(How) Does It Make a Difference? Perspectives of Adults With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Parents

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Few studies have addressed the experiences or perceptions of adult children of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) parents. In this study, 46 adult children of LGB parents were interviewed, and their perceptions of how growing up with LGB parents influenced them as adults were examined. Qualitative analysis revealed that adults felt that they were more tolerant and open minded and had more flexible ideas about gender and sexuality as a function of growing up with LGB parents. Participants often felt protective of their parents and the gay community, and some went to great efforts to defend them to peers, family members, and society. Some participants struggled with issues of trust in adulthood, which they related to the experience of their parents' unexpected coming out, as well as to experiences of teasing and bullying. The importance of understanding these findings in the context of societal heterosexism is discussed.

Keywords: children, gender, lesbian, gay, parents

A growing literature exists on the social, emotional, and developmental outcomes of children of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) parents (e.g., Chan, Brooks, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998; Golombok et al., 2003; Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Much of the early research in this area was conducted in a context in which custody cases often claimed that children would be harmed by remaining with their LGB parent(s) (Allen & Burell, 1996). Thus, these studies typically compared children of LGB parents with children of heterosexual parents or single mothers on social, emotional, and developmental outcomes. On the basis of their findings, scholars have concluded that children of lesbian parents do not seem to differ from children of heterosexual parents in terms of depression, behavioral problems, or social functioning (Chan et al., 1998; Golombok et al., 2003; Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Wainright et al., 2004). Researchers also have reported few differences between children of lesbian parents and children of heterosexual parents in terms of gender role behavior and sexual orientation (Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, & Smith, 1986; Tasker & Golombok, 1997). Similarly, researchers have noted that the gender development of children of gay fathers tends to fall within normal limits (Harris & Turner, 1986) and that most children of gay fathers assume a heterosexual identification (Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, & Mikach, 1995).

In their meta-analysis and critique of the research on children of LGB parents, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) problematized the tendency for scholars to deliver a "no-differences" mantra. They acknowledge that, because antigay scholars and activists view homosexuality as pathology, these individuals will inevitably view evidence that children may be more likely to consider or engage in same-sex relationships and sexual behavior as evidence of malad-

justment. Sensitive to such interpretations, most scholars are extremely cautious in their investigation of and interpretation of findings of difference among children of LGB parents compared with children of heterosexual parents. However, Stacey and Biblarz have argued that such politicization of the issues surrounding gay parenting has brought the field to a standstill. Antigay scholars use any evidence of difference as evidence of harm, and in response, mainstream scholars are reluctant to explore areas of difference, even though, from a social-constructionist viewpoint, they must exist: Children of LGB parents and children of heterosexual parents experience different social realities. Thus, Stacey and Biblarz have proposed the need for a new model of doing research on LGB parents and their children, in that the current model accepts heterosexual-parent households as the gold standard and implies that differences equal deficits (Baumrind, 1995). A more fruitful approach may be to simply view differences as differences and not as evidence of superior or pathological development per se (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Differences in children's experiences may lend insight into the socially constructed nature of family forms and highlight areas of advantage or opportunity associated with growing up with LGB parents (e.g., greater encouragement of girls' academic pursuits). Furthermore, evidence of differences (e.g., in offspring's attitudes and/or gender role behavior) must be interpreted in the context of a heteronormative society and offsprings' membership-by-association of a stigmatized minority group; indeed, as Hicks (2005) noted, it is important not to treat "lesbian" and "gay" as referring to a distinct type of person with a distinct set of characteristics that can be passed on to children.

Few studies have interviewed adults raised by LGB parents in an effort to understand the subjective impact of having nonheterosexual parents. This research is important because (a) it may uncover yet-undocumented areas of perceived influence; (b) it permits individuals to speak in their own words about how they feel they are (and are not) different from their counterparts raised

in traditional households; and (c) by asking adults about their experiences and perceptions, the tendency for defensiveness is reduced (e.g., in contrast to children, who may feel more self-conscious about the potential implications of their response, such as criticism of their parents; Garner, 2004). The present study, then, reports data from interviews with 46 adults with one or more LGB parents. Participants were asked a series of questions about their experiences growing up with a nonheterosexual parent (or parents), as well as their perceptions of how, if at all, their membership in a nontraditional family structure influenced them in adulthood: Little research examines the long-term perceived "effects" of growing up with a nonheterosexual parent (but see Saffron, 1998; Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

Sexuality and Gender

In their meta-analysis and critique, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) re-evaluated the existing research on children with LGB parents and concluded that some differences, in fact, do appear to exist, particularly in the area of sexuality and gender development. For example, Tasker and Golombok (1997) found that youth with lesbian mothers may be more likely to experience peer stigma related to their own sexuality (such as, teasing about being gay themselves). They also reported that young adults with lesbian mothers were more likely to consider a same-sex sexual relationship and to have had a same-sex relationship, but they were no more likely to self-identify as nonheterosexual.

In terms of gender role behavior, a study by Green and colleagues (1986) found that, according to parent reports, the children of lesbian mothers (particularly girls) more frequently behaved, dressed, and played in ways that did not conform to sex-typed societal norms. Several studies also found that daughters with lesbian mothers had higher aspirations to nontraditional gender occupations (Green et al., 1986; Steckel, 1987): Half of the daughters in Green et al.'s study aspired to be doctors, lawyers, and engineers, compared with a quarter of the daughters of heterosexual mothers. Similarly, sons of lesbian mothers may behave in less traditionally masculine ways (Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983), possibly as a function of having two women as parents. Saffron (1998) asked adult offspring of lesbian mothers to reflect on the advantages of being raised by a lesbian mother (or mothers). One theme that emerged concerned women's independence: Some women noted that their mothers' relationships, which were characterized by egalitarianism and mutual caring, presented an alternative to the gender inequality typical of many heterosexual relationships. These relationships served as inspirational models for their daughters to follow in their own relationships.

It is unclear whether differences observed between children of LGB parents and children of heterosexual parents are due to the gender of the parent(s), the sexuality of the parent(s), or some other factor(s) such as societal heterosexism. Some scholars (e.g., MacCallum & Golombok, 2004) have suggested that lesbian parenting in particular may free daughters and sons from a broad range of traditional gender prescriptions. Some differences, however, may be related directly to the sexual orientation of the parent. As sexual minorities, LGB parents may be more affirming and open with respect to their children's questions about sexuality (Tasker & Golombok, 1997) and may be more sensitive to issues surrounding their children's sexual development in general (Stacey

& Biblarz, 2001). More research that includes children and adults raised by both lesbian mothers and gay fathers (the latter group is not well represented in the literature) is needed to tease apart these issues. Furthermore, the sexual orientation of parents intersects with children's gender in complex ways. For example, Tasker and Golombok (1997) found that girls raised by lesbian mothers had a higher number of sexual partners in young adulthood than daughters of heterosexual parents, whereas boys had fewer partners. Perhaps lesbian mothers encourage exploration of sexuality in their daughters but not their sons. Furthermore, their sons, raised in a family of women, may experience heightened consciousness of their status as males and lack confidence or permission for "male privilege." This may facilitate greater cautiousness in their approach to and treatment of women.

