believed they were at the forefront of a movement to redefine heteronormative parenting in terms of gender roles, wanting to reconceptualize and redefine what makes a family. These men described feeling like they were doing something that had never been done before and were creating new norms and defining their own roles in

what they described as "conscious parenting." The men in this focus group believed love and emotional attachment make a family; they also expanded this definition to transcend biological ties and to include other important adults in their children's lives as well as their children's birth family.

Going against cultural norms is anxiety-producing, they explained. In a time of changing roles, a network of social supports is crucial. These men described ways in which they gained social support as parents (most commonly through friendship networks that included other non-traditional families, LGBQ parenting groups, their own families of origin, and their religious affiliation) and developed a connection to their child's culture or family of origin. It was important to them to expose their children to a variety of cultures and different family structures. They wanted to both shield their children from intolerance as well as demonstrate how to be an educator and an activist. They wanted to role-model and be open with their children about how to handle discrimination and homophobia.

Pathways to Parenthood

Greater variations exist in the route to parenting taken by gay and lesbian couples compared with heterosexual couples (Tasker & Patterson, 2007). The LGBQ couples become parents through previous heterosexual relationships, adoption through foster care and other agencies, sperm donorship, surrogacy, other assisted reproductive technologies, and co-parenting with another LGBQ couple. Much greater variations exist in parenting arrangements, and the number of adults and parental figures in their children's lives often increases (Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Families of choice may also provide significant social and parenting support (Weston, 1991). In addition, it is possible that children of LGBT parents were born in the context of a heterosexual

relationship that dissolved when one partner came out (Lick, Patterson, & Schmidt, 2013). There may be an adjustment period as one parent came out, as compared to a child who was born and raised with one or two LGBT parents.

Bergstrom-Lynch (2012) conducted interviews with prospective and new LGBQ parents and described a number of notable experiences. She found that in order to start a family, LGBQ parents must communicate with many community resources, raising the question of how out they can be in certain domains. The process of having children in an LGBQ relationship can involve sperm banks, adoption agencies, surrogacy agencies, lawyers, hospitals, and birth or parenting classes, as well as communication with each partner's family of origin. Even if prospective parents desire to be completely out, they may face societal or legal discrimination through the process of becoming parents. These obstacles may be compounded if the couple is seeking an international adoption where the laws and norms may be significantly different and where they may jeopardize their ability to adopt if they disclose their sexual orientation. Some parents face the prospect of deciding to lie and say that they are single, bring a person of the opposite gender with them abroad so he or she can sign adoption paperwork, or relinquish their desire for an international adoption.

Some of the parents who were interviewed explained that they did not make any effort to share or to conceal their sexual orientation in order to decentralize the role of their sexual orientation in the process of becoming parents. Other parents sought out institutions known to be affirming and knowledgeable about LGBQ parenting. In states that did not allow same-gender parents to adopt together, some parents reported feeling invisible if they were not included in the adoption proceedings or paperwork. Some were even asked to "disappear" at court.

Other parents faced discrimination from biological parents; one gay couple was asked if they would have sex in front of the child. Some prospective parents were asked by the adoption agency to sign an agreement stating that they were not gay. Individuals experiencing this overt discrimination felt pressured to keep the peace and not respond to insulting questions in order to maximize their chances of having children. Prospective parents reported that this experience of oppression, strategizing, and silencing took an emotional toll on them. Some LGBQ couples reported unexpected positive moments throughout the process, that is, one biological mother told a gay couple who was adopting her child that she was happy they were gay because she did not want to be replaced.

One qualitative study examined the impact of Florida's gay adoption ban and the subsequent impact on parents after the ban was lifted (Goldberg, Moyer, Weber, & Shapiro, 2013). Numerous negative consequences were reported by participants, including the legal invisibility of one partner and the inability to adopt foster children. After the ban was lifted, participants reported a sense of relief, a feeling of security for themselves and their children, and increased comfort in being out through the adoption process.

Few studies have examined the role of donor parents—whether they are unknown or known, male or female. More lesbian women are parents than gay men, and more lesbian parents have chosen unknown donors. Therefore, some research has focused on children's ideas about their donor fathers and their desire to meet them (Goldberg & Allen, 2013). Legal issues around known donorship can be complicated and anxiety-provoking. Some prospective parents may wish for the known donor to relinquish his parental rights against his wishes despite desiring their children to have

an ongoing relationship with this person who is often a family friend (Goldberg & Allen, 2013). In addition, lesbian mothers are often more open with their children about the circumstances surrounding their conception and often describe the relationship with the donor like an "uncle."

In one exploratory study (Goldberg & Allen, 2013), most adult children of the lesbian mothers interviewed knew their donors; the ones who did not know their identity wanted to know. Most adult children reported a somewhat distant relationship with their known donor that was at times "awkward," but they were satisfied in knowing their identities and with the level of their donor's involvement in their lives. The young adults who were interviewed had a strong sense that family is defined by relational ties rather than biological or genetic ones; some expressed frustration that some people did not understand this.

Disclosure

In general, children of gay and lesbian parents often do not see their own situation as different until they begin learning about how other families work (Tasker, 2005). This knowledge comes in the context of their school, their neighborhood, their friends, and other families they know. In addition, children generally begin noticing differences once they become aware of the sexual and romantic aspects of their parents' relationship (Tasker, 2005). Based on data from the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study conducted by Gartrell et al., 2005), about 57% of 10-year-olds with LGBQ parents chose to be out to their peers.

Once children of LGBQ parents begin having more experiences in their communities, some are challenged with issues of disclosure and deciding who and how to tell about their family structure (Welsh, 2011). This disclosure depends on the

need to acknowledge their parents' relationship weighed against the risks of discrimination (Tasker & Patterson, 2007). At times, children report that forming new friendships is anxiety-provoking or uncomfortable because they are worried the "secret" will slip out when they are not ready to disclose (Lubbe, 2008). This serves to isolate these children. Some children report feeling like they have a secret and want to get to know the other person better to determine if they would disclose. Some children report being vague in their statements about their families or may change significant details about their parents, that is, saying one of their mothers is an "aunt" or their mother's "best friend" (Lubbe, 2008; Welsh, 2011). This is intended to protect themselves or to shield the other person because they want to make sure others are comfortable. They describe being reluctant to disclose the sexual orientation of their parents because it could mean they lose someone's acceptance or the possibility of a friendship.

Lubbe (2008) interviewed South African children, ages 9 to 19, with lesbian mothers about how they disclosed their family structure to others. All children were aware that prejudice and homophobia existed and understood the complexity of the disclosure process in light of this knowledge. Most children described that they got a "feeling" about whether or not to disclose or they read nonverbal cues. They reported reacting differently to different people and picked up on uneasiness or anxiety in others.

Most children agreed that disclosure of their family structure led to stronger friendships (Lubbe, 2008). In addition, they felt they were more open to sensitive issues their friends disclosed to them because they knew the value of disclosure, open

communication, authenticity, and the negative impact of discrimination. They also noted that other kids thought it was "cool" to have lesbian parents.

Parents must also weigh the pros and cons of disclosure in their communities. Becoming a parent often necessitates coming out to schools, other parents, and children's service providers. This may cause significant anxiety depending on the level of outness of the parent, the perceived level of acceptance of their community, and the level of social support (Power et al., 2014). In one study, lesbian mothers felt overwhelmingly that parents must be out before having children (Ben-Ari & Livni, 2006). These mothers felt it was important that families did not live in secrecy so that the child gets the message that something about their family is wrong or shameful. Power et al. (2014) also found that people living in inner metropolitan areas were more likely to be out than people living in outer metropolitan areas or rural areas.

Another issue surrounding disclosure is if lesbian and gay parents have the experience of coming out later in their lives to their children. This transition tends to be easier for younger children than older ones but may bring up issues for children of trust, loss, and silencing and fear of embarrassment, ridicule, or isolation (Long et al., 2006). In addition, parents may be faced with being encouraged to conceal their identity, denial of legal or custodial benefits, or negative reactions from peers and their children's social circles (Long et al., 2006). Some parents have noted that coming out may be less of "making an announcement" and more of a continuous process of the child's growing awareness as they get older (Bigner & Wetchler, 2012).

Bullying

In general, children of gay and lesbian parents worry about the possibility of being bullied or victimized. They are actually no more likely than their peers to be

bullied; however, when they are bullied, it is usually about their family (Tasker, 2005). One study found that children of LGBT parents were more likely to be bullied if they lived in a rural area (Power et al., 2014). Other research has found that by age 10, 43% of children of lesbian parents had experienced homophobia (Gartrell et al., 2005). Interviewed children shared stories about getting bullied and reported that other children had made comments such as “that’s gross,” assuming that they would be lesbian or gay because their parents were, assuming that they must have been “molested,” or having ideas that being lesbian or gay was contagious (Lindsay et al., 2006). One child in this study shared that she ran out of show-and-tell crying due to bullying. When bullying occurs, it is extremely distressing for LGBQ parents, their children, and for teachers and administration who may not know how to handle these situations.

In one study (Leddy, Gartrell, & Bos, 2012), children of lesbian mothers reported that as young children, their peers were less accepting but became more accepting as they got older. Most participants reported getting bullied at some point in their childhood over their mothers’ lesbianism, which led them to disclose less due to fears about being teased. Adolescent children of LGBQ parents reported that they got bullied the most in middle school; the majority of the bullying challenged or teased them about their own sexuality (Welsh, 2011). Adult children of gay and lesbian parents report that their social experiences related to having same-gender parents became increasingly positive over their lifetimes (Lick et al., 2013).

Adolescent children of same-gender parents feel extremely protective of their families, wanting to shield their parents from knowledge that they were being bullied (Welsh, 2011). They do not want their parents to feel like it is their fault they are

getting bullied. Similar to the gay fathers in the focus group (Schacher et al., 2005), these children wanted to present themselves positively, knowing any faults they have could be blamed on their having gay parents. Overall, children of LGBQ parents understand that prejudice is grounded in fear, and most other people have assumptions about what families should look like (Lubbe, 2008). When parents feel hesitant to disclose about their families due to fears around their children getting bullied, this leads to hesitancy on children's parts as well (Lindsay et al., 2006).

School Environments

Navigating the school environment can also be an affirming or marginalizing experience for LGBQ parents and their children. Lindsay et al. (2006) qualitatively explored Australian lesbian parents' and their children's experiences in school settings. They found that experiences varied across social context and cautioned against viewing "lesbian families" as a homogenous group. Parents in their study discussed negative reactions from schools such as feeling excluded by the forms they were requested to fill out stating the mother and father's names. They also discussed their sense that some teachers felt embarrassed and unsure of how to address same-gender parenting in the classroom. Some mothers concluded this embarrassment stemmed from teachers' confusion over the distinction between discussing sexual orientation and discussing sexual behavior.

Alternatively, mothers in this study described actively selecting schools for their children based on the commitment and demonstration of multiculturalism, especially if they knew other gay- or lesbian-parented families who attended the school (Lindsay et al., 2006). The mothers in this study also reported that it was helpful to come out to teachers and administration from the beginning in order to

actively participate in reshaping the curriculum. Speaking with teachers about inclusion and understanding helped these families feel they were impacting the students and school in order to create a more accepting environment for their children.

Some research is emerging around preparing educators to work with LGBTQ-parented families. Hedge, Averett, White, and Deese (2014) found that although teachers' attitudes are generally positive toward LGBT-identified individuals, this does not necessarily correlate with engaging in action in the classroom. When young children do not see their family structure acknowledged by their educators, this may be invalidating and could impact development of a healthy self-concept (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014). In addition, families may experience feelings of rejection and marginalization if their families are overlooked or excluded due to teachers not knowing how to include them (Hedge et al., 2014). This reflection of heterosexual privilege exists whether the child has parents, family members, friends, or self-identifies as LGBT (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014).

Hedge et al. (2014) identified a need for increased preparation for early childhood educators to challenge the culture of heteronormativity. These authors also identified areas in which early childhood educators have the opportunity to include diverse families in songs, stories, and classroom displays. Recently, some books have been published for educators wanting to increase awareness of sexuality and gender diversity in the classroom (e.g., from the *Dress-Up Corner to the Senior Prom: Navigating Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Prek-12 Schools* by Jennifer Bryan, 2012).

Kintner-Duffy, Vardell, Lower, and Cassidy (2012) developed a curriculum intended for early childhood educators to encourage reflection on their attitudes and

beliefs, to educate them about resources available for LGBTQ families, and to help them become allies for the LGBTQ community. Some themes that emerged from talking with these early childhood educators were how they had never discussed LGBTQ families before, how some educators were struggling with balancing their personal or religious beliefs with not wanting to discriminate against children, and having worries about the appropriateness of talking with young children about LGBTQ relationships. This echoed the Lindsay et al. (2006) findings around how some individuals may equate talking about LGBTQ relationships with talking about sex.

Psychological Adjustment of Children

Children of lesbian and gay parents have been compared on a number of levels and are comparable to children of heterosexual parents with regard to gender development, social relationships, sexual orientation, and psychological adjustment (Tasker, 2005). In a meta-analysis, Fedewa, Black, and Ahn (2014) did not find any gender-influenced outcomes on children's development, meaning that parenting skills or influences on children are not exclusive to either women or men. These authors found that in general, where there are differences, children of LGBQ parents show greater psychological well-being (Fedewa et al., 2014). Psychological adjustment is indistinguishable between children who were adopted early in life, whether they have lesbian, gay, or heterosexual parents (Goldberg & Smith, 2013). Psychological adjustment has also been compared in children of LGBQ parents who do or do not know their donor, and their psychological adjustment is indistinguishable (Gartrell et al., 2005). Also, the more equal the division of childcare between parents, the higher

children's measures of psychological adjustment (Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Adult children of gay and lesbian parents also do not report differences in adjustment based on their family type, sex of the parent, or at the age they learned their parent was gay or lesbian (Lick et al., 2013).

Research has compared heterosexual families, two-parent families, single families, and other types of family structure; overall, associations exist between parents' relationship satisfaction and children's well-being (Lambert, 2005). Regardless of family structure or parent sexual orientation, children in less happy or high-conflict homes have less positive outcomes, leading to the above author's conclusion that healthy relationships within families are more important than parent sexual orientation in terms of the psychological well-being of children. Furthermore, no significant differences existed between the psychological adjustment of children raised by lesbian parents and an age-matched United States population sample (Bos, Gartrell, Peyser, & van Balen, 2008).

Bos and Gartrell (2010) measured the psychological adjustment of 17-year-old adolescent children of lesbian mothers. They found that these children had lower levels of social problems and externalizing behavior and higher levels of social, academic, and overall competence than teenagers from heterosexual-parented families. Adult children of LGBQ parents are also overwhelmingly heterosexual (Golombok & Tasker, 1996). Although it is likely sexual orientation is determined by a number of interacting factors, the sexual orientation of parents does not appear to be a meaningful variable of influence.

There are no differences in the play of young children of lesbian-headed families compared with heterosexual parented families. In one study, young girls

generally had a more accurate view of family dynamics and more themes of affection, while boys were less likely to incorporate interpersonal relationships in their play (Perry et al., 2004). In relation to young children, some LGBQ parents brought up issues around having the "sex talk" and noted that books for children did not address sex or affection in LGBTQ relationships (Long et al., 2006).

One difference among children with LGBQ parents is that they report being more open to trying same-gender relationships and are also more accepting of others in same-gender relationships (Golombok & Tasker, 1996). They are also more tolerant of gender nonconformity. One study (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010) found that sons in lesbian and heterosexual mother-only families were no less masculine than children raised with both a mother and a father but were also more feminine, showing greater gender role flexibility. Children of lesbian mothers also had lower rates of experiencing physical or sexual abuse (Gartrell et al., 2005), and gay fathers were even less likely to spank their children (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010).

Parent–Child Relationships

In a recent meta-analysis of the comparative literature, Fedewa et al. (2014) found that there is no relationship between the quality of the parent–child relationship and the parent's sexual orientation or gender. Having close relationships with their mothers increased adolescent well-being in the face of discrimination (Bos & Gartrell, 2010). Family communication, nurturance, and support are protective factors for adolescents that are also associated with well-being in adulthood. In addition, recent research has suggested that children of lesbian mothers experience greater closeness with their biological rather than nonbiological mothers (Goldberg & Allen, 2013).

Overall, family compatibility and communication enhanced resilience in lesbian-headed families despite having experiences of stigmatization.

Bos et al. (2008) recently published their results from the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study. They administered the Child Behavior Checklist to parents as well as interviewed each family member. They also found that homophobia had a negative relationship with the well-being of children who experienced it; yet, these children were particularly resilient due to their mothers' attitudes. When their mothers considered themselves a part of and participated in the local lesbian community, this resulted in increased resilience and was a protective factor for their children. In addition, another protective factor was LGBTQ curricula in the children's classrooms. When these children did experience homophobia, it resulted in higher levels of anxiety and depression, increased social and attention problems, and increased externalizing and internalizing behavior as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist.

Breshears (2011) interviewed lesbian parents to explore messages these mothers perceived from society as well as messages their children perceived. These parents reported that the morality of their family identity had been challenged as wrong or sinful. Their children reported being teased about having two mothers, which their mothers interpreted as challenging the validity of their family. They described their family being perceived as "taboo," meaning that others had recommended they keep their family structure a secret or that only their close family should know. They reported their children received messages in class about the validity of their family, that is, when teachers drew family trees with one mother and one father.

In addition, Breshears (2011) noted that these messages were not all negative. The mothers stated their children often received conflicting messages from others of both approval and disapproval. They believed the outsider discourse helped their children understand that all families are different and family structures are diverse. Finally, they described how excited their children were when they were able to talk with other children who had two mothers.

Therapy with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer-Parented Families

Theories and Models of Counseling

As of the 2012 writing, Bigner and Wetchler (2012) in the *Handbook of LGBT-Affirmative Couple and Family Therapy* stated that no known couple or family treatment protocols have been empirically validated with sexual and gender minority couples and families. Taking into account this lack of research, Long et al. (2006) reviewed major family therapy models and discussed their applicability with families with LGBQ members. The following section describes relevant highlights from their discussion.

Structural family therapy focuses on hierarchies and boundaries within a family system. Depending on when or if a parent comes out, this could be stressful for the couple and/or parental subsystems. A change in family rules may be required, or children may align themselves with one parent or another depending on current issues.

In Satir's human validation and experiential approaches, growth is assumed to occur through experience (Gehart, 2010). It may be possible to change patterns of communication among LGBQ families in session by actively encouraging

communication and expression of emotion among family members by using touch and by reframing issues in the family.

Solution-focused models focus on solutions to problems rather than on the problems themselves. Because it is a constructivist perspective, it is assumed that there is no typical family, and all families create their own meaning through shared experiences and language. Long et al. (2006) expressed concern about family members potentially labeling an individual's sexual orientation as a problem but suggested that in using a solution-focused model, the clinician can help change and explore the family's values and beliefs about the "problem."

In narrative therapy, problems are viewed as a result of the stories individuals tell themselves as a product of their own experiences and through the influence of the dominant culture. When the dominant culture is oppressive, counseling psychologists must help clients develop different stories to feel empowered and to redefine and deconstruct the problem. Of all the family therapy models presented, Long et al. (2006) expressed their belief that narrative therapy has the greatest potential with LGBQ populations. They cautioned clinicians to avoid externalizing sexual orientation as the "problem," which would imply that sexual orientation is not a part of a person's identity.

Worell and Remer (2003) described foundations of feminist therapy that emerged from a dissatisfaction with traditional theories of counseling and development and aimed to challenge traditional gender stereotypes by examining issues of power, privilege, and oppression. The feminist perspective asserts that most sex differences represent differences in socialization and levels of oppression rather than actual differences. Many mental health problems are actually due to external

pressures and oppression. Because the dominant culture defines mental health, feminist theory states that most diagnostic categories are socially constructed and pathologize diversity and alternative sexualities.

Although not a theory of counseling, queer theory also offers a unique lens to working with LGBQ families. Queer theory emerged from feminist theory and lesbian and gay studies, from attempts to depathologize homosexuality in the 1970s, and from political struggles aiming to legitimize diverse identities (Oswald, Kuvalanka, Blume, & Berkowitz, 2009). Similar to feminist theory, it focuses on gender and power and additionally aims to deconstruct binaries and dualisms viewed as false linguistic distinctions. Queer theory states that power in society is enforced through binaries of gender, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression. Institutionalized heteronormativity serves to ensure conformity, to keep some groups in power, and to ensure that some will have more status than others. Because the LGBTQ population is devalued, risk is associated with coming out and being authentic in society. In addition, Oswald et al. (2009) reminded their readers that queer theory is not necessarily about studying LGBTQ individuals but is intended as a lens through which to view all individuals, relationships, families, and societies.

Finally, Long et al. (2006) encouraged psychology training programs to help counseling psychology trainees examine their beliefs about sexual minorities in a safe learning environment. They encouraged training programs to examine their curricula for heteronormativity and bias and to encourage self-reflection among faculty and trainees.

In general, models that appear successful with LGBQ families merge feminist and queer theory, systemic therapy, and postmodern/constructivist approaches.

Societal norms around sexual orientation and gender roles, identity, and expression affect and oppress all individuals regardless of whether they are part of the dominant or a marginalized culture. Counseling psychologists, when equipped with this knowledge, are in a position to work effectively with diverse families as well as be advocates in their communities.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Families in Therapy

When LGBQ couples present in therapy, they struggle with the same issues heterosexual couples do—communication, finances, sex, parenting, and division of labor. The LGBQ couples are more likely to seek out therapy for these issues than for issues directly related to being lesbian or gay (Green & Mitchell, 2008). When LGBQ-parented families present in therapy with issues directly related to being LGBQ, it is important that counseling psychologists are aware of these issues, are able to address them effectively with families without perpetuating heteronormative stigma, and take into account the impact of heterosexism on mental health. Long et al. (2006) reminded counseling psychologists to be aware that families or individuals do not need therapy because of their sexual orientation, but they may need therapy due to the impact of heterosexism by society.

Shelton and Delgado-Romero (2011) found that microaggressions were commonly experienced by LGBQ individuals in therapy. Seven sexual orientation microaggression themes displayed by therapists emerged through a focus group discussion: (a) assumption that sexual orientation is the cause of all presenting issues, (b) avoidance and minimizing of sexual orientation, (c) attempts to overidentify with LGBQ clients, (d) making stereotypical assumptions about LGBQ clients, (e)

expression of heteronormative bias, (f) assumption that LGBQ individuals need psychotherapeutic treatment, and (g) warnings about the dangers of identifying as LGBQ. Experiencing these microaggressions negatively impacted the therapeutic process, and clients felt uncomfortable, powerless, misunderstood, suppressed, and angry (Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011). In addition, clients in the focus group reported increased skepticism about the effectiveness of therapy, the ability of the therapist, and the therapist's investment in the process. Overall, despite the inclusion of multicultural competency education infused in counseling programs, LGBQ clients still currently experience microaggressions in therapy.

There are several key differences counseling psychologists must be aware of when working with LGBQ couples and families. Discrimination, prejudice, and internalized homophobia are common experiences in the LGBTQ community (Gottman et al., 2003). The LGBTQ individuals may also experience limited social support, resistance from their own families of origin, or face prejudice around life transitions such as being in a relationship, getting married, or having children (Negy & McKinney, 2006). The LGBTQ individuals who are rejected or face a lack of support from their families of origin may instead find a family of choice (Weston, 1991). This expansion of the concept of family may include friends, former partners (heterosexual or LGBTQ), or mentors who are not blood relatives.

The *Handbook of LGBQ-Affirmative Couple and Family Therapy* (Bigner & Wetchler, 2012) described a number of obstacles LGBQ-parented families face that heterosexual families do not. The LGBQ individuals as well as their children and family members face societal oppression and marginalization. They are members of a marginalized population, and due to the non-visible nature of their minority status,

may have a lack of positive role models or feel isolated. In addition, LGBQ couples and family members may face invalidation of their relationship by society, friends, or their families of origin. Finally, difference in levels of outness or identity development between members of a couple may impact the visibility and potential support the family might receive (Jonathan, 2009).

It is also possible that families with LGBQ members will present in therapy wanting to directly address issues related to their sexual orientation (Bigner & Wetchler, 2012). Families, especially children, may need help with role playing how to combat heterosexism, particularly in the school setting where they may be bullied or have teachers who are unresponsive. Families may also need to discuss issues around disclosure and the positive and negative consequences around coming out to family members, school or work, or socially. Children may need to explore their own sexual orientation or gender identity or may benefit through group therapy with other children from non-traditional families. Finally, parents may need guidance around coming out to their children or how to have effective ongoing conversations about heterosexism and sexuality or their children's experiences, perceptions, feelings, and opinions.

Counseling psychologists must aim to create a safe place for families to discuss potential negative societal messages they receive (Bigner & Wetchler, 2012). It is likely that difficult family conversations are not only about coming out but are around identity and heterosexism. It is also likely that families presenting in therapy have tried to have these conversations at home and were unsuccessful before coming to therapy. Counseling psychologists must be able to hold each individual family member's perspectives as well as view the family through a lens of having

experienced societal oppression and disempowerment. All this must be done in the context of family therapy where people present in therapy due to relational conflict.

As described earlier, successful LGBQ couples engage in conversations about power, equality, and aim to be attuned to their partner's experiences (Jonathan, 2009). Children of LGBQ parents have a sophisticated understanding of diversity and oppression. Counseling psychologists can look to LGBQ-parented families for guidance as they facilitate conversations with all their clients about power, marginalization, and diversity.

Uniqueness and Strengths of Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, and Queer-Parented Families

The LGBQ parents exhibit a number of unique strengths. They combine a historically marginalized identity as LGBQ with a societally valued identity as a parent, and thus have a unique perspective (Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999). Because they do not have societal pressure to maintain traditional gender roles in their relationships, they are more intentional about parenting and the division of labor; they actively engage in conversations about power and equality in their relationships (Jonathan, 2009). In conflict, they exhibit fewer power struggles and show more humor and positivity than do heterosexual couples (Gottman et al., 2008). If relationships end, LGBQ individuals are more likely to continue friendships with their former partners and continue to think of them as family (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).

As parents, LGBQ individuals take pride in expanding traditional gender roles and redefining and expanding the definition of family (Solomon et al., 2005). They display courage in going against cultural norms and display resilience in the face of oppression. They actively construct families of choice and ensure that they have

social and familial support (Weston, 1991). The LGBQ parents also see themselves as advocates and actively select schools for their children that demonstrate a commitment to diversity (Lindsay et al., 2006).

The fathers in one focus group described many rewards of being a gay parent (Schacher et al., 2005). They felt proud that they "beat the system" by breaking through stereotypes and creating social change. They believed they were role models for other gay men who wanted families. They felt personal growth and fulfillment in being fathers and felt a commonality with straight people over this shared experience of parenthood. Finally, they described that being a parent facilitated a deeper connection with their partners and the rest of their families.

Schacher et al. (2005) recommended that society looks to gay men as role models to elevate the status of fathering. They believed there are positive repercussions for society in terms of protecting the father–child bond, that is, increasing the acceptability of paternity leave and influencing social policies and new ways of social thinking.

Lambert (2005) described a number of unique strengths of children of gay and lesbian parents. These children often have a greater appreciation of diversity; a willingness to challenge traditional sex-role stereotypes; and an ability to develop creative, nurturing, and healthy family relationships in the face of discrimination. Ten-year-olds interviewed as part of the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (Gartrell et al., 2005) also demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of diversity and acceptance. They reported being saddened when their classmates were discriminatory. These children also reported that their mothers were educating them about diversity, how to respond to harassment, and how to stand up against homophobia.

Welsh (2011) recently interviewed adolescents, ages 13 to 18, being raised by same-gender parents. These children described their concept of family as different than others, stating that they had a greater understanding of diversity and the value of family. These children demonstrated a greater ability to be flexible and accepting of self and others. They had an understanding of the minority perspective and believed that acceptance, maturity, their role as an advocate, and valuing diversity were strong family values. They described frustration that their family might be perceived as abnormal and believed that marriage or genetic ties did not necessarily make a family.

Adolescents' developmentally appropriate process of separation and individuation as teenagers is compounded with their identity as children of same-gender parents (Welsh, 2011). The theme of "I am not my parents, so who am I?" was prevalent in the narratives of interviewed adolescents. A few of the adolescents interviewed were in college; they stated that this transition was helpful in allowing them to redefine themselves and choose how they identified. Throughout their adolescence, they reported that having communities of understanding, such as peer support or being with other children of same-gender parents, were essential.

Adult children of lesbian mothers reported varying perceptions of the existence of societal discrimination; most individuals noted that the prevalence varied depending on geographic location (Leddy et al., 2012). Most individuals reported having to defend themselves and their families and to prove how normal they were. They described feeling a lack of peer support during these times. As they grew older, adolescent children of LGBQ parents reported having more awareness of homophobia by hearing negative political statements or hearing statements in the media about the

debate over gay marriage. They believed it was their role to be an advocate and to speak up and fight on behalf of their families (Welsh, 2011).

Leddy et al. (2012) recently conducted a qualitative online, open-ended questionnaire of adult children of lesbian mothers. The first theme that emerged identified the positive aspects of being raised in a lesbian home: being in an environment of acceptance and love, being involved with the close-knit LGBQ community, and feeling proud of defying social norms. Adult children of lesbian mothers also experienced positive reactions from peers including interest, surprise, and thinking it was "cool."

Overall, adult children generally have a sense of pride in and respect for their families (Leddy et al., 2012). As adults, they are more open to trying same-gender relationships and are more accepting of others in same-gender relationships who are gender nonconforming (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Golombok & Tasker, 1996). These individuals, couples, children, and families as a whole are resilient, attuned to issues of diversity and oppression, and do this in a cultural and societal context of marginalization and oppression (Kurdek, 2005).

Gaps in the Literature

Although research on LGBQ-parented families is an emerging and rapidly growing area of research, gaps in the literature still exist. These gaps generally focus around examining the lives of individuals with different gender or sexual identities, the experiences of children, and incorporating qualitative methodology into the field. Throughout the research, there was also a lack of systemic perspectives and a focus on exploring interactions between family members.

There is a great paucity of empirical research on individuals who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming, although recent media attention and documentaries have brought attention to their experiences. As adults and parents, transgender individuals may face unique challenges in their relationships as their individual process of coming out, transitioning, and identity development becomes a transition process for their entire family. One recent study explored adult children's experiences of their transgender parent's disclosure and transition (Veldorale-Griffin, 2014). This study found that adults and their children experienced similar levels of stress around this transition, and that overall, no changes or positive changes resulted in the parent–child relationship.

In addition to the paucity of research on transgender and gender nonconforming individuals, other demographic categories and spectrums were missing from the research. Current research is mostly dichotomized between lesbian and gay perspectives and neglects the experiences of individuals who identify as bisexual, queer, or who do not identify themselves within a binary category of sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender identity, or gender expression.

There is also a lack of research on the experiences of heterosexual individuals as members of the dominant culture. This research is largely theoretical; it generally focuses on the experience of privilege and how individuals in the dominant culture have a lack of awareness of their power and a lack of knowledge about what individuals from an oppressed culture experience. For example, Oswald and Suter (2004) compared the experience of attending a heterosexual wedding between LGBTQ and heterosexual individuals. Heterosexual attendees felt the wedding rituals served to help them feel included and feel closer to the family, while the experience of

LGBTQ attendees was that the wedding challenged their sense of belonging to the family, especially if the wedding was religious or rural. Heterosexual individuals felt they were "naturally" members of the family, had no expectation that their partner might be excluded from the wedding, and did not experience anxiety around the opposite-gender pairing of the bridal party when walking down the aisle or during dancing.

As noted earlier, LGBQ families may have a wider definition of family and may be more likely to construct a family of choice (Weston, 1991). Although relational and social support for LGBTQ parents has been examined in the community, families of choice have not been incorporated into empirical research on children and parenting. Existing research on gay male parenting is largely qualitative; the field could benefit from quantitative studies as well. Alternative family structures such as non-monogamous or polyamorous relationships, families of choice, or incorporating biological donors into the family were also not generally represented in the literature or had limited generalizability (Goldberg & Allen, 2013; Sheff, 2011). Polyamorous families also challenge traditional heteronormative definitions of family. These individuals are much less visible than LGB-parented families; yet, they face many of the same obstacles around marginalization, disclosure, custodial issues, and relationships with their families (Sheff, 2011).

Importantly, LGBTQ individuals are not a homogenous group. Because research on LGBQ-parented families is an emerging area, few studies have incorporated other identities and demographics such as ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. Much current research has been completed with LGBQ people of higher socioeconomic status who are highly

educated. Thus, findings might not be representative of all LGBQ individuals. Recently, European and Australian research in the field of LGBQ family studies has dominated the literature; less information is available about the experiences of LGBQ-parented families in the United States.

In relation to the current study, three notable areas were underrepresented in the literature. First, most research in LGBQ family studies was quantitative. Because listening to the voices of individuals from marginalized populations is such a deeply unique and personal experience, it is important that future research incorporates qualitative research so individual stories may be told and explored. Second, very few studies incorporated a family systems perspective. Most research explored the experiences of individuals, asked them to think about their relationships with their family members, but did not actually involve researching or interviewing more than one individual in a family. In the few studies conducted with multiple family members, they were interviewed separately rather than together. Finally, very few studies incorporated young children of LGBQ parents; most of the research involving children asked adolescents or young adults to reflect on their current experiences in their families or their experiences growing up. The voices and perspectives of elementary- and middle-school children are equally valid and were missing from the literature.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the current literature related to LGBQ parents and their families. Initially, it explored theoretical foundations to working with LGBQ-parented families in therapy including systems theory; relational cultural theory that incorporates social justice and feminist foundations; and intersectionality theory,

which explores multiple minority identities. Then, individuals' experiences as part of marginalized cultures were discussed as well as described how LGBQ individuals managed stigma. Next, lesbian and gay couple relationships were explored including issues around relationship satisfaction and stability, conflict, and division of labor. Literature was also reviewed to understand the experiences of lesbian mothers and gay fathers; specifically pathways to parenthood, issues around parent and child disclosure, bullying in schools, psychological adjustment of children of LGBQ parents, and dynamics of LGBQ parent–child relationships. Literature around LGBQ-parented families presenting in therapy was discussed including preferred models of counseling and unique issues and strengths of which counseling psychologists should be informed. Finally, gaps in the literature were presented, which included a paucity of research on LGBQ-parented families as a family system, the absence of the voices and opinions of young children, and the lack of qualitative research on LGBQ-parented families.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The field of psychology has generally been dominated by positivist research paradigms and quantitative methodologies (Ponterotto, 2005). Ponterotto (2005) offered that this limits the psychology profession's ability to advance the field and suggests that qualitative methodologies be incorporated into psychology research for the purposes of improving scientific training and the quality of services provided to clients. Qualitative methodology is appropriate when researchers are interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon from the perspective of the person experiencing that phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is emic—it refers to concepts unique to an individual's experience and may not be generalizable (Ponterotto, 2005). In addition, qualitative research is idiographic, that is, it explores uniqueness by richly describing individuals (Ponterotto, 2005).

Qualitative research seeks to explore meaning in its naturalistic context and provides perspective rather than seeking to uncover some objective truth or to generalize findings to the greater population. Every family is unique and constructs shared meaning out of their experiences. Because I sought to understand the lived experiences of LGBQ-parented families from an emic perspective, qualitative research was the most appropriate method to investigate this phenomenon.

In this chapter, I first discuss the theoretical framework used to provide the basis for the methodology and provide a description of the stance of the researcher. A pilot study is presented that I conducted to begin exploring the experience of being part of an LGBQ-parented family. Then, research methods are presented including the phenomenological research design that was utilized, the procedures for data collection, criteria for inclusion of participants, research procedures, and data analysis. Potential biases that may have influenced the analysis of the data are discussed. Finally, I provide a discussion of ethical considerations accompanying this research as well as describe methods that maintained the rigor and trustworthiness of this study.

Theoretical Framework

A qualitative study begins with certain philosophical assumptions made by researchers (Creswell, 2007). Initially, researchers must have a clear understanding of their philosophical background and the theory they will utilize to conceptualize their research. The goal of this research was to understand the lived experiences of LGBQ-parented families and to understand each individual and family's unique experience as well as the common and discrepant experiences between interviewed families. Each family is unique. Therefore, I was interested in understanding the shared meaning created in these family systems in order to explore if there was a unique phenomenological experience of being part of an LGBQ-parented family.

My theoretical stance is both systemic and constructivist. This study sought to explore meaning and experiences rather than impose values on participants. Social constructivism seeks to explore and understand the rich diversity of experience as well as understand the meaning individuals create. This study aimed to understand the shared meaning each interviewed family system made out of their lived experiences as

a non-traditional family. Whole-family interviews were conducted in order to systemically explore the impact that societal heteronormative assumptions have had or not had on these family units.

People create meaning in different ways. In a constructivist framework, meaning is constructed, not discovered (Crotty, 2010). There is no single, discoverable, objective truth or reality; rather, meaning is actively and constantly constructed. Constructivism states that meaning is socially and individually constructed by humans through a process of interacting with the world (Ponterotto, 2005). It is an ongoing process of meaning-making that is unique to each individual. In addition, there are different circles of influence on individuals: relational, familial, environmental, societal, and historical (Creswell, 2007).

In addition, the influence of the researcher on the participant and the participant on the researcher is a unique element of qualitative research (Ponterotto, 2005). During interviews, meaning is uncovered through dialog and the researcher's interpretation. Part of the research process involves the researchers identifying their own worldview and biases in order to position themselves to interpret their findings accurately based on the worldview of their participants (Creswell, 2007). In this study, I hoped to uncover the meaning of the lived experiences of my participants through examining multiple sources of data including self-report, family dynamics, my own analyses, and other researchers examining the data.

The added element of systems theory is crucial to the theoretical framework of this study. Constructivist researchers address the processes of interactions between participants (Creswell, 2007). As described previously, family systems theory describes how individuals influence each other and how families self-correct to

maintain normalcy (Bateson, 1972). A number of assumptions underlie the theory including assumptions that all behavior is a form of communication, and all behavior makes sense when one takes into account one's family and the broader social and environmental contexts (Gehart, 2010). In addition, systems theory assumes that the purpose of any behavior is to allow the family to maintain homeostasis. By altering the interaction patterns between family members, therapeutic change can occur (Gehart, 2010). Meaning, values, and beliefs are uniquely created in each family system.

In general, there is limited qualitative research that involves interviews with whole systems (Eggenberger & Nelms, 2007). When whole groups or systems are interviewed, it is generally conducted in a focus group scenario rather than with families. When family research is done, it generally involves interviewing individual family members rather than the family as a group (Eggenberger & Nelms, 2007). Family systems are more than the sum of each individual member as each family member has a voice that is both independent of and related to one another. The authors emphasized that families want to tell their stories together, which they believe are affirming, empowering, therapeutic, and give each individual a greater understanding of family issues and meaning-making within the system.

Due to the dearth of literature exploring how to conduct whole-family interviews, I have relied on the theoretical base of systems theory, relational-cultural theory, and intersectionality theory to inform the methodology for this study. The purpose of conducting whole-family interviews is to have data to describe the interactions and relationships between family members, a focus of systems theory (Bateson, 1972). In addition, the lens of relational-cultural theory was applied to these

interviews, as the theory focuses on exploring the impact that privilege and oppression has on personal relationships.

It was also important to observe and note nonverbal information, which was video-recorded as well as noted in my researcher journal after the interview. Nonverbal information may, for example, indicate comfort or discomfort, emotional closeness or distance between individuals, agreement or disagreement, or openness or defensiveness. In addition, in alignment with systems theory, it is assumed that an individual's behavior and symptoms always make sense in the person's broader relational contexts (Gehart, 2010). I am assuming that the behavior of each individual member of an interviewed family is influenced by the other members of the family as well as by the broader cultural context in which they reside.

Importantly, because knowledge is constructed, each family member may make a different meaning out of an identical event (Dahl & Boss, 2005). Having each family describe multiple perceptions of the same event within one family system was crucial to my research. Family therapists are familiar with the process of family members having different perspectives about the same situation; navigating this process is fundamental to being a systemic therapist. Given that family therapists often see families when they are in distress, Dahl and Boss (2005) suggested that as phenomenologists, it is worthwhile to understand the experiences of families even in the most every day, mundane situations to understand how they work.

Each family system is unique and each individual has his or her own experience and interpretation of the meaning of each relationship he or she has with other family members and with the entire family system. The purpose of this study was to systemically examine the experiences of individuals, taking into account the

reciprocal nature of their relationships with their family and society. My goal was to explore the meaning of each participant's experience as well as the shared meaning each unique family system creates in their greater societal, political, and historical context. In addition, I hoped to uncover similarities and differences within each family member's unique experience as well as understand similarities and differences between each family system I interviewed.

Methodology

This phenomenological study explored what it means to be a part of a family with same-gender parents and younger children. The goal was to explore the differences and commonalities between families experiencing the same phenomenon of being in a same-gender-parented household in order to describe the essence of their experience (Merriam, 2009). Polkinghorne (as cited in Creswell, 2007) suggested, "The reader should come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, 'I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that'" (p. 188).

A number of philosophical assumptions inform the phenomenological method. First, instead of using an empirical approach to research, phenomenology returns to the original Greek concept of philosophy as a search for wisdom (Creswell, 2007). Instead of searching for an objective truth, the approach of a phenomenological study is to suspend judgment and set aside biases and presuppositions in order to be open to the participants' lived experiences; this is known as epoche or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher is not interested in measuring an objective reality but in understanding the subjective reality and experiences of the individual.

A phenomenological researcher's goal is to focus on the wholeness of an individual's experience (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological interview is the

preferred way to directly interact with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). The goal is to obtain a composite description of the phenomenon so the meaning and inner structure can be understood.

Moustakas (1994) described the process of conducting a transcendental phenomenology. In this case, the word "transcendental" refers to the researcher's process of rising above his or her own worldview and biases to naively, freshly, and openly perceive the phenomenon itself. Although the researcher may engage in interpretation and analysis of the data, a greater value is placed on the description of the individual who has actually experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). For this study, because the goal was to understand as deeply as possible the experiences and meaning-making of the participants and their families, a transcendental phenomenology was conducted.

Prior to the beginning of data collection, the researcher must examine her or his own experience, a process known as epoche or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing is the process of becoming aware of the researcher's own biases, life experience, and previous knowledge in order to immerse herself or himself in the participants' experiences to be able to see things as the participant experiences them (Moustakas, 1994). Although this process is rarely fully achieved, the goal is to minimize researcher interpretation in order to freshly perceive new information (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher must first become aware of his or her own experience and stance in order to set those experiences aside. Moustakas (1994) suggested, "The challenge of the Epoche is to be transparent to ourselves" (p. 86). As such, bracketing is initially done before research is begun and then becomes a constant reflexive

process throughout the course of the research (Creswell, 2007). However, this process is as much a preparation for understanding new knowledge as well as an experience and internal state unto itself (Moustakas, 1994).

Ultimately, the goal of phenomenology is to fully understand the experiences of individuals experiencing the same phenomenon. I have aimed to do this by describing the similarities and dissimilarities between participants who have experienced living in a family with LGBQ parents. The first step in that process was to identify my own perspectives, life experiences, and biases related to the phenomenon.

Researcher Stance

A number of pertinent issues contributed to my interest in the study and advocacy for LGBQ-parented families. First, I grew up in a Jewish home. From an early age, it was instilled in me by my family and teachers that we have historically been a marginalized culture. Our responsibility as a Jewish people was to prevent that from happening to others. I learned that we stand up for others because we know what it is like to be oppressed. The Jewish culture holds an admiration for individuals who have struggled and overcome oppression and anti-Semitism. We value keeping traditions strong, even during times when they must be kept secret.

In addition, the primacy of the family is emphasized as the center of transmitting values, education, and support. I am proud of the emphasis on social justice that has been passed down through my family. My maternal grandfather, a professor of labor relations, participated in the Selma march for civil rights in the 1960s. My maternal grandmother was a professor of education who advocated for the integration of special education students into regular classrooms. My paternal

grandmother was known as the “cookie lady” at a residential home for individuals living with human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. She and my paternal grandfather, a professor of microbiology, were the first couple in the neighborhood to sell their home to an African American couple in the 1960s and they specifically requested African exchange students during a time when they could not find placement in most homes.

I have grown up knowing family is important. I was drawn to the field of marriage and family therapy because I believe everyone deserves a loving family. I am inspired by the incredible diversity of healthy families. In particular, I have always had a special interest in gay and lesbian families because I value their uniqueness and admire their courage for standing up for healthy relationships in the face of discrimination.

I also want to give children a voice through this research. Talking with younger children provides special moments and insight into the nature of childhood, which is filled with wonder, curiosity, and playfulness. Children are intuitive and observant; children of LGBQ parents have observations and perceptions that are valuable, important, and will contribute to the understanding of the field. Exploring and observing children and parents talking together about these important social and emotional issues is, for me, the perfect confluence of my interests in working with families, children, and the LGBTQ population.

Finally, I have been challenged to identify and articulate the reasons why I am doing this research as a member of the dominant group. I chose to do this research not in spite of my heterosexual identity but because of it. I believe it is my responsibility as a member of the dominant culture and as an LGBTQ ally to promote diversity in

research and to try to understand the experiences of people who are different from me. My hope was to bracket my assumptions in order to relinquish the privilege of not having to have awareness of my heteronormative bias as a member of the dominant culture so I could fully immerse myself into the experiences of these families.

Pilot Study

In 2012, a pilot study was completed for the purpose of developing and improving this study (Gall, 2012). Kate and Jodi had been together for 19 years at the date of the interview. They had one son, Dylan, who was 8 years old and in third grade. The interview occurred in their home and lasted for approximately 1.5 hours. All family members were present for the interview.

Three major themes emerged from the data: the couples' intentionality of parenting, the complexities of the ongoing process of disclosure, and wanting to protect each other from discrimination. Overall, Jodi and Kate discussed the intentional process of becoming parents, described themselves as being more bonded together as a result of the process, and described Dylan as more "wanted." They wanted to make sure they were not "coddling" Dylan as well as wanting to provide him with male role models and opportunities to roughhouse. Also, each family member described being hesitant to disclose the structure of their family and reported getting a "feeling" of comfort or trust when they determined it was okay to disclose. Finally, throughout the interview, Jodi, Kate, and Dylan displayed discomfort with certain topics. This was interpreted as sensitivity to other family members and intended to protect each other from the experience or awareness of discrimination. Jodi and Kate were sensitive to Dylan's developmental level—not wanting to expose

him to more complex societal attitudes. However, Dylan seemed to be more aware of gender stereotypes and social messages than his parents expected.

The Intentionality of Parenting

Kate and Jodi discussed one unique aspect of same-gender parenting—the intentionality of having a child. Their decision to have a child was the result of years of conversation and was an incredibly bonding experience for them. They compared the decision to have a child with couples struggling with infertility, where couples invest an enormous amount of emotional energy around the process. They decided they would use a donor and Jodi became pregnant easily. As a teacher working in inner-city schools, Jodi described Dylan as being especially "wanted" compared to other families she had observed. She also described her and Kate as being "committed to their product," gesturing to Dylan. Despite a number of initial comments from relatives worrying about Dylan having "25 to 100 siblings" or Kate and her side of the family "not really" being related to Dylan, Jodi and Kate helped their family understand their unique situation by likening it to adoption.

Another element of intentional parenting was Jodi and Kate's worry that as two women, they would be too nurturing and would not provide Dylan enough opportunities to get out physical energy. They described themselves as warm and maternal. However, they expressed worry that they would "coddle" Dylan, stating that sometimes there were "too many cooks in the kitchen." All three members of the family expressed that they were grateful for the time they cuddled and spent with each other and would not change a thing. Kate said she tries to roughhouse with Dylan to get his physical energy out, and he also expressed how much he enjoyed this time. Jodi stated that they put Dylan in Judo to get his "testosterone flowing." They were

also intentional about him spending time with male relatives and his friends' fathers to have male attention and interaction.

Kate and Jodi seemed particularly cognizant of developmental issues, being wary of exposing Dylan to issues that might upset him or he might not understand. They frequently asked him if he knew what words like "straight" or "same-sex" meant. They notably did not say the words "gay" or "lesbian" during the interview, although they had many rainbow-themed objects around their house. They stated that Dylan "doesn't have a frame of reference" for the structure of families unlike their own.

Disclosure

Similar to other themes described in the literature, Jodi, Kate, and Dylan's discussions echoed the complexities around disclosure to others and determining "okayness" to disclose. They discussed wanting to be open with others; aside from a few comments here and there, they explained they had no reason to worry about others' reactions.

Dylan explained that he wants to get to know people before disclosing about his family. He had difficulty describing what made him hesitant to disclose right away. He said he becomes uncomfortable when others ask questions such as, "What does your dad do for a living?" He described he gets a "feeling" and a sense of comfort and trust with individuals whom he decides to tell. He also explained that other kids think it is "cool" that he has two moms. He did not anticipate any bullying or discrimination as a result of this disclosure. Dylan had some close friends who were supportive and protective of him; he described these friends as being part of the disclosure process and who would stand up for him if need be.

Jodi described that she recently changed jobs. She was a teacher and had worked in rural as well as urban areas; she was much more open about her sexual orientation with others in urban schools. She described feeling less open with her new colleagues in this rural area. She had noticed once in a while others distancing themselves from her after learning about her family. However, she and Kate had come to the conclusion that it is possible others do not like them because of reasons other than their sexual orientation. They assumed this is the reason rather than any potential discrimination.

