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CHAPTER

11

THE FAMILY LIVES OF LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

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Most lesbians and gay men today grew up in a family headed by heterosexual parents. As adults, lesbians and gay men often establish committed partner relationships. Increasing numbers of lesbians and gay men are becoming parents and raising children. Research about these different aspects of the family lives of lesbians and gay men—as children, as romantic partners, and as parents—is relatively new. Of the 1,521 articles published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* and the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* from 1980 to 1993, only 5 focused on some aspect of sexual orientation (Allen & Demo, 1995). In the past decade, however, there has been a noticeable increase in research on gays and lesbians in families.

This chapter reviews empirical research about the family lives of lesbians and gay men. We focus on four main topics: societal attitudes about gay men and lesbians, the relations of lesbians and gay men to their family of origin, the nature of gay and lesbian couples, and the experiences of homosexual parents and their children. Throughout, we highlight areas where additional research is needed.

THE SOCIAL CLIMATE: PUBLIC ATTITUDES ABOUT LESBIANS, GAY MEN, AND FAMILIES

The family relationships of lesbians and gay men cannot be understood without recognizing the social climate of sexual prejudice in U.S. society (Herek, 2000). Representative national surveys conducted during the past 30 years show that Americans' attitudes about homosexuality have become more tolerant (see review by Loftus, 2001). Lesbians and gay men are aware of this change. In an important new survey, the Kaiser Foundation (2001) conducted telephone interviews with 405 randomly selected, self-identified gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults from 15 major U.S. cities. In this survey, 76% of respondents said they believed there was more acceptance of homosexuals today than in the past. Nonetheless, 74% also reported that they had experienced some form of prejudice or

discrimination because of their sexual orientation, and 32% had been the target of violence against themselves or their property.

Today, a strong majority of Americans (often 75% or more) approves of laws to protect the civil rights of lesbians and gay men in such areas as employment and housing (Loftus, 2001). However, public attitudes about morality and family issues are more strongly divided. In a recent national survey (Kaiser Foundation, 2001), about half of Americans agreed that "homosexual behavior is morally wrong," opposed legally sanctioned gay and lesbian marriages, and indicated that "allowing gays and lesbians to legally marry would undermine the traditional American family." There was somewhat less opposition (42%) to legally sanctioned gay and lesbian unions other than marriage. Approximately half of those surveyed (56%) agreed that "gay and lesbian couples can be as good parents as heterosexual couples," and 46% approved of permitting gay and lesbian couples to legally adopt children. In short, the general public is fairly evenly divided in their views about the morality of homosexuality and the wisdom of same-sex unions and gay adoptions.

RELATIONSHIPS OF GAY MEN AND LESBIANS WITH THEIR PARENTS AND FAMILY OF ORIGIN

Lesbians and gay men are usually raised by heterosexual parents who assume that their children will be heterosexual. The revelation that a child is gay or lesbian often precipitates a family crisis. Perhaps because of the turmoil associated with this event, available research has focused on the individual's initial disclosure of his or her sexual orientation ("coming out") and the parents' reactions to this disclosure.

Disclosing a Minority Sexual Orientation

Many lesbians and gay men anguish about the decision whether or not to disclose their sexual identity to family members. Some individuals who anticipate a negative response and want to preserve family bonds never reveal their sexual orientation. In other cases, family members learn about the person's sexual orientation indirectly, perhaps by overhearing a conversation, or they may suspect a person is gay or lesbian based on the person's choice of friends, hairstyle, or dress. In most cases, however, gays and lesbians intentionally share this important information with at least some family members.