Attitudes Toward Sexual Minorities

Children raised by LGB parents may be influenced by their parents' sexual orientation, specifically, in some important sociopolitical ways. Tasker and Golombok (1995) found that young adults with lesbian mothers viewed their parents' sexual orientation as a political matter and, in turn, sought to inform public opinion about gay rights by disclosing about their own families. These youth also reported more positive attitudes toward sexual minorities than did young adults raised by heterosexual parents; they also had more gay and lesbian friends (Tasker & Golombok, 1997). Similarly, Saffron (1998) found that participants often named their positive attitudes toward sexual minorities, and about diversity in general, as a distinct advantage of being raised by lesbian parents. Garner (2004), a journalist, interviewed 50 adults raised by LGB parents and also found that adults described a commitment to "queer" politics, so that they felt identified with the queer community and were invested in making the world a better place for LGB people and their families.

Limitations of the Research

Although some important research has investigated the experiences and perceptions of adults raised by LGB parents, this work, which is still in its infancy, understandably lacks in-depth, formal analysis. It is unclear, for example, how general attitudes (e.g., being "more accepting") affect specific behaviors and identity. Does this perceived openness and tolerance extend beyond tolerance of homosexuality to other stigmatized minority groups? Furthermore, it is unclear how various dimensions that have been identified in this research are related to each other and to having an LGB parent. Do adults perceive themselves as having more flexible gender role orientations? If so, how is this related, in their minds, to having an LGB parent? Is it more about being raised by women (if one's parents are lesbians) or not? The research on children and adults with LGB parents has revealed some interesting associations, but more in-depth analysis is needed to clarify the meaning of these associations, using the perspectives of adult offspring themselves.

Much of the research on children of LGB parents has been informed by psychological theories of child development, such as social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and cognitive–developmental theory (Martin, 1991). Although the use of such theoretical frameworks is certainly valid, it is possible that the field

would benefit from different and/or broader theoretical approaches, particularly in relation to the study of adults with LGB parents (as opposed to children). Theoretical perspectives that acknowledge the role of social and institutional processes in shaping development (e.g., laws and practices that construct nonheterosexuality as deviant) are particularly important in theorizing about LGB persons and families. As Patterson (2000) and Stacey and Biblarz (2001) have noted, research on LGB-parent families provides opportunities to explore the limits of theoretical perspectives and to apply new frameworks to improve theoretical and practical understanding of family structure and process. By integrating other perspectives (e.g., social-constructionist frameworks) with traditional developmental and learning approaches, we broaden the explanatory power of family/developmental frameworks. Consideration of social context and emphasis on the interactive nature of families and development may facilitate a richer elaboration of traditional psychological theories of gender and social development, particularly in relation to adult development.

Also, as stated, with a few exceptions (e.g., Garner, 2004; Saffron, 1998; Tasker & Golombok, 1997), studies in this area have not specifically focused on adults' perceptions of how they have been influenced as adults; the emphasis is on their childhood experiences. A broader and more nuanced understanding of the life course of individuals with LGB parents can be gained by considering the experiences and reflections of adults. Additionally, little work addresses adult children of gay men (but see Garner, 2004); most research is on children of lesbian mothers.

Despite these limitations, this area of research has begun to answer some key questions. Furthermore, the work of these pioneering scholars has paved the road for exciting new research possibilities. Thus, the purpose of this study is to build on the work that these pioneers have begun.

Theoretical Perspectives

The present study utilizes an integrated theoretical framework that draws from social constructionism and queer theory. A social-constructionist approach acknowledges families, sexuality, and gender as socially and materially constructed (Dunne, 2000; Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). This perspective challenges the notion that any particular family form is natural or functional in a timeless way, and it contests the heteronormative practice of legitimating relationships that are based on biological or legal ties while marginalizing other forms of relationships (Dunne, 2000). From a social-constructionist standpoint, LGB-parent families, single-parent families, and other non-nuclear family arrangements do not represent the disintegration of family but rather constitute new and valid family forms (Cheal, 1993). A social-constructionist perspective does not reduce sexual feelings, gender identity, and gendered behavior to essential qualities that a child is "born with"; a complex array of factors are influential in shaping behaviors and identity states, including aspects of the prenatal environment (Hines, 2004) and the interaction of social processes (e.g., parents, peers) with the individual that lead to such behaviors and identities (Kitzinger, 1987; Lorber, 1994). From this perspective, having an LGB parent may indeed influence one's adult identity, values, and behaviors, in that parents may construct as acceptable a wider range of sexual attractions and gender-related behaviors. In turn, children of LGB parents may be more likely to take on complex or

nontraditional gender behaviors and may be less fearful of acknowledging same-sex attractions.

Queer theory is a theoretical framework that can be used to deconstruct the binaries of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and real families/pseudofamilies, and it can highlight the complexity of family, sexuality, and gender relations (Oswald et al., 2005). Queer theorists (e.g., Elia, 2003; Oswald et al., 2005) have argued for a more critical examination of heteronormativity as an ideology that treats traditional gender roles, heterosexuality, and family traditionalism as normative. "Queer," a term that has been reclaimed by LGB–transgendered (LGBT) activists and educators, implies a self-conscious deconstruction of heteronormativity and the arguably arbitrary binaries of gender, sex, and family (Phelan, 1997). By engaging in behaviors and activities that challenge norms about gender, sexuality, and/or family relationships, individuals deconstruct and reconstruct concepts of gender, sex, and family.

"Queering," then, refers to acts and ideas that resist heteronormativity by challenging gender, sexuality, and/or family binaries (Oswald et al., 2005). Adult children of LGB parents may "queer the family" in complex ways (Goldberg, 2007). They may resist heteronormative self-labels of "gay" and "straight" and may, in turn, describe their own sexuality in rich and complex ways. They may also queer the family by developing creative and integrative ideas about kinship: Saffron (1998) found that some adults with lesbian mothers reported having highly inclusive definitions of family as a result of growing up with lesbian mothers and/or within the queer community, where the practice of "choosing kin" is standard (Weston, 1991). Finally, they may engage in complex gendering. Having two mothers, for example, deconstructs gender relations and heteronormative ideas about family; yet models of families other than their own likely uphold conventional gender relations and family forms. Of interest is how such exposure to multiple contexts and ways of being influences individuals' own gender narratives.

Both perspectives highlight the active role of the individual in drawing from cultural and societal ideologies (such as discourses of gender/sexual attraction) to attach meanings to their lives. Furthermore, both theories emphasize the potential for individuals to resist, transform, or modulate available social discourses and to negotiate their social locations. For adults with LGB parents, their early experiences (and subjective interpretation of such experiences) are important but must be understood in the context of their current positioning in their current social context, which includes contemporary social norms, politics, geographic location, peer group, etc. In summary, both theories assume that reality is socially constructed: Gender and sexual orientation are not fixed categories but are fluid and contested, and there are many ways to "do gender" and to "do sexual orientation" (Demo & Allen, 1996; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Also, both frameworks can be used to challenge heteronormative models of family development and to theorize outside of this paradigm.