Kate was aware of the changing way she has decided to disclose to others. She described realizing that though her intent was to educate people, she was actually making others defensive by being too direct. Since this realization, she had softened her approach while still wanting to be open with others, for example, Dylan's teachers. She described having awareness of the implicit messages sent when, for example, teachers say, "Bring this form home for your mom and dad to sign." She stated how important she believed language is in communicating acceptance or discrimination.

Wanting to Protect Family Members from Discomfort

One notable theme was the undertone of discomfort around certain topics during the interview. It is possible this may have been due to being uncomfortable being interviewed about these topics, or because there was not enough rapport built with the interviewer. However, this discomfort seemed to be very subtle.

A notable part of the interview was Dylan's comment that Jodi was "more like the mom" and Kate was "more like the dad" despite both Jodi and Kate saying that Dylan had no frame of reference for what typical families look like. As soon as Dylan

said this, Jodi exclaimed, “I wondered if that was going to come up!” Dylan appeared to immediately regret making this statement; he gave somewhat generic and roundabout answers after being questioned about his comment of his parents. He immediately curled up and put his face in the blanket, stating, “This is a hard one,” and avoided answering his parents’ questions. Eventually, he answered that Jodi was like the mom because she wears makeup and skirts and Kate was like the dad because she yells, drinks coffee, and has short hair. Interestingly, Kate also spoke with less stereotypically feminine mannerisms and intonation patterns and appeared direct and assertive.

Kate mentioned that a young niece of hers was 2 when she said Kate was a boy; Kate seemed somewhat embarrassed to discuss this. She described herself as emotional, a “neurotic mom,” and continually repeated, “It’s so funny.” She also stated that she thought people believing social constructs about gender was interesting because it “isn’t real.” The couple was once asked, “Who’s the man in the relationship?” soon after they started dating; this was highly offensive to Kate.

Jodi continued to be curious and attempted to press Dylan on the subject. She eventually gave up, stating, “I blame Mattel” (the manufacturers of Barbie dolls). Other instances of discrimination they had faced were alluded to in unfinished vignettes during the interview and Jodi and Kate stated, “It’s 2012, we’re beyond that!”

Two other moments during the interview seemed to make Dylan uncomfortable. In one, he described how he made a Father’s Day gift in class only to throw it away and that he had to work “double-time” on Mother’s Day to make two gifts. Kate asked him if he was upset that he did not have a dad on Father’s Day, and

Dylan immediately protested in a high-pitched, whiny, and agitated manner. Kate asked him to explain his feelings and he said, “I have nothing really to say.” He emphatically stated that he was not stressed out having to make two gifts on Mother’s Day. Kate and Jodi also asked him if he had ever held anything back that happened at school so they would not get their feelings hurt, which he also denied.

Taking all this information together, it appeared to me Dylan had a number of thoughts about his family that he chose not to share. Developmentally, he was at a stage in his life where protecting his family will take precedence over any information he is willing to disclose to an interviewer. It seemed that by stating frequently Dylan “has no frame of reference,” Jodi and Kate were attempting to reassure themselves that they were protecting Dylan from the realities of a world where homophobia and discrimination still exist. However, it appeared to me that they may have underestimated Dylan’s perceptiveness and sensitivity to issues of gender and sexual orientation. I believe he noticed more than he was willing to disclose.

Limitations

A significant limitation of this pilot study was trustworthiness. Because only one family was interviewed, it was difficult to establish credibility or to determine if the emergent themes would be applicable to other interviewed families. In the future, collecting data to the point of saturation will help to address this limitation. In addition, as the researcher, this was the first interview I performed relating to this topic so my interviewing skills were likely not as polished as they could be. It is also possible that the results and emergent themes of the pilot study may influence or bias my interpretation of the current study. Finally, I was the only individual performing the interview and data analysis. It is possible my bias influenced the analysis. In the

future, expert review will be implemented so other individuals can review my work to identify bias and introduce diverse opinions.

As a result of the pilot study, I continued this research in a more in-depth way. I shared more about myself and why I was doing this research to build increased rapport with participants. I also took steps to become more aware of my own worldview and how to bracket this during interviews and the data analysis process. These areas of learning were incorporated into the procedures of the current study.

Research Methods

Institutional Review Board Approval

After my dissertation committee approved the proposal, I submitted an Institutional Review Board application for approval by this university. An expedited approval was sought due to the nature of this research involving what is considered vulnerable populations of minors and LGBTQ individuals. Upon Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix A) in February 2014, I began recruiting participants.

Participants

Sampling method and recruitment. This study employed the non-probabilistic method of criterion sampling (Merriam, 2009). Each participant met certain specific criteria to be eligible for participation in order to maintain the rigor of the study. It was hoped that participants would come from a variety of backgrounds and types of families so a maximum variation occurs within the sample (Creswell, 2007).

Participants were recruited in the Rocky Mountain region and the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Participants were recruited through well-known and popular community organizations that provide support, resources, or

networking for LGBTQ individuals, couples, and families. Many of these organizations have online groups, e-mail lists, bulletin boards, and newsletters that were used for recruitment. A letter was used for recruitment to ensure consistency (see Appendix B). Participants were also recruited through professional connections of the researcher, for example, mental health professionals or instructors, using the same recruitment letter.

After a review of other qualitative family studies (Eggenberger & Nelms, 2007; SmithBattle, 1996), I stopped recruiting participants and collecting data as I reached saturation, which was reached at eight families. Saturation is defined as the point of redundancy—when new findings cease to emerge from the data or when all research questions are answered (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The family, not the individual, was the unit of analysis in this study.

Inclusion criteria. Participants needed to meet three criteria for inclusion. The first criterion was that both parents must identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. The second criterion was that the couple be married, have a civil union/domestic partnership, or refer to their relationship as a lifetime partnership. Given that LGBQ-parented families often have a broader definition of family than is traditionally defined, my aim was to interview a wide variety of LGBQ-parented families as long as the parents were in a committed relationship (American Society on Aging, 2010). In addition, this ensured that the couple has been together long enough for the child and family to experience life together and to develop family culture and meaning. As discussed in Chapter I, sexual orientation of parents is the variable of interest in the current study. Therefore, participants may have a range of gender identities or expressions including transgender.

Finally, the third criterion was that there must be at least one child in the family who is in elementary school and between the ages of 5 and 11, or between kindergarten and fifth grade, as I was specifically interested in families with young children. Families were acceptable for inclusion in the study if there were multiple children who were older or younger than elementary school age as long as at least one child was in elementary school. For the purposes of this study, at least both parents and one elementary school-aged child needed to be part of the interview so that three or more family members were present (Dahl & Boss, 2005). My hope was that in these cases, the entire family would still be interviewed as a system. In certain interviewed families, some children older and younger than elementary school were not present during the interview.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted face–to–face in participants' homes. I also offered to meet participants at a location of their choice, for example, a public library, but no participants chose this option. This was to ensure their comfort and confidentiality and to minimize distractions. Importantly, all interviews were conducted with the family system present; individual interviews with each family member were not obtained. This decision was made to maintain consistency with the systemic theoretical orientation of the study. I wanted all family members present to witness the responses of their family members in order to facilitate dialog and elicit their reactions to each other. However, if a child or parent was uncomfortable discussing a certain issue in front of their family members, it was possible for that person to request to be excused from the interview and return later or to discuss these issues individually

with the interviewer. No families chose this option, although some children chose to take breaks throughout the interview.

All interviews were digitally recorded using audio-visual software onto the researcher's personal computer. After the interview the files were immediately removed from the computer and stored on two identical flash drives. Each file, as well as access to the flash drive, was password-protected in order to be Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act compliant.

Informed consent was provided before the interview began (see Appendix C). A child assent form was also provided to minors (see Appendix D). This ensured that participants were aware of the purposes of the study, the nature of their confidentiality, and their ability to opt-out at any time. It was also explained that due to the group nature of the interviews, I could guarantee their confidentiality with me but their family members could not guarantee their confidentiality. I explained that they each had the choice whether or not to discuss what they talked about in the interview with themselves or with others after I left; however, I recommended they make this decision together as a family (see Appendix E). It was very important to me to ensure that I introduced myself and described the purposes of the study in a way that used inclusive language and identified myself as an ally of the LGBTQ community. Therefore, I consulted with the Coordinator of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Allies Resource Office on this campus to develop the language for my introduction.

During the preliminary interview process, a demographic questionnaire was administered (see Appendix F), which also included an opportunity for the participants to choose their own pseudonyms. The in-depth interview lasted approximately 1.5 to

2 hours and used a semi-structured format (see Appendix G). In developing these interview questions, I made sure that they were culturally appropriate and sensitive in alignment with relational-cultural theory and intersectionality theory. Therefore, I consulted with an expert in qualitative research with LGBTQ couples, Dr. Naveen Jonathan (personal communication, October 4, 2013), who is a published author in this area. In addition, the interview questions reflected the constructivist and family systems approach that I took by inquiring about relationships between family members and asking for shared meaning that the family had created out of their experiences.

Field notes were recorded immediately after the interview and consisted of behavioral observations of the family as well as observations of family dynamics. In alignment with systems theory, important information was gained by observing facial expressions, glances, movement of individuals, and other nonverbal behaviors. In the field notes as well as in the data analysis section, these nonverbal behaviors were described rather than interpreted in order to maintain the transcendental and descriptive nature of the phenomenology. Researcher reactions were also documented in this journal. The journal contained pseudonyms of participants rather than their actual names to maintain confidentiality. The file was password-protected on the researcher's password-protected flash drive.

In addition, three referrals for family counseling were provided in case the family wished to continue exploring these topics with another mental health professional. These referrals were printed on the informed consent document. Because interviews were completed in the Rocky Mountain region as well as the Pacific Northwest region of the United States, two identical informed consent documents were written with different referral sources depending on the location of

the interview. In the Rocky Mountain region, the referrals were determined by my personal knowledge of low-cost family counseling services in the Denver and Greeley metro areas. In the Pacific Northwest region, the referrals were determined by an Internet search for low-cost family counseling training clinics. Finally, included in the informed consent was a statement that the researcher may contact the family after the interview was complete to ask clarifying or follow-up questions.

Role of Researcher

The researcher is the key instrument of data collection in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). As the researcher who is entering into these family systems, I was both a participant and an observer in the experience of the interviews (Creswell, 2007). My presence necessarily alters family dynamics and the interactions between the participants; this knowledge was taken into account during data analysis.

My goal as a participant–observer was to be constantly reflexive. I attempted to bracket my experiences and biases in order to fully and richly explore the experiences of these families (Moustakas, 1994). Although the results were filtered through my own reality, I hoped to allow the participants to define and describe the phenomenon themselves using their own language (Dahl & Boss, 2005). Finally, I hoped the experience of being interviewed and reflecting on their created meaning and shared experiences was an affirming and empowering experience for the family (Dahl & Boss, 2005).

Data Analysis

Initially, all interviews were transcribed by the researcher. At the point of transcription, participants had already chosen pseudonyms which I used in place of the participants' names. I also changed any Health Insurance Portability and

Accountability Act identifiers revealed in the interviews so all transcripts were de-identified. I had originally planned on either myself or a graduate student transcribing the interviews, thus a transcriber consent is found in Appendix H. This was not necessary as I transcribed each interview.

As Creswell (2007) explained, data analysis starts when data collection begins. Data analysis is a process of discovery that involves the researcher's immersion in the data and subsequent incubation and reflection on the participants' statements (Dahl & Boss, 2005). The researcher is involved in a back-and-forth process between data collection and data analysis and lets the results and themes emerge organically.

During the interviews and after the interviews were transcribed, I first read and reread the transcripts to get a sense of broad themes within each family system and between each family system. Using the process of horizonalization, all the data were laid out for examination and treated with equal weight so the essence of the phenomenon could be isolated (Merriam, 2009). Through this process, significant statements that explain how the participants experienced the phenomenon were highlighted. These statements were not judged but given equal weight and importance.

As the broad themes became narrower, I organized participants' statements into clusters of meaning that served to identify themes in the participants' lived experiences of being part of an LGBQ-parented family. I explored each of these themes systematically and used them to write a rich, thick description of the participants' experiences. Finally, I organized these descriptions to portray the essence of the participants' experiences in order to gain a full understanding of the phenomenon. These descriptions included statements describing similarities and

differences between the meanings each individual and family assigned to their experience of being in a same-gender-parented household.

When describing participants' themes, I included a combination of textural and structural descriptions to convey the essence of participants' experiences. Textural descriptions involve an explanation of the qualities of the experience, for example, time, spatial qualities, colors, internal consciousness, and emotions involved (Moustakas, 1994). Textural descriptions were obtained using the process of phenomenological reduction, wherein the researcher seeks to vividly and completely describe the nature of the experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This process occurs by the researcher first bracketing their experiences and then, through the process of the interviews, attempting to elicit the participants' full descriptions of the phenomenon.

Dahl and Boss (2005) likened this process to peeling away the layers of an onion. During the interview, the researcher begins with a hunch about what the experience of the phenomenon is, and then through process of elimination peels away the layers of meaning to discover its essence. In phenomenological reduction, the researcher uses his or her intuition to understand what the phenomenon is not so he or she can more precisely determine the experience of the phenomenon (Dahl & Boss, 2005; Moustakas, 1994). The result is a nuanced description of the phenomenon that has been examined from every angle and coconstructed by the participants. Again, because this study is a transcendental phenomenology, greater weight was placed on richly describing and examining the participants' experiences rather than on the interpretation of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

After the phenomenological reduction was completed, the next step was to complete the task of imaginative variation. Imaginative variation seeks to grasp the structural essences of the participants' experience (Moustakas, 1994). A structural description involves describing the underlying and precipitating factors involved in the phenomenon of being part of an LGBQ-parented family. The researcher uses his or her imagination to come up with every possible angle from which the phenomenon can be viewed, describe how the phenomenon has come to be, what led up to it, and ultimately, the meaning participants assign to the phenomenon. Through the process of the researcher first bracketing his or her experiences and biases and then using the techniques of phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation, a full synthesis of essences and meanings can then be described (Moustakas, 1994).

In addition, another researcher was asked to be a second peer reviewer in order to strengthen trustworthiness. Dr. Geri Tien has a master's degree in marriage and family therapy and a doctorate in counseling psychology and specializes in working with and conducting qualitative research with diverse couples and families. Dr. Tien examined preliminary data analyses in order to determine if she concurred or would make any modifications to my coding or analysis of themes. The peer reviewer and I discussed any discrepancies in order to ensure that the analysis was completed thoroughly and accurately.

Ethical Considerations

Much more so than in quantitative research, the trustworthiness of a qualitative study depends on the ethics and methods of the investigator (Merriam, 2009). To increase my knowledge and multicultural competence, I attended the University of Northern Colorado's Safe Zone Training through the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,

Transgender, and Allies Office. This training gave me the opportunity to gain awareness of my own heteronormative assumptions, become more informed about current language and terms, and learn tools to be a visible ally. They reminded me that changes in society occur by challenging heteronormativity. It was important to remember that I had made and will make mistakes, and I am the one needing to be educated about my participants' experiences.

As the researcher, I also needed to be aware of my privilege during the interviews and data analysis. I am a member of the dominant group in various ways: being Caucasian, heterosexual, and having a graduate education. Although I wanted to connect with and understand my participants' experiences, they may have been hesitant to share this information. As a feminist-informed theory, relational-cultural theory gave me a framework for how to have these conversations, specifically in terms of discussing potential disconnections we may have and by acknowledging power and privilege (Comstock et al., 2008).

At the beginning of the interviews, I acknowledged my privilege in our culture and discussed how I believe it is my responsibility as a researcher to understand the experiences of all different types of families in order to best serve them as a mental health professional. In addition and in preparation for these interviews, I increased my awareness of my own heteronormative biases and became more aware of common microaggressions toward LGBQ individuals in general and in therapy (McGeorge & Carlson, 2011; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011).

A number of ethical issues were present, especially given the personal nature of this topic. As Dahl and Boss (2005) stated, the lines between therapy and research are more blurred while doing a family phenomenology than with other types of

research. One issue was potential participant discomfort due to my asking about personal or uncomfortable experiences. To mitigate this, I used my skills as a psychologist-in-training to acknowledge their discomfort, respect participants' privacy, and remind them that they did not need to disclose information they were uncomfortable with. In addition, it was mentioned in the informed consent that they may withdraw at any time.

Another ethical issue was the fine line between using my training as a therapist and researcher to facilitate conversation between my participants and doing therapeutic interventions. Because I am trained as a therapist, I went through a constant reflexive process to check myself during these times. My purpose as a researcher was to explore these families' experiences in-depth, not to conduct therapeutic interventions. I kept a researcher journal after each interview and participated in expert checks to prevent myself from becoming isolated and to maintain my reflexivity.

Yet another issue was the need to protect the young participants in this study. As minors, especially because they were elementary school-aged children, they were considered a vulnerable population in need of extra protection. As a licensed school counselor, I have training and experience in talking with children. This allowed me to be sensitive to the developmental, affective, and cognitive levels of these participants in order to appropriately interact with them and identify if they were experiencing any discomfort or confusion.

The final and most serious potential ethical issue was the possibility of this research being misused. It is impossible to predict the future readers of this study. As stated earlier, the intended audience for this research was individuals in the helping

professions who were interested in becoming more knowledgeable and effective when working with LGBQ-parented families. Given the historical context of this study, I have read each sentence of this writing and filtered it through a lens of potential misuse. I can only ask that this research be used for the purposes of social justice, multicultural competence, and to honor the diversity in all families.

Rigor in Qualitative Research

According to Merriam (2009), in qualitative terminology, trustworthiness refers to the rigor of the study. It is comprised of four components: dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability. In quantitative methodology, validity focuses on the measuring instrument to determine whether it is measuring what it is intended to measure. However, in qualitative methodology, the researcher is the instrument of investigation; therefore, validity depends on the skill, competence, and rigor of the work of the researcher (Creswell, 2007).

Credibility

Credibility in a qualitative study is similar to the concept of internal validity in a quantitative study (Merriam, 2009). It examines whether the researcher is studying what he or she intends to study, whether the findings are congruent with reality, and if the findings are a true reflection of the participants' perspectives and experiences. Because the researcher is so closely intertwined with the participants' descriptions of their experiences, credibility is a strength of qualitative research.

Credibility is most often strengthened by triangulation (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources in order to converge on accurate findings. Multiple sources of data, multiple researchers, multiple theoretical frameworks, and multiple methods may be used (Creswell, 2007). In addition, other

methods of strengthening credibility include prolonged engagement in the field; adequate and purposeful time spent collecting data; conducting negative or discrepant case analysis; researcher reflexivity; and peer review of methods, interpretation, and findings (Merriam, 2009).

Dependability

Reliability in quantitative research refers to the extent to which the results can be replicated. In qualitative methodology, because generalizability is not necessarily a goal of research and because human behavior is so varied, the question of reliability refers to whether the results are consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2009), also known as dependability. Replication of a qualitative study will not yield the same results due to different participants, fluctuating environments, and different analyses from the researcher.

Dependability is generally enhanced through an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is designed for independent readers to be able to authenticate the findings by following the detailed journal of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). An audit trail describes how the data were collected, how codes were derived, and how various decisions were made throughout the entire research process (Creswell, 2007). A researcher journal—where reflections, questions, challenges, ideas, and decision-making processes are detailed—is instrumental for an audit trail (Merriam, 2009). In addition, dependability is also enhanced through peer examination, triangulation, and researcher reflexivity (Merriam, 2009).

Confirmability

Confirmability is similar to the concept of objectivity or neutrality. Because research can never be truly objective, the reader must be the one to confirm the

adequacy of their findings. Confirmability refers to the extent the findings make sense and are consistent with the raw data, resulting in the necessity for the researcher to manage his or her own biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is enhanced through the use of an audit trail, the management of researcher bias, triangulation, and peer and expert examination of the data and results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, confirmability was enhanced by using other researchers to confirm I was describing the findings and extracting themes accurately.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the same quantitative concept of external validity, that is, the extent to which the findings are generalizable (Merriam, 2009). In quantitative methodology, the results of a study are aggregated statistically to provide a rationale for generalizing the results. In qualitative methodology, the burden of proof for transferring information is on the reader—the one who determines whether or not the results of the study apply to his or her situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability is commonly enhanced through giving a rich, thick description of the setting, participants, and findings of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This allows the reader to assess the similarity of the study to his or her own setting. Another method for enhancing transferability is having maximum variation in the sample through multiple sites or a heterogeneous group of participants (Merriam, 2009). This allows a greater range of application for readers.

Summary

This chapter began by describing the theoretical framework of this study as systemic and constructivist. Essentially, each family is comprised of individuals who create their own meaning of their experiences as well as coconstructing a shared

meaning in each family system. The methodology of the study was described as a transcendental phenomenology where the researcher's interpretations are minimized to allow the participants to describe their own experience of the phenomenon—being in an LGBQ-parented family. Then, I described my own life experience and potential biases that may have influenced my experience of collecting and analyzing data. I presented the pilot study that was conducted for the purpose of developing this study. Three themes emerged from interviewing one family: the intentionality of parenting, issues involved in disclosing their family structure to others, and wanting to protect each other from discomfort. I then described the process of participant selection and recruitment as well as the process of data collection, how interviews were conducted, and how the data were analyzed. Finally, ethical considerations were described as well as an examination of relevant issues around trustworthiness in this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe participants and share emerging themes as they relate to my research question, as well as reflect on the process of doing this research. After successfully proposing my dissertation and gaining Institutional Review Board approval, I completed 10 interviews over the course of 13 months. It is important to note that two of these interviews were completed and are not included. Unfortunately, the video files became corrupted at the time of recording due to a malfunctioning secure digital card and were unsalvageable. These interviews were coincidentally both with male parents and would have provided valuable information about the experience of gay male couples and their children. Therefore, a total of eight interviews are included.

Prior to beginning the interviews, I attempted to bracket my own assumptions and prior knowledge and experiences to attempt to freshly perceive new information (Creswell, 2007). Throughout the interviews, I also engaged in the constant reflexive process of bracketing in order to continue to be open to my participants' experiences. Immediately after each interview, I wrote field notes in my researcher journal to document my thoughts and impressions, nonverbal and behavioral observations, and questions that came up for me. Each interview was videotaped and transcribed, and

emerging themes were noted until saturation was reached. In addition, the transcripts were reviewed by a peer trained in qualitative research in order to enhance trustworthiness and converge on the emergent themes.

The analysis was completed using a systemic-constructivist stance, using the frameworks of relational-cultural theory, intersectionality theory, and systems theory, as described previously. Analysis in this study was a three-part process. First, through the process of horizonalization (Merriam, 2009), all data were laid out for examination by highlighting significant statements and giving them equal weight. The data were then organized into clusters of meaning. Second, I sought to vividly and completely describe the experience of the phenomenon using phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). This allowed me to give a textural description of the phenomenon by explaining the qualities of the experience. Finally, using imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994), I aimed to grasp the structural essence of the phenomenon. This allowed me to explore underlying and precipitating factors, what had led up to the experience, how it came to be, and the meaning that participants assign.

The data analysis is presented in two sections: a within-case analysis, where I present each family's story in context and how each family talks together about their experiences, and a cross-case analysis, where I compare emergent themes across families. In addition, analysis in this study included how both my participants and I were changed by the process of conducting this research. Participants were asked to reflect upon what it was like being part of a research study, and I have also compiled my own reflections upon the research process and the impact of talking with these

families. I also discuss the rigor of the study and ways in which trustworthiness has been considered.

The research question for this dissertation is as follows:

Q What are the lived experiences of families with same-gender parents and elementary school-aged children given that they are members of a marginalized group?

Within-Case Analysis

Before presenting each family, it is important to note ways that I have protected the confidentiality of participants. As this is a relatively identifiable population, multiple demographic identifiers have been changed. Participants chose pseudonyms to use, although with the exception of two families I chose last names. Gender identification and racial/ethnic identification has been preserved, again, to preserve the rich description of participants. Education levels and occupations have been modified slightly as mental health professionals were overrepresented in this sample, and I believe that is a unique variable that is important to include as it may have important implications. Ages of adults and children have been modified slightly to protect confidentiality and to preserve the developmental level of the children. The length of each couple's relationship has also been changed slightly. Finally, annual income has been rounded to the nearest $5,000 (see Appendix I).

The Benson Family

The Bensons live in a house in a suburban neighborhood of a large Rocky Mountain metro area. Mary and Karen have been together for 13 years and have a 10-year-old daughter, Quintry. Both Mary and Karen are 45 years old and both are Caucasian. Mary works at a nonprofit agency, and Karen is a licensed mental health

counselor at a local community mental health agency, and they consider themselves middle-class. Their daughter Quintry is in fourth grade at the local elementary school.

Mary and Karen met in 1997 through mutual friends and moved in together in 1999. They had a commitment ceremony in 2001 and consider this to be when they got married, although it was not yet legal in their state for same-gender couples. They are now legally married. In 2003, they made the decision to begin the process of having a child. Mary knew that she wanted to carry the child, and they used a donor from a sperm bank. Karen described the process of picking a sperm donor as "weird," because they just had a list of physical characteristics to pick from, and they did not like the idea of using a medical model to bring their child into the world. Mary did not get pregnant the first time, but got pregnant the second month. They both describe how grateful they were to get pregnant quickly, because they knew couples who had significant troubles with infertility. However, they found that during the process of getting pregnant, they were treated by the clinic as an infertility case. Both Mary and Karen found this "strange," as they did not have fertility problems.

Quintry lit up as she was listening to the story of her birth. Mary and Karen chose to have a home birth and described not liking the idea of going to a hospital to deliver Quintry as that is where they "treat sick people." Mary rolled her eyes jokingly as she shared about the "whole team" of midwives, acupuncturists, and massage therapists that spent four days with them during the birth process. Quintry begged Karen to tell the story of the moment of her birth: apparently, Mary and Karen thought they were having a boy, and their first experience of Quintry was when they looked down, realized she was a girl, and Quintry pooped right on Karen's hand!

The Bensons value family and moved to their suburb initially to be closer to their large extended family. Throughout the interview, family members and friends were filtering in and out of their house, and they were taking care of their friends' baby as well as their 3-year-old nephew. Quintry jumped up frequently to show me photo albums of various family members and old pictures of her parents. Quintry was also quite curious about myself and the questions I was asking and asked me questions about how I "got to be" in this job. At the end of the interview, Quintry gave me a felt-covered rock that she had made.

The Woodward-Albright Family

The Woodward-Albrights live in a suburb of a large metropolitan region in the Rocky Mountains. Carmen Woodward is Caucasian, 39 years old, and works as a scientist. Carmen's wife, Sophie Albright, is also Caucasian and is 37 years old. Sophie works in a small office. They have one son, John, who is 8 years old and is in third grade at the local elementary school.

John is Carmen's biological son. Nine years ago, Carmen had ended a relationship with her boyfriend, Rick, and then discovered that she was pregnant a month later. This was shocking for her, and she immediately decided to move in with her parents to have support from them during her pregnancy and lived with them for a few years before moving out when John was 4. After Carmen told her parents she was pregnant, she called Rick, who encouraged her to have an abortion. Carmen told him, "I'm going to have this baby, I don't believe in the alternative." She was fully prepared to not contact him again, which she did for a few years except for briefly contacting him to get a family medical history when she was pregnant. Eventually, she decided that she wanted to ask him for child support, which he paid for about a

year and then stopped. Carmen believes that Rick is currently living somewhere in a nearby state.

After Carmen and Sophie got married, they had discussed the idea of asking Rick to sign his rights away so that Sophie could legally adopt John. However, they were both worried about what the consequences of that would be. They were worried that being a lesbian couple may give him more leverage in the state where he lives if Rick ever wanted to regain custody of John. Currently, they have an "under the table" agreement with Rick stating that he has relinquished his rights and no longer needs to pay child support, but it has not been officially approved by a judge. Sophie would like to legally adopt John, but they are both worried about the "can of worms" that this could open.

It was difficult for John to hear this story. John initially began rubbing Carmen's back as she began telling it, and then he hid his face behind her as I asked them questions about their relationship with Rick. John misses him and has only one memory of meeting him. Rick spent a weekend with them and took Carmen and John out to lunch. With his meal, John got a cup of juice with a plastic lid. The cup has since disappeared, but John keeps the broken plastic lid in a special place in his room. This is the only physical piece of connection that John has with his father.

Carmen and Sophie met in 2011. Sophie says, "This is such a stereotype, but I had gone online to find a group to start playing softball with, and I saw Carmen!" They initially began a friendship which quickly turned into a relationship. They laughed together that it went fast, but "not fast for lesbians!"

After a year, Sophie had gotten to know John, and Sophie and Carmen took a big backpacking trip that summer. On this trip, Sophie began realizing that she did not

want to spend any more time without Carmen in her life. Sophie considers herself very traditional, and after they returned from the backpacking trip, she called Carmen's parents and asked their permission to propose. Sophie proposed soon after Carmen's parents gave their blessing, and they had a commitment ceremony in the summer of 2012. This was a private ceremony just between the two of them. However, after they began attending some of their friends' weddings, Carmen's parents started asking them, "When are you guys going to have a wedding?" They agreed to have a ceremony, and then marriage equality passed in their state. Somehow, this "turned into a full-blown wedding," and Carmen and Sophie have now been legally married for about two years.

Carmen, John, and Sophie continued to live near Carmen's parents after the wedding. One day as they were having breakfast, Carmen told Sophie that she would love to raise John in the South where she was raised, and Sophie said, "Well, if that's what you want, let's do that!" About a year ago, they moved to the Rocky Mountain region and love their life there. Carmen and Sophie would love to adopt another child, but they are worried that they are going to have obstacles because they are a lesbian couple.

After the interview was complete, Carmen and Sophie would not let me leave until they gave me the first tomato from their garden. I also had the honor of listening to an original composition written by John, a haunting, mature piece in a minor key that he played on the piano for me.

The Kimball Family

The Kimball family lives in a suburb of a large metropolitan area in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Terry is a 48-year-old Caucasian woman who

works at a nonprofit agency. Her wife, Rosa, is a 49-year-old Caucasian woman who is a social worker. Also living in the home is Terry's stepfather, and the three of them own the house together. Terry and Rosa have adopted five children. All the children are Latino and range from 2 to 14 years old. In the interview was one of their daughters, Saige, who is 11 and is in fifth grade. She is the only child currently in elementary school, as her older brother is in ninth grade, and the three younger ones are all still in preschool.

Terry and Rosa met in 1998. At the time, Terry was volunteering with an organization that provided cleaning and companionship services for men with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. Terry was matched with a man named Jacob, and she came to his house and cleaned for him every other week. Jacob's best friend, Rosa, was often there spending time with Jacob. The first time they met, Terry was "crouched in the kitchen scrubbing cupboards." They got to know each other, and eventually Terry asked Rosa out. They have now been together for 16 years and got married recently.

Terry and Rosa joked that like "typical lesbians, we moved in, in like a year!" Terry had always known that she wanted children, and Rosa had always known that she did not, in addition to not feeling very comfortable around children in general. They went through a process of discussing this, and Terry eventually decided that it was more important that she was with Rosa than it was to have children. A few years later, Rosa changed her mind and decided that she did want to have children. Now, it is hard for Terry to believe that Rosa did not want children, because she is "absolutely a natural mother." They joked that at the children's preschool, the teachers make fun of Rosa because they cannot believe that at one point she did not want children.

In 2007, they decided that they wanted to do a foster-to-adopt program, and they knew that they wanted to adopt siblings. On their anniversary, they got two children (Saige and her older brother), each with a different father, from the birth mother, Alicia. Both of the children had experienced physical abuse and were quite traumatized when they arrived at the Kimballs'. Since then, their family had been through too many court dates to count. Alicia continued to fluctuate from wanting guardianship and the reunification process to wanting the children to be adopted, so it was a long process. This has been extremely hard on Terry and Rosa, not to mention the children. The children had been through multiple removals from the home as well as multiple foster placements, and Terry and Rosa felt strongly that they wanted to keep the children together, as well as that adoption would be the best thing for them. All of the children have "been in the system," and the oldest boy was not comfortable talking with me, as Terry and Rosa thought he might associate me with the interviews he had to be part of with Department of Human Services social workers. Over the years, the family adopted three more children from Alicia. The social worker called them each time Alicia has had another baby, and each time Terry and Rosa decided that it was important to keep the siblings together. They believe that the younger three are full siblings, based on their looks and their personalities, but they are not sure.

Because Alicia is from Mexico, Terry and Rosa make sure that the children have opportunities to speak Spanish, celebrate Mexican holidays, and meet with Alicia often to cook Mexican food. Saige's favorite bedtime book is in Spanish. They believe it is extremely important for all the children to be part of Mexican culture. They were initially worried that because they are a lesbian couple and Alicia is Catholic that she would feel uncomfortable with Terry and Rosa adopting her children.

Alicia has never said anything about that to them. They have been pleased that she has been very reliable in coming to visits and doing everything that Department of Human Services has asked of her.

The Dawson-O'Riley Family

The Dawson-O'Riley family lives in a small town in the Pacific Northwest region. Their family is made up of Dorothy and Alice, their child Fin, and their three dogs. Dorothy O'Riley is a 30-year-old female Caucasian addictions counselor, and her partner, Alice Dawson, is a 35-year-old Caucasian woman who homeschools Fin, who is 8 years old and currently somewhere between first and third grade (as a homeschooler, Fin does not easily fit into a category).

Dorothy and Alice have been together for 10 years. They are not married, although Fin would like them to be. They do not consider themselves traditional and do not feel the need to give themselves a "label," but the family has done a lot of lobbying for marriage equality at the capitol building, and Fin would like them to take advantage of the fact that they can now be legally married. However, Fin is exhausted thinking about the work they have to put in as a ring bearer for another couple's wedding, so Fin would like them to just do something small.

About two years into their relationship, Dorothy and Alice decided that they would like to have a child. They used a donor, and Alice chose to carry the baby. Fin shared that Alice was "really, really sick" when she was pregnant and that they were a "crybaby" in their first moments. It was very important that once Fin was born, both Alice's and Dorothy's names were on the birth certificate, and they "jumped through hoops" to make that happen. Now, Fin calls Alice "Mom," and Dorothy "Momo."

They explained that this is because Dorothy's last name is O'Riley, and they first called her "Mom O.," which evolved into "Momo."

Their town is near a military base as well as being known as quite conservative for the Pacific Northwest region. The Dawson-O'Rileys look a little different from traditional families in their area, with Dorothy having spiky hair, tattoo sleeves, and eyebrow and lip piercings, and Fin having wild brown curls that go halfway down his back. Alice says that they are the "anomaly" in the neighborhood, and that they are used to "walking their own path" and not seeking approval from others. Dorothy thinks that they are perhaps "more of a high visibility family because we don't necessarily look like everybody else."

The family has been living in their town for about six years, and at first they noticed that they did not have much contact with the neighbors. However, during the winter a few years ago, there was a big snowstorm and lots of trees fell all over the neighborhood. The whole neighborhood got together and shared their snowplows, heat, and other resources. Dorothy shared that "they kind of had to come into our world to get some of those needs met, and some of their reactions were, 'Oh! They're just regular old folks!'" Now, they engage in "resource sharing" eggs and garden tools with their neighbors all the time. Alice says, "Our neighbors all love us and think that we're fabulous."

The Knapps Family

The Knapps family lives in a suburb of a large city in the Pacific Northwest region. Katie Knapps is a 38-year-old Caucasian woman who works as a certified public accountant at a large accounting firm, and her wife Sara Knapps is a 34-year-old Caucasian/Hispanic woman who works as a nurse practitioner intern. Their son,

Ethan, is in kindergarten, and calls Katie “Mama” and Sara “Mommy.” They also have two cats and a dog. When asked to describe their family, Ethan shared that “my moms really love me, and they love to play board games.” Katie and Sara whispered to me that Sara is currently pregnant, which Ethan does not yet know.

What Ethan does know is the story of how his moms got together: “First, Mommy saw a pretty girl which was Mama, they kissed, and they had me!” Sara and Katie agreed that this was a pretty accurate description, and they also added some details. They met through mutual friends in late 2004, dated for about two years, and had a traditional wedding in 2007. Although they were not able to be legally married at that time, they had a small ceremony at their home recently, as soon as marriage equality was passed in their state. Although they each always knew that they wanted children, Katie always knew that she did not want to be pregnant, and Sara always knew that she did. Ethan knows that he came out of Mommy’s belly and Mama’s heart.

Before Sara became pregnant, they talked about using a known donor versus an anonymous donor. Although Katie did not care, Sara felt strongly that they go with an anonymous donor. The donor they chose happened to be “identity disclosure.” This means that when Ethan is 18, he can get the last known records of the donor from the sperm bank, although there is no guarantee he will be able to find him or that any correspondence will be answered.

The Callahan Family

The Callahan family lives in a rural town in the Pacific Northwest region. LaRae Callahan is a 47-year-old Caucasian woman who works for the state as a manager. Her wife, Christine Callahan, is a 39-year-old Caucasian woman who works

part-time at a small business. The Callahans have three children at home: their daughter Margaret who is 9 years old and in fourth grade, their son John who is 6 years old and in first grade, and their nephew Ed who is 15 years old and in 10th grade.

LaRae and Christine met in 2001. They lived in a large city until 2009 when they decided to slow down their pace of life and move to their current location. Christine initially did not want children, but eventually LaRae convinced her to have just one. They decided that Christine would carry the child. They chose to use a donor, and did not care whether they went with an anonymous donor or an identity release donor. The donor they picked happened to be anonymous, and they picked this person because he had physical characteristics similar to LaRae. LaRae and Christine laughed together that one time they took Margaret to the pediatrician, who said, "Well, how tall are you, Christine, and how tall are you, LaRae?" LaRae said, "It doesn't matter how tall I am!"

The day that Margaret was born, Christine said, "I would like to have another child." A few years later, they decided to use the same donor, so that their children would be biological siblings. Christine wanted to carry the pregnancy again, and John was born six years ago. A few years ago, Margaret expressed some curiosity in finding out who her donor was. Margaret wrote a letter to the sperm bank and told me, "In the letters, I always made sure to make it that I wasn't looking for a dad, I just wanted to know who this person was." LaRae and Christine put the children on the sibling registry. They found some biological half-siblings a few hours away who had used the same donor and exchanged pictures. The children look completely different.

About six months ago, Margaret and John's cousin Ed moved into their house. Ed is LaRae's brother's son and due to some family issues is currently living with the Callahans. Ed seems to be adjusting well to the transition.

The Curran-Miller Family

The Curran-Miller family lives in a large metropolitan area in the Pacific Northwest region. Ann Miller is a 47-year-old Caucasian licensed marriage and family therapist, and her partner Lynn Curran is a 48-year-old Caucasian licensed mental health counselor. Elsa Curran is their 6-year-old Caucasian daughter, who is currently in first grade. They also have two dogs.

Lynn and Ann met through mutual friends in 1996 while in graduate school. After they had been dating for a few years, they moved to the Pacific Northwest region in 1999. Neither of them had ever really wanted to have children, and for a while they lived their lives until Lynn turned 39 nine years ago. Something clicked inside Lynn, and she realized that she was going to be 40 and may actually want children. Neither of them wanted to take the time to try and become pregnant and have that not work, and neither of them felt a strong desire to be pregnant. They decided together that they would start the adoption process.

They spent some time thinking about what kind of adoption they wanted and decided on an open adoption. After multiple "false alarms," they started becoming discouraged. At the two-and-a-half year mark, they decided that they would give up after three years of trying. At that point, they knew enough about the adoption process that they felt they no longer needed to work with an agency and worked with their attorney to place private ads in newspapers. Because of their careers and the metropolitan location in which they lived, they placed ads in more rural newspapers.

Their attorney received a call from a man saying that he found their ad in an old newspaper, and his daughter was pregnant and wanted an open adoption. Lynn and Ann did not put much stock in this because it was not the birth mother herself who was calling them.

Two weeks later, they met Jessica, Elsa's birth mother, when she was nearly nine months pregnant. A week after that, as Elsa describes, "Mommy and Mama were sleeping in their bed . . ., and then the phone rang, in the middle of the night!" Lynn and Ann got the call that Jessica was going into labor. Elsa gleefully shared, "[Mama] stayed in her bed and was like, 'There's no way the baby's coming!'" Ann was in denial that it was actually happening, as there had been so many false alarms. So Lynn got out of bed, packed their bag, and convinced Ann to head to the hospital. Lynn said, "[Jessica] wanted us to be in the delivery room so that Elsa would know that her moms had known her from the minute she came onto the planet . . . [Elsa] loves that story."

Despite Jessica wanting an open adoption, it has been very difficult for her, and she has not actually seen Elsa in person since she was 4 months old. Jessica has been consistent in telling Lynn and Ann that she feels she made the right decision, but they believe that the loss she has experienced has been quite profound. Lynn and Ann spoke with her on the telephone weekly for nearly a year after the birth, an hour at a time. Lynn and Ann had actually offered to pay for therapy for her, but they also believed that they could provide the support that she needed. Ann shared, "I feel proud of how that was all handled and that we could tolerate that and provide that kind of support for her." She believes that part of Jessica's process of letting go was getting to know Elsa's parents, and they both felt comfortable being with her as she

experienced the loss. Now, they get “sporadic” e-mails and Facebook messages from her, usually on holidays and birthdays. They do not want to pressure her, but they hope that at some point she will be able to meet Elsa again and that it will become easier for Jessica after the first time.

Now, Elsa is currently at an exclusive school. This school values diversity greatly, and when Ann and Lynn were asking about families like theirs, the teachers said, “Unfortunately, we don’t have any families with two dads.” Ann and Lynn shared that it meant a lot to them that the school saw this as a “real lacking.”

The Murphy Family

The Murphy family lives in a large metropolitan area in the Pacific Northwest. Sinead and Alex Murphy are married and have been together for 12 years. Sinead identifies as Caucasian/Hispanic (of Mexican heritage), and Alex identifies as Caucasian. They both work in public health research. They have two children: Merida who is 6 years old and in first grade and Ben who is 4 years old and attends preschool.

Sinead and Alex met in graduate school 14 years ago. They were friends for about two years before they began dating. In fact, they both supported each other during this time as they were coming out to their parents, and they each came out to their parents at the same time. They each felt as if the other knew what the other was going through and were able to share this experience together. They began dating soon after, met each other’s families, and moved to the Pacific Northwest together. Soon after, Sinead’s parents passed away, and since then she has felt that Alex’s family is her “surrogate family.” She shared that she has seen Alex’s parents evolve from introducing her as “Sinead,” to introducing her as “Alex’s partner,” to

introducing her as "our daughter-in-law." Alex became tearful as they were describing this and shared that she felt "victorious" that her parents "in the end, have been very positive." Alex shared that her mother now brags to her friends about how wonderful their family is.

About eight years ago, Alex and Sinead decided that they wanted to start a family. Sinead had never thought that she would be interested in having children, but eventually changed her mind. While at a previous job, Alex knew a colleague and her partner who had children with a male donor who was very involved in their children's life. As Alex and Sinead were deciding how to go about having children, they saw this arrangement and how well it was working, and felt that it would be ideal for their family. Because Sinead had never had a desire to be pregnant, they decided that Alex would carry the child. They were close friends with a couple, Sam and Owen, who both also work in their office. Sinead shared, "We wanted to find somebody who was a friend and who would be interested in being part of their lives." They knew that Sam had never wanted children, and that Owen had always wanted to adopt children. This was potentially going to be an issue for this couple in the future because they anticipated that it would get to the point where Owen might have to choose to not have children and stay with Sam or leave Sam in order to have children.

Sinead and Alex thought about all this for some months, until they learned that Owen was going to be leaving soon to do research in Romania for a year. They decided that they needed to ask him now. So, they invited Owen and Sam over for dinner, and after thinking about it for a few weeks, Owen said yes. They found out that Alex was pregnant with Merida a week after Owen had left. Sinead legally adopted Merida at birth. It was less of a challenging conversation to talk with Owen

and Sam when they felt ready to have another child, and two and a half years later Ben was born.

Now, Alex and Sinead describe their relationship with Owen and Sam as "co-parenting." Owen and Sam are considering moving to be closer to them. Merida and Ben sleep over at their house on Wednesdays and usually spend one day each weekend with them. They also have a sleepover at their house on the weekend about once a month. Merida particularly enjoys the fact that they get to have waffles for breakfast, although one downside is that they do not have as many toys over there.

They had many discussions before the children were born that Alex and Sinead would be the primary, legal parents. Owen feels fortunate to be involved in co-parenting—he "defers" to their parenting expertise, but Alex and Sinead also look to him for guidance. They trust him and value his opinion, and Merida and Ben call Owen "Pop." Alex and Sinead describe Sam as somewhat "hands-off" and do not think that he ever changed a diaper. At the same time, Sam loves the children and takes great delight in knowing that there are "little Owens" running around and is glad that it worked out that Owen could have children. All four of them and the children frequently go on vacation together, and Owen, Sam, and their parents and siblings are invited to yearly family trips with Alex's family.

Cross-Case Analysis (Emergent Themes)

In the following section, I present each theme and describe subthemes, as well as provide quotes from participants illustrating each theme. Following my within-case analysis, I analyzed the interviews again to determine emergent themes. Themes were developed through the following process. First, the process of horizonalization was used to "lay out" all the data for viewing and to give it equal weight (Merriam, 2009).

I began the process of reflecting on themes immediately after each interview in my researcher journal and continued this process after the interviews were completed and transcribed. Each transcript was thoroughly reviewed and broken into broad themes. These themes were highlighted and "tagged" within the text, named, and further explored via sub-headings within each theme, which are presented in this section. Then, I consulted with a peer who is trained in qualitative research. This individual reviewed the de-identified transcripts and went through her own process of analyzing the data without initial knowledge of the themes I had developed. We then compared our findings and collaborated throughout the process in order to develop the final themes. My hope is that these themes have accurately portrayed and captured the experiences of my participants. I also hope that this will provide comprehensive information to counseling psychologists working with LGBQ-parented families. The following six themes emerged from the data:

- Intentionality of parenting decisions.
- Advocacy and visibility.
- Times are changing: Acknowledgment that it is a different world.
- Acknowledgment of biases: Assumptions are a two-way street.
- Questioning the relevance of gender to parenting.
- Normality and intersectionality: We're the same, it's just two women!

Intentionality of Parenting Decisions

The first theme that emerged was intentionality of parenting decisions. This theme emerged around discussions of deliberately choosing where to live and the communities parents chose to surround themselves with in terms of schools, the

workplace, religious organizations, and extracurricular activities. They described how they intentionally chose travel locations where they would be accepted or restricted their displays of affection on vacations. Parents described how their children are "wanted," and how there are no conception "accidents" in same-gender relationships, yet they have experienced institutional barriers to having children. Parents also described how intentional they are about having discussions with their children that although they have chosen to live in accepting communities, the children may face discrimination in other places.

Intentionality of Where to Live

Living in a city that was known to be accepting of diversity was important to many parents. Many parents had moved from their hometowns or the places where they went to college to areas in the Pacific Northwest or Rocky Mountain regions where they believed they would feel more accepted. Some parents acknowledged that they had experienced some discrimination regarding their sexual orientation when they were younger and did not want their children to experience similar feelings. Sophie Albright discussed the fear that she had living in her hometown in the South and how much more comfortable she feels where they live now:

> **Sophie Albright**: Here, I feel so much more comfortable, and that's part of the reason why I don't want to go back to [the South], is because I have so much fear and so much worry, and I don't want to be lynched, you know! I hate to say that, like all [Southerners] would lynch a gay couple, but it is a completely different situation. Here I don't get that at all. I have never heard any anti-gay statements here. At all. . . . Maybe we're naïve. I think we're just very fortunate. Like I said, we're surrounded by an amazing family, we really have been very fortunate in the community that we've surrounded ourselves with here.

Her wife, Carmen, was pleased with how much she forgets that others might have a problem with her sexual orientation.

> **Carmen Woodward**: It's funny because every now and then, somebody'll say, "Oh, you know, I just don't have any problem with that!" Or, "Somebody's cool and they don't have any problem with that," and I'm like, "Oh! I forgot that that would be a problem."

Christine and LaRae Callahan echoed the idea that they are intentionally living in a certain area of the country. At one point they had considered moving back to the rural area where LaRae grew up, and she expressed how protective she would feel of their daughter, Margaret, if they were still living there.

> **Christine Callahan**: But maybe we've put ourselves in comfortable spots.
> **LaRae Callahan**: Yeah, you know that, because when we talked about moving out to someplace rural, you were really nervous! I grew up very rural, and you didn't want to have. . . . Which I think is a wise thing, I didn't want to pick us up and move back. I can see, you know, you start to think about it, if we lived, say, in [a rural area], and I could see Margaret getting, if she was constantly teased, you could see a kid being resentful, being, like, "I wish I wouldn't have been born! I don't want to have two moms, I want to have a dad and a mom! I want what everybody else has that's normal!" We aren't unique on island, nobody's like, "Oh! It's so great! You have two moms, that's super special, you're the greatest!" But there's also no one saying, "You have two moms? That's, ew." We're just another family!

The Curran-Miller family also moved to the Pacific Northwest region intentionally. Lynn also mentioned her upbringing in her rural community and alluded to a potential lack of acceptance where she grew up.

> **Lynn Curran**: Certainly if we lived maybe in a more rural area, or just a more conservative area. I would not necessarily feel as open. I might be more cautious.
> **Ann Miller**: We wanted to go to a city with a big LGBT population. At that point it didn't have anything to do with the kids, it's just we wanted to feel comfortable and where we could be ourselves. And after living in [a big city], I had a certain outlook!
> **Lynn Curran**: And I was from [a rural area], and I was not going back [there]!
> **Ann Miller**: I feel extremely fortunate. I feel like we live in a little bubble. And I feel very aware and appreciative of that . . . I work, I have a small practice . . . [and] I hear all kinds of different things. We are in a wonderful little world right here, it's this little bubble, and I know it's not the rest of the world, and I am really aware and appreciative.