Recent surveys provide information about disclosure to parents and relatives (e.g., Morris, Waldo, & Rothblum, 2001). In a study of nearly 2,300 gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults from northern California (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1996), 79% of respondents said that their mother knew about their sexual orientation, and 65% had talked directly with her about the topic. Siblings were the next most likely to know: 74% of respondents indicated that one or more sisters knew, and 69% reported that one or more brothers knew. Gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals were somewhat less likely to disclose to their father: 62% said that their father knew, but only 39% had talked with him about their sexual orientation. In a national telephone survey (Kaiser Foundation, 2001), 84% of lesbians and gay men said that they were generally open about their sexual orientation with family members. These rates of disclosure are higher than those reported in earlier studies (e.g., Bell & Weinberg, 1978), suggesting that an increasing percentage of gay men and lesbians are coming out to their families.

Studies of adolescents and younger adults show generally similar findings. Based on their review of existing studies, Savin-Williams and Esterberg (2000) estimated that 40 to 75% of young gay men and lesbians have disclosed to their mother and 30 to 55% to their father. These researchers also suggested that "with each passing year, a greater percentage of youths are disclosing to their parents" (p. 201).

In summary, three genera] findings emerge. First, although most lesbians and gay men are open with their family, a substantial minority conceals this important aspect of their identity from parents or other family members. Second, mothers are more likely than fathers to know about their child's sexual orientation and to have discussed it with the child. Third, the proportion of gays and lesbians who disclose their sexual orientation to parents and relatives appears to be increasing over time.

Research is needed to map systematically the patterns of disclosure in families from diverse backgrounds. First, it appears that a greater proportion of lesbians and gay men are disclosing to their families today than in the past and are doing so at a younger age. Studies systematically examining disclosure among different age cohorts would be valuable. Second, researchers have speculated about the reasons why gay men and lesbians may disclose to some family members before others, but empirical support for these hypotheses is largely lacking. For instance, do individuals tend to come out first to their mother because they have a closer relationship with her and expect a less negative reaction? Do some individuals disclose first to siblings to "test how the family will react" as Crosbie-Burnett, Foster, Murray, and Bowen (1996, p. 400) suggested? Studies examining the transmission of disclosure information among siblings and other family members would also be informative. Third, little is known about the experiences of lesbians and gay men from diverse ethnic, cultural, or religious groups. Some have suggested that lesbians and gay men from traditional ethnic backgrounds may be especially reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation to family members for fear of losing a vital source of social support and connection to their ethnic community (Savin-Williams, 1996). In some cases, ethnic minority lesbians and gay men may also fear that revealing their sexual orientation will bring embarrassment or shame to their family. Finally, prior research has tended to view disclosure as a single, one-time event. In reality, individuals often engage in a continuing process of sharing greater information about their sexual orientation with family members over time. We know little about temporal patterns of disclosure

Family Reactions to a Gay or Lesbian Child

Initially, family members' reactions to learning that a son is gay or a daughter is lesbian are often negative (see review by Savin-Williams & Esterberg, 2000). Common reactions include such feelings as shock, disbelief, guilt, and anger (see review by Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). In a recent survey, 50% of lesbians and 32% of gay men reported that their "family or a family member" had refused to accept them because of their sexual orientation (Kaiser Foundation, 2001).

Many factors contribute to this negativity. Family members may view homosexuality as immoral or a sign of mental illness. They may believe myths about the lives of gays and lesbians, fearing, for example, that their child is doomed to a life of loneliness. Families may also worry about the dangers of sexual prejudice or have concerns about an increased risk of HIV infection. They may fear that they have contributed to their child's being

gay or lesbian through their inadequacy as parents. Further, since the lives of parents and children are interdependent in important ways, parents may have concerns about their own future, wondering if they will have grandchildren or if their child's "secret" will affect connections among their extended family and community.

Over time, many families recover from the initial turmoil of disclosure, and relations with the gay or lesbian child improve. We know little about the processes that enable families to restore positive relations, although the quality of predisclosure family relations appears to be important (Patterson, 2000). Popular writers and parent support groups have suggested that parents' reactions follow predictable stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Researchers such as Savin-Williams and Dube (1998) are skeptical of this stage model and note that empirical confirmation of a normative sequence of parental reactions is lacking.