Research Questions

The following research questions were of interest in the present study.

1. Subjective perceptions of influence. First, where do these adults locate the impact of their family structure? On their

own gender development, for example? Their political sensibilities? Second, where do they locate the source of this impact? In their parent's sexual orientation, for example? Their parent's gender? Their parents' values?

2. Constructions of gender, sexual orientation, and family. How do these adults think about and construct gender, sexual orientation, and family? Are there ways in which they resist or transform traditional notions of gender, sexual orientation, and family?

3. The role of gender. (How) Do participant gender and parent gender figure into participant narratives? That is, do men and women report different perceptions and experiences? How does this intersect with parent gender (lesbian mother/gay father?)

Question 1: Subjective Perceptions of Influence

A number of studies have explored how children of LGB parents differ from their counterparts raised by heterosexual parents, but this research has frequently (a) used parent or investigator ratings of behavior and (b) focused on specific parameters of interest (e.g., gender development, psychological well-being). Adult children of LGB parents have rarely been asked to reflect on how and where they experience the impact of their family structure in their adult lives. Thus, of interest is, where do these adults locate or perceive the impact of their growing up experience? For example, (how) do they feel their values, beliefs, orientation to relationships, gender role orientation, and sexual orientation have been affected as a result of having LGB parents? Furthermore, how do they explain or understand this impact; that is, what is it about having LGB parents that is responsible for engendering the quality in question (e.g., their parent's gender, sexual orientation, or marginalized status)? It was expected that some of the same themes identified in previous literature on children and adolescents with LGB parents would emerge but that additional areas of impact would surface in the context of being asked about their present-day lives specifically.

Question 2: Constructions of Gender, Sexual Orientation, and Family

Scholars have argued that LGB people, because of their social positioning in society (e.g., as marginalized "others"), challenge dominant paradigms and fundamental notions about family and relationships (Elia, 2003; Oswald et al., 2005). By virtue of their nondominant status, they are also in a unique position to "queer" (i.e., to disrupt, destabilize, and transform) conventional thinking about gender, family structure, and sexual orientation. Of interest is whether, how, and to what extent offspring of LGB people think about, construct, and perhaps challenge notions of gender, sexual orientation, and family.

Question 3: The Role of Gender

A third general question of interest is whether the narratives of adult men and women contain different themes. For example, the work of Tasker and Golombok (1997) suggested that young men and women may be differentially affected by having LGB parents

in the area of dating. Also of interest is whether thematic differences may emerge for participants with gay fathers versus lesbian mothers: As of now, few studies have included children of lesbians and gay men. Finally, the intersection of parent–child gender is also of interest: Are there notable differences in the experiences of daughters and sons of lesbian mothers and of daughters and sons of gay fathers?

Method

I conducted telephone interviews with 46 adults with at least one LGB parent, using a semistructured interview format. In the interview, I asked open-ended questions that addressed participants' experiences growing up with a nonheterosexual parent, their current relationship with their parent(s), and their perspectives on having a nonheterosexual parent.

Participant Recruitment

To be included in the present study, participants had to (a) be 18 years of age or older and (b) have at least one lesbian, gay, or bisexual parent. Participants were recruited for the present project in several ways. The study was advertised in the electronic newsletters and on the Websites of two organizations that are geared toward children of gay parents: Children of Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (COLAGE) and Families Like Mine. Recruitment of participants through organizations that are specifically geared toward adult children of LGB parents introduces bias in sampling, in that adults who are aware of these organizations may be more likely to acknowledge their status as a child of a gay parent than adults who are not connected to these organizations. To somewhat lessen such bias, I advertised the study through numerous PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chapters throughout the country, in various geographical regions, as well as Rainbow Families, an organization serving LGB-parent families in the Midwest. People were asked to share study information with individuals who may qualify for participation. My contact information was included with the study description, and interested individuals were asked to contact me for more information. At that point, the study was explained to the participant. If interested, they were mailed a consent form assuring confidentiality and detailing the conditions of participation. All participants then completed a telephone interview with me.

Description of the Sample

Participants ranged in age from 19 to 50 ($M = 30$, $Mdn = 28$). The sample consisted of 36 women and 10 men. Nine adults (6 women, 3 men) had a gay father; of these 9 individuals, only 1 woman had actually lived with her gay father while she was growing up, and the remaining individuals had lived with their heterosexual mothers but saw their fathers regularly during their childhood (with the exception of 1 man who lived in a different state from his father and saw him only on vacations). Twenty-five adults (21 women, 4 men) resided with a lesbian mother, 2 women were raised by and lived with a bisexual mother, and 10 participants (7 women, 3 men) were raised by and lived with two lesbian mothers. Of the 10 participants raised by two lesbian mothers, 5 participants' mothers had been together since they were born, and

5 had been raised by their mother and a partner since early childhood. The remaining 36 participants' parents either (a) came out to them during their childhood or (b) never officially came out to them, but participants knew of their sexual orientation through clear indicators such as the presence of a same-sex partner in the home.

Except for 3 multiracial individuals, all participants were European American. Two participants lived in the United Kingdom, and 1 participant lived in Canada. Of the 43 participants living in the United States, 37% resided on the East Coast, 23% lived on the West Coast, 21% lived in the Midwest, and 19% lived in the South. Participants' educational attainment level was varied: Two participants had less than a high school education, 13 participants had completed high school, 3 participants had completed some college, 20 participants had a bachelor's degree, 6 participants had a master's degree, and 2 participants had doctoral degrees. Thirty-eight individuals self-identified as heterosexual, 4 women self-identified as lesbians, 3 women self-identified as bisexual, and 1 biological male self-identified as gender queer (i.e., identifying as both male and female, neither male nor female, or the nonbirth gender).

Data Collection Process and Open-Ended Questions

I interviewed all participants over the telephone during the summer and fall of 2005. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 min. All interviews were transcribed to capture participants' thoughts and feelings in their own words. A number of open-ended questions were asked. Probes and clarifying questions were used throughout the interview. Analyses for the present article were based on responses to the following questions:

1. Tell me the story of what it was like growing up with an LGB parent. *Standard probe:* What was it like for you? How and when did you know that your mother(s)/father(s) was/were gay?

2. What is it like for you now, having an LGB parent? *Standard probe:* Have your feelings/thoughts about it changed?

3. In what ways, if at all, do you feel that having an LGB parent has influenced you? *Standard probe:* Do you feel like there are things about you or your life that have been affected by having (an) L/G/B parent(s)?

Data Analysis

Methodological framework. I assumed a constructivist framework, which recognizes "the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510). Also, I recognize that the conceptual framework, theoretical perspective, choice of methods, and unique worldview (e.g., an interest in social justice) necessarily inform "what is seen" and how phenomena are described. The research questions of interest give expression to, but are also bounded by, the epistemological and theoretical perspectives that frame the research. At the same time, I have undertaken careful data analysis of over 40 participants in an effort to generate useful conceptual categories, the meaning and relevance of which transcend the present study.