While Alex and Sinead Murphy acknowledged that they chose to live in the Pacific Northwest region intentionally, they still feel some hesitation about being in public together.

> **Alex Murphy**: It limits us to where we would want to live in the world. In the country and even in the state.
> **Sinead Murphy**: And even in [our city], it's like, we're not totally comfortable walking down the street holding hands. It's not that I'm ashamed of it, it's more . . .
> **Alex Murphy**: We don't know who's around.
> **Sinead Murphy**: Whereas a heterosexual couple would just walk around, do whatever.

The Dawson-O'Riley family lives in a rural town. Although their relationship with their neighbors has improved, they still feel somewhat isolated, as well as protective of Fin.

> **Dorothy O'Riley**: Much easier to have community in those places. Out here we just stick to our own little bubble. We do our thing.

Now that they are established in the cities they live in, these parents shared the intentionality of choosing schools, workplace environments, places of worship, and extracurricular activities based on the level of acceptance they feel. The Bensons discussed their comfort level with the church and school that they chose and discussed their gratefulness for the ability to have a choice.

> **Karen Benson:** And that was consciously chosen, we'd rather be with other people who understand, yeah, it would be different in other parts of the country or if we were trying to live in another community, a different church experience or school experience, or whatever.
> **Mary Benson**: And we were lucky enough to be able to choose those. . . . We've chosen the school because it would be a safe place; we've chosen the church because it is a welcoming environment.

Sinead and Alex Murphy have found community in their neighborhood at their gym and appreciate the owners' efforts in making it a diverse and inclusive space.

> **Sinead Murphy**: [Our gym is] very diverse from a lot of different perspectives, it's just a couple blocks away.
> **Alex Murphy**: This area. . . . is known to have a lot of lesbians.
> **Sinead Murphy**: It's just a lot of support. . . . Our gym is great, I mean, it's so welcoming to all walks of life. It's owned by a husband and wife, and the husband . . . fathered two kids with a lesbian couple who also lives in this area. And his mother is a lesbian, and her dad is gay, so they formed this community around this gym. They want it to be multiracial, LGBT, all-inclusive. And they've done a really good job of that. So that's been a really neat community to be in.

Lynn Curran expressed gratefulness for the fact that she has a choice to be able to choose where they live, what school Elsa goes to, and the place where she works. She also identified her sexual orientation as a "non-issue" and feels that her family is just one type of family in a culture of all sorts of different types of families.

> **Lynn Curran**: So I mentioned that I changed jobs, and my previous job, I guess it's true at my current job too, but my previous job, lots of families had kids, and there were other same-sex parents that had kids, lots of single parents, you know, all different kinds of families. . . . And it just sounds so boring! It was just kind of a non-issue." So it wasn't acceptance or non-acceptance, it was a non-issue, which I took to mean acceptance. I never felt like we were excluded from activities or invitations or anything like that, because of it. And my current job, there are just far fewer families, a lot more people are younger and don't have kids yet. But I don't feel a lack of acceptance. . . . And I feel like because we're so lucky to live where we live and have schools where we don't fight any battles, I don't need any extra support beyond what any parent would need. Part of why I changed jobs was to get to a job that promoted balance for any family. And that is true, and I'm getting that.

Travel

Four families mentioned being intentional about where they travel, as they anticipate there may be some areas in the United States and abroad that are not safe. They described how their perceptions of safety impact their level of outness as well as displays of affection between them when they travel.

> **Mary Benson**: We tend to go and do things and places that we know we're going to be safe.
> **Karen Benson**: Yeah.

> **Mary Benson**: We also have to think very carefully about where we vacation, and if we're in a place that we're not super comfortable with, it makes a difference about how we walk down the road, and what we do, and how we act, interact with each other. And that's not necessarily something that's verbalized.

> **LaRae Callahan**: When we travel, you guys have known that we've been in places. . . . You probably don't remember, but being in Jamaica, we were very careful about not holding hands or kissing or anything while we were there, because they're not very gay-friendly.

Terry and Rosa Kimball also acknowledged the choice they make about where to travel, although they tend to take more road trips because they have five children. Although they joked about driving through Wyoming, there was an acknowledgment that there are certain areas of the country where they would not feel comfortable.

> **Terry Kimball**: We're totally out.
> **Rosa Kimball**: Yeah.
> **Terry Kimball**: Unless we're traveling through Wyoming. . . . But it does affect our choices with regard to activities with the kids and travel, I think. Mostly, we have four kids so we get in the car, right? We get in the van and go somewhere, but we haven't had that many road trips. Maybe as the kids get older.

Terry also acknowledged that they traveled through Oklahoma and Arizona and had worries about how people would react to them. Luckily, their worries did not pan out:

> **Terry Kimball**: But to the credit of the people of Oklahoma and Arizona, we had been totally open, we had two kids who were both calling us "Mommy," and actually in Oklahoma we never had anyone say. . . . People just kept telling us that the kids had really great manners.

Lynn Curran and Ann Miller do a lot of international travel and had one situation in the past where they experienced some discrimination as a couple. Although they had this experience, they are not hesitant to restrict where they travel as a family.

> **Lynn Curran**: The one place we had kind of an issue is before [Elsa] was with us. And it wasn't an issue, it was just weird, with the two of us. But at this point, that hasn't been the deciding factor where we travel. It's been more how

> much are we willing to go to a developing country with her. We're taking more risks in that area as she gets older. But that's been the driving force, not . . .

There Are No Accidents:
Children Are Wanted

Many families acknowledged the fact that in a same-gender relationship, there are no "accidents" in conceiving children. Therefore, each child is deliberately planned for and desired. Many families described themselves as traditional in the sense that they were dating, got married, and wanted a family.

> **Alice Dawson**: About 10 years ago we met, and two years later made a very conscious decision that we wanted to have a kiddo, and so we had a donor that we used, and made Fin!

> **Ann Miller**: When we first met, I was in graduate school, and I hadn't really wanted kids [said in a very quiet voice so Elsa doesn't hear], and [Lynn] hadn't really either, and I was turning 40 . . . I said, let's make a conscious decision about this and not just not do it because we never talked about it.

Although John was conceived through Carmen's previous relationship, Sophie Albright discussed her intentionality of understanding that she was marrying not only Carmen, but was committing to be John's parent too. She also described her frustration with how gay and lesbian parents have to go through a process of being "approved" by the government or by an agency to be parents, while perceiving that others do not have to qualify.

> **Sophie Albright**: She gave me vows, like she talked to me, whereas I had to, I had vows for both Carmen and John, because I wasn't just marrying Carmen [stroking John's hair], I was marrying John too. It was awesome, he was up there with us, and I mean, it was, I don't know, going back to what she was saying in regards to gay and lesbian families who plan to have families, or marry someone with a family, a lot of times I find that just in my dealings with them, and I don't deal with all of them, but the majority of them are well-educated. Functioning parents, functioning people in society, they have jobs, not just jobs, they don't work at Burger King, they are pretty good jobs, they're very educated, they're very responsible, and they pass that along to their children. I just think that it's funny a lot of times when you see heterosexual

> people who aren't educated, and I'm not trying to be stereotypical, but "Fine! You want to quit school in the seventh grade, go for it! Let's go work at Sonic!" It's like, whoa! But we're the ones who can't adopt or be foster parents or whatever.
> **Carmen Woodward**: If there was any way that this kind of stuff could enter into the minds of adoption agencies—we're a totally normal family! Why is it that our orientation has anything to do with whether we can adopt or not? That bothers me.

The Callahan family also described the intentional and thoughtful choice they made in having children. LaRae also brought up the idea of how they felt that their children were more desired than perhaps some "accidental" children of straight parents and how the process takes a great deal of time and effort. She felt that perhaps research should not necessarily explore what is different about same-gender parents, but that research could explore differences between intentional and unintentional parents and their children.

> **Christine Callahan**: The one thing I wanted to say, that we did, is that it is a choice, and that we really thought it through. I think sometimes that's the difference.
> **LaRae Callahan**: And not that we would never have a problem, but I don't know that if we had a problem that it would be any different than if a husband and a wife did. A lot of times family problems don't have anything to do with your gender. It's just personalities. I think that, from what I know the research shows, lesbian and gay people wait 'till later to have children. It's also never an accident! We didn't accidentally get pregnant with John. We knew for sure we wanted to have kids, you don't just willy-nilly do that, it takes a long time.
> **Christine Callahan**: It's a process, there's a lot that goes into having a kid.
> **LaRae Callahan**: That said, I'm sure there are parents who do have abusive relationships, but I think that they're not the norm. I think that being forced into having a family can sometimes cause problems . . . I think that there are straight couples that wait to have kids, and are more intentional about having kids, so I would say it's different. The question would be, what's unique to intentional parents or what would be the situation for intentional parents than parents who just accidentally got pregnant?

Although many couples felt the natural urge to have children, many of them experienced barriers to having children that were a result of their sexual orientation. One barrier that initially impacted some families is the societal stereotype that "gay

people don't have kids." Although Terry Kimball acknowledged that this stereotype may be lessening, it still impacted their process of becoming a family.

> **Terry Kimball**: I think also when you're gay, I mean, maybe things are changing, but you sort of had to face that as part of your future, that obviously we're not necessarily going to biologically make a child with another person, so that was part of it. I think [Rosa] had to come around on that decision. But it worked out.

LaRae Callahan shared her experience with her father's discomfort with being told that he was a grandfather, as LaRae was the non-biological parent.

> **LaRae Callahan**: Reminds me of a conversation I had with my dad after we had [Margaret], and the first thing, he started talking about himself, and I said, "Did you hear what I just said? I said, 'You have a granddaughter!'" I hadn't talked to my dad in a long time. I said, "You have a granddaughter!" And he said, "Well, I don't know about all that." "What do you mean?" I said, "You know, guess what. We had a baby just like any other woman in the world has a baby. She got pregnant, a baby came out." There's nothing, you know, sure, there's a little bit of differences in how that baby got there, but that's it! It's still a baby, and you still have to. . . . Two moms still have to change a diaper!

Alice Dawson faced this stereotype from her grandmother. She felt that because she was viewed as someone who "shouldn't" have children, there was more pressure to show that she was a good parent and had a well-adjusted child.

> **Alice Dawson**: I feel like I have worked really hard, because my grandmother didn't think that we should have children. So I feel like I wanted to be able to say, not only did I have a child, but he's incredible, and he's articulate, and all these things that, manners, all these things that I never want anybody to say, "Oh, well you never taught him this, or he doesn't do these things."

Another barrier that the Benson family discussed was having to go to a clinic when they were trying to conceive and being treated as an "infertility case." They did not have any issues with fertility, yet they had to follow the same protocol as a couple who was having trouble getting pregnant.

> **Mary Benson**: You have to go through a clinic, and we were treated as . . . infertility, we didn't really have any concerns that we couldn't get pregnant, obviously we didn't because we got pregnant after the second try, but you

> know, you're going to the clinic, and going through all the screenings, and they want you in there within 24 hours to test your blood, and do all kinds of things, and so that was like one of the weirdest parts, I think, for me.
> **Karen Benson**: We always had to try twice. The first month she didn't get pregnant, and then the second month she did, so that, I think, was very lucky, because we've known a lot of people who had a lot harder time getting pregnant.

Another unique element in becoming parents was the experience of choosing a donor. The Bensons described this process as "strange" and "weird," because they felt they were essentially choosing half their children's genes out of a notebook.

> **Karen Benson**: Well, it was a little strange, like picking out the sperm donor was very weird, it's like you have age and height and hair color, and you know, that part was a bit strange.

The Murphys chose a known donor, a friend and coworker, who they share a deep friendship with. They described their process of how they chose Owen, Merida and Ben's biological father, and the social, genetic, and ethnic factors they considered.

> **Sinead Murphy**: At some point we decided to start thinking about children, and one of Alex's colleagues . . . her and her partner had two children with a male donor who was very involved in the children's life, and he also had a partner that was involved so it was just like this ideal situation. We heard such great things about it. So when we were thinking about having children, we wanted to find somebody who was a friend and who would be interested in being part of their lives. And so the person we picked was Owen. We worked with him, we still work with him. So we sort of approached the subject with him and [his partner] Sam.
> **Alex Murphy**: So Sinead's half Mexican-American, as is Sam, Owen's partner. So we had originally thought about asking Sam, and we had talked with Owen about that possibility. Sam has OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder] and severe allergies, and I happen to have both, I'm not OCD, I haven't been diagnosed, but I have very obsessive tendencies, and so we thought genetically it was not a good idea to make children with us. And Owen had also been someone that we'd thought about, to some extent . . .
> **Sinead Murphy**: And also, Owen had wanted to adopt children.

For the families who chose the adoption route, many described elements of having to be "in the system" as a barrier they experienced. Alice Dawson and

Dorothy O'Riley shared how important it was for Dorothy to legally adopt Fin from the moment of birth.

> **Alice Dawson**: And Dorothy adopted Fin, so that way if I fell on my head and lost my mind, she'd still have rights to him, which was very important that we jumped through those hoops. Fin's birth certificate has both of our names on it, which is very important.

Ann Miller and Lynn Curran initially felt it was easy to find an adoption agency that would work with their family.

> **Lynn Curran**: And then, finding the adoption agency to work with was relatively easy. I felt like it was really easy. Because [here], there were kind of two options for agencies that would work with our kind of family.
> **Ann Miller**: But before then, because we thought about all the different kinds of. . . . We did a lot of research, what are the different kinds of adoptions, international, foster to adopt, and when we learned about open adoption, which is what we did, both of us learned that that was the obvious right choice. And then when we found the one agency here who works a lot with LGBT families, and all they do is open adoption, it was kind of like . . .

At the same time, they acknowledged how stressful the process of adoption was for them, because of the wait and because of the numerous "false alarms" they experienced that fell through. In fact, at the two-and-a-half year mark, they nearly gave up.

> **Ann Miller**: I had a lot of denial. We had a long, three-year process of waiting, and we had a lot of false alarms.

She shared a positive aspect of being an adoptive family, which for them is the social aspect.

> **Ann Miller**: Because of the adoption, through the agencies, we're going to these groups, and they're just social, kind of potluck on Sunday afternoons kind of things that meet regularly, with LGBT families who are adopting. . . . Doing that so that she would meet other adopted kids, and other kids who had LGBT parents. And so that's been a big part of her life.

Carmen Woodward and Sophie Albright have started thinking about a sibling for John. Although they would like to adopt their next child, they have concerns about facing potential discrimination by going through an adoption agency.

> **Carmen Woodward**: I would love for him to have a sibling, but I'm worried that we're going to have obstacles.

After discussing how there are certain adoption agencies that are known for being open and gay-friendly, Carmen wondered:

> **Carmen Woodward**: But is that where people are willing to give their kids?

In addition, they are greatly fearful of what might happen if Sophie tries to legally adopt John. Although they had John's father sign a document where he relinquished his parental rights and obligations to pay child support, this was an "under-the-table" agreement. They are concerned that he could one day wish to reinstate these rights and that there would be no legal protection for them. This is why Sophie has not pursued legal adoption of John.

> **Sophie Albright**: What if all of a sudden they are appalled that [Rick's] son is being raised by two lesbians, and now all of a sudden they're going to fight, and who knows! I mean, obviously, things today are a lot different than they were three years ago . . .
> **Carmen Woodward**: Right, and they live in the middle of [the South] [laughs], they might be that way.
> **Sophie Albright**: But I'm just saying that I'm too afraid, really, of what can of worms would open up if I do that. I want to do that, I absolutely want to do that, I just don't want. . . . And the other thing, one of my concerns is, all of a sudden we have this person come into our house saying, "Yeah, well I would like to do that, I want to do that," and then all of a sudden I've got a 9-year-old boy waiting in the door, waiting for someone to come pick him up and then they don't come and pick him up. It doesn't bother [Rick] at all, it bothers us and our family, and I have to explain that to my son. I was a product of a divorced family where my dad was MIA [missing in action], and I grew up believing, "What did I do? Why doesn't he want to be a part of my life?" And I don't want John to ever feel that. And maybe he does! I don't know what he feels about the absence of him. But I don't know, my main concern is John and his welfare, and my family, and I don't want to risk my family for my self-

> satisfaction or whatever. I feel like I'm John's parent with or without a paper . . .
> **Carmen Woodward**: Sweat equity!
> **Sophie Albright**: But then, it does scare me because truth be known, technically, he could be taken away from me and I have no say-so, because I have no legal rights to him, other than the way I feel about him and the family that we've created and we've lived for, you know. . . . For me, it's when my life started when they became part of my family. So it's hard to say, I mean, I don't want John not to have that access, but I have to also protect him as a parent because I have no, that's an unknown that I don't know.

Terry and Rosa Kimball described a lengthy history of being "in the system." They adopted children from a local birth mother, Alicia, because they believed that it was important to keep siblings together. After getting, surprisingly, two siblings all at once, they later decided to adopt three more children that Alicia had after the first two were adopted. Due to the trauma that the children experienced, both from their family of origin as well as from being in the foster system before their final adoption, Terry and Rosa and their children have been involved in multiple social service agencies. This has not only caused stress on the couple and the children, but they recognized cultural differences that the children needed to adjust to that would create additional areas of adjustment. Although Terry and Rosa have helped the children maintain a positive relationship with Alicia, they understand that this is an ongoing process.

> **Terry Kimball**: Also at that point in time, there was a process called reunification happening, because when we took the kids there was a termination outstanding because they were planning on terminating parental rights. [To Saige] The court was going to decide if your mommy could have you or not. But that was actually more than what happened, so then, actually on the eve of the trial, they changed their minds, and decided to go for reunification. That was about nine months or a year, past a year, into having her, so what was really hard for the oldest was the process of increasing visits and really different families. Her family is Spanish-speaking from Mexico, both parents, and culturally obviously very different, and she's an amazing cook. I'm kind of hoping she teaches Saige and us to cook too!

The Kimball and Curran-Miller families both discussed similar issues around international adoption as another barrier to having children. They both expressed concerns about having to lie in order to adopt a child, as some countries have the stipulation that adoptive parents cannot identify as gay. This was disturbing to these families and they described not wanting to start their family with dishonesty. They each went with a local adoption, but felt frustrated that they did not have the option for international adoption.

> **Rosa Kimball**: When we went to adopt, Terry had a real pull towards a baby from China, because at the time . . . a lot of people were adopting from China, but we just had real concerns about the fact that we weren't going to be able to be out.
> **Terry Kimball**: And whoever participated, which, we didn't get that far, would have had to sign a document. We probably both would have had to sign saying that we're not gay, for the government of China . . . I don't want to lie to even a country. . . . We just didn't want to start everything that way.
>
> **Lynn Curran:** At that time, there were no countries that would allow an adoption to LGBT families. So that means that whoever came in to do the home study was going to have to lie, and we did not want to ask someone to do that, and we didn't want to start our family in a lie.
> **Ann Miller**: And typically, what happens is when you go the other country, you have to act like it's a single-parent adoption, and the other person has to kinda hide out in a hotel.

Finally, Quintry, Fin, and Ethan each told me how loved they feel by their parents. Because of the barriers that families had to face in order to have children, parents wanted to make sure that each child knew that they were well-loved.

> **Quintry Benson**: [hugging Karen] I feel like I'm safe and supported.
>
> **Ethan Knapps**: Part of my family is that my moms really love me, and they love to play board games.
>
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: A really good family.
> **Dorothy O'Riley**: A really good family. What makes us good?
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: Because they really love you. I know that my family loves me and I love my family.

Discussions with Children

Many families described having an open communication style and wanting to make space for exploring their children's reactions and perceptions of the world. In addition, many families discussed having conversations with their children about potential discrimination they could face. Although most families thoughtfully chose the area of the country in which they lived, they acknowledged that their children may go away to college or encounter people with different beliefs or values. These parents wanted to make sure that their children are prepared in case someone has a negative reaction to learning about their family.

> **LaRae Callahan**: We're trying to raise resilient kids.
>
> **LaRae Callahan**: That's just how the world is made up. And we've also not sheltered our kids. Because I don't want Margaret or John or Ed to grow up and go away to college, say, Margaret chooses to go to college in the Midwest. I want her to not be shocked that someone could be like, "That must have been creepy." I want her to be fully prepared that there is a big chunk of the world that doesn't think that's okay.
> **Christine Callahan**: I think we're very lucky here, is what we are. If we went somewhere else it might be eye-opening. It's different. We're comfortable being . . .
> **Margaret Callahan**: I think we'd have a lot more experiences with people not liking that we have two moms, or . . .
> **LaRae Callahan**: We've always been very open with them that not everywhere we go people will be okay with it. They could, when they go to college, meet people that . . .
> **Christine Callahan**: We haven't tried to soften the fact that others . . .
> **LaRae Callahan**: For a while, every time we'd drive by churches John would ask about that church. "Is that kind of church okay with gay people?" You remember doing that?
> **John Callahan**: No.
>
> **Karen Benson**: I think it's important for us to be aware, like if there are times that we need to talk to her about things that come up and all that, but it's actually rather surprising how infrequently issues [come up].
>
> **Dorothy O'Riley**: I think that it's really important to have those conversations . . . I just can't recall anything negative that overtly we've been redirecting or to unpack some of those. But we do talk about all the reasons why somebody

> might have a negative reaction toward our family, so I think he's already kind of prepared.
> **Alice Dawson**: Yeah, I think that we have done a lot of prep work to prepare for, "This could come up." People feel differently, people have different opinions, that we have talked a lot about that. Knowing that we were going to a new school that had a lot of religious families. So we do, we talk about what that means, and we validate that people are different.

Additionally, Dorothy O'Riley acknowledged that although LGBQ parents may be prepared to discuss issues around sexual orientation, they may not be prepared to discuss trans or gender identity issues.

> **Dorothy O'Riley**: I do think that within gay/lesbian families, queer families, there's probably more of a conversation that happens just out of necessity, but I certainly don't think that, especially if we're talking about transitions, that LGB, you know, lesbian or gay, that you're ready to take on trans issues or gender issues.

Advocacy and Visibility

The second theme that emerged was advocacy and visibility. Specifically, families identified issues around being advocates and what that means for them, issues around disclosure and how they share about their family structure, and how others react to learning about their family. Within each sub-theme, families identified positive, neutral, and negative aspects.

Seeing Themselves as Advocates

Many families discussed issues around advocacy, ranging from going to the capitol building to providing education about different families in their children's schools to the children standing up when someone said something mean about their families, knowingly or unknowingly. The Dawson-O'Rileys have gone to the capitol building, and the Callahans have done volunteer tabling.

> **Dorothy O'Riley**: So marriage for me, I don't, I mean, whatever, gay marriage, I just feel like if a couple wants that, they should have that option. It

doesn't necessarily appeal to me. Do I feel like I need it? Not necessarily. Fin has gone with us, though, down to the Capitol building, and held signs, and . . .
Fin Dawson-O'Riley: I was actually on the news.
Dorothy O'Riley: But we did, we've done a lot of work. And part of it is to educate him, and with the homeschooling, part of it is just our lifestyle, but from the time he's been really little, we've done advocacy work on the capitol steps, and had our voice heard!

LaRae Callahan: We had a booth, we had a volunteer shift at the group for gay marriage at the festival, and Margaret came . . . and she was the biggest one! She was out there handing people fliers and stickers, and talking to people, and saying, "Do you think that it's okay for my two moms to want to be married?" And she was talking to people, yeah. It was great. It's just who she is.

The Kimballs have not done any advocacy at the government level, but they have answered questions from their children and their extended family. They described feeling proud that their nephew wrote letters about the fact that his aunts could not get married.

Rosa Kimball: Years ago there was not really on the radar that we would be able to get legally married.
Terry Kimball: We did have a very small commitment ceremony before we had the kids. [One of our kids] came up with a magazine and was like, "You can't marry?" She's like, "What is this?" And we had to sort of explain. Actually your cousin found out, he found out when he was in Spain, and when he came back to the States, when he found out that we couldn't marry and he was really upset, really angry, so he wrote to all his representatives and the president saying that this was wrong. How come his aunt's not married? This is ridiculous!

The Bensons described having more empathy and understanding for others who have also experienced discrimination. They described valuing and celebrating diversity, and this seems to have deeply affected Quintry in the advocate role she sees herself in.

Quintry Benson: That it's kinda different, and it's good to be different. That not everybody in the world has two moms.
Karen Benson: I think it's easier for us to understand each other.

> **Quintry Benson**: We understand better what we have to go through. Sometimes it's hard for girls. Like sometimes in different areas girls, when they're little, they can't go to school but their brothers can go to school.
> **Karen Benson**: Like in other countries.
> **Quintry Benson**: And it's hard for girls.

Karen also described how she and Mary put on a class at their church to talk about different kinds of families. Lynn Curran and Ann Miller described how they understand that some parents have to go into their children's classrooms and provide education about different types of families. They feel extremely grateful that they do not have the responsibility to educate others—this kind of education has already been incorporated into Elsa's school curriculum.

> **Lynn Curran**: But I don't feel like we're having to do a lot of education at the school. Like, they're studying families! We didn't have to do a lot of education about all the different ways families can exist." They get that. And that's part of why we chose that school, also. Like when I toured, there were already things on the wall about adoption. Things about LGBT families. Our family was already on the wall there! . . . It means that we're not going to have to—I don't want to have to educate. The first week of school, the teacher met with all the parents, like, "Tell me what I need to know about your child." I'm fine doing that, they do that with every child. Here's who you're about to spend a year with. And that wasn't about us being an LGBT family. But it means a lot to me to not have to educate about the real basics of, "Please, when you talk about families, include all these different kinds of families." And also, like in her class, there are single-parent families, there aren't any two-dad families that I am aware of. There are two-mom families, there are lots of trans-racial families, so I feel like there are lots of different ways to be different, and that all are included.

On a micro-level, the Dawson-O'Rileys and Callahans discussed small moments in which their children did not remain silent when other children said negative things about their families or about LGBTQ-parented families in general. Parents had a sense that the other children were echoing the opinions of their parents or grandparents and were proud that their child stood up for their family. Although Alice Dawson described being hesitant to overstep her bounds with talking to the other

child, she felt that she was able to do it in an appropriate way and then discuss the situation with the child's parent later on. In addition, families acknowledged that these situations have been few and far between.

> **Alice Dawson**: We were going on a walk . . . in the woods . . .
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: And mom told, I think, was it you that told her? I think I told her that I had two moms. And what happened?
> **Dorothy O'Riley**: They were talking about marriage, and then one of the other kids suggested, "Well, what about two women getting married?" And her response was. . . . "Eeew!" Because you weren't really a part of the conversation, you were a little bit further ahead. And you turned around and you said what?
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: I said, "Two moms is actually pretty great.". . . .
> **Alice Dawson**: So she had a very negative response to two women getting married.
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: And partly because of her family.
> **Alice Dawson**: It's all about families and what their opinions are. And she was really like, "Ugh!" And he was up a couple steps ahead, and he turned around, and . . . I explained to her that, "Well, I am actually partnered with a woman!" And it was just such a natural conversation, and I was like, "Well actually. . . ." Because she was very much like, "Ugh! That's wrong! That's gross!" And Fin was like, "Well, my family, and I love my family, and we're pretty great!" And then that was it. He kept going, and it was just, like, no big deal! Like, by the way! And so her and I spoke about it, and I was like, "Actually, I'm partnered with a woman." And I volunteer, and I'm constantly there, and I know that she adores me. So it's like, "Oh! Oh!" So I later had a conversation with the mother, because as a volunteer, I don't feel it's like my business to describe things to other kids. So I let her mom know, "This is the conversation we had," and she had said to me that they need to talk about it more. She's like, "Well I know that that's obviously not my view," but the kids do a lot of child care with the grandparents, so it was definitely the grandmother's perspective. But you could . . . hear the grandmother's voice in what her response was. And I don't remember exactly what it was, in the actual statement, but it was, you could hear the adult voice in her distaste for same-sex couples. And I feel like she learned that, "Oh! It's not bad, and you guys are great." So it was a somewhat negative experience. He was so, like, who cares! But I don't think there's ever been any situation that has really hurt his heart in that way, for our family.

> **Christine Callahan**: It's just Margaret, she's just, "That's who I am," standing on her own two feet. She's always been that way, so I don't think she thinks anything of it. She would fight, you would always, I mean, if today someone came and said something about us, what would you do?
> **Margaret Callahan**: I'd say that we're made that way.

Disclosure to Others

Most families described that they are completely out. They shared that because children "out" you anyway, it is easier to disclose up front. In addition, families described how it cuts down on awkwardness or others' assumptions by disclosing about their family structure quickly. Alice Dawson noted that this is also a way to filter through others who would not want to get to know them based on their sexual orientation.

> **Sophie Albright**: Yeah, I'm a big believer in. . . . If we act as if it's shameful, or if we hide it and don't really say anything, then how is it that the rest of the world's not going to treat it that way? I grew up in a town where it was not hip to be gay.
>
> **Terry Kimball**: When you have kids you just can't avoid it.
> **Rosa Kimball**: It just kind of comes up about your partner, or spouse.
> **Terry Kimball**: Or if some people have kids, usually it comes up that way. Then sooner or later they say, usually they say, "Oh, your husband," and then I have to . . .
>
> **LaRae Callahan**: It wasn't much of a choice about it at the beginning. Margaret was very vocal about it as a little girl. She would tell people, "I have two moms!" She must have early on figured out that it was different, and then people started saying to her, "Well, you're lucky," and then she started saying to people, "I have two moms, aren't I lucky?" So we always joked around that there was no way, which we weren't in the closet, but if we wanted to be in the closet, then we couldn't.
>
> **Alice Dawson**: I'm always very open to say "Fin's other mother," or "my partner," in that way because I do want to put it out in the front that that's who we are. And that way conversations can be led with that, because I feel like a lot of the parents who do participate in the programs that we do will then just avoid us. And that's great! That works for me.
> **Dorothy O'Riley**: For myself, I always model. I really don't care. I work for a mental health agency, and I'm very open, and very much, like, you know, trying to normalize anything that you can, really, about our weird family!
>
> **Katie Knapps**: I find myself sharing a lot more since Ethan was born. The more common thing is at work for people to say, "Oh, what does your husband do?" Especially if they know you have a kid. So my strategy is, I'm like, really proactive about saying, "my wife," when I first meet people or when we start having personal conversations, because what ends up happening is they

say "husband" and they feel really embarrassed. They aren't even like, it's just an assumption, the odds are with you, that that's going to be the case. So I try to save everybody from that awkwardness by just saying, "Yeah, my wife and I whatever."
Sara Knapps: Yeah, I'm the same way. It's easier just to kind of get it out there.

Lynn Curran: We don't hide it, and we also don't announce it. People kind of figure it out. It's like, at her kindergarten, they had over the summer, weekly playdates at the playground for kids to get to know each other, for the parents to get to know each other. "Oh, I'm Elsa's mom," and then someone else on the playground, Ann would talk to the same people, and, "Oh, I'm Elsa's mom," and all of a sudden they know!

Alex Murphy: It's rare that I. . . . Well, I was going to say that it's rare for us to tell people, because for years, before Merida started elementary school, everyone around us knew. So it's not like we were telling people. All of our colleagues knew, we were very up front about it. But since she's started school, I have found myself maybe hesitating suddenly, disclosing that Merida has two moms, that I'm one mom and there's another mom out there. Oh, and there are dads involved.
Sinead Murphy: You know, a heterosexual couple won't come up and say "other mom," or "dads involved."
Alex Murphy: But when you introduce herself to some of her friends, do you say, "I'm Merida's mom," or "I'm one of Merida's moms"?
Sinead Murphy: It depends on the situation. . . . Like with the teacher, I think they were fine, like, "I'm the other mom."
Alex Murphy: That's all true, and there is still an element of, at some point in time, I feel the need to disclose if it's not obvious. And straight people don't have to do that.

Some children also described the ways that they disclose to others about their family structure. For Saige, John, Merida, and Fin, this disclosure is a non-issue. Fin seemed to laugh at the absurdity of someone assuming that he had a father. John's parents, Sophie and Carmen, were shocked that John did not even think to tell them that he had announced to his class that they had married until they found out from his teacher at a parent-teacher conference.

Rosa Kimball: How do you talk about your family?
Saige Kimball: Oh, I tell my friends that my parents are gay.

Merida Murphy: Um, well, I just say that I'm me, and then I kind of just describe what they look like.

Fin Dawson-O'Riley: They've asked me if I've had, if I have, a dad. A different parent.
Dorothy O'Riley: And what do you say?
Fin Dawson-O'Riley: I say "no!" [Laughter] I have two moms. I say, "No, I have moms!"

Sophie Albright: When we got married and we went on a honeymoon, [John] stood up in class and told the class. We were very surprised to hear that. We had a teacher conference because they schedule them, and the teacher was like, "Congratulations!" And we were like, "Well, how did you know?" "Well, John told everybody!" That's pretty amazing.

Reactions of Others

Participants described a range of reactions that others had when learning about their family, ranging from positive, neutral, and subtly or overtly negative. Most families described experiencing many positive reactions from others learning that they are part of a LGBQ-parented family. Reactions came both from other adults, as well as other children saying "That's cool!"

Sophie Albright: We've been part of a big baseball community here, everybody's fine.
Carmen Woodward: They're all heterosexual.
Sophie Albright: A lot of them are just good ol' boys. . . . Because all of them are like "Oh, it's so cool!". . . . So cool! Awesome! But I mean it's so funny because the kids will say to John, what do I want to say, they call me "Mom" and her "the other mom" or vice versa.

Ann Miller: Do you remember when Brody asked you, "Elsa, do you have two moms? Do you have two moms?" And he kept asking you every day! Do you remember that?
Elsa Curran: No.
Ann Miller: So there's another little boy in her class and he asked over and over! And I think he asked you, and he asked me, and one day, I remember, I was dropping you off, and he came over to you and me and said, "Does Elsa have two moms?" And I said, "Yeah! What do you think about that?" And he said, "That's great!" And then he ran off. But that's kind of been. . . . Somebody else at school recently asked her that, and said, "That's really cool." That's really been the response she's gotten from other kids.

Terry Kimball: We belonged to a church when the girls were little. It's been a couple years, but at the time, they loved us, they thought it was the greatest thing. It was nice to be able to walk in there at the time and have them recognize us as a family. It was very validated [by the church].
Rosa Kimball: And celebrated.

LaRae Callahan: And I'm very involved with sports with the kids on island, and it's a very very supportive community. Our kids go to church, and their church is super supportive. Lot of gay families. And I work for the state, and they have great, all different types of social justice.

Sophie Albright: [Referring to John's announcement to his class that his moms got married] It was just the fact that I think that we're doing something right for him to feel so comfortable to stand. . . . He's not a very outspoken kid, and for him to get up and say that in front of everybody and not think twice about it. To take it a step further, it's not just about him, it's about the fact that he hadn't gotten any crap from any of the kids in his class.
Carmen Woodward: Nobody teased him, nobody said anything. But there is another women couple in the same grade, and they've been there since early on, I'm pretty sure, and they have two kids, so it's just possible that they were the trendsetters.
Sophie Albright: Yeah, it's cool there.
John Woodward: [Looks at Sophie] Well, like you said, they think that it's cool that I have two moms.
Rachel Gall: How come you think that they think that?
John Woodward: Well, they say it to me.

Rachel Gall: So has anybody else ever thought it was cool that you have gay moms?
Saige Kimball: Uh-huh! Some of my other friends.
Rachel Gall: Oh yeah? How come you think that they think it's cool?
Saige Kimball: Um, because, um, I don't know.
Rachel Gall: What do you guys think?
Terry Kimball: I think some people see difference as a good thing. Like, it's cool because it's different.

Sinead Murphy: We do have, our friends are supportive but also jealous, our straight friends, like, it's not fair you have four parents! They don't get a date! To be able to have them experience the kids.
Alex Murphy: My parents, in the end, have been very positive. My mom tells us that she brags now to all of her friends that we're in this co-parenting relationship and it works so well. It's very sweet, actually.
Merida Murphy: I don't know. It's kind of actually cool to have two moms.
Rachel Gall: What makes it cool?
Merida Murphy: Well, there's two kids, and there's two moms, so you can have, like, so it's easier to take care. And we have two dads who are dads who take care of us.

The Kimball and Callahan families discussed Mother's Day and Father's Day as times where they have felt supported by their school. These families and their teachers have worked together to find creative ways to celebrate these holidays.

> **Rosa Kimball**: On Father's Day they make things for grandpa.

> **LaRae Callahan**: Oh, we've had great experiences, . . . [Margaret's] kindergarten teacher said, was it Mother's Day or Father's Day, Mother's Day, and she said, "We're doing a kind of complex project, should I have Margaret do one for one mom for Mother's Day and one of you for Father's Day, or should she just do one that she share?" And we're, "Oh no, just have her do one that we share and then on Father's Day she'll do one for her grandfather." But I thought that was a really, we've had lots of positives.

Saige Kimball described her excitement to learn that there was another boy in her class who was adopted and who had two dads.

> **Saige Kimball**: So once there was this person in [my] class . . . and I told him my parents were gay, and he said that it was really cool, and he said his parents were gay too. He had two dads. And he was adopted.

At the same time, the Dawson-O'Rileys and the Knapps families described how their children were less excited than they thought they would be. Fin did not seem impressed and thought their moms were making a big deal out of the fact that they met another family with two moms. Ethan shared that he had talked to another boy, Philip, with two dads, but was not sure why this was important. Sara and Katie Knapps thought that perhaps Philip had a dad and a stepdad. Ethan seemed genuinely baffled as to why others might be interested in his family.

> **Alice Dawson**: Recently, Fin met another kid in class that has two moms as well, and I don't know who was more excited, me or Fin!
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: You were probably more excited.
> **Alice Dawson**: Because we had known this kid, and we had no idea that they were, not that it makes us that different but it's nice to relate with people, and I do know that prior to [Fin] knowing, he wasn't really interested in the child, for whatever reason, but after knowing, it was like, "I need to know you! Let's

be friends, we have this common connection." And it was very, I think he was really excited to hear that he wasn't the only unicorn in the room, you know?
Dorothy O'Riley: I'm not sure that even he is aware, or conscious of the reason he wanted to make that connection after he found out. I think that, yeah, we have this shared or similar experience, and it is not in the majority, you know what I mean? So I think that there was that, hold on, now we have something in common and we can build from that!

Ethan Knapps: Oh yeah! Oh yeah! Philip was interested that we had two moms. And Alyssa was.
Katie Knapps: Can you tell her about the times when that happened?
Ethan Knapps: I was at my bus stop, and Philip and a bunch of kids.
Katie Knapps: What happened with Philip and a bunch of kids?
Ethan Knapps: He said, "Awesome!"
Sara Knapps: Did he wonder who Mama was, or who I was?
Ethan Knapps: He knew who you guys are. Because you guys are my parents!
Rachel Gall: So how come you think Philip thought that was awesome? Why did he say that?
Ethan Knapps: Because he has two dads!
Katie Knapps: We think there might be a stepdad in the picture. Why did Alyssa think it was cool?
Ethan Knapps: I have *no* [emphasis added] idea.
Rachel Gall: Can you take a guess?
Ethan Knapps: I don't know!

Many families described neutral reactions they experienced from others as they learned about their family structure. Families described many instances where they simply received no reaction. Families also described situations in which they had worries that others would react negatively, but that they were faced with a neutral reaction. Overall, families seemed to interpret getting "no reaction" as a positive sign.

Terry Kimball: It's amazing how little reaction you get. Like none.

Sara Knapps: I think almost every . . . if it's been a negative reaction, what they tend to do is to not initiate any kind of correspondence with us.

Carmen Woodward: Nobody has been overt about it, I guess. If somebody has a problem with it they just don't say anything. Maybe some of the other baseball parents might have been weird about it, and we may have gotten a bit of an attitude, but that could have been an attitude for any reason. So I've never heard anything specifically derogatory or anything. I mean, we flew our

rainbow flag and nobody said anything. I just don't feel like it's something to hide.

Alice Dawson: I think that we as a family walk pretty confidently. Who we are, and I don't think that we allow for a lot of else.
Dorothy O'Riley: There's just not a big sense of community out here, like when I think about what community means. There just isn't that kind of community out here. We are kind of stand-alone. Not that we don't have friends or whatever, but it's not, especially, specifically where we live. The reference, is that we live in a, this is highly militarized out here, lots and lots of military families.

Sara and Katie Knapps pointed out that it can feel awkward to them when others are overly positive when learning that they are two moms. They would prefer that others did not react to them. At the same time, they enjoyed when others came up to them to share that they were from a similar family.

Sara Knapps: Every interaction has been either positive, or there's been nothing . . .
Katie Knapps: Generally it's just people trying to make it a non-issue . . .
Sara Knapps: Unless people are like, "Oh! That's so wonderful!" Because that's kind of awkward too. We know people, too, that have been raised by two moms. Like there was someone in my class who has two moms, and she's in her late 20s. They're the ones who are like, "Oh! You're a gay family! That's awesome because I'm from a gay family!" So those are like the really positive ones. But they've all been relatively positive.
Katie Knapps: Or they're like, "My sister is gay! That's so awesome!" But otherwise, people, it's kind of weird to be like, "That's awesome!"

Margaret Callahan, John Callahan, and Elsa Curran also shared times that other children made comments to them about having two moms that they interpreted as neutral.

LaRae Callahan: Do you recall when you were little that you were different?
Margaret Callahan: A little bit.
LaRae Callahan: Yeah.
Margaret Callahan: I don't exactly remember, but I've had kids say to me, like, "Do you wish you had a dad?" And stuff like that.

John Callahan: I have somebody who didn't know, for some reason they wanted to know if I had two moms, and I said I had two moms. And they reacted a little bit weird to me.

> **Christine Callahan**: I heard someone at soccer the other day say to you, "John, you've got two moms?" But it wasn't like in a bad way, they were just putting it together.
>
> **Ann Miller**: Elsa, has anyone said anything mean to you about having two moms?
> **Elsa Curran**: No.
> **Ann Miller**: Or teased you, or made fun of you or anything?
> **Elsa Curran**: No. I feel like somebody has but I'm not sure.

The Knapps and Benson families were the only families who specifically discussed the idea of "tokenness." The Knapps family described perceiving a difference between others' curiosity, where they are happy to answer questions and make assumptions. They also described how in their experience people will ask more questions once they have gotten to know them. Feeling as if they were the "token" family was experienced as neutral, with some positive and some negative aspects.

> **Sara Knapps**: You know, it doesn't usually bother me, I feel almost like we're ambassadors to gay families in the sense that we're the only gay family in the neighborhood, but people ask questions, they're curious. Most of the time they don't mean any harm in it, so that's fine, I mean, we're happy to talk about it. . . . But I think people asking questions and being presumptuous is kind of different.
> **Katie Knapps**: People will only ever say anything, once they kind of, in general, if they know you pretty well and they feel like the time is right.
>
> **Karen Benson**: That happens with other parents actually, like at our church, like who want to raise their kid to be open-minded, and whenever it comes up they'll be like, "You know, like Quintry, *she* [emphasis added] has two moms!" Like we're kind of that story in the family. I think we're that for a lot of families. I don't really mind being that for families, at least they have good intentions. And at least they have a kid that they can tell their kids, "Like Quintry!"

Karen and Mary Benson described an experience where they found out later that their chiropractor may have had some negative assumptions about them. They now view this as a positive experience that they were able to expand his knowledge about families like theirs, yet also acknowledged that they had no idea in the moment

and this could have been a more negative experience. They also noticed that although they live in the same area, their communities are extremely different.

> **Mary Benson**: But sometimes I realize, like afterwards, like, that we, maybe somebody had an opinion about it, or felt a certain way about it but didn't say anything, and then later on they'll come and say. Like we have a chiropractor . . .
> **Karen Benson**: Oh! [laughing]
> **Mary Benson**: You know, we're that family for him! We've educated him! You know, I came to him when I was pregnant, and you know, Quintry's come to him since she was weeks old, and now we're his token lesbian family that he talks about when he does trainings and things. Like, oh! I wouldn't have picked that up from him that maybe he was a little nervous or unfamiliar with this territory when we started going to him, but now he talks about it a lot. "I've *learned* [emphasis added] about this family!"
> **Karen Benson**: He has a very Christian background, and he and his kids went to Christian schools and stuff, so for him, us being his patients and getting to know him well was really different, which kind of makes sense, like, oh yeah, there's people like. . . . He can live and work in the same area that we do, but his kids go to a Christian school and they go to a different church than we do, and their friends have different social norms than we do. Actually, kind of what's surprising to us, and it wasn't really offensive, because again, he actually said, like "I say to my friends that oh, there's these people I work with, blah blah blah." You know, like he was more on our side even though he acknowledged that his social norm was more outside what they were okay with.
> **Mary Benson**: He didn't let us know.
> **Karen Benson**: Not for years, actually!
> **Mary Benson**: About his process, until he had come to that positive side of the process. And then it was like, looking back, oh, well maybe . . .
> **Karen Benson**: Maybe he could have been more worried about it, but he wasn't.

Sophie Albright and Carmen Woodward had worries about a camping trip they went on where they did not know everyone who was invited. Sophie agonized over whether or not to go because she did not want Carmen or John to feel awkward. They felt some discomfort from others on the camping trip, yet realized later that this could have been for any number of reasons. They eventually came to the conclusion that they may have been perceived as different because they had a different style of camping than the other families.

Sophie Albright: We were going to go camping with other parents, another family, that lives around the block. We're really close with them, we have a good time with them. They called us up at the last minute and said, "A group of our friends, who you don't know, they have a group campsite if you guys want to just go in with them and we'll just have this big camping thing. I said to her, "I don't know these people . . . ." Are we going to be accepted, is what I'm thinking about! And she was all, "Of course you are! Screw 'em!" because that's how she is. And Carmen went, Carmen and John went prior to me going, because I was at work.
Carmen Woodward: Well they were already there already, and it was raining.
Sophie Albright: Well then you met the, I can't remember his name, and the other guy. So Carmen came and picked me up, and I was like, "How is it?" Because I'm very protective of my family, so if it's going to be, if it's going to cause a problem, I'll stay home, because I don't want John to miss out. I want him to be a part of that, and I don't want him to feel ostracized. I walk in the room and you can tell I'm a lesbian. Carmen walks in the room, not so much.
Carmen Woodward: Did anybody ever say anything to you during that trip, like, "You have two moms?" Or did they never say anything to you, like teasing you?
John Woodward: Nuh-uh. [shakes his head]
Carmen Woodward: Oh, okay!
Sophie Albright: So anyway, my concern was that. "Maybe I should stay home," and she was like, "No, everybody seems totally fine." Because you just don't know what you're going to get. And sure enough . . . I mean, one lady didn't talk to us too much but it wasn't very, she might have just been . . .
Carmen Woodward: That could have just been a classes thing! We were the only ones without a trailer. There were five trailers in the group site and they were in a circle. Our tent, was a two person tent for three people, and that was my mistake, was outside the circle over here under a tree. So we were like making our coffee in a stove that I had to pump the gas.
Sophie Albright: When we camp, like, we really camp! We don't bring our hotel on wheels!
Carmen Woodward: So we were different in so many ways. It wasn't just that, you couldn't just point to that that made us feel weird, and I'm sure they probably thought that we were in a tent, "They can't afford a trailer." They had these gigantic big houses on wheels.

Other participants described the role of religion in how others react to them and described situations in which they knew that others were holding back their opinions in order to not offend them. Sophie Albright and Carmen Woodward had an experience where Carmen's religious cousin, her children, and her husband were in town:

> **Sophie Albright**: It was awkward with her husband, he is an older gentleman. . . . Late 50s, almost 60. So it's a generational thing, so we got there and we said hi, he pretty much left, but it wasn't a confrontation or anything.
> **Carmen Woodward**: He was just like [in robotic voice], "I am not acknowledging that you exist, I will leave now."

Sara Knapps also described a neutral experience with her pastor. Although she appreciated that he was open with her and shared his beliefs, she still knew that for him there was a difference between neutrality and true acceptance.

> **Sara Knapps**: Religion is kind of the one place you just never know what's going to happen. So when we were looking for a church, it's like, how do you even go around finding a place that's accepting of your family, and still giving you what you need religion-wise. . . . [One church that we found,] I really liked it, there were other young families, and they were funny and just really relevant, and I remember meeting and talking with the pastor, and after I had been there for a couple months I said, "Hey, I'd like to sit and have coffee with you," and I talked to him about it. He's like, "I was waiting for you to come and address this with me." Which was really cute! And for him, you know, he lives his life by the Bible. He says there's no precedents in the Bible that supports the particular family that we have. With that said, he said, "I don't even begin to presume to know God's grace. That's not my job. My job is to help you find your right path to God. That's what we're about." He said, since he lives through the Bible, that that's basically his answer. He's not going to say, "Yes, absolutely, I agree with your family," because that's just not what he believes. But the fact that he's still open, it's hard, I'd like to have somebody say that to me, but we're not going to find that, at least not yet.

Mary Benson described how they interpreted their church's attempt to make their sexual orientation a non-issue. Although they thought that the church's intention was to make an effort to normalize their family, they felt that this negated part of their identity.

> **Mary Benson**: It's a part of everything and it's not the cause of everything. One of the things that I struggled with with our church in the beginning, was, they were like, this isn't an issue to us, tell us about all the other things about yourself. Yeah, I get that you don't want to make this an issue, but for our lives . . .

Dorothy O'Riley and Alice Dawson acknowledged that although they have not had many overtly discriminatory experiences, they are still cautious about appearing in public together due to living in a religiously and politically conservative area.