It would be valuable to know more about the ways families cope with having a gay or lesbian child. After the initial disclosure, some parents strive to learn more about their child's personal experiences and about homosexuality in general, perhaps by participating in groups such as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) that provide support, education, and advocacy opportunities. In contrast, other parents seek to avoid continued discussion and treat the topic of homosexuality as a dark family secret. Research is needed to identify characteristics of the gay or lesbian individual, of the family, and of their social environment that are associated with differing family reactions to disclosure, both immediately and overtime. To date, studies of parents' reactions have typically recruited participants from organizations such as PFLAG. As Savin-Williams (2001) has noted, research based on these parents may "distort the reality of how typical parents react to having a sexual-minority child" (p. 249). Investigations of parents who do not join support groups are needed to understand the full range of parental reactions. Another limitation of existing studies is that they describe how families respond to disclosure from only one perspective, either that of a parent or that of the gay/lesbian individual. It is possible, however, that the gay or lesbian person and the family perceive events quite differently. Consequently, studies that include multiple family members would be useful. Finally, the study of disclosure patterns among family members will benefit from the development of more adequate conceptual frameworks and more comprehensive measures (see Beals & Peplau, 2002, for one example).

Gay and Lesbian Couples

This section provides an overview of research about gay and lesbian couples. We begin with basic information about couples and then consider the initiation of relationships, satisfaction and commitment, the division of labor and power, and needed research on gay and lesbian couples. For more detailed reviews, see Patterson (2000), Patterson, Ciabattari, and Schwartz (1999), Peplau and Beals (2001), and Peplau and Spalding (2000).

Basic Facts About Couples

Many lesbians and gay men want to have a committed love relationship. In a recent national survey (Kaiser Foundation, 2001), 74% of lesbians and gay men said that if they could legally marry someone of the same sex, they would like to do so some day. Most (68%)

lesbians and gay men said that legal marriage rights were very important to them. Many studies find that a majority of gays and lesbians are currently in a romantic relationship (see review in Peplau & Spalding, 2000). For example, in a large-scale survey of lesbians, 65% of women reported currently being in a same-sex primary relationship (Moms et al., 2001). Information about the percentage of gay and lesbian adults who live together with a same-sex partner has recently become available from the 2000 U.S. Census and other national surveys (e.g., Black, Gates, Sanders, & Taylor, 2000; Human Rights Campaign, 2001; Kaiser Foundation, 2001). The best estimate is that about 25 to 30% of gay men and lesbians' live with a same-sex partner. A recent survey of more than 2600 African American lesbians and gay men found that 41% of women and 20% of men were in a committed relationship (Battle, Cohen, Wan-en, Fergerson, & Audam, 2002).

The experiences of gay and lesbian couples are colored by the social climate of sexual prejudice. Simply being seen together as a couple can increase the risk of hate crimes and violence against gay men and lesbians. Laws against same-sex marriage deprive gay and lesbian couples of legal benefits in such areas as taxation, health insurance, social welfare, pensions, inheritance, and immigration (Savin-Williams & Esterberg, 2000). In an extreme example of sexual prejudice that took place in 2002, Carla Gray son, her partner Adrianne, and their 22-month old son barely escaped with their lives when an arson fire destroyed their home in Missoula, Montana. A psychology professor at the University of Montana, Carla had been active in efforts to extend the university's insurance benefits to same-sex partners of employees.

Same-sex couples are also vulnerable to daily hassles, inconveniences that are a constant reminder of the stigma of homosexuality. Studies have found that hotels are significantly less likely to make a room reservation for a same-sex couple than for a cross-sex couple (Jones, 1996). In shopping malls, same-sex couples may receive slower service by store clerks and experience more incidents of staring and rude treatment (Walters & Cumin, 1996). Taken together, realistic fears about sexual prejudice and chronic daily stressors associated with being gay or lesbian may increase an individual's feelings of psychological distress and adversely affect physical health (Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, Morris, & Rose, 2001). Research is needed to assess how often gay and lesbian couples experience discrimination, the strategies that couples use to cope with these experiences, and the impact of these events on same-sex relationships.