Coding. Social-constructionist and queer theories guided coding, analysis, and interpretation of the data. A thematic analysis of the data was conducted (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), which involves a thorough exploration of recurrent themes and patterns. I began by reading transcripts of each respondent's data multiple times, giving special attention to the questions identified earlier. Then I began the coding process, first with open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This involves examining each line of narrative and defining events or actions within it. This approach led to the specification of emerging categories or codes. Second, I engaged in focused coding, which uses initial codes that frequently reappear, to sort the data. Focused coding is more conceptual in nature than initial coding (Charmaz, 2000), and the categories that emerge are those that best synthesize the data as a whole. Many adults used words such as "tolerant" and "open-minded" to describe themselves.

Close examination of the data indicated that, at times, these words were used to describe an openness and acceptance that generalized to all groups: Some individuals felt that having a gay parent allowed them to embrace diversity and to resist classifying people according to race, class, and so forth. At times, however, individuals used similar words (e.g., *accepting* and *aware*) to refer to their feelings about the LGB community specifically. Their experiences growing up with LGB parents had heightened their awareness of heterosexism and led to greater sensitivity about homophobia. In this way, greater specification of emerging categories was pursued. Then I applied the coding scheme to the data, which allowed for the identification of more descriptive coding categories.

The relationships among categories were also examined (e.g., the relationship between parent gender and perceived influence on gender development). I continued to reapply the coding scheme to the data and made subsequent revisions until I accounted for all data. The coding scheme was revised six times. The final coding scheme was peer reviewed by a scholar in qualitative methodology, who read random segments of participant transcripts and evaluated the scheme against the data. On the basis of the reviewer's comments, the coding scheme underwent a final revision. The findings are organized around the final scheme.

Results

Five main sets of results are presented. First, adults' reflections about the general value systems they have acquired as a function of being raised by LGB parents are discussed. Second, adults' sensitivity to and response to heterosexism are considered, with attention to the strategies that they enlist to shield and protect their parents, families, and selves. Third, adults' ideas about gender and sexuality are discussed. Fourth, their experiences negotiating membership in the queer (LGB) community as children of LGB parents is considered. Finally, challenges related to trust and honesty are discussed, in the context of growing up with LGB parents.

Open-Minded, Nonjudgmental, and Tolerant

Many of the adults in the sample felt that having LGB parents had facilitated their capacity to tolerate differences among peoples and to embrace diversity (Saffron, 1998). The majority of the sample (23 of 36 women, and 7 of 10 men) spontaneously described themselves as open-minded, nonjudgmental, and "accept-

ing of differences." They viewed these characteristics in the context of growing up in a society that judged their parents, their families, and them. Having come of age in a society that privileges heterosexuality and heterosexual-parented families, they were intimately familiar with the experience of being marginalized for not conforming to the status quo. As one woman said, "It has made me a lot more open-minded . . . I'm not judgmental whatsoever because of so many years where I was judged because of something that my dad is." This experience of not having heteronormative privilege led them to feel sympathetic toward other marginalized groups (e.g., racial/ethnic minorities; people with "alternative" lifestyles and interests), to "empathize with people who are struggling," and to be more open to and accepting of differences. They often grew up in homes in which their parents explicitly emphasized the importance of tolerance and the value of diversity. Stated Suzie, a 30-year-old woman who grew up with a lesbian mother:

> I think knowing from a very early age what it is to be different or not, to be like the mainstream or not accepted . . . that gives me an understanding that people just come from so many different walks of life and that respect and an open mind and encountering the world with love and flexibility is definitely how I live my life. I just don't judge. Well—that's not true. I have biases and I make assumptions, but I work very hard to try and be honest about those and try and be reflexive about who I am. This is what my mother taught me.

Five of these 30 individuals specifically noted feeling that, had they not had an LGB parent or had their parent never come out to them, they might be less open-minded than they were, "a little more close-minded about different kinds of people, like in terms of races and ethnicities," as one woman stated. They felt that they were better people as a function of having a gay parent, as it had "opened [their] eyes to other ways of being" and forced them to confront their own homophobia and fear of difference. It also led them to develop what several individuals called a "humanitarian" orientation—that is, to conclude that, despite our differences, "we are all the same," as one man put it. Jared, a 33-year-old man with a lesbian mother, observed:

> I feel I'm a more open, well-rounded person for having been raised in a nontraditional family, and I think those that know me would agree. My mom opened me up to the positive impact of differences in people. Though, everyone has prejudices. It didn't make me a saint.

Here, Jared emphasizes the positive qualities associated with having a lesbian mother but is also careful not to provide an overly simplistic and essentialist explanation of his development.

Taking It Personally: Sensitivity to Homophobia

Thus, growing up with LGB parents had the effect of sensitizing individuals to the "various 'isms': racism, sexism, classism" as one participant put it, and, in general, encouraging them to become more open to differences. However, on a more personal level, it heightened some individuals' sensitivity to and awareness of homophobia and heterosexism. Many participants felt personally affronted by societal heterosexism. They were aware of the ways in which their families were misrepresented or simply not acknowledged in the news and media, and they took note of the assumptions made by friends, acquaintances, and strangers with regard to families, homosexuality, and LGB issues. Specifically,

20 of 36 women and 8 of 10 men reported that having an LGB parent made them more sensitive to homophobia. They bristled at the word "fag" or the expression "that's so gay," and they felt a sting when they heard politicians denouncing the "gay lifestyle" or listened to a group of acquaintances talk scornfully about the "gay agenda." Similar to the young adults in Tasker and Golombok's (1997) study, these individuals viewed their parents' sexual orientation as a political matter. National political campaigns, news stories about LGB parents, and offhanded comments by strangers and friends held personal implications for these individuals: In them, individuals discerned clear messages about what is normal and what is illegitimate, as well as indirect attacks on the rights and well-being of their own parents. This led individuals to feel protective of and defensive of their parents. Penny, a 29-year-old woman with a lesbian mother, stated emphatically:

> I feel very triggered by—it just hits the heart when I watch the news and there's [President George W.] Bush trying to ban same-sex marriage. I get very triggered at those things. Most people probably wouldn't get so heartfelt. My heart is like Ahhhh! This is my mother.

Defending Our Parents: Taking a Stand

For some participants, their feelings of protectiveness and their desire to shield their families from misrepresentation led them to take a defensive stance. Sixteen of 30 women and 2 of 10 men emphasized their efforts to verbally defend LGB people in general, and/or their parents specifically, to family members, friends, acquaintances, and strangers. As I found in a previous study (Goldberg, 2007b), using data from the same sample, homophobic remarks often prompted individuals to come out about their own families, even when they were not typically "out" about their families. They did so in an effort to educate others about the realities of growing up with a gay parent, as well as to correct harmful stereotypes; however, their efforts to defend their parents often fell on deaf ears. This is expressed by Ellen, 25:

> My dad didn't like it, obviously, her coming out. And we've had discussions where I'm like, "You need to stop bashing Mom. She's a lesbian. Get over it." His family is very redneck, very biased. They do it all the time, they're always making gay jokes. It comes to the point where I just don't visit them. I love them but I don't love what they are in terms of their bigotry.