> **Dorothy O'Riley**: And I would say at this point that we have not faced a lot of adversity as a family because of the makeup of our family. Even in a conservative living environment, we don't engage as much in our community out here, but we still show up at grocery stores, and restaurants.
> **Alice Dawson**: But we don't necessarily hold hands walking down the street on the sidewalk.

Some families shared some overtly discriminatory or negative experiences they have had. For example, when attempting to legally adopt their children, Terry and Rosa Kimball sat in the courtroom and listened to the opposing attorney's argument that their family would not be "culturally appropriate" for the children because Mexicans are homophobic.

> **Terry Kimball**: Saige probably doesn't know this, but when we [went] to court just for these girls. . . . Her mom had really wanted them and it had gone on for a long time, so, it was used by attorneys on the other side. In fact, they tried multiple times to ____, and this is crazy, and it's not true, because "all of Mexico is homophobic, so [our family is not] culturally appropriate. [To Saige] They actually said gay marriage is okay in Mexico before here. So much for all those . . .

The Kimballs also described another experience where they were overtly discriminated against on a family vacation. They were quick to reassure Saige that this was an unusual situation and that this is why it stuck out in their memory.

> **Rosa Kimball**: We were coming home, and on Southwest, and they did the call for pre-boarding for families and children, and we went up, and they said, "Oh no."
> **Terry Kimball**: She was willing to hold up that plane to get us. . . . She's like, "You can't be a family."
> **Rosa Kimball**: "You can't be a family. One of you could board."
> **Terry Kimball**: Well she actually accused us of falsely pretending, of being two families. So one of us could board with the children. . . . It was really weird.
> **Rosa Kimball**: And we didn't want to make a huge big deal.

Saige Kimball: But did you guys finally get on?
Terry Kimball: Oh yeah. We all got on. She was wrong too! But it's pretty unusual.
Rosa Kimball: Pretty rare for us. . . . It was unusual, Saige, so we noticed it, that she didn't think that we were a real family.

Quintry Benson had not experienced any direct discrimination, but described being upset knowing that others are talking about her behind her back and making fun of her.

Quintry Benson: Cuz I have two moms, and that, they have a problem with that, they shouldn't tell anybody, it just makes me feel bad.
Rachel Gall: Has anybody ever said mean things to you or made fun of you for having two moms?
Quintry Benson: Kinda, not, like, out loud, but like _____.
Rachel Gall: Wow, so you know that maybe people are making fun of you behind your back. How do you know that?
Quintry Benson: Because sometimes I know people are talking about it.
Rachel Gall: Yeah, you seem really sad when you're talking about that. Can you tell me more about how you feel when that happens?
Quintry Benson: I kinda feel a bit sad because my family is different, they're judging us.

Ethan Knapps also shared that other kids had made fun of him for having two moms, but did not know why having two moms would make him the target of teasing.

Sara Knapps: Has anyone ever made you feel bad about having two moms?
Ethan Knapps: Yeah. . . . They said, "You have two moms instead of a dad and a mom!" [in a mean, teasing voice] Ha, ha!
Sara Knapps: Who said that?
Katie Knapps: It doesn't matter who said it. Do you remember where you were?
Ethan Knapps: I went to daycare. There were a lot of kids there.
Rachel Gall: How come you think they said that? How come you think they were mean to you because you had two moms?
Ethan Knapps: I don't know.
Rachel Gall: Can you take a guess?
Ethan Knapps: I have *no* [emphasis added] idea. I don't have any guesses, because of my brain!

While Merida Murphy has not experienced any discrimination, Ben said that one child has pointed and laughed at him. However, Sinead and Alex were skeptical

of him saying this and thought that perhaps he was just saying "yes" because I was asking.

> **Rachel Gall**: Merida, or Ben too, I'm wondering, has anybody ever been mean to you or made fun of you for having two moms?
> **Merida Murphy**: Um, no, not for me.
> **Ben Murphy**: [nodding] They pointed at me. They didn't say anything. They just laughed and pointed.
> **Sinead Murphy**: I don't remember that, Ben. Ben, who was laughing at you?
> **Ben Murphy**: Andy.
> **Alex Murphy**: I'm . . . [looks skeptical]
> **Rachel Gall**: You're wondering about that story.
> **Alex Murphy**: Yeah. I know the child, and it's the youngest, most socially immature child in the class, so it doesn't entirely surprise me.
> **Sinead Murphy**: I'm just curious [if it's] something entirely, entirely unrelated. I'd be curious if we talked to him a little bit more or talked to his teacher.

Three families described worries that other parents would not let their children come over to their house. Although each family expressed worry about this, the Callahans were the only family who actually experienced this situation.

> **Sara Knapps**: I do worry that people would be concerned, not as much because we're two women, but concerned about having their kids come here by themselves.

> **Sophie Albright**: Kids come over for sleepovers, John goes over for sleepovers, we just have not had "We don't want my kid going down there because of . . . ." Maybe it's happening, but we're not aware of it.
> **Carmen Woodward**: And he just doesn't hang out with the kids that are, their parents care.

> **Margaret Callahan**: One girl that wouldn't come over.
> **LaRae Callahan**: It's her mom. Her dad is fine with it, but we had invited her to a birthday party two years ago. We had one little girl, her mom wouldn't let her spend the night. But then she had another friend who. . . . You want to tell, honey? They moved to the island, and she said something about, "Do you think it's okay for two women to be married?" Because gay marriage was a big thing at that point, and the little girl said, "No, my mommy says that the Bible says that that's against God." And Margaret said, "Well, my mom's a Christian and she doesn't think that." And then Margaret said, "Well, sorry, I guess we can't be friends!" And then she ended up coming to our house for a birthday party.
> **Margaret Callahan**: No, because you said to invite all the girls in the class!

> **LaRae Callahan**: But she came, just saying! Her mom knew and her mom didn't keep her.

Four families discussed experiencing others asking intrusive questions about their families, and that this was uncomfortable for them. Most families alluded to the idea that perhaps others would not be asking if not for their sexual orientation. Most of the questions were related to the origins of the children, whether they were adopted or used a donor, or who gave birth to the child.

> **Sophie Albright**: I think that the women are more intrusive than the men about us and our relationship.
>
> **Terry Kimball**: I think it's a little hard for us because it does bring up the issue of how they came to be with us, and that involves some very personal stories, and the kids are different about sharing. [Our older daughter is] much more protective about the story, in fact, both kids would agree to say they were adopted on the bus or whatever, etcetera. I think you have to own that it's their story, so I think that's what's a little hard, it brings up the issue, because people are really curious, like how did you bring them? Or they assume their parent was terrible, which isn't true, so it's a little bit of, "I'm not trying to be rude, but I can't disclose much because it's really my child's story to tell, I'm sitting on a bus." . . . I think it's amazing that they ask, people don't really listen to themselves, because I've literally had people, "Well where are your real children?" "Um, I have five, the same ones I just mentioned."
>
> **LaRae Callahan**: I think it's just people don't understand the whole process. . . . Especially when the kids were little, I could have both of them with me and people thought that I gave birth to them.
> **Christine Callahan**: And people still ask when they meet us, like "Who gave birth?" And some people will say, "Did you give birth to John, and you gave birth to Margaret, or vice versa?"
> **Margaret Callahan**: I still have some of my friends that I've had for a long time ask me which, and it doesn't even cross my mind!

Another uncomfortable reaction families described is when others refer to the donor as the "dad." The Knapps and Callahan families felt that the language that others used is important. They wished that others would modify their language to refer to him as a "donor," because the word "dad" or "father" implies a relationship.

> **Sara Knapps**: It bothers when people say, "Oh, who's Ethan's dad?" or, "Do you know his dad?" And I'm like, he doesn't have a dad! A dad is somebody who raises you and is there all the time. He doesn't have a dad, he has a donor. My father-in-law still calls him his "father" and I'm like, it's not his father, he's the donor! He has absolutely no interaction.

> **Christine Callahan**: I've had straight people say, "Who's the dad?" or "does the dad have straight hair?" or, "do you know the dad?" Yeah, or stuff like that. And I'm like, "It was a donor. We don't know who they are." I've had to explain that that was the right term.
> **LaRae Callahan**: We always thought that if we had a son, he would be the one who would be more like, "I wonder who my dad is." But she's been the one to say, "It's not really a dad," because "Dad" denotes a relationship, it's a "donor," but she's been curious about it, and we've entertained that curiosity.
> **Margaret Callahan**: I've also lost interest in it the last few years.
> **LaRae Callahan**: The last few years you haven't, but you were for a long time, at about 8, very wanting to know.
> **Margaret Callahan**: Just that when I was younger, I really wanted to know this person who I was belonging to.
> **Christine Callahan**: Half of you.
> **Margaret Callahan**: Yeah. I just really wanted to know who this person was because I had no clue who it was.
> **Christine Callahan**: She was angry a little bit.

Sinead and Alex Murphy were the only family I interviewed that had a known donor and were also in a unique situation by working with and being friends with both their children's biological father and his partner. They described their experience as they went around to their coworkers announcing that they were going to have a child. They had one negative experience as they made the announcement to one coworker. In addition, Sinead, as the non-biological parent, felt somewhat excluded from the celebrations.

> **Sinead Murphy**: When we told people at work that we were pregnant, everybody was like totally happy for us. With one exception.
> **Alex Murphy**: Oh, I remember this so clearly. When I was pregnant, viably pregnant, 10 or 12 [weeks] . . . Owen was in Romania, and so Sinead and I walked around, sort of coming out to everybody, saying, "I'm pregnant and Owen is the biological father."
> **Sinead Murphy**: Everybody knew that we were together.
> **Alex Murphy**: Right. And one woman said, "Oh, that's kind of weird!" And that was about it. I do remember one kind of negative thing. One of our

colleagues wasn't around the day that Sinead and I walked around, so I went back to her later, alone, without Sinead, and told her. She was very excited for us, and then said, "Oh, I'll have to email Owen and congratulate him!" And there was no mention of Sinead. I remember you reacted negatively to that. You don't remember that?
Sinead Murphy: I don't, actually.
Rachel Gall: At the time, what do you think that meant to you that they reacted that way?
Sinead Murphy: Well, because I'm not biologically connected to the kids. Actually, I don't remember that specifically, but I remember, not that anybody at work said anything, but we had a big, when Owen came back, it was a baby shower, and it was huge. People were just so generous and stuff. Me, and it was just internal, felt kind of like the third wheel because I wasn't the one who was pregnant, I wasn't the one who fathered the children. But I don't remember anybody every saying anything . . . I think at the beginning, like, [Alex was] experiencing something I'm not. But that's changed.

Mary Benson described institutional discrimination they had faced. Because their marriage is now recognized by the federal government, she and Karen recently filed taxes together for the first time. Yet, for years, according to the government, Mary was unmarried, a non-parent, and did not own a home. She felt angry about this, as well as frustrated at the fact that others had the privilege of not having to think about these issues. While she feels that her sexual orientation is not often salient in their day-to-day life, this is an area in which the discrimination has been overt and thus their sexual orientation becomes primary.

Mary Benson: We go about our lives and we don't think about it that much until it becomes an issue, and then it is fully encompassing everything that we are. You know, I mean, this year we just went and got our taxes done, and this is the first year that we've been able to file together. And it actually didn't work in our benefit, but every single year. . . . I was like, "Oh, that's kind of a bummer!" But every single year, when we have to file taxes, for a lot of reasons, we've had Karen carry the house and Quintry, and so when I go to file taxes, I'm single, I don't own a house, and I don't own a child, according to the federal government! And it would just make me mad! So it was surprisingly, we talked about that, that how many people didn't know that. And yet it only really brought up and represented anything important in my life that one time of the year. So it's everything, and it's nothing. [voice is louder, more impassioned]

Finally, some families had uncomfortable experiences in their preschools and elementary schools that were responded to in an affirming manner by people in authority such as teachers and staff. This response was experienced as positive and was turned into an opportunity for processing and understanding that others may judge or not accept their family. Often, these experiences stand out to families as they have not experienced much overt discrimination and were pleased that when they did they felt supported by their school. Some families decided that they wanted to be involved in further discussions, and some decided that it was enough to know that they were backed by the administration. In addition, this discussion provided the opportunity for some parents to ask their children if they would tell them if they had experienced any discrimination.

> **Terry Kimball**: Some people see difference and they don't know how to manage it. That's when you get someone who. . . . There's really been really very little between both kids. [Saige's younger sister] was in preschool? Summer daycare. And she came home really upset one day. . . . Not only are we a different ethnicity, and gay, but also they have another mom, which the kids have another mom too, just part of the picture. So [she] told the kids that she had three moms, and they just freaked out. "It's not possible! You can't!" But with intermarriage and divorces these days I'm pretty sure there's other ways to get three moms. We took her out of the daycare actually. Because they heard it, and the staff intervened, they had a conversation about families, but we just decided that it wasn't the right place for her because she is not so assertive. There was just a lot of kids, and chaos. So she ended up spending the summer with me.
>
> **Christine Callahan**: Definitely feel support. At school, when that incident happened with Margaret and that girl, the principal had said, "Well, I will call the family, that's not okay." We said, "No, let them deal with it, we just wanted to bring it to your attention." But we felt very backed by her saying, "That's not acceptable."
>
> **Saige Kimball**: Once, I told my class that my parents are gay because we were doing ____ so then it was about gay people, and my teacher called on me and I said my parents are gay. This guy named Robbie, he said that people shouldn't be gay, and I was like, "Ummm?"
> **Rachel Gall**: How did you feel when he said that?

Saige Kimball: I felt a little different, but it still . . .
Terry Kimball: I think he said something about how we couldn't believe in God. . . . Not very educated parents.
Rachel Gall: Did you tell anybody, or not tell anybody?
Saige Kimball: I told my moms.
Rachel Gall: Oh, you did? And what did they say?
Saige Kimball: They said that . . . I don't remember.
Rachel Gall: Do you guys remember what you said?
Terry Kimball: I'm pretty sure that we talked about it, that ___. And that some people just have this opinion that it's not okay.

Karen Benson: But it's sort of telling too, that like, we have to really think about it to come up with things.
Mary Benson: I was thinking too, at one point in time during preschool, and that was really painful, and really hard, but now I can't even remember exactly what happened! You know I think some of it was a misunderstanding.
Karen Benson: And we've always had the support of. . . . So like in her preschool we did a pride celebration, and one person really questioned it, but they didn't tell *us* [emphasis added] that, and the teachers didn't think that it was anything at all weird that we were coming in and doing that, and they were 100% behind us, the school was 100% behind us. So it wasn't like we were the ones who were feeling uncomfortable with what was going on, it just kind of eventually came to light that somebody else was really uncomfortable.

Dorothy O'Riley: And Fin, if someone did [react negatively], do you think that you would tell us? Like, "I had this experience today . . ."
Fin Dawson-O'Riley: Yeah, I'd probably tell you. If they did a negative response, I'd probably just walk away.
Dorothy O'Riley: But do you think that you would process that with us later?
Fin Dawson-O'Riley: Yeah.
Alice Dawson: Yeah, I think so too.
Dorothy O'Riley: We're just so transparent and we talk so much about everything that I think even if Fin could recall a negative experience, it's probably been processed and turned around into a learning moment, and into a try to find the silver lining, if you will.

Times Are Changing: Acknowledgment that it is A Different World

Another theme that emerged was the sense participants had that times are changing regarding others' perceptions and reactions to diversity in sexual orientation. Some families reflected on experiences they or others of the same generation had had, while other families looked to their children's experiences to tell them that times are

changing. Mary Benson shared another older couple's experiences and how they have paved the way for her generation, which has paved the way for Quintry's generation.

> **Mary Benson**: We know a family out of state, that are much, much closer to our parents' generation. They live as a couple, and they're not out—they're not—they've never had kids, they don't have—you know, it's a different reality to them. They said to us at one point in time, "We paved the way for your family." And we feel the same way for the next generation, with our being out and about, and you know, never being closeted in that way is paving a way for *these* [emphasis added] kids to have, to not even, you know, to be a non-issue on a different level. And you know . . . it'll be 13 [years] this summer when we had our commitment ceremony. It never really occurred to us that there would be marriage in our, it just snowballed. That experience has just snowballed . . . I don't think it's too far off that it'll be nationwide.

Families generally had the consensus that while it is a different world than the one they grew up in, we are "not there yet." They based this sense on observations of their children's experiences, the language that others use, their felt sense of comfort in being out in their communities, and reactions of their families and people they know.

> **Terry Kimball**: And definitely the world has changed significantly. It's way cooler to be gay than it was. . . . But we got married with a lot of family support . . . and I think having not had support when we wanted to do a commitment ceremony years before the kids.

> **Carmen Woodward**: People a little bit younger than us, and maybe [Rachel's] age group and younger, they're just like, "Who cares?" Almost everybody knows somebody, and it's so much easier to come out now than it was.

> **Karen Benson**: But, just, and that's pretty different, because I think when I was a kid, it was very like, kids were also just reflected back by all of the adults around them, like oh, this isn't something you talk about, this is awkward, whereas now, I think, we react that way.

> **LaRae Callahan**: I think people just don't know. Some people say, "Who was the donor?" And I think as the world is changing, I am noticing that used more and more, that term.

At the same time, LaRae Callahan and Sara Knapps both expressed some skepticism regarding how others view them.

> **LaRae Callahan**: I feel the same thing, that we don't live in a world that's gotten there yet, where we aren't odd or different.
>
> **Sara Knapps**: [An experience with a devoutly religious person] made me more aware, that things are changing slowly, they're still changing. And whether or not, I mean I can't really believe in my heart of hearts that they truly believe that this kind of family is okay in their minds, but I think they're wrong. So I don't know. I think religion will always be a struggle, at least for this generation.
>
> **Sara Knapps**: You also worry about the social stigma. I don't think it's as much now as it was 20 years ago. There's gonna be kids who tease him. You know, "you have two moms." Or, "your parents are gay, that makes you gay." We haven't encountered that, but it's gonna happen. Kids can be mean, and they pick up on anything that's different. And it's pretty different. Even in this area.

Lynn Curran and Ann Miller applied to an exclusive school near their home where Elsa attends first grade. They described how much the school values diversity and felt that their sexual orientation may have helped Elsa get in to the school.

> **Lynn Curran**: And I do wonder a little bit, the school that we have her at, it's not easy to get into. It's a private school, with a lot of applicants, and as far as I know we're the only first grade family with same-sex parents, I know there are others in the school. But I wonder if that helped us! Because they do really value diversity, and that's a big deal to them. In our interview, because we were asking about families like ours, and they said, "Unfortunately we don't have any families with two dads." And they saw that as a real lacking. So rather than discrimination, did it help us? I don't know.
> **Rachel Gall**: How does that feel to you?
> **Lynn Curran**: It feels fine! [laughter] Maybe I shouldn't feel okay about it, but I do! It's where I want her to be! [laughter]

In addition, when they went on a tour of the school, they saw posters and artwork of diverse families in the hallways and classrooms. When Elsa was in kindergarten they, among many other families, were asked to come in and talk about their family, and Elsa has watched videos of all different kinds of families in class.

> **Lynn Curran**: I think that it's more true now than it has been previously, but when it was true previously it wasn't talked about with nearly the openness that it is now. And I'm appreciative of that.

> **Ann Miller**: Her kindergarten had a whole unit on families. Right? We never did that as kids! We would never do that. And I think because there's just more recognition, that's become a topic.
> **Lynn Curran**: They've asked parents, "Who wants to come in and talk about your family?"
> **Ann Miller**: She asked us to come too.

Sara Knapps discussed how excited she was to hear how her neighbor talked with their children about her and Katie's marriage ceremony, once they were able to get married legally. At the same time, she noted the reactions of the children were not about two women getting married, but the fact that they were not married yet and they already had a child. Sara felt uncomfortable about the lack of values that this implied and how the developmental level of the children meant that they may not understand the reasons behind their inability to previously get married.

> **Sara Knapps**: When we got married last summer, we had, we invited a bunch of our friends, we had a big ceremony, walking down the aisle, we had a buffet, the works. So this time we just had all of our friends. . . . Our friends, which is so funny, because two houses down, she sat her kids down and said, "This is history in the making. This is a really big deal, and you have to understand how important this is in the grand scheme, come on!" Right? But when the kids found out that we were getting married, their big thing was, "You had a baby and you weren't married?" It wasn't the fact that we were two women, it was the fact that we had a kid and we weren't married! I think that that shows a lot. These kids are older, they're 9, 10 years old, and it just didn't really faze them! And the fact that we weren't making it a big deal. I mean it is, obviously, but it's not quite accepted yet. But I think that could also be something in the future, the fact that your parents aren't married. How are we supposed to instill values in him and say, "Look, you find somebody you love, and you get married." How am I supposed to say that if I couldn't get married myself? I'm a hypocrite, right? I had kids and I'm not married! Even though, see what I mean?

Carmen Woodward joked about how her aunt was mad at her that she did not come out to her. Listening to Carmen's experience, Sophie continued to be awestruck at how different things are.

> **Carmen Woodward**: I have several people in my family that have come out, and some of them grew up Catholic and were like, "Oh, I can't tell anybody," for so long!
> **Sophie Albright**: [Laughs] And then your aunt, who is gay, is open about it now, was so mad at Carmen because Carmen didn't come and tell her that she might be gay! She did not come to the wedding, and that's because she said she had "other obligations," but I mean, I just think that was so funny that she was just mad that Carmen didn't confide in her! That's the most silliest thing I've ever heard of! That was just a big . . .
> **Carmen Woodward**: That was so silly!
> **Sophie Albright**: So, you're mad because you're gay, Carmen didn't . . . subscribe, to your circle. That was funny, I'll never forget that! When you told me her response, I was kinda like, "What?"
> **Carmen Woodward**: Now she works on the Trevor Project, and she was like, "Oh I must be really bad at the Trevor Project because I'm making somebody that has just come out to me feel really bad about themselves!" [Laughs and mimics high-five in the air] Haha, good job! [Sarcastic]
> **Sophie Albright**: That's weird! I just think that it's amazing. I just do!

Sophie Albright was the only parent who discussed experiencing multiple acts of homophobia as a young woman. She is grateful to see the culture changing and is excited to have had affirming experiences as a family. The homophobia that she has experienced in the past has led her to further solidify her position that she will not change, pretend, or hide who she is for anything. While this has felt freeing to her, she does not want John to ever have to experience the violence or the distress that she has. Although she sees that the world is changing, she still sees that LGBTQ individuals experience discrimination and feels protective of John.

> **Sophie Albright**: I got the crap beat out of me by two Marines because of it! So I grew up in a time where gay was not cool, it wasn't on TV, it wasn't . . . I think it's just so much more accepting now.

> **Sophie Albright**: I think it's really awesome to see the generational growth of, like, when I was in school it was a taboo! You didn't talk about it. You knew who it was, and whatever, you got made fun of or you got into fights or whatever, and my nieces and my nephew are, "My friend is gay." "Well how did you know he was gay?" "Well he's 14." "Oh, right!" That's right, I knew when I was 14 too. But that's awesome that they're talking about it that young! And now, to hear, you know, it's just the movement, I don't think it's a movement, I really think it's . . .

Carmen Woodward: A matter of time.
Sophie Albright: But it's the fact that I really truly believe people now just don't care about other people in that sense!
Carmen Woodward: Except for staunch religious people.
Sophie Albright: I've been in the deep South. There were times where . . . I would get gas, and I wouldn't get gas again . . . because it was scary to stop. There are parts that are the same way. Even just in the short time that we've been together . . . I'll tell you this. I wrote my senior thesis in college about DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act] and what an atrocity it was, the massive civil rights violation.
Carmen Woodward: And that's a long time ago!
Sophie Albright: I would never thought in my lifetime I would be able to marry my wife! [Carmen and Sophie high-five] Every day I wake up and I just think it's amazing. But I think it's just people, and I think that it's just people who honestly don't give a shit about other people! If you're happy, that's great, and I'm not happy, so good for you!

Sophie Albright: I had a very serious girlfriend for a long time in college . . . and she got really sick. . . . At that moment, I realized I will never hide who I am, ever again. Not going to do it. So when, later on in undergrad . . . , I dated a younger girl and she wanted to tell her parents, and I'm like, "We don't need to tell anybody right now," because I knew what was going to happen. But she did, and I lived for six years on the outskirts, like Christmas I would drive her down to Houston, and I would stay at, you know, a hotel and do whatever, but you know what, it was fine! I don't want to cause problems for anybody because of who I am. But I'm also not going to be ashamed of who I am, I'm not going to hide who I am. I'm not going to pretend to be somebody I'm not. It's just not in me. It truly my entire life has never been in me. For the first couple years of me being out, within myself, I didn't know how to handle that. I will tell you, and this might surprise you, I would do anything in the world, I will love John no matter what he wants, I do not want him to say, ever, to ever feel like he's, I don't want him to be gay. Not because I'm ashamed of that, but I still live in the mind that I lived in, I need to realize that it's a different world now. But I just want his life to be awesome. And I don't want him to have problems. I don't think in this time and age there will be the problems that I have, but I still have to go off of my experiences. And I will love him and be so proud of him, I think he's awesome.
Carmen Woodward: Absolutely, and I agree, but I think that men have a harder time than women, because society is a little bit more forgiving of lesbians than gay guys.

Finally, two families shared stories where they heard their children's friends using non-heteronormative language. These families felt proud of the language these

children were using, as well as acknowledging how this was a benchmark in how they see the culture changing.

> **Sophie Albright**: Well it's really amazing because one of [John's] little friends down the street, she comes over all the time, and they're thick as thieves. She was in the kitchen one day and I think Carmen and I were sitting over there doing something, and she said, "Well, when I get married, my husband or my wife is going to do that—I'm not going to do that!" And we looked at each other, like, "Did you just hear that?" [Smiles] . . . I mean, it doesn't even skip a beat, I think that's so awesome! . . . Her spouse is not, she's not going to take the trash out, the spouse is going to. That's amazing.
>
> **Terry Kimball**: We have a great story about that. Tell the story of the Life game.
> **Rosa Kimball**: Oh. So, the girls have, Saige and [her sister] were playing with their cousins. . . . They're sort of all interspersed with age. . . . They were playing Life, and they had to make decisions about life! So [one of the cousins] decided that she was going to marry a woman. And her cousin . . . was like, "Oh, I like that, I'm going to do that too!" So he married a man.

Acknowledgment of Biases: Assumptions Are a Two-Way Street

Another theme that emerged was the identification of biases that others had about participants, as well as the biases and assumptions that participants made about others. Specifically, participants described frustration over others' assumptions that they are straight, that their children must be adopted, and that they have equal employment opportunities as men of the same age. Participants also described assumptions that they made about others based on their political and religious affiliation and described the affirmation they felt after these assumptions did not pan out. In addition, participants described a situation in which they thought that a child was making an assumption about them, but was asking an innocent and curious question.

Assumptions Others Make About Them

Sara Knapps described a stereotype that she has faced, which is that "gay people only adopt children." She expressed frustration that even her mother made this assumption, as well as the fact that others assume that Ethan is adopted when he is her biological child.

> **Sara Knapps**: I think it's just one of those things, like anybody else, you meet somebody, get married, and it's like, "Oh, we should have kids!" You want kids. It's just kind of a natural progression. I know our friends were really interested in the process of how we did it, because it was probably really different from our friends who are straight. And people still ask me, like "Do you have pictures of him?" "Do you know what he looks like?" "Do you know him?" Although I find . . . I understand that people don't know, don't have information, and there are a lot of stereotypes out there, but it's always bothered me when people are like, "Oh, did you adopt Ethan?" No, I didn't adopt him, like, he looks just like me! Really? He's the spitting image. That always kind of bothered me, that assumption that because you're married and you're gay, you have to adopt a baby. I mean, my mother said that!

The Benson family also described how the assumption of adoption impacts them, as well as how they see this impacting Karen's sister differently based on the race of their children. Quintry also expressed absolute shock that others would assume that she was adopted.

> **Karen Benson**: I mean, it's also been interesting watching, like, um, so my sister and her partner are adopting these babies [gesturing to the other two kids] who are a different race. It's interesting how the issues come up a little differently. People rarely, I guess sometimes people do ask us if she's adopted, because . . .
> **Quintry Benson**: [gasps with mouth open wide, looking dramatically shocked]
> **Karen Benson**: But I guess, just how it comes up differently, you know, like, we also get, like, I get, "Oh, she looks a lot like you!" and, I don't know, just all of those assumptions. It's interesting when you see someone who, someone's family who's a little different, and where the issues come up, it's a little different.

Alex and Sinead Murphy discussed the assumption that others have made that they are straight, although they felt that this has not happened often.

> **Sinead Murphy**: Because I think the default is people think you're heterosexual. . . . And when we're with the kids, sometimes I wonder what people think. Are they sisters? Are they . . .? Remember, our neighbor thought we were sisters! [laughter] Not this one currently, but our other neighbor. Like, uh, no?
> **Alex Murphy**: That was before we had kids.
> **Sinead Murphy**: That was before we had kids. I don't know, sometimes I feel the need to explain for our family. . . . Honestly, there are stereotypes and stuff like that, but we don't fit into any of those. And a lot of people [here] are pretty progressive and kind of in tune with not making certain assumptions, at least in the communities we interact with.

Lynn Curran described moments when others would make the assumption that she was straight and would make offensive comments around her that she thought they would not make if they knew her sexual orientation.

> **Lynn Curran**: I certainly encountered a lot of homophobia [at my last job]. My clients didn't know that I was in a same-sex relationship, and I heard some things, like had they known, hopefully, they would have been mortified that they had said that to somebody. Because they thought they were talking to somebody just like them. And I think that for me, that highlighted how much of a bubble we lived in. We do live in. Because that [agency] draws from a wide geographic area.

Katie and Sara Knapps experienced a situation where someone on a flight assumed that Sara was the nanny. During the flight, Katie decided not to correct the person and told Sara afterward. Sara was upset that Katie allowed the man to continue this assumption.

> **Katie Knapps**: There have been experiences like in the airport, and it's just those things you kind of let go, because to really sit there and correct them is really kind of a waste of emotion.
> **Sara Knapps**: There have been times when people think that I was her nanny, because, you know, we fly, and I usually sit with him, I have a lot more tolerance! I'll never forget the flight where she's sitting across the way, and Ethan's like, "Mama! Mama!" And they guy next to her goes, something about "Your nanny." She didn't say anything, and when she told me, it's like "Why didn't you tell him I'm not your nanny?!"
> **Katie Knapps**: Because it's just, like, some random guy I'm never going to see again.
> **Sara Knapps**: But again, it's one of those things . . . I'm *not* [emphasis added] your nanny.

Terry and Rosa Kimball described some frustration they were experiencing with Terry's brother. They shared that her brother assumes that they have equal opportunities provided to them as he does, yet Terry and Rosa have identified their age, gender, and sexual orientation as factors that impact their work life in terms of obtaining a job, maintaining a job, and receiving equal pay.

> **Rosa Kimball**: And I think that there's, we've gotten older, there's a reason why people over 40 are a protected category in employment, as I've discovered. . . . [laughter] So I'm over 40, I've been out of work a lot in the last few years, and that's hard for [my brother] to understand generally, and that's a woman issue. But we're two women, trying to support a family, and it's hard for them to see that reality.
> **Terry Kimball**: A lot of time women's jobs don't pay as much as men when they're doing the same job.
> **Saige Kimball**: That's not fair.
> **Terry Kimball**: No, it's not. Unfortunately that's how it works. And I have to say, [companies] have to pay more depending on need! It's such a disincentive for someone older. So it's not helped. So there's a lot of things that we face that are not overt. That they don't really get. And I think sometimes they get frustrated, "No, I know!". . . And they just don't get it. They just don't. They just want us to make the same decisions as they make, which is a little weird, because they're in their 30s and we're in our 40s, with different kids, different families. . . . We're struggling with them because they seem to want to tell us what to do. It's like, okay, let me start with the gay part—I didn't ask your permission for that. And it's just right there, at the get go, our paths go a different way. I lost friends when I came out, I'm not going to give that up, I'm not going to give up my choices.
> **Rosa Kimball**: But there's this real inability to understand that we can do the same things, [for example,] we can go to law school, we can get a job in a firm, we could try to make partner.
> **Terry Kimball**: To be honest we're less likely to make partner than my brother, who's a White man.

Assumptions That They Make About Others

Most families described assumptions that they have made about others in the context of both political and religious affiliation. Specifically, some families shared impressions that politically conservative and Christian individuals would not accept

their family. Many families shared moments where their assumptions were challenged and how this was experienced as a positive moment that expanded their outlook.

The first time that Sophie met Carmen's family, they were pulling up to Carmen's family's house when Carmen said, "By the way, my uncle is very right-wing Tea-partier, so just be prepared." Sophie thought, "Aw, crap," as Carmen is his favorite niece, and at that point only her mother and father knew that she was gay. Sophie described her reaction:

> **Sophie Albright**: I'm like, "Okay, all right, I'm 35 years old but all right, we'll do this, whatever, I did this in college." We walk in and everybody's kind of in a circle in the living room, and it just so happens the only chair open is the one next to her uncle, and Carmen's across from me. She's sitting on the couch across from me, and I'm just sitting there. I'm just pleasant, I can talk to anybody, I don't have a problem, and he just reaches over to me, and politely, kind of in a whisper, says, "Um, hey, so, Carmen's really happy, and . . . just make sure you take good care of our girl." And I looked at Carmen like, "[motioning 'speechless'!]," nobody knows anything, and I'm like, "I don't know what even to say right now!" She has an amazing family and it's just made it so easy. But . . . I've been in some rough situations where it wasn't easy.

In addition, Sophie had an experience at their wedding that confirmed her positive feelings toward this uncle.

> **Sophie Albright**: They all thought that I was getting cold feet, and I wasn't, I was just in the bathroom practicing. . . . So her uncle, that I'm referring to, came in and he was so nice and supportive, talking to me like "It's okay!"

Sara Knapps described neighbors who they have that she assumed would not accept their family. One neighbor who they initially had assumptions about actually officiated their wedding. She shared:

> **Sara Knapps**: We know these neighbors up and down the street, and actually the guy two houses down, he married us. He's a staunch Republican and a veteran of Afghanistan, yet he wanted to marry us; it was really cute. They can ask us pretty much any questions. But I haven't experienced anything to the contrary.

In addition, Sara and Katie have other neighbors whom they have also developed a positive relationship with.

> **Sara Knapps**: We have these friends down the street who are very Christ-centered, and they are the warmest, most open people. They are so, they have never said anything about our family. They've met Katie, "Oh! It's so nice to meet you!" They've been included in all our family functions, like I get text messages, "Hey, I was thinking about you, how's Ethan doing in school?" Really wonderful people. And they are bothered by religion who doesn't embrace everybody, because for them, they don't believe that that's the message of Christ.

Sara also shared her experience with someone from the Jewish Chabad community:

> **Sara Knapps**: So I had the local Chabad come by, and I was talking with him, my mom was visiting, and then he heard something, like, "Oh, is that your husband's mom?" "No, that's my wife," and it's like, "Oh!" I could see him working it in his mind, like, "We are very open to all kinds of families; we would love if you would come." That to me was like, finally! You are getting on board!

Dorothy O'Riley and Alice Dawson described a moment they experienced with an older woman from a conservative area who expressed her observations that they were good parents and that Fin was well-adjusted. This was surprising to hear and felt affirming to them, despite their general stance that they do not seek validation from others.

> **Dorothy O'Riley**: [She] pulled Alice aside and said, "I see you guys, and you're doing a great job, and your family's really awesome." And whatever, but especially to have older folks say "I see you."
> **Alice Dawson**: And we're having this really intimate conversation, and it was very much that he is really well-adjusted, you know what I mean? So it wasn't just like, "I really like watching him and your family," it was, "He's incredible! And I'm so proud of you!"
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: Yeah, I've heard that a couple times.
> **Alice Dawson**: And it made me feel really good, because I think that. . . . It was validating for me to hear from an older woman, from a conservative area, that we were doing a really good job. It made me feel good, because I feel like I know that I'm doing a good job, so it felt good having that validations.
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: Mm-hmm. You are.
> **Alice Dawson**: And being seen.

> **Dorothy O'Riley**: I don't know, I think it's good. I don't often seek other people's approval generally, like I have gotten very used to pushing back and walking my own path in a lot of ways. But I think that it was important to receive positive feedback, because often you don't . . . folks forget to give the positive and want to give the critiques. I also know that it's really validating for her. So I think that's great.

Terry and Rosa Kimball described two situations where they made assumptions about others based on their religion that did not pan out to be correct. The first was a neighbor they had who was the pastor of an evangelical church.

> **Rosa Kimball**: He was our best neighbor! He used to mow our lawn.
> **Terry Kimball**: He used to mow our lawn, he was really sweet. And what I found is that you shouldn't make assumptions about people because you don't know. And I think that surprised us. And I think overall we've been supported.

The second situation where they made an assumption was with the birth mother of their five children, Alicia. Alicia is from Mexico and is traditionally Catholic, and they worried that she would not want them to adopt her children because they are gay.

> **Terry Kimball**: We were worried that that would be in an issue with their mom, but I have to say I believe that she never. . . . That never came out. She never said anything to us. And she's pretty religious.
> **Rosa Kimball**: She's in a very charismatic church. Just from my own perspective. She's sweet, and everyone is very sweet, but I was a little bit freaked out because I was originally raised Catholic, so it was this huge leap for me. Although everybody was so sweet. And she has said over the years that she is, if the kids were going to land anywhere, she's glad they're with us. She knows they'll be welcome and we'll take good care of them.

Finally, two parents, Sinead and Karen, remembered reactions from children they initially thought were negative and then realized that the children were just curious.

> **Sinead Murphy**: The kids are asked questions, like, "Why does he only have two moms?" And sometimes the teacher will explain, they'll say, "Oh!" So you know, they're just curious. But I've never felt anything negative.

Karen Benson also described an immediate reaction she had when a child asked her a seemingly offensive question. Despite this initial reaction, she was able to understand what the child was actually asking and also frame this in the context of the child being curious.

> **Karen Benson**: I remember one time being in a classroom and I was talking about something totally else, and one little boy, he was about four years old, asked, “Which one of you is the man and which one of you is the woman?” And he was like, “No, but, which one of you had her in your belly?” And I was like, “Oh!” It’s not offensive, it’s just a good question! So I said, “Oh, the other mommy had her in her belly.” And that was it! It’s just like, they’re just curious.

Questioning the Relevance of Gender to Parenting

Many families discussed issues related to their perception of the gender binary. These topics generally fell into two categories: perceptions of differences between mothers and fathers, and the perceptions parents had that children need both male and female influences for healthy development. Finally, some families discussed having a greater awareness of gender diversity and diversity in gender roles as same-gender parents.

Perceptions of Mothers and Fathers

Both parents and children brought up ideas that mothers and fathers are different in meaningful ways and have different roles. Most children felt that mothers are “better” in many ways and described experiences in which other children felt jealous that they had two moms. Often, parents attributed this to mothers being more nurturing, and at this developmental level that is what they saw children wanting and needing.

> **Ethan Knapps**: [Moms] care about you. They take care of you. And they also, they also be nice to you but they sometimes be mean.

> **Carmen Woodward**: It might be a situation where their moms are their favorite, and they're like, "Oh, you have two moms?" Maybe their family is, mom is cookies and hugs, and dad is discipline, or something.
>
> **Ann Miller**: These are young kids, so kids are in that place where they're very attached to their moms, and moms are very nurturing, and that's who comforts them, and all that kind of stuff. So at this age, wow! Two is more than one!
>
> **Sinead Murphy**: I remember when [Merida] was in preschool, other kids were like, "I want two moms!"
> **Alex Murphy**: I've also heard recently, only maybe one time, from Ben, a comment that Ben is lucky to have two dads.

Terry Kimball related their older daughters' comfort with women to their children's traumatic experiences with men before Terry and Rosa adopted them. She described that they may perceive women to be safer and this eased the transition when they were adopted.

> **Terry Kimball**: I would say that what the kids have commented on during this time period, our older kids, she liked having two moms, because I think our older kids have some issues with separation in their early experiences, so they were pretty keen on the, well if you can't find one mom you can find the other, right? Also, especially with their eldest, she had some bad experiences; actually both of them had some early bad experiences with men. So in their case I think it was easier for them to move into a family, and my dad's here, obviously, but he wasn't parenting them. But he does take care of them. But I think it was an easier transition for the kids when they first came, they were pretty terrified.

While Margaret Callahan has the idea that mothers should spoil children and be more "feminine," her family joked that things did not turn out this way. They also noted how LaRae may take more of the "dad" role in their household, although John didn't feel this way.

> **LaRae Callahan**: You would probably tell people that it's not that great because neither of your moms is very feminine! Margaret's always like, "I got *two* moms, and neither *one* [emphasis added] of them are very girly!"
> **Margaret Callahan**: I say that all the time! If I had two moms, I'd probably think that I'd be spoiled! But *no*! [emphasis added]
> **Christine Callahan**: No! No high heels, no makeup.
> **Margaret Callahan**: She's [LaRae] our dad, if anything! [Laughter]

> **Rachel Gall**: Yeah? What do you mean?
> **Christine Callahan**: I think I'm the one who's home.
> **LaRae Callahan**: More the disciplinarian. And you would think I'm more the dad because I do the fishing and that type of stuff.
> **Margaret Callahan**: Yes.
> **John Callahan**: Not really.
> **LaRae Callahan**: You don't think I'm more like a dad, you think I'm more like a mom?
> **John Callahan**: Yeah.

Children's perceptions of fathers were generally that they are loud, smelly, and make gross jokes and that they are stricter than mothers.

> **Quintry Benson**: That sometimes it's better with two moms.
> **Rachel Gall**: What do you think is better?
> **Quintry Benson**: That it's less boomy voice. [Laughter] And more sweet people.

> **Margaret Callahan**: It's too. . . . Maybe I'm wrong, but maybe two dads might be more strict. Maybe not.
> **LaRae Callahan**: Think about Paul and Javier. Paul isn't very strict, and Javier is. I don't think it's always just the dad is more strict than a mom.

> **Mary Benson**: I remember the little girl Olivia was saying, "Why does Quintry get two moms?". . . She's lucky! Ugh, why do I have to have a dad! Olivia has a dad!
> **Karen Benson**: We had it the other day when one of her friends said, "You're lucky you don't have a dad! My dad says really inappropriate things!" [laughter] We're like . . . "Oooh-kay!"
> **Mary Benson**: Yeah, it's not good or bad, but it's. . . . different. I don't know. It's been interesting to reflect.

> **Lynn Curran**: Or if they're from a family with a mom and a dad, I don't mean to stereotype, but if the dad's at work all the time, or travels for work, and mom's the one around, well who wouldn't want two parents there all the time?

Ethan Knapps also felt that dads would protect children in different ways than mothers do. Sara and Katie were not sure exactly what he thought or if he just was not able to articulate his thoughts. They also thought that the media may have influenced his perceptions of gender roles.

> **Sara Knapps**: How do you think it's different having two moms than having a boy in the house?

Ethan Knapps: Because boys stink! And their farts are really stinky.
Sara Knapps: How do you think things would be different if you had a mom and a dad versus two moms?
Ethan Knapps: Hmm. I would vote for two moms.
Sara Knapps: But how do you think it would be different? What would it be like if you had a mom and a dad?
Ethan Knapps: I have *no* [emphasis added] idea. . . . Because, um, a mom and a mom make one boy, right? And a mom and a dad make a ____, right? So if you have a mom and another mom, that means, um, they can come together and they bring you to school and stuff. And you know what also they do? They also make you take the bus sometimes.
Sara Knapps: Do you think a mom and a dad would do that?
Ethan Knapps: No.

Katie Knapps: So a few times it's come up for us, there was one point that I remember him saying, he was probably 4 or so. He said, "I wish I had a dad." We had heard from someone else how they dealt with that situation, I don't remember who told us, but we said…
Sara Knapps: He said he wants a dad because a dad would hunt and protect us.
Katie Knapps: He said a dad would protect us. And we said, well, if you had a dad, then you wouldn't have one of your moms. And so which one of us do you want to give up? And that was the end of that.
Ethan Knapps: I don't want to give up anybody.
Katie Knapps: It's never been an issue since then.
Ethan Knapps: I want to give up Mommy. Mommy, I want to give up you.
Sara Knapps: Okay.
Ethan Knapps: I'm just kidding!
Rachel Gall: So what do you think he was saying by that?
Katie Knapps: I think he was just seeing that all of his friends have dads. So he didn't want to feel different.
Sara Knapps: I think he's watching TV, and he sees men doing these masculine things, like they're the ones that carry weapons, and they protect, and . . . in our species is exactly what they do, but I think that the gender roles are, they're changing but they haven't changed that much.
Rachel Gall: And the media, if that's what they do, protect people.
Katie Knapps: So that was once when he was 3 or 4, and ever since then he mostly says, "I love having two moms." He won't get beyond that, like you can't tell, he's not the most articulate.

Carmen Woodward and Sophie Albright were also curious about John's perception of mothers and fathers. Although they asked him in multiple ways, he may not have seen a difference, he may have been uncomfortable talking, or he may have had trouble articulating the differences he sees.

Carmen Woodward: Why would they not want two dads?
John Woodward: I don't know!
Sophie Albright: Do they not know how mean I am? [Laughs and tousles John's hair]
Carmen Woodward: Do you think that it's that they like their moms more than their dads, and they wish that they had two of those, or what? Are they just being nice to you?
John Woodward: One of them says that they wish they had two moms and two dads.
Carmen Woodward: But wait, how is it different if, say, that I had met a man? That I married? How would that be different, do you think, even if you liked them the same?
John Woodward: Um. . .
Carmen Woodward: Would it make a difference?
John Woodward: Uh. . . . Different because it wouldn't be Sophie.
Carmen Woodward: I understand that you love Sophie, but your answers are me having a spouse and not necessarily that ____, but maybe you don't distinguish.

Perceptions of the Necessity of Both Male and Female Influence

Sara Knapps identified positive aspects of Ethan being raised by two women. She believes that they are teaching him to be polite and conscientious, aware and expressive of his emotions, and comfortable with his own sexuality.

> **Sara Knapps**: I always kid around that Ethan is lucky to have two moms, because he won't be afraid of laundry, he won't be afraid of the white tampons at the grocery store, he'll always put the toilet seat down, he'll open doors for women. So in my mind I feel like he benefits, because he'll be the kind of man that most girls love. I mean, he's sensitive and secure in his own sexuality, he's kind, he can still be a man, for whatever that gender role is. I think we're in a unique position to really say, "Boys can cry, it's okay." It doesn't mean you're weak, you just don't want to cry all the time, I mean "You skinned your knee, get up, you're okay, go play." But I also think we're just a lot like everybody else. Katie and I had very different childhoods. I grew up . . . it was just me and my mom, and I think Ethan's lucky in that he has two parents that have a normal relationship, whatever "normal" is. We have our disagreements, we don't fight, we don't shout, we're affectionate, we're caring, we try to expose him to all the different things, you know, culture, athletics, and whatever. I think we're unique from my perspective because I didn't have that growing up. I had a mom and a dad. Yeah, I really think that, I mean, I don't know any different, right? But I think having two moms really encourages him to really explore that sensitive side. We're very much, women are all about feelings, right? How does that make you feel? Tell me how you

> feel. Identify how you're feeling. I'll help you identify what you're feeling. So that you and I can have a good conversation and discuss this. I don't know how dudes communicate, right? About their way. But I think having two moms will really encourage him to be in touch with his emotions and be able to express those to other people. I think that will really serve him well, inside and as he gets older. Instead of being all moody and grumpy, be like, "Hey, that really pissed me off, that really makes me feel like crap!" So I think having two moms will really help him kind of be in touch with that side. I don't know.

Many families had the perception that their children, especially their sons, needed male energy in their lives in order to be well-rounded, to have a male role model, or to help with developmental tasks that the mothers felt unequipped for, such as toilet training or conversations about puberty. Sophie, for example, felt that she has "masculine" traits such as being good at baseball and fishing. She noted that she also did not grow up with a father figure and is unsure as to how this impacted her development.

> **Sophie Albright**: I am obviously not a male figure, but I do try to play baseball, and fish, and I don't know what. I mean, my brother and I grew up with no father figure in our lives, and whatever, I think I'm okay, I guess maybe I'm not.

Katie and Sara Knapps noted that their family members and even a man they ran into at a bar believe that it is important for Ethan to have male influence. They explained that somehow this seems to be a comment that is "okay" for people to say to LGBQ parents, and that it taps into others' ideas of gender roles and what it means to be male. Although this was somewhat offensive for them to hear, at the same time, they also believe that it is beneficial for Ethan to have male role models and struggle with the duality of these ideas.

> **Katie Knapps**: We're two women and he's a boy—like where's the male influence?
> **Sara Knapps**: Your sister's said that.

Katie Knapps: This man at the bar . . . asked, "Does he have a male role model?"
Sara Knapps: Yeah, a male role model. Which I actually believe is important, especially for young boys, I think at this age is important. For girls, as they're older, like pre-teens and teens, it's important for girls to have a female role model. But I don't think it's absolutely necessary. I think that's probably. . . . And now I think people feel it's almost safe to say. As opposed to other things . . . I think boys, it's good for them to see men. . . . For us to tell him, "You need to be nice to women," open doors, be kind, and it's okay to cry if you're a boy, but if you're hurt make sure to brush it off. To raise a sensitive man it's not easy and is doable as two women. But for them to actually see it in action, to see a man who is like that, goes a long way in their own self-identity. Like, "Hey, I want to be like that guy."
Katie Knapps: Maybe, and again, it's kind of conjecture here, but things like going in to the men's room. You know, like, we couldn't really teach him that. Your dad, and my dad, it was a very, every time during that period of his like that my dad was with us in a public space, or even at home, he would take him, and they would practice the etiquette. So as he gets older there might be other examples of that. I mean, I could think of some other developmental milestones that would, uh, be nice! But I don't think it has to be a parent, could be an uncle, close friend.
Sara Knapps: I think they should be there, but it doesn't have to be a parent. I think he knows that he has two parents that love him. Really, I kind of feel like that's all you need, right?
Katie Knapps: My sister is in the horse business, so she lives in Montana now, she has lived in Texas, and I think they sort of believe. . . . They've made these comments that a lot of men in America, our society's raising a bunch of "girlie men." Like not "real men." I think it's kind of funny, because I know, for example, that a lot of guys I did my master's with. . . ., she would consider most of them "girlie men" because they're intellectual, and they dress really nice, and it's less "manly," because they're not cowboys. Because they share in the household duties. It's just such a different, again, I think it's a geographical thing that's pretty huge in our country. . . . Yeah, like a "real man" needs to know how to hunt, and the list goes on and on. They can only learn that from doing those activities with men.

Many mothers enlisted the help of male friends, teachers, or relatives. Although Terry's father lives with them and helps with child care, they are the primary parents and wish they had more support in toilet training and helping their son learn to go into men's rooms. Terry and Rosa also noticed how their young son Tomás gravitates toward men. In addition, they brought up sex education and thought that it

would be more comfortable to have a male talk to Tomás, although it has not been as awkward as they thought it would be.

> **Terry Kimball**: But I think the hardest thing is that they don’t have a father in the house, for Tomás.
> **Rosa Kimball**: I think as he gets older, I mean he’s really keen on that stuff, you walk into a room of family and he just gravitates toward the guys, like he follows his older cousin like he’s . . .
> **Terry Kimball**: I mean, there’s lots of men in the house, both our brothers and fathers.
> **Rosa Kimball**: But yeah, as he gets older. The kids recently asked, we were somewhere in a public bathroom all together, and one of them said, “Well why doesn’t he pee standing up?” And I said, “Well honey, I can’t teach him how to do that!” And they were like, “Well our cousin does that!” And I said “Well, that’s because Uncle Jim taught him how to do that!” And it was just this moment where I was like, “Well, that’s true!”
>
> **Rosa Kimball**: I think we lean heavily on our families, and having Dad here is a great shortcut in some ways, because he’s always here, and he takes care of them, he drives them around, takes them to after-school care, so I think we’re really lucky. We have not had to be as . . . we are though, deliberate.
> **Terry Kimball**: Because when Tomás was going to be potty trained, we’re like . . .
> **Rosa Kimball**: I think we tried to talk Dad into letting him watch. He didn’t go for that.
> **Terry Kimball**: So we decided it’s not going to hurt him, and boys can sit and go to the bathroom, so it’s not like he can’t go. We didn’t push it, mostly he just does what his sister does.
>
> **Terry Kimball**: I think sometimes doing sex ed is awkward.
> **Saige Kimball**: Why? What?
> **Terry Kimball**: Because you have to explain things that you probably just wouldn’t be explaining, and just a taboo thing. . . . But we try to be age appropriate and answer their questions. I’d say overall it’s way less awkward than I thought it would be for us.

Lynn Curran and Ann Miller have not deliberately sought out male teachers for Elsa, but have been aware of their hope that Elsa has more men in her life. They noticed that Elsa tends to go to women for comfort, yet gets along well with men. Their hope for her is that she has “balance” in having male influence in her life. They

have found that with their male neighbors, although they have been disappointed that their male family members have not been as involved as they would like.

> **Lynn Curran**: I have to say we haven't looked for [male influence], but we've appreciated that it's happened. When we chose her school that she's in now, there were two female kindergarten teachers. . . . But I do find myself, there's a male second grade teacher also, and so I'm kind of hoping you might have him next year!
> **Ann Miller**: Miss Elsa, I'm wondering what you think about having a male teacher this year! . . . Do you think it is a good thing that you have a male teacher?
> **Elsa Curran**: [nods "yes"]
> **Ann Miller**: Do you think you would want another boy teacher in the future?
> **Elsa Curran**: [nods "yes"]
> **Ann Miller**: What do you like about boy teachers?
> **Elsa Curran**: [shrugs]
> **Ann Miller**: Are they different from girl teachers?
> **Elsa Curran**: No.
> **Ann Miller:** Do you wish that there were more grown-up boys that we were friends with or anything?
> **Elsa Curran**: No. Me want everything Mama does.
> **Ann Miller**: It's interesting. I mean, she knows what she knows. She has always bonded most with her female teachers, it's always been a very strong connection. She's always gotten along very well with male teachers, and they've always liked her, and she's had good relationships with them, but she goes to women for comfort. And I just wonder, where does that come from, because growing up she has a lot of nurturing women in her life. Not a lot of men, even in the relatives. And the ones who are there tend to be a little less engaged with young children.
> **Lynn Curran**: I want her to have just some balance. A little more balance than she does.
> **Ann Miller**: I wish that we had more men in our life. We have wonderful male neighbors. Dads of other kids, and a few gay households across the street.
> **Elsa Curran**: Who?
> **Ann Miller**: Randy and Louis and Tim.
> **Elsa Curran**: And Brad.
> **Ann Miller**: Right. Lots of really positive, engaged dads in the neighborhood, so she sees that. But nobody that we're really close with. I mean, we've got a great neighborhood, we've got great neighbors, we wish that [our family] were more interactive.

I then asked further about Ann and Lynn's ideas about wanting male influence for Elsa. Lynn identified that the thought that believing children need male influence

is a product of internalized homophobia, that children are "missing out" on something if they do not have both a mother and a father. Ann agreed, yet still felt that there is something different about male energy, and that it is a good idea to expose children to all different types of people.

> **Lynn Curran**: I'm willing to say, it may just be a reaction to internalized homophobia saying that there should be! This underlying belief of, "Oh, am I depriving my child of something," if there isn't that. Because there is enough research out there about the different ways that moms and dads interact, that kids need all sorts of types of stimulation, to be well-rounded. Well, no, there are all sorts of that are lacking or present in any one person. But I think it is that underlying belief, or fear, whether I'm depriving my child of something.
> **Ann Miller**: I was just thinking about that. Yes, I agree with that [glances at Lynn]. But I do think that, I mean, Elsa is fine, I'm not worried about her, but there is a different male energy, there is something different. And I want her to have that different. . . . And have those relationships, and be around that different kind of energy, because I think that's a life skill. I think it will help her be more equipped to deal with life.

Alex Murphy shared Ben's statements last year about wanting more boys around. Alex was hesitant to agree that he benefits from male influences in his life, as to her this sounded similar to opponents of marriage equality's argument that children need both a mother and a father to be emotionally healthy. At the same time, she has noticed the benefit of Ben spending more time with Owen and Sam, as well as the benefit to Merida. However, when I asked Merida and Ben about what it was like to be around boys, they did not feel that there was anything different.

> **Alex Murphy**: I guess the only thing I would mention is that maybe about a year and a few months ago, we went through a period where [Ben] was very, he noticed that he was the only boy in the family. And he would say things like, "There are too many girls in here. There are too many girls in this house." Do you remember when you used to say that? You don't remember that?
> **Ben Murphy**: [shakes head no]
> **Alex Murphy**: And this was before they would go over to Owen's house on Wednesday nights. That didn't use to be. That prompted Owen to invite Ben to go over on Wednesday night to have a boys night. And that really seemed to help, that he would get one overnight by himself. And Merida was invited

to do that as well, and she declined initially. And then she found out there were waffles served on Thursday morning! So now they both go over. And we don't hear Ben complaining about how there's only girls around. . . . I hesitate to say this, because the argument against gay parenting is. . . . So, this relationship is unusual, right? There usually aren't two moms and two dads. There's usually a set of moms or a set of dads. The argument either way is, if there's two moms, a boy needs his father, right? That's sort of the traditional argument. And I really hesitate to say this, but I wonder if to some extent that's true!

Sinead Murphy: And maybe it's not a father, but a father figure.

Alex Murphy: Yeah.

Sinead Murphy: They can identify with, you know, if he looks at Pop, he looks the same! So it may just be identifying with them, and I don't know if that's it. Or if the school talks about doing things with their dads, and he's just internalized that somehow. He's probably too young to really process it. But this is all theory.

Alex Murphy: Again, hesitating to make that traditional statement, I noticed the benefit that [Merida] gets from having that father figure. [Pop's] very playful with her. He's just a playful guy, by nature, but she is different with him than she is with us. I don't know if flirtatious is the right word? I don't mean to imply anything by that. Have you ever noticed that?

Sinead Murphy: I mean, I think the dynamic is different, you know, we're the primary parents and we see them all the time, so it's not special. Some of the things they pull with us they won't pull with Pop. Not that it's all fun and games every time they go over there, but it's a diversion. I think they both like it for different reasons.

Rachel Gall: Huh. So Merida and Ben, when you go over to Pop and Sam's house, what's it like to be around two boys?

Merida Murphy: Sometimes we like to go swimming on Saturdays or something.

Rachel Gall: But how about the fact that they're two boys? I mean, you've got two moms, so is it different there at all?

Merida Murphy: Not really, we're used to having two moms and two dads most of the time.

Sinead Murphy: How about you Ben?

Ben Murphy: We like going swimming, but it's super duper fun to go swimming.

Rachel Gall: What's it like to be around two guys? Because here you're with your moms, right? And when you go over there it's two boys, right? Do you think it's different at all?

Ben Murphy: No.

Greater Awareness of Gender Diversity and Gender Roles

The Benson family identified a greater awareness and wider understanding of gender and gender roles. They attributed this to identifying as lesbian women and thus having a lack of gender roles and expectations in their relationship.

> **Mary Benson**: Um, I was thinking about, like, stereotypes, or gender roles, you know, that we get to create these different assumptions about gender roles in our family. . . . We definitely have things that we assume that I am going to do, and assume that you are going to do, and it's based on what we like, or who likes them the least. Process of elimination! [Laughter]
> **Karen Benson**: Yeah, I think that's true, we don't ever go, like, "Oh, it is only because I'm the man or I'm the woman that I'm doing this," we just work everything out based on personality and interest. . . . Yeah, I mean, we just, we don't ever wonder, or feel like, am I only coming up with this because I'm the mom, or whatever, it's like, we're all just . . .
> **Quintry Benson**: Equals.
> **Karen Benson**: Equals.
> **Quintry Benson**: Sometimes it's not awkward.
> **Karen Benson**: Like when you take baths and stuff. Yeah, that's probably true.

Terry and Rosa Kimball also noticed that others make assumptions about them based on their gender. They described a situation where they were left out of a family event because there was no "man" for their family members to coordinate with.

> **Terry Kimball**: But our family tries, but I think what's hard is that you're just not the same as a straight couple, you're just not. So sometimes the assumptions they make, or the ways we're not included because there's not a man. For example, there was a Christmas present they all bought together, for my parents. And we didn't know about it until it was already over.
> **Rosa Kimball**: Until they gave it to them!
> **Terry Kimball**: Basically, my sister's husband had organized it, and there was no man to call!
> **Rosa Kimball**: And he had talked to the brothers.
> **Terry Kimball**: My sister knew it was going to make me angry, but there was no man! So it's not like they're not okay with us being gay as a concept, it's just they don't realize that there's a long way until the whole world acts toward us.
> **Rosa Kimball**: It carries over.

Terry Kimball also mentioned their greater comfort with Tomás's desire to wear pink and to wear dresses. They believe that he is playing and wants to be like his sister, but they think that their brothers would have little tolerance for this behavior.

> **Terry Kimball**: Like literally they wear each other's clothes, sometimes I'll come home and find [Tomás] absolutely decked out in pink. My brothers would freak out. One time he put on a dress, but he was just dressing like her.

Terry Kimball also described her sense of the areas of overlap between sexual orientation and gender identity. She also shared that she would like to talk more to their children about gender issues, as throughout the interview they had shown that they have spent time to educate Saige about different terms and concepts related to sexual orientation.

> **Terry Kimball**: But I think that if you're talking, like, transgender, then you get into bigger issues like pronouns, and ways of talking about things or materials not being exclusively referenced. But I think that gets into more gender identity issues, which can be an issue with lesbians too. Of course there are people who are maybe more masculine, and there's maybe a little edge of gender issues when you first come out, so I think that was probably the biggest group that we ____. I feel bad that we haven't, I periodically talk to the kids about it, I feel like it hasn't been something that we've talked much about lately.

The Dawson-O'Rileys were the family who spoke most about gender identity. They described Fin's preferred gender pronoun as "they" and the ways that their family has incorporated greater awareness of gender diversity in their personal and professional lives.

> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: My gender's "they". . . You are a "she."
> **Alice Dawson**: Absolutely I'm a "she."
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: And you are a "they," and I'm a "they."
> **Dorothy O'Riley**: And you're a "they" . . . I think Fin's got a much more advanced perception of gender and what that can mean.
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: A lot of people think I'm a "she" because of my hair.
> **Dorothy O'Riley**: And, you said that you'll go by whatever.
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: I'll go by whatever.

> **Dorothy O'Riley**: And does it bother you that people get your gender all over the place?
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: No, it doesn't bother me at all.
> **Dorothy O'Riley**: It doesn't bother me either. . . . Part of my preferred pronoun is in solidarity with Fin, and so I am very comfortable with any pronouns. I've always used female pronouns, but in order to support this young person right here, I'm totally comfortable changing up my pronouns as well, because I think that's important to you. Yeah, Fin?
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: Yeah.
> **Dorothy O'Riley**: I don't know many of my self-identified straight friends that even talk about pronouns or would even identify themselves as cisgendered or anything like that. . . . And it is really interesting, because I think even in talking with Fin and going through their development, there's still a predisposition towards, "Oh, I want to marry her!" Or "I have a crush on her," you know what I mean.
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: Me?
> **Dorothy O'Riley**: Yeah, like "Back to the Future," you and Leah Thompson.
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: Mom! [Laughter]
> **Alice Dawson**: And you also have a crush on Logan! And he's male!
> **Dorothy O'Riley**: So I think that's something that is maybe more allowed for. But regardless of your romantical preference, it doesn't necessarily have to have anything to do with your gender.

Alice also noted that just because someone identifies as a minority in regard to one's sexual orientation, this may not mean that one is open to gender diversity in one's family as well.

> **Alice Dawson**: We have a friend who is transitioning, and their parent is a lesbian, and there was a lot of pushback in that family. At least it happened when, in their situation, he was much older when he transitioned, but it took a really long time for his mom, as a lesbian, to even come to terms with that she wanted to be a he.

Finally, they mentioned that Fin has stood up for others in regard to their gender identity in a situation where there could have been negative consequences. They feel proud that they have made assertiveness and advocacy a value in their family.

> **Alice Dawson**: And even one of the instructors at the camp you did this summer. . . . There is an instructor there, Ashley, who goes by "they," and there were a lot of different children in this program that aren't the yearly kids. And there was, a couple of the kids that were really, "She! She! She!" Or trying to.
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: "Yes sir, yes sir, yes sir!"

Alice Dawson: "Yes ma'am!" But you stood up, and what did you say?
Fin Dawson-O'Riley: "Yes, they!"
Dorothy O'Riley: What did you say to that kiddo? Tell me what happened. You raised your hand.
Fin Dawson-O'Riley: And I said, "Yes, they." That's all I said, "Yes, they."
Dorothy O'Riley: So you led by example. You were modeling.
Fin Dawson-O'Riley: I think I said, "Actually, yes they."
Alice Dawson: So you are a really good person, you stand up for when you hear things. And it's interesting to hear how natural it comes out, that . . .
Dorothy O'Riley: I do think that has a lot to do with the parenting. With our parenting.
Alice Dawson: Oh, for sure!
Dorothy O'Riley: How we support and encourage and make that a value. Because I want him to be empowered in that targeted identity, that you have to be confident to say, "I don't feel good," or, "That hurts my feelings for whatever reason." And be able to name that. They have shown that they're very comfortable doing that!

Normality and Intersectionality: We're the Same, It's Just Two Women!

The final theme is normality and intersectionality. Every family discussed their desire to be perceived as "normal" by society. At the same time, families acknowledged that there is some uniqueness in being part of a family parented by two women, yet felt that in general, this is where the difference ends. In many cases, families felt that the sexual orientation of the parents was not usually the most salient identity factor for them. Parents generally felt that motherhood was a much more significant part of their identity at this time, and some compared this to an earlier place in their lives where their sexual orientation was more primary.

All families wanted to be perceived as "normal," yet acknowledged that the fact that they are two women has an inherent difference compared with most families. Many families seemed to struggle with the dialectical challenge of the reality of this difference from the norm, yet wondered how meaningful this difference truly is. Some families hypothesized that the idea of their gender difference being meaningful

is constructed by society: to summarize Mary Benson, they felt that "it's not an issue until it's an issue."

> **Sara Knapps**: We never really thought of ourselves as different from other married couples, we are mostly around other highly educated people, like business school, we're just like any other married couple. Here, we live in this area, and everybody's got the same problems, paying their mortgage, kids are in school, I don't know. I think it's just kind of normal to us, we're the same as everybody else.

> **Alice Dawson**: But now, I think everybody is like, "Oh, we're normal!" You know, I think in that way, like, "Oh, your family looks like my family!"

> **Ann Miller**: We're kind of boring!

> **Carmen Woodward**: That's the hardest thing, is trying to meld, and I'm sure it's that way for any couple. We're not any different.
> **Sophie Albright**: No, we're not any different . . . I don't even think about, I don't even take into account that we're a gay family, if you will. I don't know if that adjective comes into my mind, I mean, we're just a family.
> **Carmen Woodward**: I rarely think about it.
> **Sophie Albright**: I don't either. It's really weird. I don't. I don't think about, "Oh, well, should we do this because we might be this," or something. The bottom line is we have a duty as parents to try to do what we can to make him become a better human being in life! I don't think in this day, I really don't! I don't think in this day it matters to human beings whether he has two moms or two dads or a mom or a dad.

> **Sophie Albright**: Maybe I'm way off but I think we're pretty normal, but I think the more people realize just how normal families like ours are, and that we have one thing that's different, but everything else absolutely is the same. We love each other, we respect each other, we honor each other, we support each other, I think that . . .
> **Carmen Woodward**: We uphold the marriage vows just like anybody else.

> **Christine Callahan**: When you go over to your friend's house with a mom and a dad, do you feel like, "Oh, this is so different?" Or is it just "family's family."
> **Margaret Callahan**: Um, I mean, every family is different.
> **LaRae Callahan**: Is there anything you can think of, John? If you could tell a complete stranger kid who was wondering about gay and lesbian families, is there anything you would tell them?
> **John Callahan**: No.
> **Christine Callahan**: What about you? You've been living with us. . . . Before that, you weren't living with a gay family. Is it really different here?

Ed Callahan: Not that much. Well I don't know really, because I haven't really had any brothers.
LaRae Callahan: But just parents.
Ed Callahan: Well, nothing has been really different.

Karen Benson: There's other issues in our family, that really, it's a minor part of everything. Yeah, like, if you're judging a family from the outside, and you think, "Well, this family is _____ because of this," it's like, really? There's so many ways in which we got to be a family, that seeing two women is like the least of the issues.
Mary Benson: Yeah, our challenges are, there are so many things that we're just, we're just a family. We're just going about trying to get homework done, and fast, and the dog not to run away, and all those things. And you know, things come up, like the conversations we've had because of summer camp, and I know will continue to come up, but you know, just like any family out there we're boring, or somebody doesn't like them at work or something like that, but I think that probably the biggest thing is that we're more similar than dissimilar.

Mary Benson: I was kind of thinking, as we were going along, "If we had more time to think about this, we would have probably been able to answer these things better."
Karen Benson: But it's sort of telling too, that like, we have to really think about it to come up with things.

Alex Murphy: I keep coming back to the term in my own head, "non-issue." It's just a non-issue.

Merida Murphy: I think it's special because it's kind of unique for other people that don't have two moms.
Alex Murphy: What do you think makes it unique, Merida?
Merida Murphy: It's just that a lot of people don't have two moms and two dads, so they just do like one dad and then one mom. So our family is different from the way we made ourselves. . . . Well I feel fine about it, but sometimes it's kind of, sometimes, when you're like, when other people are like really happy to have one mom and one dad, you feel kind of left out. . . . But it's never happened to me, it just might happen to someone else.

Mary and Karen Benson shared, like other families, they do not usually think about their sexual orientation in their day-to-day interactions. Although they prepared by reading books and having discussions with each other before Quintry was born about potential implications for Quintry, they found that once they started the daily routine of parenting, their concerns disappeared. Mary expressed the complexity of

sexual orientation being one part of their identities, and it comes up as more or less salient depending on their situation.

> **Mary Benson**: This is kind of a good reflection of, it reminds me, like, we, um, we read books out loud, before we had Quintry and before we got married, we read a partnership book, and then we did financial books, and then we did a ton of parenting books, and we'd read out loud and talk about these things, and it was so important and we're like talking about all the issues, and then you just start parenting, and you realize that it's not nearly as big of an issue as you thought it would be. I mean it's kind of interesting to reflect on that and how it does affect us, and if it affects us. Like I said, it has a presence in a lot of things, but it's not *the* [emphasis added] thing, all the time.
> **Karen Benson**: Right. It may come up again differently as she hits the teen years.
>
> **Karen Benson**: I think that it's just, it may be a factor, it's a factor I'm sure in some ways, but it's also not necessarily that different. You know, like, I think that when we struggle with all the same things mostly that everyone else does, you know, like keeping the house clean, keeping everything together, you know, and I think it's not that different, I don't know . . . [looks at Mary].
> **Mary Benson**: It's funny, because it's one of those things where, if somebody assumes that it's the issue, it's not. But if someone assumes that that issue does not affect it, then it does [voice getting louder and gesturing strongly].
> **Karen Benson**: That will bother us.
> **Mary Benson**: That's what I mean when I say, it's not about that, but it's, that has a piece in everything.

Ann Miller was the only parent who overtly brought up her cautiousness with this research topic. She worried that the idea of being sought out because of their sexual orientation may send a message to Elsa that there is something negative or different about their family. She and Lynn were also struggling with the dialectic of difference/no difference. They, like many families, and like myself, believed that this was an important area of research, yet struggled with how meaningful or unique the difference of two women truly is.

> **Ann Miller**: I do feel cautious having this conversation and the idea that we're presenting something that there is something to think about.
> **Lynn Curran**: You're afraid that that sends a negative message?
> **Ann Miller**: That just having this conversation sends that message.

> **Lynn Curran**: I think, again, because I feel like it's such a non-issue for our family, that's kind of the message I want spread, is that we're just like every other family. We're talking about who's going to take Elsa where and who's going to make dinner what night, just like any other family. I feel like that is becoming more known and accepted, but I don't know if that's just because of where we live, or if that's totally becoming accepted elsewhere. So the more that we can help that message spread, I think that's a good thing and that will benefit the kids.
> **Ann Miller**: And I definitely want to support there being more research and scientific study that says these are families like any other. Because they are! And we know so many of them. I have the same conversations with my coworkers who have a more traditional makeup. The same kinds of stuff! Juggling relationship issues, parenting issues, homework. And it's just been such a non-issue for us, that I feel very privileged, but think that needs to be represented in the research just as everything else.
> **Ann Miller**: But there is difference. Right? And I think that for all those people who see difference, and see way more difference than there actually is, then you have to meet them there and say, "It is different!" It's two women. It's two men. And then that's where the difference ends!
> **Lynn Curran**: But perhaps where the difference is, is that I'm so much more aware, and so much more appreciative, of all of Elsa's schools! She's had male teachers in preschool, and kindergarten! Her kindergarten teacher was a male, and that's rare! We are so appreciative of that. Because we don't have a lot of male figures in her life that live locally. So to have that in our school system, where I'm guessing parents from straight families don't give that an ounce of thought. And it makes me question, yeah, it's a non-issue for us, or are we missing something? Are things happening that we're just choosing to ignore. I don't think so, but it makes me ask that question.
> **Ann Miller**: Because I feel like we just are who we are and it's all just fine, there's nothing that stands out! I guess that's the thing. I know that's not everybody's experience, but it's ours. And like I said, just the fact that we're having this conversation suggests that there is a "thing," and, like, I wonder how that will be processed or what will go on with that. And I'm guessing there will be questions a lot later, and I'm curious what shape that will take. But yeah, I don't feel like I have anything big to say, because we're just a family!

Other families echoed the idea that a family with two mothers is inherently different, but that is not necessarily a meaningful difference. Participants acknowledged that all families have things that are unique about them, that are not necessarily related to the sexual orientation of the parents. Children, in particular,

seemed to have a wider understanding of the diversity and uniqueness of all families that was surprising and exciting to their parents.

> **Saige Kimball**: We're kind of like everybody else but the reason that we're different is because we're not, like . . . there's no mom and dad, it's just a mom and a mom, but it feels like it's the same as usual. Like if you brought, it's the same as any other family. It's just that they're different, that there's two moms or two dads.
> **Terry Kimball**: I think we did worry about it and take classes before having kids, and I would just say overall, like 98% is the same. I mean, knowing that there are different families out there, families remarried, families' kids being raised by grandparents, kids being raised by aunts, all different situations, and kids that were adopted and fostered.
> **Rosa Kimball**: We are different in multiple ways, so I don't think I thought anything more about it than if you had been interested in talking about families that came together via foster care. It's just one of the ways in which, it's just one of our realities in how we came together.
>
> **Karen Benson**: At our church, some families put on this class, like to talk about different families, kinda like this, and there were two little boys who were adopted by a single woman. . . . When they talked about what was different about their families, Quintry said, "We have six chickens in our family!" And the little boy said something that didn't have to do with adoption at all, and that, I think, is really the reality of more of this generation, is that what we assume is going to be the thing that is going to make us feel different, isn't necessarily even it.
>
> **Margaret Callahan**: I mean, every family's special. Every family has something special about them. But in my opinion there's nothing special.
> **LaRae Callahan**: That's related to having two moms.
> **Margaret Callahan**: Yeah.
> **LaRae Callahan**: I think that's a good answer. I don't think we're that different, I think we're just a lot like any other family. I think Margaret's right, every family has something special about them. They were lucky they had a mom who could stay home with them when they were babies, and that was special for us. I'm very involved in their school, and I eat lunch with them every Friday. That's special, but other parents do that, that's special to me being a mom.

The Dawson-O'Rileys, Kimballs, and Woodward-Albrights identified parenting style as one thing that makes them unique that is not related to their sexual orientation.

> **Alice Dawson**: Do you think that we're different from other families, like from your friends' families?
> **Fin Dawson O'Riley**: No.

Alice Dawson: Other than we're really cool!
Fin Dawson-O'Riley: No, there's no real difference.
Alice Dawson: There isn't!
Dorothy O'Riley: There's no real difference, I agree with you!
Fin Dawson-O'Riley: Except you probably let me do a lot more things.
Alice Dawson: That's probably true. But that might just be parenting and I don't think it has anything to do with, it's a parenting style, not necessarily anything that's rooted in having two moms.
Dorothy O'Riley: Um, what would I want other people to know? I guess that's just it, that there's not . . . it's kind of an overarching, that we're just like everybody else!
Alice Dawson: And it probably depends on from family to family, like if some people are really open about things, and I know we know other families that keep things private, we're more forthright with things.

Saige Kimball: I think about how happy I am that I have two moms, and how I . . . I don't know.
Terry Kimball: It's kind of hard because it depends on the situation.
Rachel Gall: Well maybe it's not that different?
Saige Kimball: Yeah.
Terry Kimball: I think most of the time we're not very different, are we? Do you get in trouble when you're doing something you're not supposed to be doing?
Saige Kimball: Yup.
Terry Kimball: Just like the other kids. Do you get snuggles when you need them?
Saige Kimball: Yup, I love snuggles.

Carmen Woodward: We come from different backgrounds, we have different methods of discipline, we think of things differently, it's not unique!

Many families alluded to the concept of intersectionality and being complex, multidimensional individuals, and how this relates to their family. Three parents discussed their own coming out experiences and how they no longer feel that their sexual orientation is the most salient identity for them. A few families discussed the impact of ethnicity on their family identity, and many mothers described their sense that they now most strongly identify with motherhood. Terry Kimball discussed her family's reaction to her coming out:

Terry Kimball: Now my family, after I came out, it took my mom, my dad was like okay with it from the get-go, he was the first person I came out to in

> my family. He was like, "Does that mean you're going to start dating?" "Um, I guess so. . . ." The next morning he asked if it was his fault, and I reassured him that it had nothing to do with that. Actually I was in graduate school, which was like 20% female, so all my friends were guys at the time. Though they increasingly were coming out to me, so I'm not sure . . . I was attracting a lot of gay men. Gay and bisexual men.

Sara Knapps discussed how that when she was younger, being gay was her primary identity.

> **Sara Knapps**: I think that when you're young, and single, and just in a relationship, being gay is your identity, that's who you are. You're gay, whether you're out and proud or not, that's just really the focus.

Sophie Albright described her own process of self-discovery around her sexual orientation, although her family put the pieces together well before she did. It took Carmen a bit longer.

> **Sophie Albright**: My family, everybody knew before I did, and when I figured it out, they were like, "Welcome to the party! We all knew!" My sister, when I finally told her . . .
> **Carmen Woodward**: [Gave her a high-five] "Thank you for finally admitting it!"
> **Sophie Albright**: Yeah! So I've always known, but I wasn't really comfortable with it til 8th, 9th grade. And then I started going, "Okay. I get it."
> **Carmen Woodward**: I wasn't comfortable with it till I was about 30.

LaRae Callahan brought up the issue of race and compared being a sexual minority to being a racial minority.

> **LaRae Callahan**: I'm sure people of color, living in all-White communities, their kids face a lot more hardship.

Terry Kimball agreed, and she, Rosa, and Saige discussed the implications of being part of a family where the children look different from their parents. They shared multiple situations in which ethnicity was important in their and their children's lives.

> **Terry Kimball**: I think for our family, probably the bigger differences are being a different ethnicity than the kids. Because that's something that people see right away.
> **Saige Kimball**: What does ethnicity mean?

> **Terry Kimball**: You look different.
> **Saige Kimball**: Oh, yeah!
> **Terry Kimball**: They were very happy when we brought in [our youngest daughter] for the first time, they looked down at her and were like, "She's brown too!" I think it's been nice for the kids to have that with each other.
> **Rosa Kimball**: I would get the question sometimes, "So where were they born?" "Um, Swedish?" They've never been to Mexico. They're locals. But there was just this assumption that just because they were dark-skinned that they were from somewhere else.
> **Saige Kimball**: I think at school people would ask me if I was from Mexico, and I say nope! . . . . But I've never been to Mexico before.
> **Terry Kimball**: We'll go one day. Definitely. There's actually some cool family language classes that you can take, so. . . . Wait till the others are a little bit older, so they'll get more out of it.
> **Terry Kimball**: So I would say that we put more energy into including Spanish in the house.
> **Rosa Kimball**: It's easier for the older girls because they come out of Spanish language environments, even at previous foster homes.
> **Terry Kimball**: What's your favorite CD from your childhood?
> **Saige Kimball**: Lullaby.
> **Terry Kimball**: The Spanish lullabies became a favorite.
> **Saige Kimball**: I love lullaby.
> **Terry Kimball**: We do try to do things like Day of the Dead and different Mexican things, we try to incorporate different cultural stuff. It'll actually be easier for them to develop their identity. . . . To be honest on the paperwork we had to say "race unknown." It's going to be hard one day to look at that. It's kind of like, that's a basic identity.

Finally, some mothers discussed how they are at a point in their lives where motherhood is their most important identity. They discussed how having children opened up a world of involvement in family-focused activities and social circles. They also found that their relationships with others who did not have children (either by choice or by way of life circumstances) tapered off as they became more involved in family activities. This stands in contrast with their previous involvement with the LGBTQ community.

> **Terry Kimball**: Having kids almost included us more in the world than we ever did before, it opened . . . and our friends with kids had different reactions. Some good, some bad. I definitely had friends who were freaked out by the kids.

> **Terry Kimball**: We had a wedding, how many people were there, 50? And there was two gay people. So that just shows you that at the end of the day, most of our friends are straight, although there are gay members. . . . I think that as we've had kids, our interactions are just kids' parents, or the neighbors, it's much more locational. Our gay friends, especially if they aren't married, we don't actually see them much.

> **Sara Knapps**: Of all our friends, we're the only ones to get married and have kids, and our friends are kind of coming around, but we're the first. And I think because of that, most of the friends we hang out with just happen to be straight, one, because when you're a couple, it's hard to. . . . When you're single, you go out with your single friends, and you go and do whatever, and then once you find somebody and you get married, or you're in a long-term relationship, you kind of tend to nest, and do your own thing, and then you do things as a couple. Since we don't have a lot of gay friends who are couples, we just hang out, we spend most of our time with straight couples. And for us, it's easy to forget that we're a gay couple. None of our friends think of it as that. Sometimes when we're around other gay people, it's a little awkward, like, "This is really weird! We're all gay!" That's just. . . . And I never, I don't think about it!

> **Sara Knapps**: If you were to ask me now how I identify, I would say, "First I'm a mother." That's the first thing that comes to mind! Because you've got kids. And then I'd say I'm a wife. Gay really isn't in there as much, it's part of who I am but you know, I'm a homeowner, I have a mortgage, I'm a student.

Carmen and Sophie have been cautious about associating themselves with the gay and lesbian community. Although they recognize the importance of the pride movement and its political impact, they feel that it can be "outlandish" and does not represent who they are. Like Sara Knapps, Sophie recognized that developmentally, when she first came out, she felt very connected to the gay community. Yet, she had a realization as we were talking that she no longer identified with this community and has transitioned to seeing her primary identity as a mother and wife.

> **Sophie Albright**: I do feel an absolute transition from who I am as a person, when I started this a long time ago at 14 years old, to where I am now. I used to be so full of pride, and so "Oh, gay and lesbian!" I mean, everything I did, school, whatever, was all about being gay! . . . I have a beautiful family, we love one another, we respect one another, we have an *amazing* [emphasis added] young man, so I don't know if I even identify myself with the gay and lesbian community! Oh my god! Holy crap! You should get paid for this!

Reflections

After the interviews were over, I spent some time asking each family what their impressions and thoughts were about participating in the study. In addition, I spent time after each interview reflecting through the process of journaling and taking field notes.

Participants' Reflections

Families had many questions for me before the interviews began. It is interesting to note that nearly all of the Rocky Mountain families, and none of the Pacific Northwest families, asked me questions about the purpose of the research before the research process began. I received many questions about why I was conducting the research, what I was going to be using the research for, and wanting to know that it was being "used in the right way." Some families mentioned afterward that they were listening for me to say words such as "social justice" as I was describing my study to them. Overall, the Rocky Mountain region families appeared more guarded as they asked me these questions. It is possible that these differences are due to the more liberal climate in the Pacific Northwest region. Finally, other families asked about my personal investment in the research, wondering if I was gay or if I had family members who were gay.

Overall, participants were glad that they participated in this research. In alignment with their view of themselves as advocates, all families felt that it was important to educate the world about their family through research.

> **Karen Benson**: I think it's good, it does eventually remind us that our family's a little bit different, because, you know, obviously we wouldn't be sitting here. So it kinda makes me think about that again, like, "Oh yeah!" We made this decision and we've been on this path for 10 years now, so it's not something that we think about every day.

Sophie Albright: Yeah, I just think that it's awesome, and I think anything that we can do as a family to help educate the rest of the world, I'm all for it and I'll do whatever we need to do.

Rosa Kimball: I didn't think that much about it. I mean, we are different in multiple ways, so I don't think I thought anything more about it than if you had been interested in talking about families that came together via foster care. It's just one of the ways in which, it's just one of our realities in how we came together.
Saige Kimball: It was interesting talking about our family.

Dorothy O'Riley: I love it. I think it's great. I think it's great that our family is going to be in research that the families . . . because I think that there's a need for everyone to able to . . . I hope that it's helpful. I think I would just add that I appreciate the, that you're being intentional and want to do this work, and want to be as informed as possible, and want other folks within the field to be as informed as possible. I hope that you've gotten lots of good information and insight from other folks.

Sara Knapps: I thought it was such a great idea, because I feel like, like gay and lesbian families are just a demographic that people don't pay any attention to. I think they're starting too, especially in terms of the money that we have to spend, like in terms of vacations, and family things, you know, that kind of stuff. But I was really excited, yes we're like everybody else, but there are differences.

Christine Callahan: I'm glad to be able to help, to give information. So it's more clearly understood that we're just like everybody else. I think some people might think, "Wow, we're the same, why do we have to be researched?" But I just think that there's so much to be learned, that any help we can give we should do.
LaRae Callahan: I feel the same thing, that we don't live in a world that's gotten there yet, where we aren't odd or different. So yeah. And any time that we can help to do a publication to say that things are the same.

Ann Miller: This makes me feel very dull! And boring [laughter]! No, I think it's good research. I think it's important research to do. And we're happy to support it and participate in it. And I feel like I don't have much to say!
Elsa Curran: [hugs the cat]
Lynn Curran: I think maybe nonparticipation [referring to Elsa's disengagement] is also indicative. It's a non-issue. "Why are we talking about this? What's the big deal?" [laughter]

Sinead Murphy: And then the fact that we're, the subject matter is same-sex parents, I think it would be good to get good information out there about small

kids. I don't know what other families said, but hopefully the conclusion is we're just like everybody else.

In addition, many participants had done their own research in their graduate programs or careers and felt that it was their turn to "pay it forward."

Carmen Woodward: [When I did research,] it was hard for me to find subjects, because nobody really wanted to identify themselves.

Terry Kimball: I have worked for a lot of social service agencies . . . , but you know what, not a lot of people want to be interviewed. And I did research for a while, so it's like, you volunteer.

Sara Knapps: For me, coming from this science background, I first saw it and I was like, "We have to do this! This is important!" I think it's important to be sought out if only to show that we are just like everybody else. Because that in itself, I mean, coming up with nothing, is in itself important in research. If there's no response to something, that's important, just as if there was a response to something. So I think that just more information on the fact that we're the same.

Sinead Murphy: We are in research, I've been in research since I was 20 years old. Two things, one is, being in research, we want to be supportive of others doing research because we know how valuable data is and how difficult it is to get good data. And me, I've always been more interested in qualitative data than quantitative data, so I thought this would be interesting.

Finally, Alex Murphy was the only participant to bring up my sexual orientation and shared that she was surprised that I was conducting this research as a straight-identified person.

Alex Murphy: I expected you to be gay.
Rachel Gall: Oh yeah?
Alex Murphy: Because there's not a lot of literature on gays and lesbians, and it's not well-funded. When it is, it's because gay and lesbian researchers are self-motivated. They want to get more information out there, and rightly so. So I'm sort of surprised.
Sinead Murphy: That didn't even cross my mind.
Alex Murphy: Really?
Sinead Murphy: Of course I wasn't offended or anything. I think it's nice that there are people, gay or straight, that are looking into these issues. In research, one of the big things is, first, research was based on White males, middle-class White males, slowly then women, and in our research, . . . we're trying to be more inclusive so we have better representation. So when you're

> trying to apply what was learned to the greater population, you can do that if you have more representation.

Alex then asked me what motivated me to pick this topic, which led to a discussion about my own interest in this topic given my sexual orientation. I shared that the idea that people of minority statuses are solely responsible to contribute to research with their own populations seems unfair. I see that because I am part of the majority, I see it as my responsibility to add to the literature on diverse families, and that this topic is personally important to me as well.

After reflecting on the process of the interviews, I realized that initially, families wanted me to know that they were "the same." Nearly all the families that I interviewed began with stating that they are "normal" or "boring." I began having conversations with the participants during the interviews about my conflict about seeking them out because of their sexual orientation, and whether this perpetuated ideas about difference. I found that once I opened up about my own conflict, this seemed to give permission for participants to be more open with me about differences and uniqueness they felt to be part of their family. While participants had a deep desire to be perceived as "the same," they also acknowledged that they believe that it is different to have parents that are two women. This was difficult for participants to articulate, and most of them said that aside from the fact that they are two women, this is where the differences end.

Finally, it is important to mention that huge legal changes in marriage equality happened throughout the time that I was collecting data. According to Freedom to Marry, Inc. (n.d.), marriage equality has been in place in Washington state since December 6, 2012. On May 1, 2013, Colorado same-gender couples were legally

allowed to have civil unions. Following a Supreme Court decision declining to hear all appeals on same-gender marriage cases, Colorado's Attorney General ordered all counties to begin issuing same-gender marriage licenses on October 7, 2014 (Freedom to Marry, Inc., n.d.). As of December 2014, same-gender couples in 35 states plus Washington, DC have the freedom to marry. Over 64% of the United States population lives in a state that recognizes marriage equality, and this number is expected to steadily increase (Freedom to Marry, Inc., n.d.). Most of my participants acknowledged that support for marriage equality is "snowballing," and that they feel great acceptance from their communities. I did not ask participants specifically how marriage equality has impacted or not impacted them, but all couples were legally married except for the Dawson-O'Rileys, who are considering it, and the Curran-Millers.

Personal Reflections

I have been profoundly changed by this research. While I have always considered myself an advocate and an ally to the LGBTQ population, I have not spent time truly listening. Through the process of interviewing these families, I have grown increasingly comfortable as an interviewer. There were times when I called someone the wrong gender pronoun, referred to their family using language that their family did not use, and made inadvertent assumptions about their experiences. Each time, the family corrected me and helped me truly enter their world while helping me become more aware of my own biases.

In addition, I have greatly valued discussing with my participants whether exploring the experiences of LGBQ-parented families is even a valid area of research. Inherent in this research is an assumption of difference or at least a "seeking out" of

one identity marker. Am I introducing my heteronormative bias into the research by even suggesting that there might be uniqueness within these families?

Each family seemed to have a different perspective. I truly appreciate the chance to grapple with this with my participants, rather than from behind some veiled scientific wall or in front of my computer screen late at night. I believe that together we came to the conclusion that it is not either/or, but both/and. Yes, this research gives a quality of separation and an assumption of difference. Yes, this research shows that there is sameness. And, is sameness or difference important in itself? I believe that by having these social justice, dialectical conversations with participants, we were able to maintain the systemic-constructivist framework of the study.

Finally, I also believe that my participants helped me to have a deeper understanding of intersectionality. While many of the parents in this study shared what it meant to them to have multiple, intersecting identities, it was the children who caused me to reflect the most deeply. Most of the children in this study live in a world where they do not know that having two moms is something that people may have an opinion about. As Margaret Callahan, age 9, put it, "Every family's special. Every family has something special about them."

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is comprised of four related yet distinct components: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility refers to whether the findings are accurate and congruent with reality (Merriam, 2009). Credibility is strengthened by triangulation, which refers to the use of multiple sources. I used multiple sources of data including interviewing multiple family members, the use of a researcher journal to document my observations and dynamics,

multiple theoretical frameworks, researcher reflexivity and bracketing, and discrepant case review. In addition, peer review also strengthens credibility.

Dependability refers to whether the results can be replicated (Merriam, 2009). It is likely that the same study conducted with different participants, with different demographics, in different locations, with different researchers, would not yield the same results. However, my goal was to explore my participants' experiences richly and in depth, rather than seeking to generalize or provide a replicable study.

Confirmability refers to the objectivity and neutrality of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was strengthened via the use of peer review to confirm that I had described the findings and extracted themes accurately. De-identified transcripts were sent to a peer trained in qualitative research who independently developed themes. These themes were then compared to the themes that I had developed, and we came to a consensus. While I have sought to minimize interpretation and bracket my own biases, my analysis of the data is no doubt subjective (Creswell, 2007).

Finally, transferability refers to the extent to which the findings are generalizable. Overall, the goal of qualitative research is to provide perspective rather than truth (Ponterotto, 2005). Therefore, it is up to the readers of this study to determine what parts are meaningful and relevant to them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented a within-case analysis and description of each participant family. In addition, I also thoroughly described the emergent themes and described how these themes fit within and between each family in a cross-case analysis. I also described my own and my participants' reflections on being part of the

research process and the trustworthiness of the study. My analysis was guided by one broad research question:

> Q What are the lived experiences of families with same-gender parents and elementary school-aged children given that they are members of a marginalized group?

The six broad themes presented in this chapter were as follows:

- Intentionality of parenting decisions.
- Advocacy and visibility.
- Times are changing: Acknowledgement that it is a different world.
- Acknowledgement of biases: Assumptions are a two-way street.
- Questioning the relevance of gender to parenting.
- Normality and intersectionality: We're the same, it's just two women!

In conclusion, it is apparent that the families I interviewed have many similar experiences in relation to being part of a same-gender-parented family. It is also important to note that each of these families has unique diversity factors (geographic, financial, ethnic, family history, and dynamics, etc.) that are integral to their identity. It is impossible to paint a truly comprehensive and richly descriptive picture of these families' experiences, and there is so much more I wish could be included. It is my hope that the descriptions and analyses I provided give clinicians who work with families an accurate and in-depth exploration of these families' lived experiences.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I present a summary and discussion of the results of the current study. In Chapter IV, I presented the results by dividing them into within-case and cross-case analyses. The results were obtained through rigorous analysis of the data, which included analyzing transcripts to distill them into themes, obtaining demographic information, and the use of field notes and researcher observations. Methods to maximize trustworthiness included the use of triangulation between multiple theoretical modalities, peer review, multiple sources of data, and researcher reflexivity and bracketing. I also presented both my own and my participants' reflections on the research process and how it affected us. Six themes emerged through the analysis of the data:

- Intentionality of parenting decisions.
- Advocacy and visibility.
- Times are changing: Acknowledgment that it is a different world.
- Acknowledgment of biases: Assumptions are a two-way street.
- Questioning the relevance of gender to parenting.
- Normality and intersectionality: We're the same, it's just two women!

In the current chapter, I present an overview of the study and review its purpose and summarize the findings and how they relate to the current literature. I present methodological, theoretical, and practical and clinical implications for counseling psychologists, discuss the limitations of this study, and provide recommendations for future directions for the field of psychology.

Overview and Purpose of the Study

Research in the field of LGBTQ family studies developed out of a need in the 1970s and 1980s to provide evidence for the court system that gay parents should be able to adopt children (Fitzgerald, 1999). This research served to demonstrate fitness of LGBTQ-identified parents, dispel myths and stereotypes, and mitigate fears of the maladjustment of children. Thus there is a 40-year body of literature focusing on comparing straight-parented and LGBTQ-parented families.

Current researchers (e.g., Lambert, 2005) suggested that further comparative research perpetuates homophobia. Other researchers (e.g., Clarke, 2002) suggested that research exploring either difference or sameness is limiting and unhelpful, and regardless of findings, any found differences are attributable to the impact of oppression. Therefore, the current study aimed to move toward a holistic view of diverse families and to provide evidence-based knowledge for counseling psychologists working with families. I hoped to fill some of the gaps in the literature through the use of a family systems framework (by interviewing whole families) and a developmental perspective (by including the voices and perspectives of young children). My hope was also to explore the unique strengths, needs, and challenges of this population.

According to a 2011 study conducted in the United States, 3.5% of adults identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Gates, 2011). The number of same-gender households has doubled in the past five years, and now approximately 2% of all couple households are comprised of same-gender couples (Gates & Newport, 2015; United States Census Bureau, 2010). About 20% of these households have children in the home (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Given that this type of demographic data is often underreported in marginalized populations, and given the increasing visibility of LGBQ-parented families, there is an increasing need for resources to serve this population (Gates, 2011). When these families present in therapy, counseling psychologists must be knowledgeable and able to meet their needs. Counseling psychologists must be knowledgeable about working with historically oppressed populations and the effect this may have on clients. In addition, therapists working with families need to understand the multiple factors that contribute to the psychological health of families, parents, and children. This combined knowledge will allow counseling psychologists to be effective therapists, allies, teachers, and advocates.

The purpose of qualitative research is to explore meaning in context. Individuals' experiences do not occur in a vacuum: This study explored the meaning that has been created within each family system's interaction with society. The system is more than the sum of its parts. Each family is unique and has constructed shared meaning out of their experiences within their family and in relationship to the outside world. Therefore, qualitative research, and specifically phenomenology, is the most appropriate methodology to explore if there is a unique experience of being part of an LGBQ-parented family. The main research question guiding this study was:

Q What are the lived experiences of families with same-gender parents and elementary school-aged children given that they are members of a marginalized group?

Summary of Findings and Relationship with Current Literature

In this section, I list the themes that emerged through my analysis and how they relate to the research question and to the current literature. Overall, the current research study supported and built on results that have been found in other studies, both qualitative and quantitative. I also present areas of discrepancy with the current literature.

Within-Case Analysis

Eight families were interviewed who had at least one child in elementary school. These families were mostly located within metropolitan areas, with two exceptions, and the parents were primarily married, with a typical relationship length of 10 to 15 years. In general, participants were Caucasian, with one child, and two parents identifying as Latino. All interviewed families were parented by lesbian mothers, consistent with previous research that shows lesbian parents are more common than gay male parents (Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Families were generally upper-middle class.

Previous research has found that lesbian women tend to be more highly educated (Bos et al., 2004), and most mothers in the current study had master's degrees. Mental health professionals were highly overrepresented, as were individuals who worked in nonprofit agencies and who currently or had previously conducted research. Many participants who had conducted their own research as graduate students or in their careers felt a responsibility to contribute to research, as they

described knowing how challenging it is to find participants. In addition, participants valued research being conducted with diverse populations, particularly their own. As mental health professionals, these parents likely had significant training in multiculturalism and social justice in their graduate programs and beyond. As part of a sexual minority group, they have personal knowledge of how this diversity factor impacts their lives. This is a group of people that has had both professional training and personal experience in diversity and are thus in a unique position to contribute to the literature and to reflect on their experiences.