Participants who found themselves defending their LGB parent to a non-LGB parent noted that this sometimes led to conflict, alienation, and even estrangement. Stated Arielle, 35:

> My dad was very negative about gay people for most of our relationship. I think he perceived me as siding with my mom. For like 9 years, when I was in grade school, high school, college—he didn't have anything to do with me. I didn't see him for a long time.

Putting My Best Foot Forward: Pressures to "Succeed" as Children of LGB Parents

Other participants sought to protect their families against heterosexist judgment by serving as living representations of well-adjusted adult children of LGB parents, which they hoped would discredit homophobic and antifamily stereotypes of LGB individuals. Six women and 3 men noted that, as children of LGB parents,

they grew up "under a microscope" and still, to some extent, felt some pressure or urgency to "set the record straight" by standing up as "successful, well-adjusted children of gay parents." Emphasized Brian, a 23-year-old man with a gay father:

> One thing I am really proud of is, I'm not screwed up, I'm very well-adjusted. I don't know, there was never anything weird about my childhood. It was totally normal. As successful children of gay parents I feel like we have a social responsibility to come out.

Three of the women explicitly noted that they had participated in interviews with reporters in the hopes of portraying their family accurately and showcasing their "normal development" in spite of (or perhaps because of) their family structure; yet, the pressure to destabilize stereotypes and to effectively defend and represent children of LGB parents left them vulnerable to feeling unheard. Noted Kerry, a 24-year-old woman with two lesbian mothers:

> These reporters come in with a really specific agenda and after like three interviews I felt . . . and the third one I did through email. I chose my words really carefully and had a bunch of people read it and I still was unhappy with the results. I am never happy with the articles.

"It Might Look Bad": Pressure to Identify as Straight

For some adults, presenting themselves as well adjusted necessarily involved a heterosexual identification. Five women and one man acknowledged delaying their own "coming out" because of their own hesitation about how this might be received by family members, friends, and the public. They were hesitant, even fearful, about the possibility of confirming "the stereotype that gay parents raise gay children." Furthermore, when they did come out, they were highly sensitive of how people might evaluate or interpret the fact that both they and their parent(s) were gay. Thus, they both resisted and accommodated to the pressures of heteronormativity. Stated Megan, 22:

> I am always wary that people will leap to the conclusion that I am only gay because my mom is gay, and that bothers me since I feel that the two are completely unconnected. I hate to think that I am telling people things that will make them judge me unfairly. I don't like to lay all my cards on the table from the start. It takes a while for me to build trust, and then I'll talk about it. I wait to see how they phrase the question, and then answer as honestly as I can, while still trying to protect myself from any negative feedback.

For one woman and one man, their anxieties about coming out to the public were activated by their parents' anxieties. Upon coming out to their parents in young adulthood, their parents expressed concerns about confirming right-wing ideological arguments that gay parents raise nonheterosexual children, which led them to consider the implications of coming out. Said Harris, 22:

> One of the first questions they asked me was if I thought any of that had to do with growing up with them as lesbians. And it was an awkward situation because I know that question was lodged with fears that yes, it was or . . . that they had been an inappropriate influence on me. But all those fears are based within the idea that being transgendered was a negative thing. And I really wanted to tell them, well yes, actually, growing up with lesbians was an amazing influence that allowed me to really understand more about who I am much earlier than I would have. I said something similar but more focused around

eliminating their fears about being inappropriate parents or something. We haven't talked about it since.

Here, Harris speaks of his parents' anxiety about his being transgendered because of something "inappropriate" that they have done. Their concerns echo and attest to the power of heteronormativity: They resist heteronormativity by honoring their own (marginalized) sexualities, but they also reify it as the dominant social framework by anxiously questioning whether their own parenting encouraged their son's atypical gender identity. However, their son has fully embraced his gender identity, as well as his parents' influence, which he views as having freed him from the pressures of heteronormativity to find his own true sexual and gender identity and expression.

Two women and three men who did not ultimately identify as gay noted that having gay parents had made them more conscious of their own heterosexuality, and of the need to display it, for their own and the public's benefit. Said Brie, a 24-year-old woman with a lesbian mother:

> I find it hard to end relationships as I don't want to be alone, and have felt that people would judge me and think I was gay. I have stayed in bad relationships.

Selective Association: Choosing Progressive Communities

Some adults sought to protect themselves and their families through the creation of supportive communities. They were very careful about the people they invited into their lives and refused to date or form relationships with people who demonstrated signs of homophobia or, more broadly, prejudice against stigmatized minority groups. Twelve of 36 women and 6 of 10 men went out of their way to create communities that mirrored their values and to form relationships with people that would be accepting of their parents and families. Said Rose, 30, whose father was gay:

> I am a pretty liberal person in my political beliefs and I always have been. There are people who are liberal because that's what they believe but don't have any personal experience with any of it. I would say that I have a personal experience with one prong of the liberal platform, which is rights for GLBT people. If I didn't have that, I probably could have dated some guys and made some friends who were more conservative, because it would have just been, I have an ideology, you have an ideology, and we happen to not agree. But now I feel like, "If you're voting for these people, you're hurting my family." So I think I am very selective about who I date, based on certain political beliefs.

Here, Rose identifies a key way that her approach to forming relationships was influenced, a priori, by her political ideology, which in turn was shaped by her father's sexual orientation.

Queering Community and Family

For the adult children of LGB parents in this sample, membership in the queer community was no longer convenient nor requisite: As adults living far away from their families of origin, they had the freedom to disidentify with the queer community and LGB issues. However, 14 of 36 women and 3 of 10 men noted that as adults, they continued to see themselves as part of the queer community, "not based on myself but on my parents," having "taken on the political values and strivings of the gay community."

These individuals were what Garner (2004) labeled *culturally queer*: They had been shaped by the gay cultural context in which they grew up (a context defined by shared values, beliefs, community gatherings, and expressions of celebration) and sought to maintain this sense of belonging and involvement as adults. This is evident in their friendship groups: Seven women noted that their friendship networks were almost entirely made up of LGBT people. This is also evident in their community involvement and activism: Fourteen of 36 women and 3 of 10 men noted that, as adults, they had been or currently were involved in organizations and activities that allowed them to speak up on behalf of children of LGB parents or to speak out about rights for LGB people. Three women and 2 men also noted that their ideas about family had been "queered"; that is, they spoke of a "queer orientation" to families and community, in that "chosen family is what matters" as one woman stated (Weston, 1991). Thus, they created families and communities that challenged conventional notions of kinship and family relatedness. These 5 individuals had seen their LGB parents be rejected by their own biological kin and came to shift their own ideas about who and what is family. Said Suzie:

> On my mother's side there has been a huge ostracism on and off through the years. I think that, probably in a myriad of ways, it's affected me. I think that it definitely affected the kind of family and relationships that I create in my life, in terms of a very open and accepting attitude and environment.

Likewise, Vivian, age 35, stated:

> I have a lot of friends who to me equal family and I would do anything for them as I would blood relatives, because it takes all these people to replace those people, to be my, quote, 'family.' So I kind of go the route of chosen family, which is obviously very common among my gay friends.

Tension and Ambivalence Regarding Membership in the Queer Community

Four of the 14 women who reported feeling identified with the queer community also reported uncertainty or tension about their "place" within the community. As heterosexual women, they sometimes wondered if they really belonged at all, yet years of membership by association in the queer community led them to feel at home in, and even entitled to belong in, that community. One woman described her "partial membership" in the gay community like this:

> I have been trying to become more a part of the gay community, like participating on a Pride planning committee, but that is hard. I go to a meeting, and I have to out that I am straight. I just have a gay mom, but I grew up in a gay culture. I feel like I belong, but over and over I can't and I don't. I feel like I have to both apologize for my privilege and meekly ask to participate, when I have 32 years of participation in the gay community!

One of these four women described a different sort of tension: a desire to be part of the gay community and a desire to create a life and identity that was separate from and not contingent on what she perceived as her father's "legacy." Stated Mona, age 26, whose father died from AIDS:

> My biggest challenge is wanting to find a balance since my dad passed away. As in, I don't want to completely block out any connection with the gay community, but I also want to be *me* and not feel like I am carrying my dad's legacy on my shoulders.

Queering Sexuality and Gender

Consistent with the findings of Green et al. (1986), Tasker and Golombok (1997), and others, and consistent with a social-constructionist framework, adults felt that having LGB parents had led them to develop less rigid and more flexible notions and ideas about sexuality and gender.

Sexuality. Eleven of 36 women and 2 of 10 men noted that they had fluid ideas about sexuality, which they viewed in the context of growing up with a nonheterosexual parent. They saw sexuality as existing on a continuum rather than representing a binary category with heterosexuality (a discrete and permanent state) positioned on one end as "normal" and homosexuality (also a discrete and permanent state, entirely different in nature and quality from heterosexuality) positioned at the opposite end as "abnormal." These individuals emphasized that their parents had taught them that "you fall in love with the person, not the gender" and in turn viewed a wide range of attractions and sexualities as normal and acceptable. Catherine, age 25, shared the following:

> I have been with men and I've been with women. I deal with both of them—I know that I don't look at gender when it comes to looking for a partner or mate. I look for whether I am compatible with that person, and whether they're the person I'm supposed to be with.

Six of these 11 women, and 1 of these 2 men noted that having a nonheterosexual parent had led them, in their eyes, to question their sexuality. Observed Valerie, age 35:

> Throughout my life I've had times where I've questioned if—like, I had a gay side to me or not? And sometimes I wonder if that's what a lot of people do or if that's because I know it's a possibility or because it's possibly like genetic in my family or . . . (laugh). So I guess that's the biggest thing—sometimes I wrestle with that. And part of me knows that like, if I decided that, that's ok, but I also saw the struggles my mom went through. I guess it makes that normal questioning a little more real. Because you know that's a possibility and that makes you wonder more because of that.

Of note is that Valerie, and 2 of the other 6 women who reported questioning their sexuality, currently identified as heterosexual. Thus, although all 6 women felt that they thought more intensively about their own sexuality as a result of having a nonheterosexual parent, such self-exploration did not inevitably conclude with a nonheterosexual identification. Rather, they felt that having an LGB parent influenced their ability and willingness to think deeply about their own sexuality but did not influence their own orientation through social modeling. Thus, their parents taught them to question the homosexual/heterosexual and bad/good binaries and to view sexuality as a fluid and dynamic aspect of identity and the process of exploring one's sexuality as normative.

Gender. Fifteen of 36 women and 6 of 10 men felt that having a nonheterosexual parent had influenced their ideas about gender and relationships. They described themselves as being more "comfortable with gender nonconformity" than they might have been had they been raised in a more traditional family environment. Of

note is that 13 of these 15 women and 4 of these 6 men grew up with lesbian mothers; in turn, their responses indicated that they viewed their freedom from gender roles in the context of growing up with "strong, feminist women," as opposed to lesbian women, specifically. Sons of lesbians observed that growing up "in a household of strong women" encouraged them to be more sensitive, to feel free to pursue stereotypically unmasculine interests (e.g., art, dancing), and to value strength and capability in female partners. Complementarily, women noted that having strong women as mothers encouraged them be self-confident and independent and to pursue stereotypically unfeminine careers and activities. Stated Kerry:

> Being around two strong women, I'm not seeking something specific out in men. A lot of my friends seem to need men for certain things and to rely on them for certain things, like to take them out, or move them out of their apartments. I like having boyfriends but I don't have these expectations for them. I have higher expectations for myself.

In addition to feeling personally liberated from gender roles, some of these women and men also indicated that growing up with a nonheterosexual parent had also led them to place an emphasis on egalitarianism in their relationship. They engaged in "complex gendering" in that they resisted sex stereotypes and strove for relationships in which both members were free to be who they were without gendered role constraints (Oswald et al., 2005). They often mentioned their parents (or their parent and his or her partner) as the inspiration or model for this orientation: "I value sharing of responsibilities . . . because when I lived with my dad, I got to see the whole sharing of everything, dishes, responsibilities, everything" said Mona. Two men actually called this a "lesbian orientation to relationships": a way of thinking about and being in relationships that they had inherited from their mothers and the queer communities in which they were raised. Stated Harris:

> I definitely know that I see kind of a model of relationships within lesbian communities . . . I tend to follow that model. I really get into the whole processing of things and I've always found that to be valuable. Openness and emotional honesty are important with how I relate.

Similarly, Ryan, a 20-year-old man who was also raised by two lesbian mothers, describes the upside—and downside—of developing this orientation:

> I think that I have a lesbian orientation toward relationships. I feel like, it is important, having things be very well communicated. But . . . I have been afraid to put myself out there as someone who could be interested romantically. I am very sensitive about gender issues. I demonized myself. I am a sensitive person, and I grew up in a very feminist oriented culture.

Here, Ryan describes what it is like to be a man raised by feminist lesbian culture. His parents deconstructed what it means to be a man, but Ryan does not yet have an entirely reconstituted image of what it means to be a man. His socialization is at odds with a heteronormative model of masculinity, and he has not yet determined how to negotiate or reconcile these two ideologies. He values communication and gender equality, but his gender consciousness leads him to experience some anxiety and embarrassment about actual male–female interactions.