The origins of the children in this study varied widely, ranging from adoption with a known birthmother, foster-to-adopt, unknown donorship, known donorship within the context of co-parenting with a gay male couple, and being conceived in the context of a previous heterosexual relationship. These results are consistent with previous research that found that the origins of children in same-gender relationships are more diverse than in opposite-gender relationships (Tasker & Patterson, 2007; United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Sinead and Alex Murphy were the only parents in a co-parenting relationship with a gay male couple, one of whom was their children's biological father. Power et al. (2012) found that this is typical, with many gay male parents being in nontraditional parenting arrangements where they may be donor fathers or co-parents. These authors also found that when gay men become parents, they report becoming more connected to their families of origin. Although this study was conducted with lesbian parents, this was certainly the case. Some mothers described how despite challenges to their relationship early on in their coming-out process, their parents were now supportive and felt connected to their grandchildren.

Intentionality of Parenting Decisions

Families discussed ways in which they were intentional about where to live, how and where to travel, planning for children, and having discussions with children about sexual orientation and the possibility of discrimination. Most parents had left their hometowns to go to college and planned to move to a large metropolitan area that was known for being open and accepting. For many parents who met in graduate school, they thought about this option particularly as they were planning for having a family and felt protective of their future children. This is consistent with Nabors (2012), who found that moving away to a less stigmatizing environment is one stigma management technique that minorities employ. One family, the Dawson-O'Rileys, lived in a more rural area and homeschooled their child. Holman and Oswald (2011) found that in some nonmetropolitan areas, LGBTQ-identified parents felt that sexual orientation did not matter in personal interactions, but felt discriminated against through organizations such as health care, education, employment, and family services. This was certainly consistent with the Dawson-O'Rileys' experiences, as they found their neighbors to be accepting but still felt like the "anomaly" in the neighborhood. It is possible that they chose to homeschool Fin due to perceiving stigma in their community organizations, and they shared that they drive in to the bigger city for more social connection.

Families discussed how they chose schools, workplace environments, places of worship, and extracurricular activities such as gyms and adoptive family groups based on their perceived level of acceptance. Many families also shared that they felt grateful to have a choice of these community organizations and a choice of where to live. Lindsay et al. (2006) also found that lesbian mothers actively selected schools

based on their commitment to and demonstration of multiculturalism, especially if they knew other LGBT-parented families who attended the school. Some parents in this study expressed appreciation that their children's schools incorporated units on different types of families and diverse origins of children, and that this was what attracted them to their schools. For example, Lynn Curran noted that when they went on a tour of their daughter's prospective new school, they saw posters and artwork of diverse families in the hallways and classrooms. She felt grateful that she would not have to be in a position to have to teach others about their family, as it was already part of the curriculum and obviously valued at the school.

Bos et al. (2008) found that a protective factor for the well-being of children of LGBT-identified parents was LGBT curricula in children's classrooms. When young children do not see their family structure acknowledged by their educators, this could be invalidating and impact development of a healthy self-concept (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014). Hedge et al. (2014) noted that there is a need for increased preparation for early childhood educators to challenge the culture of heteronormativity, and this could be done through including diverse families in songs, stories, and classroom displays. Based on what parents reported in the current study, their children's educators are doing just that.

Another aspect of intentionality families acknowledged is that children must be deliberately planned for by LGBTQ-identified parents. Parents must navigate choices of how to have the child, considering issues such as local or international adoption, known or unknown donorship, or which mother will carry the child. Families must also work within community organizations such as sperm banks, adoption agencies, doctors and hospitals, and lawyers that may or may not be accepting. It is important to

note that previous research has compared the psychological adjustment of children with various parenting configurations. Psychological adjustment is indistinguishable between children of LGBQ parents with known or unknown donors (Gartrell et al., 2005) and between children who were adopted early in life whether they have lesbian, gay, or heterosexual parents (Goldberg & Smith, 2013).

Many families described either perceiving barriers to adoption or donorship (e.g., Sophie Albright worrying what may happen if they try to adopt from an agency) or experiencing barriers (the Bensons being treated as an "infertility case" and others assuming stereotypes such as they should not want children or that they should adopt). Bergstrom-Lynch (2012) had previously identified these barriers to having children. She also identified how international adoption can be a source of great stress for parents who must lie and say that they are straight, leave one parent out of the process, or relinquish their desire for an international adoption. This was the case for the Kimballs, who wanted to adopt children from China but decided to adopt locally due to not wanting to start their journey to parenthood with a lie. Other parents, such as Sophie Albright, described frustration over having to be "approved" to be parents, while heterosexual couples have planned and unplanned pregnancies without any approval from an agency or the government.

Finally, many families discussed how they have intentional discussions with their children around encountering people with different beliefs and values. This is consistent with the findings of Gartrell et al. (2005), where 10-year-old children of lesbian mothers reported that their mothers were educating them about diversity, how to respond to harassment, and how to stand up against homophobia. Some of these conversations were initiated by the parents because they wanted their children to be

aware in case they encountered a discriminatory situation. Other conversations were held after an incident occurred. Most families felt that it was important for their children to be aware that others may judge their family, to not be surprised by this, and to know how to talk about it. Of course, these discussions varied depending on the developmental age of the child, with families such as the Curran-Millers talking with 6-year-old Elsa about the "rainbow of families," and families like the Callahans and Dawson-O'Rileys with older children talking about religious discrimination.

The literature supports these findings, as family communication, nurturance, and support have been shown to be protective factors for children and adolescents. Although the Schacher et al. (2005) study was conducted with gay male parents, the authors found that these parents wanted to demonstrate to their children how to be an educator and activist. Fathers wanted to have open conversations with their children about how to handle discrimination and homophobia. Bos and Gartrell (2010) found that having close relationships with their lesbian mothers increases adolescent well-being in the face of discrimination. Mothers in their study believed that this outsider discourse helped their children understand that all families are different and family structures are diverse.

Advocacy and Visibility

Participants' themes around advocacy and visibility could be grouped into three categories. First, both parents and children felt that they were advocates for human rights, and this gave them more empathy for and understanding of others who have experienced discrimination. Second, families were overwhelmingly fully out in their communities and felt that this was what was best for their children. Third,

families described ways that others reacted to them after learning about parents' sexual orientation, with most interactions being viewed as positive or neutral.

Consistent with Nabors' (2012) description of the stigma management techniques of activism, volunteering, and educating, many families described being involved in activism at the political level to advocate for marriage equality. For example, families described going to the capitol building or volunteering at a booth. Many families also felt that they were advocates in terms of educating others. This was evident both formally, for example, going to their children's schools to talk about different kinds of families and informally, for example, in small interactions or conversations with members of their community such as colleagues, classmates, or neighbors.

Some families described small moments in which they have heard children say negative things about their family or LGBQ-parented families. The Dawson-O'Rileys shared the most about these experiences, consistent with the Power et al. (2014) findings that children are more likely to experience homophobia if they lived in a more rural area. These children described being proud to stand up for their families and educate their peers about how great their family is, consistent with previous research that children of LGBQ-identified parents see themselves as advocates (Gartrell et al., 2005; Lambert, 2005; Welsh, 2011). Their mothers felt not only proud of their children for standing up, but felt they were themselves able to step in and talk with other children in an appropriate way without overstepping their bounds. Families noted that these negative situations were few and far between.

Most families discussed valuing diversity in many ways, and this was evident, for example, in 10-year-old Quintry Benson's observations of the global gender

inequalities in regard to access to education. These children seemed highly aware of diversity issues and displayed empathy for others who have experienced discrimination. Not only is this consistent with previous research (e.g., Gartrell et al., 2005; Lambert, 2005; Welsh, 2011), these successes are situated within a culture of institutionalized barriers against these families (Kurdek, 2005). Welsh (2011) found that adolescent children of LGBQ-identified parents valued and had a sophisticated understanding of diversity, and these family values of acceptance, advocacy, and flexibility were evident in the children in the current study as well.

All families described being fully out in their communities for a few reasons. First, some parents acknowledged that children will "out" you anyway, so they believed it was more helpful to disclose their sexual orientation to others. Ben-Ari and Livni (2006) also described that lesbian mothers felt overwhelmingly that parents must be out before having children. The mothers in their study felt that it was important that families did not live in secrecy and the children get the message that something about their family is wrong or shameful.

Other families in the current study discussed that disclosing to others cuts down on awkwardness, for example, when other parents ask what their husbands do for work. In addition, Power et al. (2014) acknowledged that being a parent often necessitates coming out to schools, other parents, and children's service providers. Similarly, Lindsay et al. (2006) described how lesbian mothers felt that it was helpful to come out to their children's school from the beginning in order to actively participate in reshaping the curriculum, which helped them feel that they were impacting students and creating an accepting environment for their children. Finally,

another family discussed how disclosing to others up front allows others to decide if they do not wish to get to know them.

The children in this study generally felt that disclosure was a non-issue and were very matter-of-fact as they described how they disclose to others, for example,

Saige Kimball: Oh, I tell my friends that my parents are gay.

While Gartrell et al. (2005) found that 57% of 10-year-olds with LGBQ parents chose to be out to their peers, no children in this study shared any hesitancy about disclosing. In addition, Breshears (2011) found that children of lesbian mothers are excited when they get to talk with other children with two moms. However, the mothers in the current study seemed to be more excited than their children. For example,

> **Alice Dawson**: Recently, Fin met another kid in class that has two moms as well, and I don't know who was more excited, me or Fin!
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: You were probably more excited.

Children of LGBQ parents often do not see their own family structure as different until they begin learning about how other families work (Tasker, 2005). This knowledge comes in the context of their school, neighborhood, friends, and other families. It is possible that because they have not faced much reaction from others, these children generally do not feel that their families are different from their peers'.

It is likely that the way others have reacted to them has dictated the way these families disclose and how they feel about disclosing. In general, families reported that they experienced mostly "non-reactions." They felt that people were generally supportive and accepting.

Terry Kimball: I think some people see difference as a good thing.

Bos et al. (2004) also found that lesbian mothers generally perceived little stigmatization or rejection.

Consistent with Lubbe (2008), children and parents in the current study noted that others have shared that they think it is cool to have two moms. At the same time, similarly to previous findings (Breshears, 2011), families reported that they received conflicting messages of approval and disapproval from others.

Two families noted that they had been put in the position of being the “token” lesbian-parented family. Parents were neutral about this and described feeling like “ambassadors” to others and were happy to educate others and answer questions. Some mothers shared that there have been times they were worried about what others thought; yet after they disclosed, they found that people reacted neutrally. Some parents thought that perhaps others simply do not say anything if they do not approve of their family. A few mothers believed that there is likely a difference that others feel between neutrality and true acceptance, and that this has felt evident to them especially in more religious settings.

Three children stated that they had experiences with other children making fun of them. Quintry Benson shared that she believed others had talked behind her back about her having two moms and explained that she felt sad about this because others are judging them for being different. Gartrell et al. (2005) also found that children were saddened when their classmates were discriminatory. Both Ethan Knapps and Ben Murphy shared that they thought others had laughed at them once for having two moms. Ethan did not seem to understand why others would have laughed at him for this, and Ben’s parents were a bit skeptical about his story. Overall, some parents were surprised that their children had not been teased more.

A few families disclosed overtly discriminatory experiences they had, for example, the Kimballs being told that they were “not a family” and that they could not

board a flight together. Parents were more aware of institutional discrimination, such as not being able to get married or as Mary Benson described, being single, not a homeowner, and not a parent in the eyes of the Internal Revenue Service. This is consistent with Negy and McKinney's (2006) findings that LGBT individuals may face prejudice around life transitions such as getting married or having children. Some families discussed their sensitivity to what they initially perceived as homophobic reactions from others, yet after thinking about it, they came to the conclusion that they must not have "clicked" with those people for other reasons. Some parents worried that other parents would not let their kids come over to their house. This happened with the Callahan family, although the child did eventually end up coming over.

Some families described how others have asked them intrusive questions. These questions ranged from asking about who the birth parent is, asking inappropriate questions about adoption or donorship, or referring to the donor as the "dad," which implies a relationship. The Murphys, who went with a known donor whom they planned to co-parent with, felt that the non-biological parent was ignored when they announced the pregnancy.

Times Are Changing: Acknowledgment that it is A Different World

Many parents described how different things are for them today regarding their sexual minority status in comparison to the environment in which they were raised. They described changes in relation to the current political and social climate, the increased family support they have experienced, the visibility of families like theirs in their children's school curriculum, and generational growth they have observed.

While most families acknowledged that we are "not there yet," they feel that our society has made significant progress in the areas of social justice and LGBTQ rights. Notably, as of this writing in April 2015, national marriage equality is going to the Supreme Court and is currently accepted by 37 states and Washington, DC (Freedom to Marry, Inc., n.d.).

When I asked participants to describe their families, they described their nuclear families, with some families describing their extended family including grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. Original research in the field of LGBTQ studies had identified how LGBTQ-identified individuals have constructed a family by choice when faced with rejection or a lack of support from their families of origin (Weston, 1991). Although many families identified friends who they are close to, no families in the current study referred to a family by choice. Perhaps the reason for this is that all participants felt accepted by their own families, and thus did not feel the need for a family by choice. While some participants described having struggles with their families of origin in the past regarding their sexual orientation, they felt that these relationships had improved since becoming parents. Once they had children, this seems to have brought the grandparents closer despite past feelings of distance. Current research supports the idea that individuals with minority identities are generally able to find support in their families of origin (Nabors, 2012), indicating that times truly are changing.

Mary Benson compared their family's experience to an older lesbian couple they know who were never out and who never had children. This couple shared with her that "we paved the way for your family." Mary, as well as other parents, described feeling the same way for her child and the next generation of children, whom they

hoped would view sexual orientation as “a non-issue.” This is consistent with a few parents’ anecdotes of being delighted overhearing children they know talking about how when they grow up they will have a “husband or wife.” In addition, while one parent acknowledged that she had experienced multiple violent acts of homophobia as a younger woman, this was not typical of participants’ experiences.

Although most parents in this study predicted that their children would likely be made fun of based on their sexual orientation, overall, their children did not report this happening. Previous research has been mixed and conflicting regarding the extent of children of LGBQ-identified parents experiencing discrimination. Gartrell et al. (2005) found that by age 10, 43% of children of lesbian mothers had experienced homophobia, and Leddy et al. (2012) found that older children remembered that their peers were less accepting when they were younger. Although it is difficult to compare the current sample to findings from quantitative research, the current results are not consistent with this previous research. These discrepancies may be due to the small sample size of the current research, geographical/metropolitan differences in measurement, or true differences in how quickly the social climate is changing.

**Acknowledgment of Biases:
Assumptions Are a
Two-Way Street**

Families acknowledged not only assumptions that others make about them, but assumptions that they have made about others and how these have been challenged. Some families identified stereotypes that they have faced from family or community members, such as the idea that non-heterosexual people should not have children or that they should adopt. Other families described how others have assumed that they

are heterosexual (e.g., facing questions such as "What does your husband do?") or not romantically connected (e.g., that they are sisters or that one of them is the nanny).

Families also identified assumptions that they have made about others and how these assumptions and stereotypes have been challenged. Most of these examples centered around assuming that politically conservative and religious individuals they know as family members, neighbors, or clergy would not accept their family. Participants described how these individuals challenged these assumptions by doing friendly neighborly tasks (e.g., mowing their lawn or asking how their children are doing in school), telling them how impressed they are with their children, and providing support during important milestones such as weddings. Some parents also described bristling when children asked them seemingly offensive questions, yet quickly realizing that these questions were benign and the child was just curious.

Some families described assumptions others made about how their children came to be, whether through adoption, donorship, or other avenues. Some parents noted that they faced others' stereotypes of how they should have children or remarks others made about the donor being a father figure. Margaret Callahan was the only child who was conceived through donorship who expressed an interest in knowing who the donor was. She has not been able to meet this person but has expressed curiosity about who he is and wrote letters to the sperm bank. As she shared,

> **Margaret Callahan**: In the letters, I always made sure to make it that I wasn't looking for a dad, I just wanted to know who this person was.

This is consistent with the Goldberg and Allen (2013) study with young adult children of lesbian mothers who were conceived with donors. These individuals also expressed curiosity about the donors and wanted to know their identity and were then satisfied

with knowing who they were and with the donors' level of involvement in their lives. The children in the Goldberg and Allen study spoke similarly about their donors as Margaret Callahan did, voicing frustration that others would think they were looking for a father.

Questioning the Relevance of Gender to Parenting

Responses in this theme fell into three categories: perceptions of differences between mothers and fathers, the belief parents had that children need female and male influence for healthy development, and a greater awareness of gender diversity and diversity in gender roles as same-gender parents.

The children in this study generally preferred mothers. They reported that other children are jealous that they have two moms and believed that mothers are nice, sweet, and "take care of you." They also shared that fathers are loud, smelly, strict, and make "inappropriate" jokes. One child, Ethan Knapps, went through a period in his life when he felt that there were "too many girls" in the house and wanted a father so he could hunt and protect them. Some mothers, like LaRae Callahan and Sophie Albright, shared that they felt they took on more "dad" roles such as going fishing with their kids and being more of the disciplinarian. Neither of these parents were biological parents, which may fit with other findings that biological mothers in lesbian relationships typically assume greater caregiving roles and experience more intimacy with their children (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010).

Most mothers discussed their perception of the necessity of both female and male influence for their children's development, especially for their sons. Mothers in the current study felt that it was important that their sons had male role models to be

well-rounded, in order to develop masculine traits, and to achieve developmental tasks that the mothers felt unequipped for, such as how to go to the bathroom standing up. Mothers described having interactions with each other, with family members, and even with strangers that emphasized that their children, especially their sons, need male influence. The mothers in this study enlisted the help of male friends, teachers, relatives, and neighbors to provide their sons with these experiences. Mothers also described positive aspects of their sons being raised by two women, specifically, that they believed their sons would learn to be polite, conscientious, and expressive of their emotions. Katie and Sara Knapps exemplified these conversations:

> **Katie Knapps**: We're two women and he's a boy—like where's the male influence?
> **Sara Knapps**: Your sister's said that.
> **Katie Knapps**: This man at the bar . . . asked, "Does he have a male role model?"
> **Sara Knapps**: Yeah, a male role model. Which I actually believe is important, especially for young boys, I think at this age is important. For girls, as they're older, like pre-teens and teens, it's important for girls to have a female role model. But I don't think it's absolutely necessary.
> **Katie Knapps**: But I don't think it has to be a parent, could be an uncle, close friend.
> **Sara Knapps**: I think they should be there, but it doesn't have to be a parent. I think he knows that he has two parents that love him. Really, I kind of feel like that's all you need, right?

The belief that male influence is essential for sons is consistent with the discussion of Long et al. (2006) that one of the greatest dilemmas facing same-gender couples (and single parents) is the societal belief that having opposite-gender role models is essential for normal child development. Biblarz and Stacey (2010) echo that entrenched in our societal values is a consensus that children raised by both a mother and father develop more successfully. Alex and Sinead Murphy discussed this belief

and their hesitation that expressing this belief condones the "traditional" argument against marriage equality and same-gender parenting.

> **Alex Murphy**: I hesitate to say this, because the argument against gay parenting is. . . . So, this relationship is unusual, right? There usually aren't two moms and two dads. There's usually a set of moms or a set of dads. The argument either way is, if there's two moms, a boy needs his father, right? That's sort of the traditional argument. And I really hesitate to say this, but I wonder if to some extent that's true!
> **Sinead Murphy**: And maybe it's not a father, but a father figure.

Yet, research overwhelmingly supports the idea that "when children fare well in two-parent lesbian-mother or gay-father families, this suggests that the gender of one's parents cannot be a critical factor in child development" (Patterson, 2006, p. 243). Parenting skills or influences are not exclusive to women or men (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Fedewa et al., 2014). Children of LGBQ parents are comparable in terms of gender development, social relationships, sexual orientation, and psychological adjustment (Tasker, 2005). Notably, where there are differences, children of LGBQ parents show greater psychological well-being (Fedewa et al., 2014).

Thus there is a disconnect between parents' beliefs that children need both female and male influences and research findings indicating that parental gender is not a critical factor in child development. We can look to queer theory to reconcile this discrepancy. Queer theory, emerging from feminist theories, emphasizes that power in society is enforced through socially constructed binaries of sex, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression (Oswald et al., 2009). These binaries are viewed as false linguistic distinctions, and when institutionalized, serve to ensure conformity and to keep some groups in power. All individuals in our society internalize these standards. Because the LGBTQ population has been historically devalued, they are most at risk for increased rates of mental health issues,

compromised personal safety, and access to health care, to name a few (Nabors, 2012). At the same time, Bos et al. (2004) found that lesbian parents do not experience high levels of internalized homophobia.

Lynn Curran was the only parent who voiced her awareness of her own internalized homophobia as it impacted her belief that her daughter, Elsa, needed male role models.

> **Lynn Curran**: I'm willing to say, it may just be a reaction to internalized homophobia saying that there should be [men in Elsa's life]! This underlying belief of "Oh, am I depriving my child of something," if there isn't that. Because there is enough research out there about the different ways that moms and dads interact, that kids need all sorts of types of stimulation, to be well-rounded. Well, no, there are all sorts of that are lacking or present in any one person. But I think it is that underlying belief, or fear, whether I'm depriving my child of something.
> **Ann Miller**: I was just thinking about that. Yes, I agree with that. But I do think that, I mean, Elsa is fine, I'm not worried about her, but there is a different male energy, there is something different. And I want her to have that different. . . . And have those relationships, and be around that different kind of energy, because I think that's a life skill. I think it will help her be more equipped to deal with life.

The mothers in this study, as evidenced by Lynn Curran and Ann Miller's above discussion, appeared to face a dialectical tension as they discussed gender and their belief that their children needed male role models. Dialectic is the process of "transforming apparent contradictions by engaging two opposite ends of a continuum" (Todd & Abrams, 2011, p. 355). It is a paradoxical approach that embraces the idea that people can be at multiple points on a continuum at the same time, and that movement between the poles is what helps individuals explore and resolve these apparent contradictions. While dialectics have been explored in the psychology literature thanks to Marsha Linehan's (1993) Eastern-influenced dialectical behavior

therapy, there is a paucity of research around using dialectical concepts around multicultural issues (Todd & Abrams, 2011).

Parents seemed to move along a continuum as they spoke. This continuum seems to have the idea that children need both male and female influence for optimal psychological development on one pole and the idea that two mothers can give their children everything they need for optimal psychological development on the other. These parents, aware that opponents of gay marriage have used this same argument for why their relationship is unacceptable, were hesitant to share that they may hold the same beliefs. At the same time, for example, Sara Knapps shared that she feels like having parents who love them is all children need for healthy development.

Perhaps previous research gives guidance for one way to resolve the dialectic. Schacher et al. (2005) conducted a focus group with gay male fathers who believed, like Sara Knapps does, that love and emotional attachment makes a family. Fathers in their study believed that this love transcends biological ties and can include many other important adults in their children's lives. While the families in the current study do not seem to feel the need for a family by choice because of supportive relationships in their families of origin (Weston, 1991), they all discussed seeking support from their parents, friends, neighbors, extended family, and schools. As Gerstel (2011) discussed, the traditional American emphasis on marriage and nuclear family may negate social ties that are critical to children's and communities' development. Having an extended network of supportive adults in children's lives is the rule, not the exception, in many cultures around the world. In addition, men in the Schacher et al. study felt that it was important to expose their children to a variety of cultures and different family structures. They felt that going against cultural norms is anxiety-

producing, and that it is crucial to have a network of friends and family to support them in this time of rapid social change.

The research literature provides additional information about what contributes to healthy psychological adjustment in children of LGBQ-identified parents. One of the major findings has been that children of LGBQ parents are indistinguishable psychologically from their straight-parented counterparts, with two notable exceptions. Biblarz and Stacey (2010) found that sons of both lesbian and heterosexual mother-only families showed greater gender role flexibility: They were no less masculine than children raised with a mother and a father, but were also more feminine. Research has also shown that as adults, children of same-gender parents are more open to trying same-gender relationships and more accepting of others in same-gender relationships (Golombok & Tasker, 1996).

Parents in the current study echoed many of these themes, indicating a greater awareness and wider understanding of gender and gender roles. For example, the Kimballs described feeling more comfortable than their heterosexual brothers would be with their son Tomás playing dress-up in pink dresses. Sara Knapps felt that her son would grow up to be more expressive of his emotions and more conscientious of women.

Some parents felt that they were modeling role negotiation regarding household chores, as opposed to making assumptions based on traditional gender roles. The topic of division of labor is well documented in the LGBTQ couples literature and is, in fact, one of the most well-researched topics. In general, LGBQ couples tend to assume that they will be carrying equal weight in household chores (Jonathan, 2009) and are more likely to try and maximize both partners' careers

(Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Lesbian women negotiate these roles more overtly in their relationships as compared with heterosexual couples and aim to divide chores based on the interests and ability of each partner (Kurdek, 2005). Tasker and Patterson (2007) found that the more equal the division of childcare between parents, the higher children's measures of psychological adjustment. The authors also described how lesbians report greater co-parenting satisfaction than do heterosexual couples and are more actively involved in daily parenting than many heterosexual fathers.

Finally, two families mentioned that while there may be some overlap in lesbian parents' increased awareness of gender identity and sexual orientation, parents may not necessarily be aware, comfortable talking, or even accepting of diversity in gender identity. One family, the Dawson-O'Rileys, was more aware of gender identity as their child Fin's preferred pronouns are "they/them." They have noticed that Fin is an advocate for diversity in gender identity and sexual orientation and observed Fin's assertiveness and felt proud that they have taught these values in their family.

Normality and Intersectionality:
We're the Same, It's Just
Two Women!

Overall, while this study focused on only one diversity factor (sexual orientation), this was not experienced as a particularly salient identity for parents or their children. The experience of motherhood was far more primary, although parents noted that earlier in their lives their sexual orientation was their primary identity. Mothers initially expressed to me that they wished to be perceived as "normal" and emphasized that their sexual orientation was a "non-issue," while later acknowledging

that there are some areas of uniqueness in their experience. It was evident that the children had been raised in an environment that valued diversity and appreciated that their differences were "cool" and made them unique. Finally, families seemed to experience a dialectical tension between the polarities of different/not different.

Many parents discussed their own coming out experiences, as well as how their relationship to their LGBQ identity has changed over time. Some mothers discussed how earlier in their lives, when they first came out, their LGBQ identity was the most salient identity for them.

> **Sara Knapps**: I think that when you're young, and single, and just in a relationship, being gay is your identity, that's who you are.

Now, all the interviewed parents feel that being a mother is their most salient identity. Homework, sports practice, being part of the school community, and dealing with parenting challenges are experienced as daily reminders that motherhood is the most prominent aspect of their lives. In addition, all families described that they have faced minimal sexual orientation-based discrimination as a family, and thus feel free to focus on raising their children without worrying about potential oppression. Some mothers noted that being gay or lesbian would have prevented them from getting married or being parents in the recent past. In essence, they felt that being a parent as well as getting married has included them in a different world—a world that some mothers did not think would be possible to be part of earlier in their lives due to institutionalized oppression. Thus consistent with previous research, motherhood may lead lesbian mothers to feel more connected in society. Even if lesbian women have faced discrimination based on their sexual orientation, they fulfill a valued role in American society when they become mothers (Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999).

Lesbian mothers in another study also described how they experienced being a lesbian mother as easier than "just" being a lesbian, as they felt society was more accepting of their relationship after having a child (Ben-Ari & Livni, 2006).

Most mothers described not thinking about their sexual orientation in their day-to-day life. This is consistent with findings that even in nonmetropolitan areas, LGBTQ-identified individuals did not find their sexual orientation especially salient in their everyday experiences (Holman & Oswald, 2011), and lesbian mothers generally perceive little stigmatization and rejection (Bos et al., 2004). All parents in this study described their own families as "normal" and "boring" and felt strongly that they wanted this to be portrayed through this research. Interestingly, previous research with adolescents found similar results. Welsh (2011) found that adolescents with LGBQ-identified parents experienced frustration that their families might be perceived as abnormal and felt pulled to "prove" their normalcy.

It is possible that these parents, as well as the older adolescents in Welsh's (2011) study, had greater awareness of the consequences of being labeled as "different" based on being part of a historically marginalized population. One parent brought up her hesitation with this research topic, wondering if we were sending a message to her daughter that there is something negative or different about their family by even having this conversation focused on sexual orientation. Other parents acknowledged the fact that they are two women is inherently different from most families, yet wondered if this was a meaningful difference. Yet, if someone ignores or negates their sexual orientation as part of one's identity, one may have a reaction. One mother shared,

> **Mary Benson:** It's one of those things where, if somebody assumes that it's the issue, it's not. But if someone assumes that that issue does not affect it, then it does . . . [it] has a piece in everything."

While parents felt strongly that they did not want to be differentiated from other families solely based on their sexual orientation, their children seemed to identify and value the differences between all families. Children in this study seemed to not only have a sophisticated understanding of what makes families different and unique, but they also valued these differences. They identified variables that allow all families to be unique, such as the kinds of pets they have or the kinds of hobbies and activities they engage in as a family. They also identified similarities between all families, for example, one child describing how she gets in trouble just like other kids do, and gets "snuggles" when she needs them just like other kids.

These children have not experienced discrimination based on their parents' sexual orientation. In particular, the younger children had no understanding of why their families might be discriminated against or considered different in a negative way. These mothers described how they have intentionally chosen schools, friends, and other environments in which diversity is celebrated and encouraged, and this seems evident in the children's responses that their families are "cool" and that all families are unique and different in multiple ways. Their mothers described having a deep appreciation of times when they see their family structure represented in books, classrooms, and in the media. Similar to their children's responses, some parents also identified ethnicity, adoptive status, discipline and parenting style, or differing boundaries regarding openness and privacy as unique diversity variables, while noting that discrimination can occur based on other areas as well. While their experiences varied, no family primarily identified themselves as a "gay family" or an "LGBTQ

family." Overall, these children's life experiences of learning that differences are valued and celebrated is a substantial difference from their parents' past experiences of having their differences being viewed as negative or pathological. If difference is not bad, it is cool to be different!

As described earlier in regard to gender, these parents also have a dialectical awareness of "different–not different." Parents alluded to this dialectical tension and shifted along the dialectic as they talked with me. Specifically, toward the beginning of the interview, many parents initially ensured that I knew that they were "normal" and how their sexual orientation is a "non-issue." They described how they were just like other families and dealt with the same challenges as other parents. At this point in the interview, some parents seemed to want to minimize their differences in being an LGBQ-parented family and described how they wanted to make sure that this research described that they were just like other families. It seemed that once I validated this for them and acknowledged that I was not necessarily seeking out difference or sameness, this opened the door for families to acknowledge that having two mothers is different in some ways, particularly around the lack of prescribed gender roles and being identified as part of a minority group.

Evident in participants' statements was the tension that they, as well as our society, experience. Even within their families, these mothers' lived experiences of living in a time when they could not get married and where their sexual orientation has been pathologized comes into conflict with their young children's lived experiences of seeing difference as special and valued. These mothers developed their LGBQ identity at a time when they faced societal oppression and have worked hard to protect their children from experiencing this. These mothers are moving through their own

process of identity development based on their intersecting identities (Warner & Shields, 2013). Identifying as part of a societally valued group, as mothers, intersects with their historically oppressed status as a sexual minority. In addition, compounding the complexity is their awareness of other diversity markers, and parents mentioned ethnicity, gender, their children's adoptive status, and religion as other parts of themselves they are aware of impacting their family.

The children in this study seemed more "okay" with the both/and nature of their identity as an LGBQ-parented family. Many children, including the older ones who had more of an awareness that society has discriminated against families like theirs, did not seem to struggle as much with this tension as their parents did. They love their families and feel that there are many things that make their family, as well as every family, special.

These discussions of dialectics have only emerged minimally in the research literature specifically around sexual orientation and gender. Yet, as Hequembourg and Farrell (1999) noted, these families combine a historically marginalized identity as LGBQ with a societally valued identity as a parent, and thus have a unique perspective. Ariel and McPherson (2000) summarized this dialectical struggle well:

> One of the most remarkable aspects of working with LGBQ-identified individuals is the continual awareness of two realities. The first is the universal reality of ordinary human beings struggling together to create intimate bonds that allow both individual freedom and family cohesion. The second is the particular reality of societal prejudice; at any moment, a gay- or lesbian family can become the object of hate or derision that powerfully affects self-esteem and the level of stress within the family. Being able to hold both of these realities is primary to intervening effectively with any oppressed group. (p. 430)

Implications

Research and Methodological Implications

The purpose of conducting whole family interviews was to have data to describe the interactions and relationships between family members, a focus of systems theory (Bateson, 1972). In addition, in alignment with systems theory, it is assumed that an individual's behavior and symptoms always make sense in the person's broader relational contexts (Gehart, 2010). It is also important to continue research from a systems-constructivist lens, because each family member may make a different meaning out of an identical event (Dahl & Boss, 2005).

The Woodward-Albrights were the only family who suggested that I talk with their son John individually, as he did not say much throughout the interview. At the same time, they also acknowledged that perhaps he was not saying much because they were speaking for him. This information about their family dynamics would not have been gathered had they not been in the interview together.

> **Carmen Woodward**: I think that the time we went to family counseling, I don't think she made an issue of whether it was two moms, but I think she must have gotten a lot more out of him to talk about instead of us being here.
> **Rachel Gall**: Yeah, I actually really went back and forth about that for me, like thinking about wanting to do separate interviews or not, but for me, my philosophy is that so much more happens when you get all of the family members in the same room together, and John is saying so much without needing to use words, I think.
> **Carmen Woodward**: I think that we tend to speak for him a lot.

Another methodological implication is the importance of building rapport with research participants. As Katie Knapps discussed, families may be hesitant to open up without knowing the researcher or the purpose of the study.

> **Katie Knapps**: Families you're interviewing, it sounds like they're all in big, pretty progressive cities, so it's not really an issue very much, and people will

> only ever say anything, once they kind of, in general, if they know you pretty well and they feel like the time is right.

It may be helpful for researchers to emphasize confidentiality in their recruitment materials as a way to address participants' hesitancy. This may also be a way to broaden the pool of interested participants. Many participants in this study had attended graduate school and done their own research and felt a need to give back to me as a researcher by participating. Homogenous samples are a limitation in the field of LGBT family studies in general (Moore, 2008).

Notably, most of the families I interviewed in the Rocky Mountain region called me before consenting to participate to ask about myself and the purposes of my research. More than one family told me that they wanted to make sure that the research was "going to be used in the right way." Interestingly, families in the Pacific Northwest did not ask me these questions. One explanation of that could be that the Pacific Northwest has historically been more progressive with LGBTQ rights and that could be reflected in potential participants' level of comfort and trust with unknown researchers. It may be helpful, particularly for researchers in less progressive areas, to spend more time building rapport in screening conversations, engaging in more conversation before beginning the interview, and using more self-disclosure to build trust and increase comfort.

Theoretical Implications

Intersectionality theory. Based on participants' responses, the use of intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) to inform counseling psychologists' practice will benefit LGBQ-parented families. The Benson, Kimball, Murphy, and Callahan families all discussed their sense of being part of a family as their primary identity.

They each acknowledged their multiple identities and the way they view these intersecting with the typical challenges of all families. The Bensons emphasized how important it is to neither ignore nor focus on their sexual orientation and acknowledged that each part of their identity will impact and inform another:

> **Karen Benson**: It's a factor I'm sure in some ways, but it's also not necessarily that different. I think that when we struggle with all the same things mostly that everyone else does, you know, like keeping the house clean, keeping everything together, you know, and I think it's not that different.
> **Mary Benson**: It's funny, because it's one of those things where, if somebody assumes that it's the issue, it's not. But if someone assumes that that issue does not affect it, then it does!
> **Karen Benson**: That will bother us, yeah.
> **Mary Benson**: It's a part of everything and it's not the cause of everything. One of the things that I struggled with with our church in the beginning, was, they were like, "This isn't an issue to us, tell us about all the other things about yourself." Yeah, I get that you don't want to make this an issue, but for our lives.

The Kimball family acknowledged the great diversity in all families and also identified a difference in that they do not divide household chores along gender roles, and that they are negotiated.

> **Saige Kimball**: We're kind of like everybody else but the reason that we're different is because we're not, like. . . . There's no mom and dad, it's just a mom and a mom, but it feels like it's the same as usual. Like if you thought, it's the same as any other family. It's just that they're different, that there's two moms or two dads.
> **Terry Kimball**: I think we did worry about it and take classes before having kids, and I would just say overall, like 98% is the same. I mean, knowing that there are different families out there, families remarried, families' kids being raised by grandparents, kids being raised by aunts, all different situations, and kids that were adopted and fostered. . . . So I think to a certain degree that tolerance is realizing that of course we're a different family, but then every family is different. And it's part of why we're different, for the most part. The kids still have parents that have two different opinions. . . . The rules of our family still apply, we just don't divide on gender lines.
> **Rosa Kimball**: So I would say that the things that are different are just the things that are different in any gay relationship, which is that a lot more things are negotiated, as opposed to following along the gender lines. Who does the cooking, who takes out the garbage, whatever. I mean, just those sort of assumptions.

> **Terry Kimball**: Who fixes the house, who works on the garden. . . . We kind of got it figured out.

LaRae Callahan suggested that although perhaps individuals in rural areas may react differently to their family, she does not think that any of their potential family struggles are unique to her or her wife's sexual orientation.

> **LaRae Callahan**: Again, I don't think that it's any different. I think that we have the same struggles as any other family. Maybe if we lived in rural Idaho or something like that, then maybe our kids would want to talk to a counselor about just how difficult it is that kids can't come over and hang out just because they have two moms. I think it's probably very, very different in areas where it's not as accepted. I just can't imagine that there's . . . I think you guys have the same problems as any other kid! Like if you have a problem with depression, I don't think it's going to be unique to having two moms, not here. But I can see that being an issue somewhere else. And not that we would never have a problem, but I don't know that if we had a problem that it would be any different than if a husband and a wife did. A lot of times family problems don't have anything to do with your gender. It's just personalities.

Sinead Murphy also acknowledged that families may present in therapy with feelings about the way that others react to them.

> **Sinead Murphy**: Well I don't think it would be very different. We experience the same issues as heterosexual families. But I think it would be important to know that there are different things we might encounter that might be difficult. Like people's reactions in schools, other kids, in the workplace. We have been really lucky in the workplace, and school, and in the neighborhood, but I can imagine that in other areas that are not so accepting they may have troubles.

Relational-cultural theory. Based on participants' responses, relational-cultural theory may also be a good theoretical fit for counseling psychologists working with LGBQ-parented families. Relational-cultural theory focuses on feelings of connection or disconnection resulting from the impact the dominant culture has on relationships (Comstock et al., 2008). Two parents directly identified that people in LGBQ-parented families could have experiences outside their family that could impact their relationships.

> **Sara Knapps**: I don't think it's so much the interpersonal relationships that therapists would need to be aware of, I think it's the external relationships in relation to the kind of family that they are. So the way that the world would perceive our family, that is something that needs to be taken into account. But not exactly our family dynamic, because I think our family dynamic is exactly the same as anybody else's. But I think the way we relate to the outside world, I think that's subtly different.

> **Lynn Curran**: Neither of us had particularly traumatic coming out experiences, I think. I didn't, and I haven't heard of any and I think I've known [Ann] long enough, but that could really influence if the family in their coming together lost other family relationships.

Practical and Clinical Implications for Counseling Psychologists

In this section I discuss practical and clinical implications for counseling psychologists. I first discuss implications based on emergent themes, and I then present suggestions that families gave during the interviews. These implications are both on the micro level (in-session considerations) as well as at the macro (social justice, advocacy, and policy) level. These implications are also intended for psychologists working with all families, not only LGBQ-parented families.

Many families discussed how they made both conscious decisions about where to live based on the perceived level of acceptance of that community, and how they felt privileged to be able to make this choice. Thus for counseling psychologists working with more rural families or families with less education or fewer economic opportunities, it may be important to explore their experience. For example, it may bring up important clinical information to discuss how parents decided to live where they live, or if they have experienced any barriers based on their sexual orientation. If these families feel as though they have less of a choice of where to live, they may experience increased stigma and stress. Because LGBQ-parented families in metropolitan areas have greater access to LGBTQ-affirming mental health services, it

may perhaps be more important to bolster affirming mental health services for rural families in need.

From a macro, social justice, and policy perspective, it is important for counseling psychologists to advocate for reduced barriers for LGBQ couples as they begin planning to have children. Many participants described institutional barriers to having children, including experiencing stereotypes about how or even if they should have children. Legal issues around adoption and donorship were common. Psychologists could play an important role in educating others as well as minimizing parents' sense of having to be "approved" as parents by the government, adoption agencies, or fertility clinics.

In addition, many parents shared how they have intentional discussions with their children around diversity issues and potential discrimination they may face. The mothers in this study were generally well-educated and trained in diversity issues. All families, including LGBQ-identified parents who for some reason have not had these conversations with their children, can be supported in counseling to begin these conversations around diversity, celebrating uniqueness, or how to respond to discrimination. Prior research has shown that family cohesion, communication, nurturance, and support are protective factors against discrimination. Counseling psychologists could help families, who have not had the type of mental health and diversity training as these parents did, have these conversations with each other when they are ready, develop pride in their families, and develop a strong family narrative.

Counseling psychologists may be able to help families develop ways in which to advocate for themselves or speak up in situations in which they are experiencing discrimination. While the interviewed families in this study did not seem to have a

need for this, it is possible that more rural families or families with parents who do not have knowledge of multicultural issues may be afraid of speaking up or not knowing how to have these conversations. Counseling psychologists could help families discuss ways in which they feel comfortable advocating for themselves, while keeping safety, context, and client self-determination in mind. In family therapy sessions, counseling psychologists could expand discussions of diversity to include not only sexual orientation, but clients' intersecting identities and other ways they experience privilege and oppression.

Another dimension of advocacy and visibility for LGBQ-parented families is in the classroom setting. Many parents described their willingness to come to their children's classrooms and present about their family structure. At the same time, it is not these families' responsibility to ensure their family structure is represented at school. Other families described being delighted to see their type of family represented in children's drawings, posters, books, and videos in class. For mental health professionals working in a school setting, it is important to advocate for diverse families to be visible. Counseling psychologists working with families could have knowledge of books about diverse families to recommend, as well as have diverse families on display in the form of books, pictures on the walls, or in advertising materials.

Many parents discussed how their relationships with their families-of-origin have changed over time, specifically regarding their sexual orientation. For some participants, their parents took time to become accepting of their sexual orientation, and the addition of children seemed to help bring these grandparents to a more involved and accepting place. Therefore, it may be helpful for counseling

psychologists to take a thorough history or use a genogram with families to assess family-of-origin relationships, how they have changed over time, and if there is any tension around this issue. For example, one participant noted that her father took some time to accept that her children "belonged" to her, because she was in a lesbian relationship and was not the biological mother. Counseling psychologists may also want to expand the invitation to family therapy sessions to extended family in these cases.

Families acknowledged that they have both experienced when others have made assumptions about them, and they have made assumptions about others. It is important for counseling psychologists working with diverse families to identify the assumptions and biases they hold and to ensure that they are using sensitive, inclusive, and appropriate language. For example, many parents and children noted that they tend to bristle when someone refers to the donor as the "dad." Other families did not feel that the phrase "gay family" or "LGBTQ family" was appropriate, as they wanted to be described as a family. Having inclusive written materials may help reduce assumptions on the part of the therapist, for example, allowing clients to self-identify their sexual orientation, gender, and preferred pronouns on intake paperwork.

Counseling psychologists could also play a part in challenging clients' assumptions of others. Many participants noted, for example, assumptions they made based on a person's religious views or political affiliation. They felt that their eyes were opened when these stereotypes they held were broken, and counseling psychologists could help clients become more aware of inherent biases they hold that may serve as barriers to connection within their neighborhoods, schools, and communities.

Another way that counseling psychologists may challenge their clients in session is around gender. As evident in this study, very young children have clear views regarding the differences between mothers and fathers. Parents have clear views that children need male and female influence for optimal psychological development. Counseling psychologists could help families take a critical view toward gender. This more critical perspective could serve to identify internalized homophobia and to acknowledge potential shame that parents experience if they perceive they are not able to provide their children with what they need. This may involve identifying societal messages and standards in session to determine whether the family feels those are helpful for their family or not. Counseling psychologists can share affirming research that shows that overall children fare just as well in mother-only homes, or that children of LGBQ parents tend to have greater gender flexibility and awareness of diversity. Counseling psychologists can also encourage parents to develop diverse networks of friends and supportive figures in their children's lives that are not only limited to gender differences.

It was important to each of the interviewed families that they were seen as "just like everyone else." I found that validating this sense of normalcy built rapport and opened the doors to more personal and sensitive conversations regarding sexual orientation. This dialectic illustrates the necessity of counseling psychologists' keeping in mind clients' intersecting identities. For these parents, their identity as mothers was most salient in their day-to-day lives, yet sexual orientation became more salient at moments of discrimination or institutional barriers. For example, if a couple was not able to get married, they would not have been able to benefit from the privileges associated with marriage and thus may experience a sense of loss, anger, or

disconnection from society that may become relevant in therapy. Singling out one particular diversity factor, such as sexual orientation, may negate or minimize other aspects of a person's identity, and thus it is important for counseling psychologists to view clients' identities from a holistic, developmental, and intersectional perspective. These conversations about sexual orientation could be situated within a wider conversation about diversity to avoid singling out one aspect of clients' identities that may or may not be salient for them at that point in time.

One protective factor for families is having a unique and cohesive identity as a family. Children in this study had a broader range of what they considered diversity variables, which included what kinds of pets they had, hobbies, and family activities. Counseling psychologists in family therapy could help families solidify their unique identity through developing and telling their family narrative or by engaging in activities such as drawing a family crest or developing a family cheer.

In the second section I describe families' suggestions for counseling psychologists. During the interview, I asked participants to consider what they thought would be helpful for counseling psychologists to know when seeing families like theirs. Families identified a number of practical implications for counseling psychologists, including suspending assumptions, using inclusive language, and taking a thorough history.

Suspending assumptions. Four parents identified the importance of the therapist suspending assumptions. As described above, families generally felt that there are few things that would set them apart from other families in therapy. They felt that it would be unfair to assume that there are differences, or that there are not differences. They cautioned therapists against thinking that they know all about their

family because they have read a book, taken a class, or worked with others in the community before, because all families are different. Participants identified many different kinds of assumptions that they thought therapists may make, such as assuming that they have experienced discrimination, assumptions about the origins of the children, assumptions that they are a great family simply because of the sexual orientation of the parents, assuming that they are different or not different, or placing them in the "token" or "ambassador" role of speaking for all LGBTQ-parented families.

> **Sinead Murphy**: It's hard not to make assumptions, but for a counselor not to make assumptions right away. Make assumptions like they read certain literature about all families experience this or that. Just like, not making assumptions about what they might be experiencing.
>
> **Rosa Kimball**: So I think it's just wise to go in with fewer assumptions, if that's possible. But you have to learn where those lines are in a gay family.
>
> **Sara Knapps**: Right, or understanding that we, maybe not making the assumption that we really are that different. That other people really don't see us differently. I think the assumption that other people do see us differently can be just as detrimental.
>
> **Ann Miller**: I think that working with any, as sort of a cultural competency issue, I think being aware that there's a lot you don't know. And to really listen and to not make a lot of assumptions. Because there are things that will be very much the same, and there will be things that will be very different. And yet, it's not that you can sit down with a textbook and teach those things necessarily. Those are experiences. And each family will be different, and each kid will, and I think how the family came to be.

The Shelton and Delgado-Romero (2011) research supported similar findings. They described common microaggressions experienced by LGBQ individuals in therapy and how therapists can stereotype or make harmful assumptions about these clients. They described how this can impact the therapeutic process and cause clients to feel

powerless, suppressed, angry, and skeptical. This can also cause clients to doubt the therapist's effectiveness, ability, and investment in helping them.

Importance of language. Three families discussed the importance of the therapist's language, each in a very different way. The Dawson-O'Riley family is attuned to inclusivity around gender identity and suggested that counseling psychologists add "preferred gender pronoun" to forms, as well as giving everyone, including children, a chance to identify and discuss their gender identity in therapy. This echoes a suggestion by Bigner and Wetchler (2012) that children may need a place to explore their gender identity.

> **Alice Dawson**: I think one thing, is a tiny little thing, is that on one of the forms [the demographic information form] it asks what our gender is.
> **Fin Dawson-O'Riley**: My gender's "they."
> **Alice Dawson**: So you could put, like, what your preferred pronoun is.
> **Dorothy O'Riley**: Totally. Allowing people to self-identify, even kiddos . . . I think that would be great for elementary-aged kids, that it's okay to ask, in those interactions, in family therapy sessions, "How do you feel about your gender?". . . But it certainly does come up in groups, like it doesn't matter who I'm facilitating or who I'm doing a group with, but I always ask at check-in to do your preferred gender pronoun, your PGP [preferred gender pronoun], go ahead and put it out there. . . . Oh yeah, having it on a form is so affirming. That's what I have learned. And being more aware of it because of Fin, I see the lack of it.

Sophie Albright discussed the impact of the use of the term "LGBT family." She felt that it was unfair to qualify the word "family" with "LGBT," as she views her status as part of a family as her primary identity.

> **Sophie Albright**: I mean, I think for me, my answer would be not to even describe it. . . . When you categorize us as a LGBT family, I mean, obviously that's what we are, but . . . I don't think that should be the title of it. We're a family.

Finally, Lynn Curran suggested listening to how families are talking about the fact that they have LGBQ-identified parents. She felt it would be important for counseling

psychologists to listen for levels of outness and disclosure, and that this would have implications for therapy.

> **Lynn Curran**: And just understanding how each individual family talks about it, or how open they are, or not open. How they tell people or don't tell people.

Finally, when families do present in therapy to discuss issues directly related to sexual orientation, psychologists must be able to provide a safe space for families (Bigner & Wetchler, 2012). It is possible these families have attempted these conversations on their own and were unsuccessful.

History-taking. It is important for counseling psychologists to take a thorough history, listening for any experiences of oppression or stigmatization, coming out history of the parents and how this impacted their relationships, and listening for any cutoffs, strain, or loss of relationships due to their identity.

> **Lynn Curran**: [Issues around coming out or losing relationships are] going to bring a very different history. So in some ways that's not any different than any other family that you're working with, you need to know their history. There just may be different aspects of their history that you want to make sure you're asking about, or open to, or understanding.

Reactions of therapists. Three families discussed the importance of therapists' reactions to families.

> **Terry Kimball**: They want the same dignity given to them, and their partners and children, especially for the children I think because to keep the reaction to a minimum because it'll throw off therapy.

Families may choose a therapist based on their experience with the LGBTQ population or their openness to seeing LGBTQ-identified clients.

> **Sara Knapps**: I have a therapist that I've been seeing for . . . four years, she's amazing, and my first question when I was looking for a therapist was, "Hey, do you have any experience with same-sex relationships?" You know, we have a relationship that's really just like everybody else, but there's some difference. She had never had same-sex clients come in, just because it wasn't where she was located, but she was aware, she was able to basically kind of

> understand it. But really at the heart of it it's really just the same as anything else.

Mary Benson also acknowledged the silencing that can come along with being a member of a minority population. She shared that many individuals may not feel empowered or even know to ask questions of their therapist.

> **Mary Benson**: I would have more ownership over asking those questions of the counselor, but I also know that there's people that come from very different, the person I would choose would have some insight into those things and be open to, you know. But not everyone feels empowered to go to a therapist and ask those questions.

Therefore, it may also be helpful for counseling psychologists to demonstrate their openness to working with LGBTQ clients. As Sara discussed, she was not necessarily looking for a therapist with experience with LGBTQ-identified clients, but she was looking for a therapist who was open and accepting of this part of her identity. Putting up signs, discussing openness to seeing clients with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in written materials or on a website, or being on resource lists for LGBTQ clients may be ways that counseling psychologists can increase their visibility and demonstrate their interest in working with this population.

Overall, the LGBQ-parented families in this study did not believe that they would present in therapy with any different issues than other families. They feel that they struggle with the challenges of being a family just like all other families. This is consistent with Green and Mitchell's (2008) acknowledgment that LGBQ couples are more likely to seek out therapy for other issues than directly being related to their sexual orientation.

These families did acknowledge that they would like a therapist who has multicultural competence; specifically, by suspending assumptions they might have

about their family, using inclusive language, and taking a thorough history with special attention being paid to uniquely LGBQ issues. Families suggested that counseling psychologists neither negate nor focus on their sexual identity. They felt that their sexual orientation is one part of their identity, and that other identities, such as being a parent or their ethnicity, might be more salient for them in therapy.

Most mothers in this study reported the belief that their sons need male role models for healthy gender development. Yet, the research does not indicate that children experience detrimental effects from having same-gender parents (Fedewa et al., 2014). In fact, research supports the idea that children experience positive psychological effects, particularly regarding openness to diversity and greater gender role flexibility (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Golombok & Tasker, 1996). Feminist and queer theories thus suggest that these mothers' beliefs may be attributable to internalized homophobia and socially constructed gender binaries. Therefore, LGBTQ parents may experience shame or feelings of inadequacy around perceiving that they are not giving their children what they need. It may be helpful for psychologists to be aware of these potential feelings and to help parents identify and deconstruct these internalized beliefs. Building on the work of Olga Silverstein, noted feminist family therapist, LGBTQ parents and their children could be encouraged to question binaries, examine what it means to be a caring parent, and explore what they want for their children independent of gender stereotypes (Silverstein & Rashbaum, 1994).

Given the above discussion, these families' responses carry implications for counseling psychologists' work with all families, not only families with LGBQ parents. Each family is unique, each family has challenges, and each family has multiple intersecting identities. Every person can benefit from exposure to diverse

individuals and perspectives and developing a critical eye toward socially constructed binaries and issues of internalized privilege and oppression. Every couple parenting children can benefit from intentional discussions around gender roles and expectations (Jonathan, 2009). Although they come from a historically marginalized population, this was overwhelmingly not the way these participants think of themselves or wish to be viewed. They wish to be treated the same as any clients and hope that their counselors can enter the therapeutic relationship with openness, a fresh perspective, and by letting each family tell their story.

Limitations

The nature of this study was to qualitatively explore the experiences of same-gender-parented families. I chose to collect data in large urban areas, and participants were self-selecting. Each participant family noted that their experiences would likely be much different if they lived in a rural area. Many families also deliberately chose to live in large cities due to expecting more acceptance and more liberal views. Therefore, it is likely that it would be a completely different study with a different set of results if I had chosen to conduct this research in a rural setting.

In addition, the demographics of these participants are quite homogenous, with multiple privileged identities. All of the parents identify as female and Caucasian (two mothers identified as Latino). They are mostly in their late 30s to late 40s and are upper middle class. Therapists and social workers are highly overrepresented, and many participants have graduate degrees. It is likely that these individuals have more education, awareness, and training regarding social justice and the experiences of minority populations. Many have been involved in or have done their own research themselves and felt a desire to “return the favor” by participating in my study. These

participants are, in general, an educated group of women who understand the purpose and nature of research and who deliberately educate their children around issues of social justice. Although individuals who identify as LGBTQ may be more aware of these issues in general, this study described the experiences of a very specific subgroup of lesbian-parented families. I believe it is both a strength and limitation that these women have both personal experience and professional training in diversity issues. They are both participants and observers in the experience of identifying as lesbians and thus offer a unique perspective. At the same time, this perspective may or may not be representative of the lived experiences of other LGBQ-parented families.

There was also inherent sampling bias in this research. I attempted to recruit participants through community listservs and organizations. However, some of my participants were recruited through snowball sampling and personal and professional connections. Participants were self-selecting, valued this type of research, valued a social justice perspective, and were willing to allow me into their home, videotape their family, and ask deeply personal questions about their family and their identity. While my goal was to achieve maximum variation within this sample (Creswell, 2007), this was not achieved regarding gender and ethnic diversity of participants. However, the origins of children in this study were quite diverse, with children coming from previous relationships, from donors, through adoption, and through the foster care system.

It is also possible that a social desirability effect impacted the results of this study (Edwards, 1957). Participants may have anticipated what they perceived my desired responses to be and answered accordingly. They may have wanted to appear a

certain way to their family members or to potential readers of this study. As participants became engaged with my questions, it is my hope that they became more comfortable and genuine throughout the interview.

Finally, I developed this study based on my perspective, my culture, and my worldview. It is possible my views may be different from my participants' or my readers' views. Although I attempted to bracket my experiences and utilize other methods of triangulation to increase trustworthiness, there is inherent subjectivity in this type of research. My intent is that counseling psychologists reading this research will choose which parts of the results, if any, apply to their counseling practice.

Future Directions for Counseling Psychology Research

It is important for counseling psychologists to be knowledgeable in their work with diverse families. My hope is that this study has contributed, in a small way, to the literature on diverse family systems so that psychologists can increase their evidence base in working with this population. The following recommendations are suggested for further areas of study.

Regarding methodology, I recommend that qualitative researchers take a more systemic approach to family research. Although I acknowledge my bias as a systemically-trained therapist, I believe that the experience of talking and interacting with whole families was extremely valuable. Taking a systemic approach, especially involving children, is more complex and takes into account family dynamics, developmental considerations, and practically speaking, is harder to track and transcribe. Yet, it is possible that more integrated or holistic information could be missed if only one family member was interviewed.

Another theme that many families mentioned was experiencing barriers to having children. These barriers came in the form of lack of knowledge if an adoption agency would be accepting, inability to have an international adoption due to certain country's discriminatory practices, being treated as an infertility case, having to be "in the system," or fear of legal retaliation from the birth parent. All LGBTQ-identified parents must go through a unique process to have children. This process in itself is likely to be stressful, expensive, and time-consuming, even without the added challenges of doing this within a system that can be discriminatory. A future area of research could be advocating for reducing barriers to adoption, surrogacy, and donorship.

Another future direction for research is the impact of marriage equality, and in general, how LGBT-parented families feel that the culture is changing. Although families in this particular study generally denied experiencing overt discrimination, they still experience others, for example, making assumptions about their gender or asking intrusive questions about the origins of their children. Many parents mentioned that their children live in a world where they do not even know that being gay is something that people have judged or made fun of. Now that marriage equality is snowballing throughout the country, this is likely to have an impact on perceived levels of acceptance and oppression.

Families in this study consistently mentioned that they deliberately chose an area of the country to live in based on their expectations of acceptance and openness from the local community. It is likely that the experiences of same-gender-parented families living in rural areas would be quite different in notable ways. It is possible that it will be more challenging to reach out to participants living in more rural areas

of the country. However, this area of research could benefit mental health practitioners understand their experiences in order to support rural LGBT-parented families, who may experience more oppression or isolation.

Yet another future direction could be in the area of extended-family parenting specific to LGBQ-identified parents. This area of research has been explored regarding ethnic and class differences in the expectations of extended family involvement, as well as questioning the definition of "traditional family" itself (Gerstel, 2011). Parents in the current study valued their extended networks of family, friends, neighborhoods, schools, and community organizations. Given the increasing numbers of LGBQ-parented families with children in the United States, and given that these families are more likely to have non-traditional parenting setups, this is likely to be an area of study that warrants further research (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

The current study was limited to primarily Caucasian lesbian mothers, who were overall highly educated. It is recommended that future research seek to incorporate participants with other diversity factors including differences in socioeconomic status, religion, geographic location, and gay male or transgender parents. For example, as the research suggests, society may attribute different parenting roles to fathers, and men as parents may face more societal barriers (Power et al., 2012). In general, it may be less helpful to isolate one particular identity (e.g., LGBQ-identified participants) than to view individuals and families from a lens of intersecting identities. This would help to steer the field away from false binaries (e.g., comparing gay-parented and straight-parented families) to a more holistic view of the complexity of families and their multiple, intersecting identities.

Concluding Thoughts and Reflections

The mental health profession has not been historically kind to the GLBTQ population. Homosexuality has been pathologized, and researchers have used the guise of science to marginalize and oppress individuals and families. My hope is that the spirit of future research will be a stance of curiosity rather than assuming difference or sameness. I hope that we can continue expanding our understanding of identity and diversity to be holistic, non-binary, and multifaceted.

As of this writing in May 2015, marriage equality is currently being debated in the United States Supreme Court. I defended this dissertation before we hear the decision. Part of me feels regret that I was not conducting this research a few years ago so that it could have hopefully contributed in a small way to the body of literature around LGBTQ parenting in order to support this cause. Regardless of outcome, a change in law will not erase discrimination. Yet, it is my sincere hope that we can move in the direction of inclusivity by granting all families the right to marriage.

In June 2014, I attended PrideFest in Seattle to recruit participants by talking with vendors, businesses, and community organizations. Previously, my recruitment strategies had been mostly over the telephone or e-mail. Armed with my rainbow shirt and my rainbow-printed fliers, I made the rounds to so many booths that I eventually lost my voice. I talked with wedding photographers, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome educators, adoption agencies, and religious organizations. More times than I can count, people took me by the hand to introduce me to their friend a few booths down who might know someone who knows someone who has a family for me.

I was deeply touched and surprised by how many people told me, "Thank you for doing this research." I have been moved by the vulnerability and thoughtfulness of my participants. It was an honor to hear their stories.

REFERENCES

Adams, J. L., Jaques, J. D., & May, K. M. (2004). Counseling gay and lesbian families: Theoretical considerations. *The Family Journal, 12,* 40-42. doi:10.1177/1066480703258693

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. (2005). *Position statement on couples and families.* Retrieved from http://www.aamft.org/iMIS15/AAMFT/MFT_Resources/MFT_Resources/Content/Resources/Position_On_Couples.aspx

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text rev.). Washington, DC: Author.

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: Author.

American Psychological Association. (2004). *Policy statement on sexual orientation, parents and children.* Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/about/policy/parenting.aspx

American Society on Aging. (2010). *Still out, still aging: The MetLife study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender baby boomers*. Retrieved from https://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/mmi/publications/studies/2010/mmi-still-out-still-aging.pdf

Ariel, J., & McPherson, D. W. (2000). Therapy with lesbian and gay parents and their children. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 26*, 421-432.

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind.* San Francisco, CA: Chandler.

Ben-Ari, A., & Livni, T. (2006). Motherhood is not a given thing: Experiences and constructed meanings of biological and nonbiological lesbian mothers. *Sex Roles, 54*, 521-531. doi:10.1007/s11199-006-9016-0

Bergstrom-Lynch, C. A. (2012). How children rearrange the closet: Disclosure practices of gay, lesbian, and bisexual prospective parents. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 8*, 173-195. doi:10.1080/1550428X.2011.623929

Biblarz, T. J., & Stacey, J. (2010). How does the gender of parents matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72*, 3-22.

Bigner, J. J., & Wetchler, J. L. (Eds.). (2012). *Handbook of LGBT-affirmative couple and family therapy.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Bos, H., & Gartrell, N. (2010). Adolescents of the USA national longitudinal lesbian family study: Can family characteristics counteract the negative effects of stigmatization? *Family Process, 49*, 559-572.

Bos, H. M. W., Gartrell, N. K., Peyser, H. & van Balen, F. (2008). The USA national longitudinal lesbian family study (NLLFS): Homophobia, psychological adjustment, and protective factors. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 12*, 455-471. doi:10.1080/10894160802278630

Bos, H. M. W., van Balen, F., van den Boom, D. C., & Sandfort, Th. G. M. (2004). Minority stress: Experience of parenthood and child adjustment in lesbian families. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology, 22*, 291–304.

Breshears, D. (2011). Understanding communication between lesbian parents and their children regarding outsider discourse about family identity. *Journal of GLBT Studies, 7*, 264-284.

Bryan, J. (2012). *From the dress-up corner to the senior prom: Navigating gender and sexuality diversity in preK-12 schools*. Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield.

Clarke, V. (2002). Sameness and difference in research on lesbian parenting. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 12*, 210-222.

Cloughessy, K., & Waniganayake, M. (2014). Early childhood educators working with children who have lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents: What does the literature tell us? *Early Child Development and Care, 184*, 1267-1280. doi: 10.1080/03004430.2013.862529

Cochran, S. D., Sullivan, J. G., & Mays, V. M. (2003). Prevalence of mental disorders, psychological distress, and mental health services use among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults in the United States. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71*, 53-61. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.71.1.53

Comstock, D. L., Hammer, T. R., Strentzsch, J., Cannon, K., Parsons, J., & Salazar II, G. (2008). Relational-cultural theory: A framework for bridging relational, multicultural, and social justice competencies. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 86*, 279-287.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43,* 1241-1299.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crotty, M. (2010). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dahl, C. M., & Boss, P. (2005). The use of phenomenology for family therapy research: The search for meaning. In D. H.Sprenkle & F. P. Piercy (Eds.), *Research methods in family therapy* (pp. 85-99). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Dermer, S. B., Smith, S. D., & Barto, K.K. (2010). Identifying and correctly labeling sexual prejudice, discrimination, and oppression. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 88*, 325-331.

Drescher, J. (2012). The removal of homosexuality from the DSM: Its impact on today's marriage equality debate. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health, 16,* 124-135. doi:10.1080/19359705.2012.653255

Ecklund, K. (2012). Intersectionality of identity in children: A case study. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 43*, 236-264. doi:10.1037/a0028654

Edwards, A. L. (1957). Social desirability and probability of endorsement of items in the Interpersonal Check List. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 55*, 394-396.

Eggenberger, S. K., & Nelms, T. P. (2007). Family interviews as a method for family research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 58*, 282-292.

Fedewa, A. L., Black, W. W., & Ahn, S. (2014). Children and adolescents with same-gender parents: A meta-analytic approach in assessing outcomes. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 11*, 1-34. doi:10.1080/1550428X.2013.869486

Fitzgerald, B. (1999). Children of lesbian and gay parents. *Marriage and Family Review, 29*, 57-75.

Freedom to Marry, Inc. (n.d.) *State by state*. Retrieved from www.freedomtomarry.org

Frey, L. L. (2013). Relational–cultural therapy: Theory, research, and application to counseling competencies. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 44*, 177-185. doi:10.1037/a0033121

Gall, R. T. (2012, December). *The experiences of families with same-sex parents and elementary school-aged children*. Paper presented at the Research Evening of the department of Statistical and Research Methods, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO.

Gartrell, N., Rodas, C., Deck, A., Peyser, H., & Banks, A. (2005). The national lesbian family study: 4. Interviews with 10-year-old children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 75*, 518-524. doi:10.1037/0002-9432.75.4.518

Gates, G. J. (2011). *How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender?* Retrieved from http://escholarship.org/uc/item/09h684x2

Gates, G. J., & Newport, F. (2015). *An estimated 780,000 Americans in same-sex marriages*. Retrieved from http://www.gallup.com/poll/182837/estimated-780-000-americans-sex-marriages.aspx?utm_source=alert&utm_medium=email&utm_content=morelink&utm_campaign=syndication

Gehart, D. (2010). *Mastering competencies in family therapy: A practical approach to theories and clinical case documentation.* Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Gerstel, N. (2011). Rethinking families and community: The color, class, and centrality of extended kin ties. *Sociological Forum, 26*, 1-20. doi:10.1111/j.1573-7861.2010.01222.x

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Goldberg, A. E., & Allen, K. R. (2013). Donor, dad, or…? Young adults with lesbian parents' experiences with known donors. *Family Process*, *52*, 338-350. doi:10.1111/famp.12029

Goldberg, A. E., Moyer, A. M., Weber, E. R., & Shapiro, J. (2013). What changed when the gay adoption ban was lifted?: Perspectives of lesbian and gay parents in Florida. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy, 10*, 110-124. doi: 10.1007/s13178-013-0120-y

Goldberg, A. E., & Smith, J. A. Z. (2013). Predictors of psychological adjustment in early placed adopted children with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents. *Journal of Family Psychology, 27*, 431-442. doi: 10.1037/a0032911

Golombok, S., & Badger, S. (2010). Children raised in mother-headed families from infancy: A follow-up of children of lesbian and single heterosexual mothers at early adulthood. *Human Reproduction, 25*, 150-157. doi:10.1093/humrep/dep345

Golombok, S., & Tasker, F. (1996). Do parents influence the sexual orientation of their children? Findings from a longitudinal study of lesbian families. *Developmental Psychology, 32*, 3-11.

Gottman, J. M., Levenson, R. W., Gross, J., Frederickson, B. L., McCoy, K., Rosenthal, L., . . . Yoshimoto, D. (2003). Correlates of gay and lesbian couples' relationship satisfaction and relationship dissolution. *Journal of Homosexuality, 45*, 23-43.

Gottman, J. M., Levenson, R. W., Swanson, C., Swanson, K., Tyson, R., & Yoshimoto, D. (2008). Observing gay, lesbian and heterosexual couples' relationships. *Journal of Homosexuality, 45*, 65-91. doi:10.1300/J082v45n01_04

Green, R. J., & Mitchell, V. (2008). Gay and lesbian couples in therapy: Minority stress, relational ambiguity, and families of choice. In A. S. Gurman (Ed.), *Clinical handbook of couple therapy* (pp. 662-680). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Guthrie, R. V. (1998). *Even the rat was white: A historical view of psychology* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Harper, G. W., & Schneider, M. (2003). Oppression and discrimination among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people and communities: A challenge for community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 31*, 243-252.

Hartwell, E. E., Serovich, J. M., Grafsky, E. L., & Kerr, Z. Y. (2012). Coming out of the dark: Content analysis of articles pertaining to gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues in couple and family therapy journals. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 38,* 227-243. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2011.00274.x

Hatzenbuehler, M. L., McLaughlin, K. A., Keyes, K. M., & Hasin, D. S. (2010). The impact of institutional discrimination on psychiatric disorders in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: A prospective study. *American Journal of Public Health, 100*, 452-459. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2009.168815

Hegde, A. V., Averett, P., White, C. P., & Deese, S. (2014). Examining preschool teachers' attitudes, comfort, action orientation, and preparation to work with children reared by gay and lesbian parents. *Early Child Development and Care, 184*, 963-976. doi:10.1080/03004430.2013.845563

Hequembourg, A. L., & Farrell, M. P. (1999). Lesbian motherhood: Negotiating marginal-mainstream identities. *Gender and Society, 13*, 540-557.

Herrnstein, R. J., & Murray, C. (1996). *The bell curve: Intelligence and class structure in American life.* New York, NY: Free Press.

Holman, E. G., & Oswald, R. F. (2011). Nonmetropolitan GLBTQ parents: When and where does their sexuality matter? *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 7*, 436-456. doi:10.1080/1550428X.2011.623937

Jonathan, N. (2009). Carrying equal weight: Relational responsibility and attunement among same-sex couples. In C. Knutson-Martin & A. R. Mahoney (Eds.), *Couples, gender, and power: Creating change in intimate relationships* (pp. 79-103). New York, NY: Springer.

Jones, J. M. (2013, May 16). *More Americans see gay, lesbian orientation as birth factor.* Retrieved from http://www.gallup.com/poll/162569/americans-gay-lesbian-orientation-birth-factor.aspx

Kintner-Duffy, V. L., Vardell, R., Lower, J. K., & Cassidy, D. J. (2012). "The changers and the changed": Preparing early childhood teachers to work with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender families. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 33*, 208-223. doi:10.1080/10901027.2012.705806

Kurdek, L. A. (1998). Relationship outcomes and their predictors: Longitudinal evidence from heterosexual married, gay cohabitating, and lesbian cohabitating couples. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *60*, 553-568.

Kurdek, L. A. (2005). What do we know about gay and lesbian couples? *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 14*, 251-254.

Lambda Legal. (n.d.). *Facts: Gay and lesbian youths in schools*. Retrieved from www.lambdalegal.org

Lambert, S. (2005). Gay and lesbian families: What we know and where to go from here. *The Family Journal, 13*, 43-51.

Leddy, A., Gartrell, N., & Bos, H. (2012). Growing up in a lesbian family: The life experiences of the adult daughters and sons of lesbian mothers. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 8*, 243-257.

Lick, D. J., Patterson, C. J., & Schmidt, K. M. (2013). Recalled social experiences and current psychological adjustment among adults reared by gay and lesbian parents. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 9*, 230-253. doi: 10.1080/1550428X.2013.781907

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lindsay, J., Perlesz, A., Brown, R., McNair, R., de Vaus, D., & Pitts, M. (2006). Stigma or respect: Lesbian-parented families negotiating school settings. *Sociology, 40*, 1059-1077. doi:10.1177/0038038506069845

Linehan, M. M. (1993). *Cognitive-behavioral treatment of borderline personality disorder*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Linville, D., & O'Neil, M. (2013). *Same-sex parents and their children.* Retrieved from http://www.aamft.org/imis15/Content/Consumer_Updates/Same-sex_Parents_and_Their_Children.aspx

Long, J. K., Bonomo, J., Andrews, B. V., & Brown, J. M. (2006). Systemic therapeutic approaches with sexual minorities and their families. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 2*, 7-37. doi:10.1300/J461v02n03_02

Lubbe, C. (2008). The experiences of children growing up in lesbian-headed families in South Africa. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 4*, 325-359.

McGeorge, C., & Carlson, T. S. (2011). Deconstructing heterosexism: Becoming an LGB affirmative heterosexual couple and family therapist. *Journal of Marital and Family therapy, 37*, 14-26. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2009.00149.x

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons.

Miller, J. B. (1986). *Toward a new psychology of women*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Moore, M. R. (2008). Gendered power relations among women: A study of household decision making in black lesbian stepfamilies. *American Sociological Review, 73*, 335-356.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nabors, N. A. (2012). The social psychology of stigma. In R. Nettles & R. Balter (Eds.), *Multiple minority identities: Applications for practice, research, and training* (pp. 13-31). New York, NY: Springer.

National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2008). *Incidence and vulnerability of LGBTQ homeless youth*. Retrieved from http://b.3cdn.net/naeh /1f4df9fc5fcad14d92_ vim6ivd15.pdf

Negy, C., & McKinney, C. (2006). Application of feminist therapy: Promoting resiliency among lesbian and gay families. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 18*, 67-83.

Oswald, R. F., Kuvalanka, K. A., Blume, L. B., & Berkowitz, D. (2009). Queering "the family." In S. A. Lloyd, A. L. Few, & K. R. Allen (Eds.), *Handbook of Feminist Family Studies* (pp. 43-55). Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

Oswald, R. F., & Suter, E. A. (2004). Heterosexist inclusion and exclusion during ritual: A "straight versus gay comparison." *Journal of Family Issues, 25,* 881-899. doi:10.1177/0192513X04267278

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. (n.d.). *What does it all mean?* Retrieved from http://community.pflag.org/page.aspx?pid=316

Patterson, C. J. (2006). Children of lesbian and gay parents. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 15*, 241-244.

Peplau, L. A., & Fingerhut, A. W. (2007). The close relationships of lesbians and gay men. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *58*, 405-424. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych .58.110405.085701

Perry, B., Burston, A., Stevens, M., Golding, J., Steele, H., & Golombok, S. (2004). Children's play narratives: What they tell us about lesbian-mother families. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 74*, 467-479. doi:10.1037/0002 - 9432.74.4.467

Ponterotto, J. G. (2005). Qualitative research in counseling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*, 126-136. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.126

Power, J., Brown, R., Schofield, M. J., Pitts, M., McNair, R. Perlesz, A., & Bickerdike, A. (2014). Social connectedness among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parents living in metropolitan and regional and rural areas of Australia and New Zealand. *Journal of Community Psychology, 42*, 869-889. doi: 10/1002/jcop.21658

Power, J., Perlesz, A., McNair, R., Schofield, M., Pitts, M., Brown, R., & Bickerdike, A. (2012). Gay and bisexual dads and diversity: Fathers in the work, love, play study. *Journal of Family Studies, 18*, 143-154.

Schacher, J. S., Auerbach, C. F., & Silverstein, L. B. (2005). Gay fathers expanding the possibilities for us all. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 1*, 31-52.

Shechory, M., & Ziv, R. (2007). Relationships between gender role attitudes, role division, and perception of equity among heterosexual, gay and lesbian couples. *Sex Roles*, *56*, 629-638.

Sheff, E. (2011). Polyamorous families, same-sex marriage, and the slippery slope. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 40*, 487-520. doi:10.1177/0891241611413578

Shelton, K., & Delgado-Romero, E. A. (2011). Sexual orientation microaggressions: The experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer clients in psychotherapy. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 58*, 210-221.

Shpungin, E., Allen, N., Loomis, C., & DeloStritto, M. E. (2012). Keeping the spirit alive: Using feminist methodology to address silencing as a structural issue. *Journal of Community Psychology, 40*, 44-61.

Silverstein, O., & Rashbaum, B. (1994). *The courage to raise good men*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

SmithBattle, L. (1996). Intergenerational ethics of caring for adolescent mothers and their children. *Family Relations*, *45*, 56-64.

Solomon, S. E., Rothblum, E. E., & Balsam, K. F. (2005). Money, housework, sex, and conflict: Same-sex couples in civil unions, those not in civil unions, and heterosexual married siblings. *Sex Roles, 52*, 561-575.

Tasker, F. (2005). Lesbian mothers, gay fathers, and their children: A review. *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 26*, 224-240.

Tasker, F., & Patterson, C. J. (2007). Research on gay and lesbian parenting. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 3*, 9-34.

Taylor, B., & Meehan, D. (2013, June 1). The 'cutest couple' this high school didn't expect. *The Huffington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/

Todd, N. R., & Abrams, E. M. (2011). White dialectics: A new framework for theory, research, and practice with white students. *The Counseling Psychologist, 39*, 353-395. doi:10.1177/0011000010377665

United States Census Bureau. (2010). *American community survey: Same sex couples*. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/hhes/samesex/

United States v. Windsor, No. 12-307, United States Supreme Court (2013). Retrieved from http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/12pdf/12-307_6j37.pdf

Veldorale-Griffin, A. (2014). Transgender parents and their adult children's experiences of disclosure and transition. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 10*, 475-501. doi: 10.1080/1550428X.2013.866063

Wald, M. S. (2006). Adults' sexual orientation and determinations regarding placement of children. *Family Law Quarterly, 40*, 381-434.

Warner, L. R., & Shields, S. A. (2013). The intersections of sexuality, gender, and race: Identity research at the crossroads. *Sex Roles, 68*, 803-810. doi:10.1007/s11199-013-0281-4

Welsh, M. G. (2011). Growing up in a same-sex parented family: The adolescent voice of experience. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 7*, 49-71.

Weston, K. (1991). *Families we choose: Lesbians, gays, kinship*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Worell, J., & Remer, P. (2003). *Feminist perspectives in therapy: Empowering diverse women.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE: January 27, 2015
TO: Rachel Gall, MA
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [552945-3] Exploring the Experiences of Families with Same-Sex Parents and Elementary School-Aged Children
SUBMISSION TYPE: Continuing Review/Progress Report

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: January 26, 2015
EXPIRATION DATE: January 26, 2016
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Continuing Review/Progress Report materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of January 26, 2016.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Generated on IRBNet

Rachel –

Thank you for the submission of your continuation approval materials. You project has IRB approval for another year based on this review. Before further use of your consent forms, please upate the contact information for report of mistreatment as a research participant to the following due to recent changes in our contact information:

"If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, in the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970.351.1910."

Also, please add a space for parents to initial the first page of each consent form at the bottom (e.g., Page 1 of 2 ________(please initial)). These two amendments do not need to be submitted for subsequent review.

Best wishes with your continued work on this research project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records

Generated on IRBNet

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO

Dear Interested Participant,

My name is Rachel Gall and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC). I am currently working on my dissertation, where I am researching the experiences of families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Queer (LGBQ) parents and elementary school-aged children. Parents with any variety of gender identity or expression are invited to participate, as long as they identify as LGBQ parents. I am looking for families to participate in an interview, which will last approximately 90 minutes and will be conducted in your home or a location of your choice.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or if you would like to learn more, please contact me by phone at xxx.xxx.xxxx, or email at racheltgall@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Rachel Gall, MA, LPC, NCC
Doctoral Candidate, Counseling Psychology
Department of Applied Psychology and Counselor Education
University of Northern Colorado
xxx.xxx.xxxx
racheltgall@gmail.com

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH—ADULT/PARENT SIGNATURE FORM

Consent Form for Human Participants in Research

Adult/Parent Signature Form: Colorado

Exploring the Experiences of Families with Same-Sex Parents And Elementary School-Aged Children

Researcher: Rachel Gall, MA, LPC, NCC
Doctoral Candidate, Counseling Psychology
xxx.xxx.xxxx
racheltgall@gmail.com

Research advisor: Dr. Basilia Softas-Nall, Ph.D., LP
Chair, Department of Counseling Psychology
xxx.xxx.xxxx
basilia.softas-nall@unco.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and experience of families with younger children and LGBQ parents.

If you choose to participate in this research, and if your child(ren) indicate a willingness to participate in this research, your family will be interviewed by Rachel Gall for approximately 1.5 hours. You will be asked questions about experiences you have had being in a family with same-sex parents, your feelings about these experiences, and how your family talks together about these experiences. Your interview will be videotaped. In addition, the researcher may contact you after the interview is complete to ask follow-up or clarifying questions.

Afterwards, the interview will be transcribed (typed out). It is possible that other trained doctoral students will be assisting with the transcription and will know your identity. These individuals will be held to the same standards of confidentiality as the researcher. During the research process, other researchers will be consulted by Rachel Gall in order to make sure that your experiences and opinions are being described accurately. Your confidentiality will be maintained at all points in the research process. All audio-visual files, demographic surveys, consent forms, and transcriptions will be stored in the department of the Applied Psychology and Counselor Education department, in a locked file cabinet or on a password-protected flash drive.

Possible risks to you are minimal and include potentially experiencing feelings of anxiety or discomfort during the interview. If you experience these feelings and would like to discuss them further, please contact the Psychological Services Clinic at the University of Northern Colorado (970.351.1645), Denver Family Institute (303.756.3340), the Counseling Center at the University of Colorado Denver (303.556.4372), or a therapist of your choice. Other possible risks include your identity being disclosed. Precautions taken to protect your identity include: you will choose pseudonyms (fake names) for yourself, the researcher will change any identifying information, the video file will be double-password protected and only the researcher, research advisor, and transcribers will have access. The data will be destroyed three years after the data collection is complete.

Possible benefits to you include having the opportunity to talk as a family about personal and multicultural issues. By signing this form, you are also consenting to have your child(ren) participate. There will be no compensation for participation in this research.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. You may decide not to allow your child to participate in this study and if (s)he begins participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970.351.2161.

______________________________	____________________
Print Parent Name	Date
______________________________	____________________
Print Child's Name (if applicable)	Print Child's Name (if applicable)
______________________________	____________________
Print Child's Name (if applicable)	Print Child's Name (if applicable)
______________________________	____________________
Parent Signature	Date
______________________________	____________________
Researcher Signature	Date

Consent Form for Human Participants in Research

Adult/Parent Signature Form: Washington

Exploring the Experiences of Families with Same-Sex Parents And Elementary School-Aged Children

Researcher: Rachel Gall, MA, LPC, NCC
Doctoral Candidate, Counseling Psychology
xxx.xxx.xxxx
racheltgall@gmail.com

Research advisor: Dr. Basilia Softas-Nall, Ph.D., LP
Chair, Department of Counseling Psychology
xxx.xxx.xxxx
basilia.softas-nall@unco.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and experience of families with younger children and LGBQ parents.

If you choose to participate in this research, and if your child(ren) indicate a willingness to participate in this research, your family will be interviewed by Rachel Gall for approximately 1.5 hours. You will be asked questions about experiences you have had being in a family with same-sex parents, your feelings about these experiences, and how your family talks together about these experiences. Your interview will be videotaped. In addition, the researcher may contact you after the interview is complete to ask follow-up or clarifying questions.

Afterwards, the interview will be transcribed (typed out). It is possible that other trained doctoral students will be assisting with the transcription and will know your identity. These individuals will be held to the same standards of confidentiality as the researcher. During the research process, other researchers will be consulted by Rachel Gall in order to make sure that your experiences and opinions are being described accurately. Your confidentiality will be maintained at all points in the research process. All audio-visual files, demographic surveys, consent forms, and transcriptions will be stored in the department of the Applied Psychology and Counselor Education department, in a locked file cabinet or on a password-protected flash drive.

Possible risks to you are minimal and include potentially experiencing feelings of anxiety or discomfort during the interview. If you experience these feelings and would like to discuss them further, please contact Seattle Counseling Service for Sexual Minorities (206.323.1768), the Fremont Community Therapy Project (206.633.2405), the Community Counseling and Psychology Clinic at Antioch University (206.268.4840), or a therapist of your choice.

Other possible risks include your identity being disclosed. Precautions taken to protect your identity include: you will choose pseudonyms (fake names) for yourself, the researcher will change any identifying information, the video file will be double-password protected and only the researcher, research advisor, and transcribers will have access. The data will be destroyed three years after the data collection is complete.

Possible benefits to you include having the opportunity to talk as a family about personal and multicultural issues. By signing this form, you are also consenting to have your child(ren) participate. There will be no compensation for participation in this research.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. You may decide not to allow your child to participate in this study and if (s)he begins participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970.351.2161.

______________________________	______________________________
Print Parent Name	Date
______________________________	______________________________
Print Child’s Name (if applicable)	Print Child’s Name (if applicable)
______________________________	______________________________
Print Child’s Name (if applicable)	Print Child’s Name (if applicable)
______________________________	______________________________
Parent Signature	Date
______________________________	______________________________
Researcher Signature	Date

APPENDIX D

CHILD ASSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

CHILD ASSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

**Exploring the Experiences of Families with Same-Sex Parents
And Elementary School-Aged Children**

My name is Rachel, and I am a student at the University of Northern Colorado. I would like to ask you to be a part of a project. Your parents have already given their permission for you to be part of this project.

I am interested in talking with families with LGBQ parents – families who have two moms or two dads. If you agree to be a part of this project, I will sit with you and your family and ask questions about what it's like to be a part of your family. You don't have to participate if you don't want to.

It is possible you might feel uncomfortable or not know what to say if I ask you a question. There are no right or wrong answers – I am just interested in what you think, and how you and your family talk together! We can take a break or stop at any time.

Please sign your name if you agree to be a part of this project.

Thank you!

____
Child's Name

____
Child's Signature

____
Date

____
Researcher Signature Date

APPENDIX E

INTRODUCTION FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Introduction for Research Participants

Hand clients disclosure statement.

My name is Rachel and I am a doctoral student at the University of Northern Colorado. I'm getting my Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology. For my dissertation, I am doing research with families with two moms or two dads with younger kids. Today, if you agree, I'll be asking you some questions about your family and how you think and feel. The reason I am asking these questions is because I am studying to be a counseling psychologist, which means that I help kids and families with problems or with uncomfortable feelings that they have.

It is important for counseling psychologists to know how to help all kinds of families. Going to counseling is going to look different with stepfamilies, single-parent families, families with one mom and one dad, and families with two moms or two dads, or families of different ethnicities, or families with younger or older parents, for example. There is a lot of diversity in LGBTQ families, and I am interested in learning about what it is like for your family to be part of that community. It's possible that some of the things we talk about may bring up feelings of discomfort. I want you to know that you don't have to talk about anything that you don't want to, and we can stop any time. It is also important that you know that we can take a break whenever you want.

I want to share what you say with other therapists so that we can be knowledgeable and effective when we see same-sex parented families in therapy. I want to communicate to others about the experiences of your family, the strengths of your family, and what makes your family unique and special. I also believe that the experiences we have in our communities and our families impact the way we think and feel.

I want to let your family know that I have my own background and intersections of identity that I am bringing with me today. For example, I am a researcher, a therapist, a student of counseling psychology, and an ally for the GLBTQ community. To prepare for this project, I have gone through a process of training in how to do research and how to use language that is inclusive and accepting. For me, this is not just a dissertation, but it is a project that is important to me on many levels.

If you decide that you want to participate, I'll ask you to pick a fake name for yourself. That way I can share what you tell me with other counseling psychologists, in a way that still maintains your privacy. I will change other identifying information so that your confidentiality is protected.

Also, the reason that I am recording today is to make sure that I am fully present with your family. I believe that you are saying things exactly the way you want them to be said, so I want to make sure that I'm not writing the whole time and can just be present with you as we talk.

As the researcher, there are rules that I need to follow about maintaining your confidentiality. Everything that you say and do here today will be kept strictly confidential. One of the only exceptions to your privacy is if I hear of any kind of child abuse. The other exception is that a few other students may be helping me type up our interview today so that I can go back and read it afterwards.

After I leave, you have the choice as a family whether or not to talk about what you said today. I would ask that you talk as a family about what this was like for you and to decide as a family whether or not to share what you said today with other people.

What questions do you have?

APPENDIX F

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SHEET

**Exploring the Experiences of Families with Same-Sex Parents
And Elementary School-Aged Children**

1. Pseudonym (fake name): ____

2. Age: ____

3. Gender: ____

4. Highest level of education completed: __________________________________

5. Ethnicity: ____

6. Occupation: ____

7. Approximate annual income: ____

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

These questions will be adapted developmentally according to the age of the child(ren).

1. Describe your family to me. Who makes up your family?

2. Tell me the story of how you became a family.

3. How do you find yourself sharing with others that you are part of a family with two moms/dads?

4. Tell me about any experiences you have had where people have reacted positively to learning that you are part of a family with two moms/dads.

5. Tell me about any times you have experienced homophobia. Have other people ever treated you badly, said mean things to you, or had preconceived ideas about families like yours? Have you experienced any other forms of oppression? Have people ever treated you badly for other reasons?

6. Tell me about where you feel acceptance and support or a lack thereof from your community.

   Prompt*: School, work, neighborhood, friends, family, community organizations, religious institutions*

7. What would you like other kids and adults to know about being part of a family with two moms/dads?

8. What do you think is special about being part of a family with two moms/dads?

9. What are some things you would like counselors to know about working with LGBTQ families?

10. Is there anything else that you thought of that you haven't had a chance to say yet?

11. What do you think about being in a research study? How did it feel to be interviewed?

Prompts to explore meaning:

- *What was that like for you/your family/as parents?*
- *Was that good or bad for you?*
- *How did that feel?*
- *What do you make of that?*
- *What was your interpretation of that?*
- *How has this impacted your family?*

APPENDIX H

TRANSCRIBER CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Transcriber Consent for Participating in Research

Exploring the Experiences of Families with Same-Sex Parents

And Elementary School-Aged Children

Researcher: Rachel Gall, MA, LPC, NCC
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Counseling Psychology
racheltgall@gmail.com
xxx.xxx.xxxx

Advisor: Dr. Basilia Softas-Nall, Ph.D., LP
Chair, Department of Counseling Psychology
basilia.softas-nall@unco.edu
xxx.xxx.xxxx

You are being asked to be a transcriber in a research study. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of families with same-sex parents and elementary school-aged children. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to transcribe interviews that Rachel Gall, researcher, is conducting as partial fulfillment of a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology.

If you choose to participate, you must be a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology Ph.D. program at the University of Northern Colorado. In addition, you must have already completed an introductory course in graduate research (SRM 600) and an ethics course (APCE 657).

The raw data (digital audio-visual recordings of interviews) will only be accessible to you, the researcher (Rachel Gall) and the research advisor (Dr. Basilia Softas-Nall). Audio-visual data will be stored electronically on flash drives and transcription must happen on campus in McKee Hall. To maintain HIPAA compliance, all electronic files as well as the flash drives they are stored on will be password-protected. They will be stored in the department of Applied Psychology and Counselor Education for 3 years.
Researchers predict no risk to transcribers. Participation is voluntary and you may refuse or withdraw at any time. There will be no compensation associated with participation.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colorado, 80639, (970) 351-1907.

Thank you for helping us with this study.

Sincerely,

Rachel Gall, MA, LPC, NCC
Dr. Lia Softas-Nall, Ph.D., LP

Transcriber Signature

Print name of transcriber: ____

Signature of transcriber: ____

Date: ____

Researcher Signature

A copy of this consent form has been given to the transcriber.

Print name of researcher/person taking the consent: ___________________________

Signature of researcher/person taking the consent: ___________________________

Date: ____

APPENDIX I

DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 1

Demographics

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Occupation	Income/yr. (approx. $)
			Benson family, Rocky Mountain region			
Karen Benson	Female	45	Caucasian	MA	Licensed mental health counselor	50,000
Mary Benson	Female	45	Caucasian	BA	Nonprofit worker	50,000
Quintry Benson	Female	10	Caucasian	4th grade	Student	0
			Woodward-Albright family, Rocky Mountain region			
Carmen Woodward	Female	39	Caucasian	MS	Scientist	30,000
Sophie Albright	Female	37	Caucasian	AA	Small business	100,000
John Woodward	Male	8	Caucasian	3rd grade	Student	25 cents
			Kimball family, Pacific Northwest region			
Rosa Kimball	Female	49	Caucasian	MA	Social worker	Currently unemployed
Terry Kimball	Female	48	Caucasian	BA	Nonprofit worker	85,000
Saige Kimball	Female	11	Latino/ Mexican	5th grade	Student	5/week
			Dawson-O'Riley family, Pacific Northwest region			
Dorothy O'Riley	Female	30	Caucasian	MA	Addictions counselor	30,000
Alice Dawson	Female	35	Caucasian	BA	Stay-at-home mom	unknown
Fin Dawson-O'Riley	Male	8	Caucasian	3rd grade	Student	0

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Name	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Education	Occupation	Income/yr. (approx. $)
Knapps family, Pacific Northwest region						
Katie Knapps	Female	38	Caucasian	MA	CPA	220,000
Sara Knapps	Female	34	Caucasian/ Hispanic	MS	Nurse practitioner intern	0
Ethan Knapps	Male	5	Caucasian	K	Student	0
Callahan family, Pacific Northwest region						
LaRae Callahan	Female	47	Caucasian	MA	State employee	70,000
Christine Callahan	Female	39	Caucasian	AA	Small business worker	30,000
Margaret Callahan	Female	9	Caucasian	4th grade	Student	0
John Callahan	Male	6	Caucasian	1st grade	Student	0
Ed Callahan	Male	15	Caucasian	10th grade	Student	0
Curran-Miller family, Pacific Northwest region						
Ann Miller	Female	47	Caucasian	MA	Marriage and family therapist	70,000
Lynn Curran	Female	48	Caucasian	MA	Licensed mental health counselor	100,000
Elsa Curran	Female	6	Caucasian	1st grade	Student	0
Murphy family, Pacific Northwest region						
Sinead Murphy	Female	42	Caucasian/ Hispanic	MA		left blank
Alex Murphy	Female	40	Caucasian	MA	Researcher	100,000
Merida Murphy	Female	6	Caucasian	1st grade	Student	0
Ben Murphy	Male	4	Caucasian	Pre-K		0

APPENDIX J

MANUSCRIPT

All Families are Unique: Experiences of

Lesbian-Parented Families

Rachel Tova Gall

University of Northern Colorado

Abstract

This study explored the experiences of families with lesbian mothers and elementary school-aged children residing in metropolitan areas of the United States. This phenomenology aimed to transcend comparative and binary research to include the voices of sexual minorities and children. Eight whole-family interviews were conducted in alignment with the study's systemic-constructivist approach. A number of themes emerged from the data that were generally consistent with prior research. Mothers were intentional about the communities in which they surrounded themselves, the process of having children, and having discussions with children about potential discrimination. Participants saw themselves as advocates and were typically out within their communities, garnering generally positive or neutral reactions from others. Families also identified assumptions others have made about them and assumptions they have made about others. Children identified their perceptions of gender roles, and mothers struggled with their beliefs that their children should have male and female influence. Mothers noted the salience of their identity as mothers as opposed to sexual orientation in their day-to-day life. Finally, families experienced a dialectical tension between wanting to be perceived as normal, yet finding uniqueness in difference. Suggestions for counseling psychologists include cautioning against making assumptions of sameness or difference and helping families identify and deconstruct internalized oppressive beliefs. It is recommended that future research include a movement away from comparisons and socially constructed binaries and toward a complex understanding of the diversity of all families so psychologists can be knowledgeable and effective therapists and advocates.

All Families are Unique: Experiences of
Lesbian-Parented Families

Introduction

In June 2013, the Supreme Court of the United States repealed the Defense of Marriage Act, granting full federal rights to all married couples regardless of sexual orientation (United States v. Windsor, 2013). This civil rights decision was a historic step in setting the stage for further acceptance and destigmatization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) couples and families in American culture.

Given the rapidly changing social and political climate and given the increasing comfort of LGBTQ-parented families being out in their communities, increasing amounts of resources must be available to serve this population. Currently, approximately 3.5% of adults in the United States identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Gates, 2011). Nationally, approximately 1% of all couple households are same-gender couples, and approximately 20% of these households have children in the home (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Counseling psychologists must be knowledgeable about working with this population when they present in family therapy. Although research on LGBTQ-parented families is a growing area, there is still a lack of research examining family systems as a whole as well as understanding the experiences of younger children. Therefore, this research was designed to explore the whole-family experiences of families with same-gender parents and younger children. Gaining a better understanding of the essence of these families' experiences will increase counseling psychologists' awareness and knowledge in working with this population when they present in therapy and their ability to be effective advocates and allies. The purpose of

this research was also to transcend comparative research (research exploring sameness and difference between lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer LGBQ-parented families and straight-parented families).

Review of the Literature

Background and Context

For the first time in the 1970s and 1980s, some gay and lesbian parents began ending their heterosexual marriages and seeking custody of their children (Fitzgerald, 1999). Prior to these decades, lesbian and gay parents and their families were an invisible population; virtually no research existed on the topic. Empirical research on children of gay and lesbian parents first appeared in the 1970s due to a need for evidence demonstrating these children were psychologically normal in custody cases. Thus, research in the field of LGBQ family studies was originally designed to demonstrate the fitness of gay and lesbian parents, to mitigate fears their children would be maladjusted, and to dispel popular myths and stereotypes about these parents and their children.

Forty years of research on the outcomes of families with LGBQ-identified parents indicates few, if any, differences (e.g., Fedewa, Black, & Ahn, 2014; Patterson, 2006). Where there are differences, families with LGBQ-identified parents tend to be favored. The LGBQ parents display more egalitarian parenting and division of household labor (Jonathan, 2009; Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2005) and are more involved in parenting than are heterosexual parents (Schacher, Auerbach, & Silverstein, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Children of LGBQ parents experience lower rates of abuse than do children of heterosexual parents (Gartrell, Rodas, Deck, Peyser, & Banks, 2005) and display greater psychological well-being and more

positive family relationships than children from heterosexual parents (Bos & Gartrell, 2010; Golombok & Badger, 2010). Children of LGBQ parents are highly aware of oppression, have a sophisticated understanding of diversity, and see themselves as advocates (Gartrell et al., 2005; Lambert, 2005; Welsh, 2011). Biblarz and Stacey (2010) found that sons of both lesbian and heterosexual mother-only families showed greater gender role flexibility: they were no less masculine than children raised with a mother and a father, but were also more feminine. These successes are situated within a culture of marginalization and institutional barriers (Kurdek, 2005).