No Good Heterosexual Role Models

Of note is that 5 women and 2 men acknowledged that, while growing up, they did not have any models for good, healthy heterosexual relationships. Three of these individuals had parents who came out in the context of a messy divorce, and 3 were raised by lesbian mothers from birth or very early childhood. This caused them some anxiety about how they would be able to relate in a heterosexual relationship as an adult. Stated Johanna, age 36:

> I don't feel I ever saw a very good, strong model of a male–female relationship growing up. Not only in my house but in various—be it grandparents or whatever—I never saw a strong male-female relationship. Not to blame my situation on that but, that's just a statement. I never had that strong male person in my life as a father figure. I don't know how to say this—I often look for approval from men. I'm not sure whether that's related or what.

Here, Johanna mourns the absence of a father figure and wonders whether her patterns in heterosexual relationships are somehow related to this absence. However, individuals' narratives clearly reflect their lack of certainty as to whether their perceived difficulties in relationships are, in fact, a result of not having a father. Furthermore, they also point out that their situation is not notably different from that of children of divorce or children of single parents. As Vivian stated:

> I will say that my upbringing did have an influence on who I am and how I deal with relationships, good or bad. I cannot ignore that fact. But I also don't know if it had any more of an effect than any other situation. Like having stepparents, or whatever the case may be.

Difficulties With Trust

Fifteen of 36 women described challenges relating to their ability to trust other people. Specifically, 8 women noted, paradoxically, that they strongly valued honesty in their relationships but also that they had difficulty trusting others, on the basis of the fact that their parents (or other family members) had concealed their parents' sexual orientation from them at some point during their childhood. From their perspective, the experience of finding out that a parent was gay— or, the experience of confronting their parent about their suspicions and having them denied—influenced both the types of relationships they desired (honest, direct, and open) and also their orientation to new relationships (somewhat guarded and cautious). It would seem that a guarded approach to relationships would undermine or interfere with one's goal of developing an honest and open relationship; yet this tension was never acknowledged by the participants themselves. Examination of participants' narratives, however, suggests that, although caution may govern their initial interactions with others, on determining that an individual is "safe" and likely trustworthy, they work to create openness and honesty in those relationships from that point onward.

Two additional women experienced difficulties with trust that were not related to having been lied to, but, rather the simple fact that their parents were not who they thought they were. Their parents' coming out made them more conscious of the possibility that what you see is not, in fact, what you get. This translated into a concern that they might be "duped," like their straight parents. In

turn, they only dated people who were sure of their sexuality. Noted Deanna, age 22:

> I was with this boyfriend. I was like, "Are you sure you're not gay?" I'm so insecure, about, you know, is this guy gonna turn around and be someone else? I can't deal with that. It's why my mother didn't get married again.

Five additional women struggled with trust related to the homophobia and teasing that they had endured as children. They were cautious in developing new friendships and relationships, fearful of rejection for reasons related to, or unrelated to, their parents' sexual orientation.

Putting It in Perspective: Other Things Mattered More

Four adults explicitly noted that having a nonheterosexual parent was "not the most important influence in my life." Two women noted that a far more important event in their lives was their parents' divorce. The loss of their fathers as live-in parents, along with the accompanying grief of watching their parents divide up their lives and belongings, was far more painful than dealing with the fact that their mother was a lesbian. One woman and one man emphasized that growing up in poverty was by far the most salient aspect of their growing-up experience. Stated Brian:

> I think that poverty was the harder part. I never think that, you know, I have a gay dad and look at me now. I think, look at where I grew up. That's the part I wear on my sleeve and I'm proud to tell it . . . Maybe that overshadows any other? That's the biggest deal . . . I mean, we went to food banks when I was younger. Not that my dad was gay.

Discussion

The present study explored adults' perceptions of how they had been influenced by having LGB parents. The findings presented both (a) support previous research and (b) highlight new areas of perceived influence, which may be worthy of future investigation.

Of interest was where adults located the impact of their growing-up experience. Consistent with the findings of Saffron (1998) and of Tasker and Golombok (1997), these adults described themselves as more tolerant and open minded as a function of having LGB parents. This study also provides some specific suggestions as to why these findings exist: These adults, as members of a marginalized family structure, reported having empathy for other minority groups. Furthermore, they often attributed their open-mindedness to having liberal parents who socialized them to appreciate diversity in all forms. This is consistent with research on lesbian mothers, who espouse a valuing of diversity (Goldberg & Allen 2007). Of interest is how these adults' values influence their life decisions and career trajectories: Do they seek opportunities to work with people of diverse backgrounds or on behalf of marginalized groups and to redress social injustices? Future research can address this.

A second area of perceived impact concerns individuals' awareness of heterosexism, which prompts feelings of protectiveness for their parents and the LGB community. In turn, they may act as their parents' advocates and defenders. Some recognize their own functioning as an important yardstick used by the media, society, and their families to judge the parenting skills and adjustment of LGB people, as well as a tool to change public opinion about LGB

people. Aware of their self-presentation, they consciously or unconsciously strive to represent themselves as successful, psychologically healthy, and heterosexual. They are responding to pressures of heteronormativity, which often takes the shape of the question, "Do they turn out differently?" Of concern is whether these individuals hide or minimize personal struggles and challenges (e.g., alcoholism, depression, anger at their parents or themselves) that stem from the pressures of proving how normal they are.

A third area of impact concerns adults' ideas about sexuality and gender. At the same time that they accommodate to the pressures of heteronormativity, many of the same individuals also resist heteronormativity. Socialized to question rigid and confining notions of sexuality and gender and to view a range of sexual and gender identities as appropriate, they "queer" gender, sexuality, and family (Oswald et al., 2005). Some adults express a greater willingness to question or think deeply about their sexuality, which is consistent with Tasker and Golombok's (1997) research on young adults of lesbian mothers, suggesting that such openness may continue into adulthood. Also of note is that both women and men (but a greater percentage of women) highlight their own gender-atypical interests, orientations, and capabilities: Nonconformity to gender roles is considered more socially acceptable for females than for males (Lorber, 1994). These data are consistent with and extend Green et al.'s (1986) finding that children, especially girls, engaged in behaviors and activities that did not conform to gender-typed norms. In turn, some adults are similarly creative in their relationship construction, in that they have less gender-stereotyped expectations for their typically heterosexual relationships and express a desire to transform potentially oppressive gender roles. Most individuals who emphasized their parents' influence on their gendered selves were daughters and sons of women, who explicitly emphasized their parents' gender in their responses (e.g., "I grew up with strong feminist women"). Women in general have a long history of challenging gendered roles and behavior by entering male-dominated occupations; men have not engaged in similar gender-crossing but in fact have responded to women's behavior by increasingly emphasizing their "differentness" from women (Lorber, 1994). Given this, feminist mothers, regardless of sexual orientation, would be expected to raise women who challenge gender norms (Saffron, 1998). Also of note, however, is that several daughters and sons of gay fathers commented on their gender-atypical qualities. This highlights the fact that gender and sexuality interact in complex ways, and, by virtue of their nonheterosexual identities, LGB people cross gender boundaries and challenge norms of femininity and masculinity. Gay men may also model acceptance of nonstereotypical gender behavior: Adult children of gay men and lesbians commented on their parents' egalitarianism and engagement in nonstereotypical tasks. This is consistent with findings that same-sex couples have a more equal division of labor than heterosexual couples (Chan et al., 1998).