Some authors (e.g., Lambert, 2005) suggest that in light of these decades of research, further studies comparing gay and lesbian families and their children to heterosexual families and their children perpetuates homophobia. Clarke (2002) suggests that research questions exploring sameness and differences are not "useful" questions, as any findings of difference can be explained by the impact of oppression.

Gaps in the Literature

Most research in the field of LGBQ family studies is quantitative, individualistic, and focused on adults or adolescents. The current study sought to fill a small part of this gap by providing qualitative data on the lived experiences of members of lesbian-parented families by incorporating a systemic perspective as well as including the voices of young children. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the question: What are the lived experiences of families with same-gender parents and elementary school-aged children given that they are members of a marginalized group?

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The current study is a transcendental phenomenology, referring to the researcher's process of rising above her own worldview to freshly and openly perceive the phenomenon without interpretation (Moustakas, 1994). In this case, the phenomenon of experiencing life as an LGBQ-parented family with elementary school children was explored.

A systemic-constructivist approach was utilized, informed by relational-cultural theory and intersectionality theory. From a constructivist approach, meaning is socially and individually constructed through interacting with the world (Ponterotto, 2005). From a systemic perspective, the meaningful unit of analysis is the relationship between individuals. It is assumed that behavior cannot be understood without understanding the context and that influence is reciprocal (Gehart, 2010). By using a systemic-constructivist approach, I aimed to understand the shared meaning each family system constructs of their lived experience as a family with LGBQ-identified parents and children in elementary school.

Relational-cultural theory is a feminist theory that focuses on the impact of privilege and oppression on individuals' felt sense of connection (Comstock et al., 2008). Given that the parents in this study self-identify as LGBQ and I was exploring their relationships within their family and community, relational-cultural theory was an appropriate theory to use. In addition, although participants identified as LGBQ, this is only one of many identities they possess. Therefore, intersectionality theory was also utilized, which is a developmental theory that focuses on an individual's

awareness of how their various identities inform and enhance each other (Warner & Shields, 2013).

Participants

Participants were whole families consisting of lesbian-identified parents with at least one child in elementary school. Participants were located in either the Rocky Mountain region or the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Participants were recruited through LGBTQ-specific community organizations and listservs, as well as through professional connections of the researcher. There were three inclusion criteria:

1. Both parents must self-identify as LGBQ. It is important to note that the reason why the “T” (transgender) has been eliminated from the LGBQ acronym in this paper is that parents of any variety of gender identity or expression could participate as long as they identified as LGBQ.
2. The couple must consider themselves to be in a long-term committed relationship. Given the variability in laws by state at the time of data collection, this could include being in a lifetime partnership, civil union, domestic partnership, or marriage.
3. There must be at least one child in the family who is in elementary school, defined as kindergarten through fifth grade (or ages 5 to 11). If there are multiple older or younger children in the home, they were encouraged to participate, but this was not necessary.

Procedures

Before data collection began, I undertook the process of bracketing, the process of identifying and suspending judgments and setting aside biases in order to be

open to the participants' full experience (Moustakas, 1994). This process occurred both before data collection and as a constant reflexive process throughout the interviews and data analysis. My aim was to be a participant-observer in the interviews (Creswell, 2007). In order to ensure that the language of my materials and interview questions was appropriate and inclusive, I consulted with two individuals: a coordinator of a campus LGBTQ resource office and a published qualitative researcher and professor in the area of LGBTQ family studies.

After Institutional Review Board approval was granted, I began the process of data collection. A brief demographic questionnaire was administered to provide context for describing families, and participants chose pseudonyms. Participants participated in a 1.5- to 2-hour semi-structured interview that was video-recorded in order to facilitate transcription.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in participants' homes, with whole families. I chose to conduct whole-family interviews because I wanted all family members present to witness the responses of their family members in order to facilitate dialog and elicit their reactions to each other. Immediately after the interviews were completed, I took field notes to document my reactions and impressions, behavioral and nonverbal observations, and family dynamics in a researcher journal.

Data Analysis

Saturation, defined as the point of redundancy when new findings cease to emerge from the data, was reached at eight families (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Transcribing the interviews then allowed me to be fully immersed in the data and allowed time for incubation and reflection on participants' statements (Dahl & Boss, 2005). After all the interviews were transcribed, the data were laid out for

reexamination and treated with equal weight, a process called horizonalization (Merriam, 2009). Data included the participants' transcribed statements, demographic information, and field notes. A within-case analysis was first conducted in which each participant family's data were condensed into a profile in order to develop a rich, thick description and to provide context for their stories.

I then conducted a cross-case analysis in order to identify emergent themes. I highlighted significant statements and organized them into clusters of meaning. Through the process of phenomenological reduction, I wrote textural descriptions, an explanation of the qualities of the experience in order to distill it down to its essence (Moustakas, 1994). Then, through the process of imaginative variation, I added structural descriptions, which involve exploring the underlying and precipitating factors involved in the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, another researcher trained in qualitative analysis was involved in reading the transcripts and identifying themes in order to improve accuracy and trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative methodology, the researcher is the instrument of investigation; therefore, the validity of the study depends on the skill and rigor of the work of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). A number of methods were employed to enhance trustworthiness in the current study. Data were triangulated through the use of multiple sources in order to converge on accurate findings (Merriam, 2009). These sources included demographic information, field notes, and transcripts of interviews. Multiple theoretical frameworks were used, including systems theory, constructivism, relational-cultural theory, and intersectionality theory. In addition, multiple researchers participated in the analysis of the data. A peer reviewer examined the

transcripts and preliminary data analyses in order to come to a consensus to ensure the analysis was completed thoroughly and accurately. Emergent themes and discrepant case analyses were discussed as well (Merriam, 2009). Finally, through the constant process of researcher reflexivity, I attempted to bracket my assumptions and biases in order to be open to the entirety of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Results

The following six themes emerged from the data:

- Intentionality of parenting decisions: This theme emerged around discussions of deliberately choosing where to live and the communities parents chose to surround themselves with in terms of school, workplace, religious organizations, extracurricular activities, and locations where they travel. Parents described how their children are "wanted," the process they went through to become parents, and how there are no conception "accidents" in same-sex relationships. Parents also described the intentionality of having discussions with their children that although they have chosen to live in accepting communities, they may face discrimination in other places.
- Advocacy and visibility: Families identified issues around being advocates and what that means for them, issues around disclosure and how they share about their family structure, and a wide variety of reactions they have faced as others learn about their family.
- Times are changing: Acknowledgment that it is a different world: Mothers had the sense that times are changing regarding others' reactions to diversity in sexual orientation. Some reflected on experiences they or others of their same

generation had, while others looked to their children's experiences to tell them that times are changing.

- Acknowledgment of biases: Assumptions are a two-way street: Participants described frustration over others' assumptions that they are straight, that their children must be adopted, and that they have equal employment opportunities as men of the same age. Participants also described assumptions that they made about others based on their political and religious affiliation, and described the affirmation they felt after these assumptions did not pan out.
- Questioning the relevance of gender to parenting: Many families discussed issues related to their perception of the gender binary. These topics generally fell into two categories: perceptions of differences between mothers and fathers and the perceptions parents had that their children need both male and female influences for healthy development. Some families also discussed having a greater awareness of gender diversity.
- Normality and intersectionality: We're the same, it's just two women!: Every family discussed their desire to be perceived as "normal" by society. At the same time, families acknowledged that there is uniqueness in being part of a family parented by two women, yet felt that in general, this is where the differences end. Many families struggled with this dialectic. In many cases, parents felt that motherhood was a much more salient identity for them at this time, and some compared this to an earlier place in their lives where their sexual orientation identity was more primary.

Discussion

Eight families were interviewed. All participants were Caucasian with the exception of one child and one mother who both identified as Latina. The origins of the children ranged from adoption with a known and unknown birth mother foster-to-adopt, unknown donorship, known donorship within the context of co-parenting with a gay male couple, and being conceived in the context of a previous heterosexual relationship. These results are consistent with previous research that found that the origins of children in same-gender relationships are more diverse than in opposite-gender relationships (Tasker & Patterson, 2007; United States Census Bureau, 2010).

Previous research has also found that lesbian women tend to be more highly educated (Bos, van Balen, van den Boom, & Sandfort, 2004). In this study, 11 of 16 mothers had graduate degrees. Mental health professionals were highly overrepresented, as were individuals who worked in nonprofit agencies and who had previously conducted research of their own. Participants reported valuing research being conducted with diverse populations, particularly their own. In addition, as mental health professionals, these parents likely had significant training in multiculturalism and social justice in their graduate programs and beyond. They have had both professional training and personal experience in diversity and were thus in a unique position to contribute to the literature and to reflect on their experiences.

Intentionality of Parenting Decisions

Families discussed ways in which they were intentional about choosing where to live and the communities they surround themselves with. They chose schools, neighborhoods to live, workplace environments, places of worship, and extracurricular activities based on their perceived level of acceptance. Some parents in this study

expressed appreciation that their children's schools incorporated units on different types of families and diverse origins of children, and that this was what attracted them to their schools. Similarly, Lindsay et al. (2006) found that lesbian mothers actively selected schools based on their commitment to and demonstration of multiculturalism, especially if they knew other LGBT-parented families who attended the school. Bos, Gartrell, Peyser, and van Balen (2008) found that a protective factor for the wellbeing of children of LGBT-identified parents was LGBT curricula in children's classrooms. One parent shared,

> I don't feel like we're having to do a lot of education at the school. Like, they're studying families! We didn't have to do a lot of education about all the different ways families can exist. They get that. And that's part of why we chose that school, also. When I toured, there were already things on the wall about adoption, things about LGBT families. Our family was already on the wall there! . . . It means that we're not going to have to—I don't want to have to educate.

Planning for children was another way these mothers described being intentional regarding parenting decisions. Parents noted that children of LGBQ-identified parents are always deliberately planned for, and thus some parents felt that their children were more desired than perhaps some "accidental" children of straight parents. Consistent with prior research (Bergstrom-Lynch, 2012), many families described either anticipating future barriers to adoption/conception or having experienced these barriers already. For example, one family discussed being frustrated at being treated as an "infertility case." Another family discussed worries that no adoption agency would work with them, and others described frustration that they needed to be "approved" by the government or an agency to be parents.

> **Lynn:** At that time, there were no countries that would allow an adoption to LGBT families. So that means that whoever came in to do the home study was

> going to have to lie, and we did not want to ask someone to do that, and we didn't want to start our family in a lie.

Many families discussed how they have discussions with their children around encountering people with different beliefs and values. This is consistent with the findings of Gartrell et al. (2005), where children of lesbian mothers reported that their mothers were educating them about diversity, how to respond to harassment, and how to stand up against oppression. Some conversations were initiated by the parents because they wanted their children to be aware in case they encountered a discriminatory situation. Other conversations were held after an incident occurred. Most families felt that it was important for their children to be aware that others may judge their family, to not be surprised by this, and to know how to talk about it. Family communication, nurturance, and support have been shown to be protective factors for children: Close relationships between lesbian mothers and their children increases adolescent well-being in the face of discrimination (Bos & Gartrell, 2010).

> **Alice**: I think that we have done a lot of prep work to prepare for, "This could come up." People feel differently, people have different opinions, that we have talked a lot about that. Knowing that we were going to a new school that had a lot of religious families. So we do, we talk about what that means, and we validate that people are different.

Advocacy and Visibility

Consistent with Nabors' (2012) description of the stigma management techniques of activism, volunteering, and educating, many families described being involved in activism at the political level to advocate for marriage equality. For example, families described going to the capitol building or volunteering at a booth. Many parents and children also felt that they were advocates in terms of educating others. This was evident both formally, for example, going to their children's schools

to talk about different kinds of families, and informally, for example, in small interactions or conversations.

> **Dorothy**: [Kids] were talking about marriage, and then one of the other kids suggested, “Well, what about two women getting married?” And [one girl’s] response was. . . .“Eeew!” And you turned around and you said . . .
> **Fin (age 8)**: I said, “Two moms is actually pretty great.”

> **Christine**: If today someone came and said something about us, what would you do?
> **Margaret (age 9)**: I’d say we’re made that way.

Most families described that they are completely out. They shared that because young children “out” you anyway, it is easier to disclose up front. In addition, families described how it cuts down on awkwardness or others’ assumptions by disclosing about their family structure quickly. One parent noted that this is a way of filtering through others who may not want to talk with them after learning about their family.

> **Katie**: I find myself sharing a lot more since Ethan was born. The more common thing is at work for people to say, “Oh, what does your husband do?” Especially if they know you have a kid. So my strategy is, I’m like, really proactive about saying, “my wife,” when I first meet people or when we start having personal conversations, because what ends up happening is they say “husband” and they feel really embarrassed.

> **Sophie**: If we act as if it’s shameful, or if we hide it and don’t really say anything, then how is it that the rest of the world’s not going to treat it that way?

The children in this study felt that disclosure was a non-issue. When asked about how she talks about her family, Saige (age 11) said matter-of-factly, “Oh, I tell my friends that my parents are gay.” Fin (age 8) laughed at the absurdity of others thinking that they might have a dad. One mother shared that her son did not even think to tell her:

> **Sophie**: When we got married and we went on a honeymoon, [John] stood up in class and told the class. We were very surprised to hear that. We had a teacher conference . . . and the teacher was like, "Congratulations!" And we were like, "Well, how did you know?" "Well, John told everybody!" That's pretty amazing.

Most families described many positive reactions from others learning that they were part of an LGBQ-parented family. Positive reactions came both from other adults, as well as other children saying, "That's cool!" Perhaps even more exciting to parents was getting no reaction. Terry shared, "It's amazing how little reaction you get. Like none." At the same time, children did not seem impressed when they met others with gay or lesbian parents and seemed somewhat baffled as to why others might be interested in or have a reaction to their family.

In general, most parents shared that they were struggling to think of examples where others had reacted negatively to their families. As Karen shared, "It's sort of telling too, that we have to really think about it to come up with things." Some of the older children shared that there had been a few times that others reacted to them in a way that made them feel neutral or somewhat negative. For example, Margaret (age 9) shared that other children have asked her if she wishes she has a dad and that this has made her feel a little different. Quintry (age 8) described the feeling that others were talking behind her back and making fun of her and shared, "I have two moms, and [if] they have a problem with that they shouldn't tell anybody, it just makes me feel bad. . . . I kinda feel a bit sad because my family is different, they're judging us."

Families discussed experiencing others asking intrusive questions about their families. Most families alluded to the idea that perhaps others would not be asking if not for their sexual orientation. Most of the questions were related to the origins of the

children, whether they were adopted, used a donor, or who gave birth to the child.

One parent responded,

> **Terry**: "I'm not trying to be rude, but I can't disclose much because it's really my child's story to tell. . . ." I think it's amazing that they ask, people don't really listen to themselves, because I've literally had people, "Well where are your real children?" "Um, I have five, the same ones I just mentioned."

Another uncomfortable reaction families described is when others refer to the donor as the "dad." For example, Sara shared, "It bothers when people say, 'Oh, who's Ethan's dad'?. . . A dad is somebody who raises you and is there all the time. He doesn't have a dad, he has a donor."

Times are Changing: Acknowledgment that it is a Different World

Participants had a sense that times are changing regarding others' perceptions and reactions to diversity in sexual orientation. Mary shared, "10 years ago . . . it never really occurred to us that there would be marriage." Carmen shared, "People a little bit younger than us . . . they're just like, 'Who cares?'"

Families generally had the consensus that while it is a different world than the one they grew up in, we are "not there yet." Most parents in this study predicted that their children would likely get made fun of based on their sexual orientation. Sara shared her worry that, "There's gonna be kids who tease him—you know, 'You have two moms', or, 'Your parents are gay, that makes you gay'. We haven't encountered that, but it's gonna happen." However, their children did not report this happening. Previous research is conflicting regarding the extent of children of LGBQ-identified parents experiencing discrimination. Gartrell et al. (2005) found that by age 10, 43% of children of lesbian mothers had experienced homophobia, and Leddy, Gartrell, and Bos (2012) found that older children remembered that their peers were less accepting

when they were younger. While some participants described having struggles with their families-of-origin in the past regarding their sexual orientation, they felt that these relationships have improved since becoming parents. This seems to have brought the grandparents closer despite past feelings of distance.

Acknowledgment of Biases: Assumptions Are a Two-Way Street

Some families identified stereotypes that they have faced from family or community members such as the idea that non-heterosexual people should not have children or that they should adopt. Other parents described how others assume they are straight in different ways, for example, a neighbor thinking that they were sisters, a passenger on a flight assuming that one mother was the nanny, or others making homophobic comments around them, which they would likely not have made had they known their sexual orientation. One mother noted the challenges they have faced as two women in their 40s trying to support a family and how their brothers do not understand the institutional biases they face regarding age, gender, and sexual orientation.

Some families described assumptions others made about how their children came to be, whether through adoption, donorship, or other avenues. Some parents noted that they faced others' stereotypes of how they should have children, or remarks others made about the donor being a father figure. Margaret (age 9) was the only child who was conceived through donorship who expressed an interest in knowing who the donor was. She has not been able to meet this person but has expressed curiosity about who he is and wrote letters to the sperm bank. As she shared, "In the letters, I always made sure to make it that I wasn't looking for a dad, I just wanted to know who this person was." Children in the Goldberg and Allen study (2013) felt similarly,

expressing frustration that others would think they were looking for a father while having curiosity about the identity of their donor.

Most families described assumptions that they have made about others in the context of both political and religious affiliation, specifically assuming that politically conservative and Christian individuals would not accept their families. Many families shared moments when their assumptions were challenged and how this was experienced as a positive moment that expanded their outlook. For example, Sophie described feeling anxious to meet her wife Carmen's uncle before they got married. Carmen had mentioned that he was a "very right-wing Tea-Partier." Sophie shared, "He just reaches over to me, and politely, kind of in a whisper, says, 'Um, hey, so, Carmen's really happy, and . . . just make sure you take good care of our girl.'"

Other families described being wary of Republican or Christian neighbors, and feeling excited when they mowed their lawn, asked how their kids were doing in school, or commented that their children seemed happy and well-adjusted. One of these neighbors, a "staunch" Republican and a veteran of Afghanistan, ended up officiating Sara and Katie's wedding.

Questioning the Relevance of Gender to Parenting

Responses in this theme fell into three categories: perceptions of differences between mothers and fathers, the belief parents had that children need female and male influence for healthy development, and a greater awareness of gender diversity and diversity in gender roles as same-gender parents. The children in this study generally preferred mothers and reported that other children were jealous that they had two moms. They described mothers as nice, sweet, and that they take care of you, while describing fathers as loud, smelly, strict, and making "inappropriate" jokes.

Most mothers discussed their perception of the necessity of both female and male influence for their children's healthy development, especially for their sons. Mothers in the current study felt that it was important that their sons had male role models to be well-rounded in order to develop masculine traits and to achieve developmental tasks that the mothers felt unequipped for, such as how to go to the bathroom standing up. The mothers in this study enlisted the help of male friends, teachers, relatives, and neighbors to provide their sons with these experiences. Some mothers shared that they felt they took on more "dad" roles such as going fishing and being more of the disciplinarian. Mothers also described positive aspects of their sons being raised by two women: They believed their sons would learn to be polite, conscientious, and expressive of their emotions. Katie and Sara exemplified these conversations:

> **Katie**: We're two women and he's a boy—like where's the male influence?
> **Sara**: Your sister's said that.
> **Katie**: This man at the bar . . . asked, "Does he have a male role model?"
> **Sara**: Yeah, a male role model. Which I actually believe is important, especially for young boys, I think at this age is important. For girls, as they're older, like pre-teens and teens, it's important for girls to have a female role model. But I don't think it's absolutely necessary.
> **Katie**: But I don't think it has to be a parent, could be an uncle, close friend.
> **Sara**: I think they should be there, but it doesn't have to be a parent. I think he knows that he has two parents that love him. Really, I kind of feel like that's all you need, right?

The belief that male influence is essential for sons is consistent with the discussion of Long, Bonomo, Andrews, and Brown (2006) that one of the greatest dilemmas facing same-gender couples (and single parents) is the societal belief that having opposite-gender role models is essential for normal child development. Biblarz and Stacey (2010) echoed that entrenched in our societal values is a consensus that children raised by both a mother and father develop more successfully. Alex and

Sinead Murphy discussed this belief and their hesitation that expressing this belief condones the "traditional" argument against marriage equality and same-gender parenting.

> **Alex**: I hesitate to say this, because the argument against gay parenting is. . . . So, this relationship is unusual, right? There usually aren't two moms and two dads. There's usually a set of moms or a set of dads. The argument either way is, if there's two moms, a boy needs his father, right? That's sort of the traditional argument. And I really hesitate to say this, but I wonder if to some extent that's true!
> **Sinead**: And maybe it's not a father, but a father figure.

Yet, research overwhelmingly supports the idea that "when children fare well in two-parent lesbian-mother or gay-father families, this suggests that the gender of one's parents cannot be a critical factor in child development" (Patterson, 2006, p. 243). Parenting skills or influences are not exclusive to women or men (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Fedewa et al., 2014). Children of LGBQ parents are comparable in terms of gender development, social relationships, sexual orientation, and psychological adjustment (Tasker, 2005). Notably, where there are differences, children of LGBQ parents show greater psychological well-being (Fedewa et al., 2014).

Thus, there is a disconnect between parents' beliefs that children need both female and male influences and research findings indicating that parental gender is not a critical factor in child development. We can look to queer theory to reconcile this discrepancy. Queer theory, emerging from feminist theories, emphasizes that power in society is enforced through socially constructed binaries of sex, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression (Oswald, Kuvalanka, Blume, & Berkowitz, 2009). These binaries are viewed as false linguistic distinctions, and when institutionalized, serve to ensure conformity and to keep some groups in power. All individuals in our society internalize these standards. Because the LGBTQ population

has been historically devalued, they are most at risk for increased rates of mental health issues, compromised personal safety, and access to health care, to name a few (Nabors, 2012). At the same time, Bos et al. (2004) found that lesbian parents do not experience high levels of internalized homophobia.

Lynn was the only parent who voiced her awareness of her own internalized homophobia as it impacted her belief that her daughter, Elsa, needed male role models.

> **Lynn**: I'm willing to say, it may just be a reaction to internalized homophobia saying that there should be [men in Elsa's life]! This underlying belief of "Oh, am I depriving my child of something," if there isn't that. Because there is enough research out there about the different ways that moms and dads interact, that kids need all sorts of types of stimulation, to be well-rounded. Well, no, there are all sorts of that are lacking or present in any one person. But I think it is that underlying belief, or fear, whether I'm depriving my child of something.
> **Ann**: I was just thinking about that. Yes, I agree with that. But I do think that, I mean, Elsa is fine, I'm not worried about her, but there is a different male energy, there is something different. And I want her to have that different. . . . And have those relationships, and be around that different kind of energy, because I think that's a life skill. I think it will help her be more equipped to deal with life.

The mothers in this study, as evidenced by Lynn and Ann's above discussion, appeared to face a dialectical tension as they discussed gender and their belief that their children needed male role models. Dialectic is the process of "transforming apparent contradictions by engaging two opposite ends of a continuum" (Todd & Abrams, 2011, p. 355). It is a paradoxical approach that embraces the idea that people can be at multiple points on a continuum at the same time, and that movement between the poles is what helps to explore and resolve these apparent contradictions.

Parents seemed to move along a continuum as they spoke. This continuum seems to have the idea that children need both male and female influence for optimal

psychological development on one pole, and the idea that two mothers can give their children everything they need for optimal psychological development on the other. These parents, aware that opponents of gay marriage have used this same argument for why their relationship is unacceptable, were hesitant to share that they may hold the same beliefs. At the same time, for example, Sara shared that she feels like having parents who love them is all children need for healthy development.

Perhaps previous research gives guidance for one way to resolve the dialectic. Schacher et al. (2005) conducted a focus group with gay male fathers who believed, like Sara does, that love and emotional attachment makes a family. Fathers in their study believed that this love transcends biological ties and can include many other important adults in their children's lives. While the families in the current study did not seem to feel the need for a family by choice because of supportive relationships in their families-of-origin (Weston, 1991), they all discussed seeking support from their parents, friends, neighbors, extended family, and schools. As Gerstel (2011) discussed, the traditional American emphasis on marriage and nuclear family may negate social ties that are critical to children's and communities' development. Having an extended network of supportive adults in children's lives is the rule, not the exception, in many cultures around the world. In addition, men in the Schacher et al. study felt that it was important to expose their children to a variety of cultures and different family structures. They felt that going against cultural norms is anxiety-producing, and that it is crucial to have a network of friends and family to support them in this time of rapid social change.

Normality and Intersectionality: We're the Same, It's Just Two Women!

All families wanted to be perceived as "normal," yet acknowledged that the fact that they are two women has an inherent difference compared with most families. Many families seemed to struggle with the dialectical challenge of the reality of this difference from the norm, yet wondered how meaningful this difference truly is.

> **Sophie**: Maybe I'm way off but I think we're pretty normal, but I think the more people realize just how normal families like ours are, and that we have one thing that's different, but everything else absolutely is the same. We love each other, we respect each other, we honor each other, we support each other, I think that . . .
> **Carmen**: We uphold the marriage vows just like anybody else.
>
> **Christine**: When you go over to your friend's house with a mom and a dad, do you feel like, "Oh, this is so different?"
> **Margaret (age 9)**: I mean, every family is different.

Many parents discussed their own coming out experiences, as well as how their relationship with their LGBQ identity has changed over time. Some mothers discussed how earlier in their lives, when they first came out, their LGBQ identity was the most salient identity for them. For example, Sara shared, "I think that when you're young and single and just in a relationship, being gay is your identity, that's who you are."

Now, all the interviewed parents felt that being a mother is their most salient identity. Homework, sports practice, being part of the school community, and dealing with parenting challenges are experienced as daily reminders that motherhood is the most prominent aspect of their lives. In addition, all families described that they have faced minimal sexual orientation-based discrimination as a family, and thus feel free to focus on raising their children without worrying about potential oppression. Some mothers noted that being gay or lesbian would have prevented them from getting

married or being parents in the recent past. In essence, they felt that being a parent as well as getting married has included them in a different world—a world that some mothers did not think would be possible to be part of earlier in their lives due to institutionalized oppression. Thus consistent with previous research, motherhood may lead lesbian mothers to feel more connected in society. Even if lesbian women have faced discrimination based on their sexual orientation, they fulfill a valued role in American society when they become mothers (Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999). Lesbian mothers in another study also described how they experienced being a lesbian mother as easier than "just" being a lesbian, as they felt society was more accepting of their relationship after having a child (Ben-Ari & Livni, 2006).

Most mothers described not thinking about their sexual orientation in their day-to-day life. This is consistent with findings that even in nonmetropolitan areas, LGBTQ-identified individuals did not find their sexual orientation especially salient in their everyday experiences (Holman & Oswald, 2011), and that lesbian mothers generally perceive little stigmatization and rejection (Bos et al., 2004). All parents in this study described their own families as "normal" and "boring" and felt strongly that they wanted this to be portrayed through this research. Previous research with adolescents found similar results. Welsh (2011) found that adolescents with LGBQ-identified parents experienced frustration that their families might be perceived as abnormal and felt pulled to "prove" their normalcy.

It is possible that these parents, as well as the older adolescents in Welsh's (2011) study, had greater awareness of the consequences of being labeled as "different" based on being part of a historically marginalized population. One parent brought up her hesitation with this research topic, wondering if we were sending a

message to her daughter that there is something negative or different about their family by even having this conversation focused on sexual orientation. Other parents acknowledged the fact that they are two women is inherently different from most families, yet wondered if this was a meaningful difference. Yet, if someone ignores or negates their sexual orientation as part of their identity, they may have a reaction. One mother shared, “It’s one of those things where, if somebody assumes that it’s the issue, it’s not. But if someone assumes that that issue does not affect it, then it does . . . [it] has a piece in everything.”

While parents felt strongly that they did not want to be differentiated from other families solely based on their sexual orientation, their children seemed to identify and value the differences between all families. Children in this study seemed to not only have a sophisticated understanding of what makes families different and unique, but they also valued these differences. They identified variables that allow all families to be unique, such as the kinds of pets they have or the kinds of hobbies and activities they engage in as a family. They also identified similarities between all families, for example, one child describing how she gets in trouble just like other kids do, and gets “snuggles” when she needs them just like other kids.

These children have not experienced discrimination based on their parents’ sexual orientation. In particular, the younger children had no understanding of why their families might be discriminated against or considered different in a negative way. These mothers described how they have intentionally chosen schools, friends, and other environments in which diversity is celebrated and encouraged, and this seems evident in the children’s responses that their families are “cool” and that all families are unique and different in multiple ways. Their mothers described having a deep

appreciation of times when they see their family structure represented in books, classrooms, and media. Similar to their children's responses, some parents also identified ethnicity, adoptive status, discipline and parenting style, or differing boundaries regarding openness and privacy as unique diversity variables, while noting that discrimination can occur based on other areas as well. While their experiences varied, no family primarily identified themselves as a "gay family" or an "LGBTQ family." Overall, these children's life experiences of learning that differences are valued and celebrated is a substantial difference from their parents' past experiences of having their differences being viewed as negative or pathological. If difference is not bad, it is cool to be different!

As described earlier in regard to gender, these parents also have a dialectical awareness of "different-not different." Parents alluded to this dialectical tension and shifted along the dialectic as they talked with me. Specifically, toward the beginning of the interview, many parents initially ensured that I knew that they were "normal" and how their sexual orientation is a "non-issue." They described how they were just like other families and dealt with the same challenges as other parents. At this point in the interview, some parents seemed to want to minimize their differences in being an LGBQ-parented family and described how they wanted to make sure that this research described that they were just like other families. It seemed that once I validated this for them and acknowledged that I was not necessarily seeking out difference or sameness, this opened the door for families to acknowledge that having two mothers is different in some ways, particularly around the lack of prescribed gender roles and being identified as part of a minority group.

Evident in participants' statements is the tension that they, as well as our society, experience. Even within their families, these mothers' lived experiences of living in a time when they could not get married and where their sexual orientation has been pathologized comes into conflict with their young children's lived experiences of seeing difference as special and valued. These mothers developed their LGBQ identity at a time when they faced societal oppression and have worked hard to protect their children from experiencing this. These mothers are moving through their own process of identity development based on their intersecting identities (Warner & Shields, 2013). Identifying as part of a societally valued group, as mothers, intersects with their historically oppressed status as a sexual minority. In addition, compounding the complexity is their awareness of other diversity markers, and parents mentioned ethnicity, gender, their children's adoptive status, and religion as other parts of themselves they are aware of impacting their family.

These discussions of dialectics have only emerged minimally in the research literature specifically around sexual orientation and gender. Yet, as Hequembourg and Farrell (1999) note, these families combine a historically marginalized identity as LGBQ with a societally valued identity as a parent, and thus have a unique perspective. Ariel and McPherson (2000) summarize this dialectical struggle well:

> One of the most remarkable aspects of working with LGBQ-identified individuals is the continual awareness of two realities. The first is the universal reality of ordinary human beings struggling together to create intimate bonds that allow both individual freedom and family cohesion. The second is the particular reality of societal prejudice; at any moment, a gay—or lesbian family can become the object of hate or derision that powerfully affects self-esteem and the level of stress within the family. Being able to hold both of these realities is primary to intervening effectively with any oppressed group. (p. 430)

The children in this study seemed more "okay" with the both/and nature of their identity as an LGBQ-parented family. Many children, including the older ones who had more of an awareness that society has discriminated against families like theirs, did not seem to struggle as much with this tension as their parents did. They love their families and feel that there are many things that make their family, as well as every family, special.

> **Terry**: I think some people see difference as a good thing. Like, it's cool because it's different.
>
> **Quintry (age 10)**: That it's kinda different, and it's good to be different. That not everybody in the world has two moms.
>
> **Merida (age 6)**: It's kind of actually cool to have two moms.

Limitations

Qualitative and phenomenological research seeks to provide perspective rather than truth and to explore the uniqueness of the participants as well as the meaning they attribute to their experiences (Ponterotto, 2005). Qualitative research does not seek to generalize information (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, the information gained from these interviews may or may not be representative of the experiences of members of lesbian-parented families as a whole.

Participants were self-selecting and generally valued this type of research and were knowledgeable about diversity and social justice issues. In addition, the demographics of these participants are quite homogenous, with multiple privileged identities. All of the parents identify as female and Caucasian (two mothers identified as Latino). They are mostly in their late 30s to late 40s and are upper middle class. Therapists and social workers are highly overrepresented, and many participants have graduate degrees. It is likely that these individuals have more education, awareness,

and training regarding social justice and the experiences of minority populations. Many have been involved in or have done their own research themselves and felt a desire to "return the favor" by participating in my study. These participants are, in general, an educated group of women who understand the purpose and nature of research and who deliberately educate their children around issues of social justice. Although individuals who identify as LGBTQ may be more aware of these issues in general, this study described the experiences of a very specific subgroup of lesbian-parented families. I believe it is both a strength and limitation that these women have both personal experience and professional training in diversity issues. They are both participants and observers in the experience of identifying as lesbians and thus offer a unique perspective. At the same time, this perspective may or may not be representative of the lived experiences of other LGBQ-parented families.

Finally, I developed this study based on my perspective, my culture, and my worldview. It is possible my views may be different from my participants' or my readers' views. Although I attempted to bracket my experiences and utilize other methods to increase trustworthiness, there is inherent subjectivity in this type of research. My intent is that counseling psychologists reading this research will choose which parts of the results, if any, apply to their counseling practice.

Clinical Implications

Many families discussed how they made both conscious decisions about where to live based on the perceived level of acceptance of that community and how they felt privileged to be able to make this choice. Thus for counseling psychologists working with more rural families or families with less education or fewer economic opportunities, it may be important to explore their experience. For example, it may

bring up important clinical information to discuss how parents decided to live where they live, or if they have experienced any barriers based on their sexual orientation. If these families feel as though they have less of a choice of where to live, they may experience increased stigma and stress. Because LGBQ-parented families in metropolitan areas have greater access to LGBTQ-affirming mental health services, it may perhaps be more important to bolster affirming mental health services for rural families in need.

From a macro, social justice, and policy perspective, it is important for counseling psychologists to advocate for reduced barriers for LGBQ couples as they begin planning to have children. Many participants described institutional barriers to having children, including experiencing stereotypes about how or even if they should have children. Legal issues around adoption and donorship were common. Psychologists could play an important role in educating others as well as minimizing parents' sense of having to be "approved" as parents by the government, by adoption agencies, or fertility clinics.

In addition, many parents shared how they have intentional discussions with their children around diversity issues and potential discrimination they may face. The mothers in this study were generally well-educated, particularly in mental health, and trained in diversity issues. LGBQ-identified parents who for some reason have not had these conversations with their children can be supported in counseling to begin these conversations around diversity, celebrating uniqueness, or how to respond to discrimination. Prior research has shown that family cohesion, communication, nurturance, and support are protective factors against discrimination. Counseling psychologists could help families with parents who have not had this type of training,

have these conversations with each other when they are ready, develop pride in their families, and develop a strong family narrative.

Counseling psychologists may be able to help families develop ways in which to advocate for themselves or speak up in situations in which they are experiencing discrimination. While the interviewed families in this study did not seem to have a need for this, it is possible that more rural families or families with parents who do not have knowledge of multicultural issues may be afraid of speaking up or not know how to have these conversations. Counseling psychologists could help families discuss ways in which they feel comfortable advocating for themselves, while keeping safety, context, and client self-determination in mind. In family therapy sessions, counseling psychologists could expand discussions of diversity to include not only sexual orientation, but clients' intersecting identities and other ways they experience privilege and oppression.

Another dimension of advocacy and visibility for LGBQ-parented families is in the classroom setting. Many parents described their willingness to come to their children's classrooms and present about their family structure. At the same time, it is not these families' responsibility to ensure their family structure is represented at school. Other families described being delighted to see their type of family represented in children's drawings, posters, books, and videos in class. For mental health professionals working in a school setting, it is important to advocate for diverse families to be visible. Counseling psychologists working with families could have knowledge of books about diverse families to recommend, as well as having diverse families on display in the form of books, pictures on the walls, or advertising materials.

Many parents discussed how their relationships with their families-of-origin have changed over time, specifically regarding their sexual orientation. For some participants, their parents took time to become accepting of their sexual orientation, and the addition of children seemed to help bring these grandparents to a more involved and accepting place. Therefore, it may be helpful for counseling psychologists to take a thorough history or use a genogram with families to assess family-of-origin relationships, how they have changed over time, and if there is any tension around this issue. For example, one participant noted that her father took some time to accept that her children "belonged" to her, because she was in a lesbian relationship and was not the biological mother. Counseling psychologists may also want to expand the invitation to family therapy sessions to extended family in these cases.

Families acknowledged that they have both experienced when others have made assumptions about them, and that they have made assumptions about others. It is important for counseling psychologists working with diverse families to identify the assumptions and biases they hold and to ensure that they are using sensitive, inclusive, and appropriate language. For example, many parents and children noted that they tend to bristle when someone refers to the donor as the "dad." Other families did not feel that the phrase "gay family" or "LGBTQ family" was appropriate, as they wanted to be described as a family. Having inclusive written materials may help reduce assumptions on the part of the therapist, for example, allowing clients to self-identify their sexual orientation, gender, and preferred pronouns on intake paperwork.

Counseling psychologists could also play a part in challenging clients' assumptions of others. Many participants noted, for example, assumptions they made

based on a person's religious views or political affiliation. They felt that their eyes were opened when these stereotypes they held were broken, and counseling psychologists could help clients become more aware of inherent biases they hold that may serve as barriers to connection within their neighborhoods, schools, and communities.

Another way that counseling psychologists can challenge their clients in session is around gender. As evident in this study, very young children have clear views regarding the differences between mothers and fathers. Parents have clear views that children need male and female influence for optimal psychological development. Counseling psychologists could help families take a critical view toward gender. This more critical perspective could serve to identify internalized homophobia and to acknowledge potential shame that parents experience if they perceive they are not able to provide their children with what they need. This may involve identifying societal messages and standards in session to determine whether the family feels those are helpful for their family or not. Counseling psychologists can share affirming research that shows that overall children fare just as well in mother-only homes, or that children of LGBQ parents tend to have greater gender flexibility and awareness of diversity. Counseling psychologists can also encourage parents to develop diverse networks of friends and supportive figures in their children's lives that are not only limited to gender differences.

It was important to each of the interviewed families that they were seen as "just like everyone else." I found that validating this sense of normalcy built rapport and opened the doors to more personal and sensitive conversations regarding sexual orientation. This dialectic illustrates the necessity of counseling psychologists'

keeping in mind clients' intersecting identities. For these parents, their identity as mothers was most salient in their day-to-day lives, yet sexual orientation became more salient at moments of discrimination or institutional barriers. For example, if a couple was not able to get married, they would not have been able to benefit from the privileges associated with marriage and thus may experience a sense of loss, anger, or disconnection from society that may become relevant in therapy. Singling out one particular diversity factor, such as sexual orientation, may negate or minimize other aspects of a person's identity, and thus it is important for counseling psychologists to view clients' identities from a holistic, developmental, and intersectional perspective. These conversations about sexual orientation could be situated within a wider conversation about diversity to avoid singling out one aspect of clients' identities that may or may not be salient for them at that point in time.

One protective factor for families is having a unique and cohesive identity as a family. Children in this study had a broader range of what they considered diversity variables, which included what kinds of pets they had, hobbies, and family activities. Counseling psychologists in family therapy could help families solidify their unique identity through developing and telling their family narrative or by engaging in activities such as drawing a family crest or developing a family cheer.

One participant emphasized, "When you categorize us as a LGBT family, I mean, obviously that's what we are, but I think that . . . I don't think that should be the title of it. We're a family." Participants wanted counseling psychologists to understand that they experience the same parenting struggles as other families. Families wanted counseling psychologists to be aware of the assumptions they make: "Maybe not making the assumption that we really are that different. That other people

really don't see us differently. I think the assumption that other people do see us differently can be just as detrimental." At the same time, families emphasized the importance of taking a thorough history with an ear tuned to LGBTQ-specific issues, such as coming out stories, levels of outness of the family, and disconnected or strained relationships.

The LGBTQ-identified participants may be hesitant to participate in research, as this is a population that has been historically discriminated against by the field of psychology. It is interesting to note that nearly all of the Rocky Mountain families, and none of the Pacific Northwest families, asked me questions about the purpose of the research before the research process began. I received many questions about why I was conducting the research, what I was going to be using the research for, and wanting to know that it was being "used in the right way." Some families mentioned afterward that they were listening for me to say words such as "social justice" as I was describing my study to them. Overall, the Rocky Mountain region families appeared more guarded as they asked me these questions. It is possible that these differences are due to the more liberal climate in the Pacific Northwest region. Finally, other families asked about my personal investment in the research, wondering if I was gay or if I had family members who were gay. Thus, it may be helpful for researchers to take more time to build rapport, emphasize confidentiality, and put participants at ease by taking time to make more conversation over the telephone as well as before beginning an interview, and using more self-disclosure, particularly in more rural areas.

Participants shared that they are not necessarily looking for a therapist who is experienced with LGBTQ-specific issues, as they felt that they would not likely

present in therapy for issues specifically related to their sexual orientation. They are, however, looking for a therapist who is open to all parts of their identities. Therefore, it may be helpful for counseling psychologists to advertise their openness to seeing diverse clients via their website, on resource lists, or their written materials.

Current research is growing in the field of LGBTQ family studies. Because listening to the voices of individuals from marginalized populations is such a deeply unique and personal experience, it is important that future research incorporates qualitative research so individual stories may be explored. It is also recommended that future research in this area aims to include a more diverse sample of LGBTQ-identified participants and their family members. This will provide a more representative picture of the lived experiences of LGBTQ-identified individuals and their families. This will also allow the research literature to move toward a non-binary, holistic, and inclusive approach that honors the depth and complexity of diverse family systems.

Given the above discussion, these families' responses carry implications for counseling psychologists' work with all families, not only families with LGBQ parents. Each family is unique, each family has challenges, and each family has multiple intersecting identities. Every person can benefit from exposure to diverse individuals and perspectives and developing a critical eye toward socially constructed binaries and issues of internalized privilege and oppression. Every couple parenting children can benefit from intentional discussions around gender roles and expectations (Jonathan, 2009). Although they come from a historically marginalized population, this was overwhelmingly not the way these participants think of themselves or wish to be viewed. They wish to be treated the same as any clients and hope that their

counselors can enter the therapeutic relationship with openness, a fresh perspective, and by letting each family tell their story.

I believe that my participants helped me to have a deeper understanding of intersectionality. While many of the parents in this study shared what it meant to them to have multiple, intersecting identities, it was the children who caused me to reflect the most deeply. Most of the children in this study live in a world where they do not know that having two moms is something that people may have an opinion about. As Margaret (age 9) put it, “Every family’s special. Every family has something special about them.”

References

Ariel, J., & McPherson, D. W. (2000). Therapy with lesbian and gay parents and their children. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 26*, 421-432.

Ben-Ari, A., & Livni, T. (2006). Motherhood is not a given thing: Experiences and constructed meanings of biological and nonbiological lesbian mothers. *Sex Roles, 54*, 521-531. doi:10.1007/s11199-006-9016-0

Bergstrom-Lynch, C. A. (2012). How children rearrange the closet: Disclosure practices of gay, lesbian, and bisexual prospective parents. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 8*, 173-195. doi:10.1080/1550428X.2011.623929

Biblarz, T. J., & Stacey, J. (2010). How does the gender of parents matter? *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72*, 3-22.

Bos, H., & Gartrell, N. (2010). Adolescents of the USA national longitudinal lesbian family study: Can family characteristics counteract the negative effects of stigmatization? *Family Process, 49*, 559-572.

Bos, H. M. W., Gartrell, N. K., Peyser, H. & van Balen, F. (2008). The USA national longitudinal lesbian family study (NLLFS): Homophobia, psychological adjustment, and protective factors. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 12*, 455-471. doi:10.1080/10894160802278630

Bos, H. M. W., van Balen, F., van den Boom, D. C., & Sandfort, Th. G. M. (2004). Minority stress: Experience of parenthood and child adjustment in lesbian families. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology, 22*, 291–304.

Clarke, V. (2002). Sameness and difference in research on lesbian parenting. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 12*, 210-222.

Comstock, D. L., Hammer, T. R., Strentzsch, J., Cannon, K., Parsons, J., & Salazar II, G. (2008). Relational-cultural theory: A framework for bridging relational, multicultural, and social justice competencies. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 86*, 279-287.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dahl, C. M., & Boss, P. (2005). The use of phenomenology for family therapy research: The search for meaning. In D. H.Sprenkle & F. P. Piercy (Eds.), *Research methods in family therapy* (pp. 85-99). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Fedewa, A. L., Black, W. W., & Ahn, S. (2014). Children and adolescents with same-gender parents: A meta-analytic approach in assessing outcomes. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 11*, 1-34. doi:10.1080/1550428X.2013.869486

Fitzgerald, B. (1999). Children of lesbian and gay parents. *Marriage and Family Review, 29*, 57-75.

Gartrell, N., Rodas, C., Deck, A., Peyser, H., & Banks, A. (2005). The national lesbian family study: 4. Interviews with 10-year-old children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 75*, 518-524. doi:10.1037/0002-9432.75.4.518

Gates, G. J. (2011). *How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender?* Retrieved from http://escholarship.org/uc/item/09h684x2

Gehart, D. (2010). *Mastering competencies in family therapy: A practical approach to theories and clinical case documentation.* Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Gerstel, N. (2011). Rethinking families and community: The color, class, and centrality of extended kin ties. *Sociological Forum, 26*, 1-20. doi:10.1111/j.1573-7861.2010.01222.x

Goldberg, A. E., & Allen, K. R. (2013). Donor, dad, or…? Young adults with lesbian parents' experiences with known donors. *Family Process*, *52*, 338-350. doi:10.1111/famp.12029

Golombok, S., & Badger, S. (2010). Children raised in mother-headed families from infancy: A follow-up of children of lesbian and single heterosexual mothers at early adulthood. *Human Reproduction, 25*, 150-157. doi:10.1093/humrep/dep345

Hequembourg, A. L., & Farrell, M. P. (1999). Lesbian motherhood: Negotiating marginal-mainstream identities. *Gender and Society, 13*, 540-557.

Holman, E. G., & Oswald, R. F. (2011). Nonmetropolitan GLBTQ parents: When and where does their sexuality matter? *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 7*, 436-456. doi:10.1080/1550428X.2011.623937

Jonathan, N. (2009). Carrying equal weight: Relational responsibility and attunement among same-sex couples. In C. Knutson-Martin & A. R. Mahoney (Eds.), *Couples, gender, and power: Creating change in intimate relationships* (pp. 79-103). New York, NY: Springer.

Kurdek, L. A. (2005). What do we know about gay and lesbian couples? *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 14*, 251-254.

Lambert, S. (2005). Gay and lesbian families: What we know and where to go from here. *The Family Journal, 13*, 43-51.

Leddy, A., Gartrell, N., & Bos, H. (2012). Growing up in a lesbian family: The life experiences of the adult daughters and sons of lesbian mothers. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 8*, 243-257.

Lindsay, J., Perlesz, A., Brown, R., McNair, R., de Vaus, D., & Pitts, M. (2006). Stigma or respect: Lesbian-parented families negotiating school settings. *Sociology, 40*, 1059-1077. doi:10.1177/0038038506069845

Long, J. K., Bonomo, J., Andrews, B. V., & Brown, J. M. (2006). Systemic therapeutic approaches with sexual minorities and their families. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 2*, 7-37. doi:10.1300/J461v02n03_02

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nabors, N. A. (2012). The social psychology of stigma. In R. Nettles & R. Balter (Eds.), *Multiple minority identities: Applications for practice, research, and training* (pp. 13-31). New York, NY: Springer.

Oswald, R. F., Kuvalanka, K. A., Blume, L. B., & Berkowitz, D. (2009). Queering "the family." In S. A. Lloyd, A. L. Few, & K. R. Allen (Eds.), *Handbook of Feminist Family Studies* (pp. 43-55). Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

Patterson, C. J. (2006). Children of lesbian and gay parents. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 15*, 241-244.

Ponterotto, J. G. (2005). Qualitative research in counseling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*, 126-136. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.126

Schacher, J. S., Auerbach, C. F., & Silverstein, L. B. (2005). Gay fathers expanding the possibilities for us all. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 1*, 31-52.

Solomon, S. E., Rothblum, E. E., & Balsam, K. F. (2005). Money, housework, sex, and conflict: Same-sex couples in civil unions, those not in civil unions, and heterosexual married siblings. *Sex Roles, 52*, 561-575.

Tasker, F. (2005). Lesbian mothers, gay fathers, and their children: A review. *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 26*, 224-240.

Tasker, F., & Patterson, C. J. (2007). Research on gay and lesbian parenting. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 3*, 9-34.

Todd, N. R., & Abrams, E. M. (2011). White dialectics: A new framework for theory, research, and practice with white students. *The Counseling Psychologist, 39*, 353-395. doi:10.1177/0011000010377665

United States Census Bureau. (2010). *American community survey: Same sex couples*. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/hhes/samesex/

United States v. Windsor, No. 12-307, United States Supreme Court (2013). Retrieved from http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/12pdf/12-307_6j37.pdf

Warner, L. R., & Shields, S. A. (2013). The intersections of sexuality, gender, and race: Identity research at the crossroads. *Sex Roles, 68*, 803-810. doi:10.1007/s11199-013-0281-4

Welsh, M. G. (2011). Growing up in a same-sex parented family: The adolescent voice of experience. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 7*, 49-71.

Weston, K. (1991). *Families we choose: Lesbians, gays, kinship*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.