Another area in which some adults noted their parents' impact concerns their ideas about kinship. The data suggest that adults with LGB parents may queer family by choosing queer social communities and recognizing the power of both biolegal and chosen kin. Such intergenerational queering would appear to have long-term implications: These individuals may be more likely to raise children with more complex ideas about gender, sexuality,

and family (Oswald et al., 2005). However, of note is that several adults discussed tensions surrounding their status within, yet outside of, the queer community. This is consistent with Garner's (2004) observations that some heterosexual individuals, having grown up in the queer community, feel culturally homeless when they reach adulthood. The data suggest that some individuals may feel alienated from and even angry with the queer community: In adulthood, the requirements of membership have changed, and their sense of belonging is challenged on the basis of their heterosexuality. Thus, heterosexual adults with LGB parents may feel marginalized and excluded from both dominant and queer communities. More research is needed to explore individuals' experiences negotiating these tensions.

A final area of impact concerned difficulties with trust, which were noted by women only. Some scholars have found that trust and honesty are more important to women (Krasovskiy, 1994; Loseke, 1987). If these findings are understood from a relational perspective, which holds that women place more emphasis on relationships than men (Chodorow, 1978), the focus on honesty by women only is perhaps not surprising. Some experienced their parents' coming out as a violation of trust: Their parent was not who they thought they were, and this unexpected shift in identity precipitated their own identity crisis. For others, it was peers who violated their trust. Of interest is how individuals deal with such violations in the long term. The data suggest that some adults simply come to place a high value on honesty in their relationships (a presumably adaptive quality), whereas for others, fears of dishonesty may have a destructive impact on their relationships.

Limitations and Implications

The themes identified in the present study may not be prevalent among those who did not or would not volunteer for a study such as this. Furthermore, it is possible that other themes, not noted in this sample, may be identified. Indeed, particular people volunteer to take part in social science research; for example, many people may participate because of altruistic or personal reasons or for general interest (Boynton, 2003). Given that LGB parents and their children are often the focus of prejudice, it is possible that more politically active adults are more likely to volunteer to participate in research. Some of the themes observed in this study (e.g., those related to political activism) might not be found with a nonvolunteer sample. A concern for researchers who study children of LGB parents should be the possibility of repeat sampling—interviewing individuals who have already participated in previous research. To guard against this, researchers should ask participants whether they have participated in previous studies. For example, in the present study, I found that 3 of 46 participants had conducted interviews with students or researchers. Acquisition of representative data from children of LGB parents is difficult but not impossible. Large-scale studies such as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health include questions about the sex of parents' partners (Wainright et al., 2004). By framing questions in a non-threatening way (e.g., "Has your mother had relationships with men, women, or both?") in the context of larger studies, investigators can obtain nationally representative data from individuals about their parents' same-sex relationships, as well as about the individuals' own related attitudes and behaviors.

Some participants in the sample lived with their LGB parent from birth or early life, whereas others did not live with their LGB parent. (In this study, the latter group consisted mainly of individuals who had gay fathers and who lived with their heterosexual mothers postdivorce/after their fathers came out.) Although this particular distinction is important, it was not a focus of the present analysis. It is possible that some interesting findings and distinctions were obscured by not contrasting the experiences of individuals who lived with their LGB parent(s) with those of individuals who lived apart from them. It may be beneficial for future studies to make this a focus of analysis.

Implications for Future Research and Theory

A major strength of qualitative research is its capacity for generating knowledge about the dynamics of social processes in developmental and social context. Indeed, the present study raises important questions to be pursued in future studies. More research is needed to explore the innovative ways in which children of LGB parents reinvent (and, in turn, queer) gender, sexuality, and family. Furthermore, across how many generations is the parents' influence felt? Do these individuals parent in such a way that their children develop flexible ideas about gender, sexuality, and kinship? Studies of the intergenerational relationships of LGB individuals would facilitate new insights regarding the rich, varied ways in which people express gender, sexuality, and family.

Future quantitative studies are needed to establish the extent to which the themes identified in the present analysis generalize to larger, representative samples of adults with LGB parents. More work is needed that, for example, compares children in various family arrangements (e.g., one lesbian mother, two lesbian mothers, one gay father, two gay fathers) to explore how the sexual orientation and gender of parents interacts with the gender of children to influence gender development and other outcomes of interest. Greater consideration of the role of the non-LGB parent (if applicable) in individuals' lives is needed: Several participants alluded to the stress of negotiating their relationships with antigay parents. In general, more work is needed to further explore and unpack the nexus of identities of adult children of LGB parents (gender, geographic status, race, marital status, geographic location, age at parent's coming out). Future controlled studies that incorporate such factors will allow the field to better articulate pathways of influence.

Many of the adults in this study emphasized the importance of positive self-presentation. The concerns of participants clearly reflect the current climate, which places the burden on LGBT people to prove their suitability to become parents and on their children to prove that they have not been negatively affected by growing up in a nontraditional family structure. In turn, these individuals have internalized the notion that their success and adjustment functions as a proxy for LGB people's suitability to parent. The fact that some individuals experience distress (e.g., anxiety about the consequences of coming out) must be considered in the context of (and perhaps as a direct function of) societal heteronormativity—that is, the broader context in which they live. Asking how children of LGB parents differ from children of heterosexual parents assumes that this is the only thing that differs about their experiences; in fact, the stress of living in a family structure that is marginalized and denied legitimacy is perhaps the

more salient distinction between these two groups. Future research must take these broader societal and contextual influences into account.

The present analysis was guided by social constructionist and queer theories. These frameworks helped to identify important processes in the lives of adults with LGB parents and serve to expand traditional developmental theories, suggesting that adult values and behaviors arise from a complex interplay of factors including parental gender, sexual orientation, and social context. Future research will benefit from broader perspectives that allow for such complexity. Queer theory, in particular, has relevance for psychological theorizing in that it adopts "a position of inquiry that is decentered from the norm" (Minton, 1997, p. 349), allowing for critical analysis of the limitations of existing perspectives and the development of new modes of thinking.

Implications for Practice

Practitioners are encouraged to recognize the unique strengths and adaptations of youth and adults with LGB parents, as well as areas of possible difficulty (e.g., difficulties with trust, absence of heterosexual models). Similarly, the findings suggest the importance of acknowledging the broader social context (i.e., societal heterosexism) as a potential stressor. Furthermore, practitioners should strive to respect and appreciate adults' efforts to navigate and confront heterosexism.

More generally, practitioners will benefit from considering broader and more inclusive notions of family and community. Adults with LGB parents may not initially present as such; thus, given that they are a relatively invisible minority group, it is important that professionals avoid making assumptions about family structure and/or implying that certain family forms are more legitimate than others. Also, the present findings suggest that men and women with LGB parents may have different views and experiences. Therapists and practitioners should be attuned to the ways in which individuals' experiences may be shaped by the intersections among their own gender, their parents' genders, and sociocultural discourses about gender, sexuality, and family.

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