Initiating a Relationship

Lesbians and gay men report that they are most likely to meet potential dates through friends, at work, at a bar, or at a social event (Bryant & Demian, 1994). We know very little about how gay men and lesbians identify potential partners or how they communicate romantic and sexual interest verbally or nonverbally. Opportunities to meet potential partners may be more abundant in urban areas with visible gay and lesbian communities. The Internet has rapidly become a new way for gay men and lesbians to meet each other, and research about the use of this technology would be particularly valuable.

Many studies have compared the attributes that lesbians, gay men, and heterosexuals seek in romantic partners (see review by Peplau & Spalding, 2000). Regardless of sexual orientation, most individuals emphasize affection, dependability, and similarity in interests and religious beliefs. Male-female differences have also been found. For example,

gay and heterosexual men are more likely to emphasize a partner's physical attractiveness; lesbian and heterosexual women give greater emphasis to desirable personality characteristics.

When gay men and lesbians go on dates, they may rely on fairly conventional scripts that depict a predictable sequence of dating events. One study analyzed gay mens' and lesbians' accounts of typical and actual first dates (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994). Many common events were listed by both gay men and lesbians, such as discussing plans, getting to know each other, going to an activity like a conceit or movie, having a meal, and initiating physical contact. However, gay men were more likely than lesbians to include sexual activity as part of a first date, and lesbians were more likely to evaluate their feelings about the date.

In addition to understanding same-sex dating, it may also be important to understand how same-sex friendships can be transformed into romantic relationships. Rose, Zand, and Cini (1993) found that many lesbian romantic relationships began as friendships, then developed into love relationships, and later became sexual. Some women reported difficulties with this pattern of relationship development, such as problems in knowing if a relationship was shifting from friendship to romance and problems gauging the friend's possible sexual interest.

Relationship Satisfaction and Commitment

Stereotypes depict gay and lesbian relationships as unhappy. In one study, heterosexual college students described gay and lesbian relationships as less satisfying, more prone to discord, and "less in love" than heterosexual relationships (Testa, Kinder, & Ironson, 1987). In reality, comparative research finds striking similarities in the reports of love and satisfaction among contemporary lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples (see review by Kurdek, 1995a). For example, Kurdek (1998) compared married heterosexual and cohabiting gay and lesbian couples, controlling for age, education, income, and years cohabiting. The three types of couples did not differ in relationship satisfaction at initial testing. Over a 5-year period, all couples tended to decrease in relationship satisfaction, but no differences were found among gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples in the rate of change in satisfaction.

Like their heterosexual counterparts, gay and lesbian couples benefit from similarity between partners. Further, consistent with social exchange theory, happiness tends to be high when partners perceive many rewards and few costs from their relationship (e.g., Deals, Impett, & Peplau, 2002). Several studies show that satisfaction is higher when same-sex partners believe they share relatively equally in power and decision making (Peplau & Spalding, 2000). For lesbian couples, greater satisfaction has also been linked to perceptions of greater equity or fairness in the relationship.

Research has begun to investigate factors that affect partners' psychological commitment to each other and the longevity of their relationship (see review by Peplau & Spalding, 2000). Of obvious importance are positive attraction forces such as love and satisfaction that make partners want to stay together. The availability of alternative partners is also important: the lack of desirable alternatives is an obstacle to ending a relationship. Finally, barriers that make it difficult for a person to leave a relationship also matter (Kurdek, 2000).

Barriers include things that increase the psychological, emotional, or financial costs of ending a relationship. Heterosexual marriage can create many barriers such as the cost of divorce, investments in joint property, concerns about children, and the wife's financial dependence on her husband. These obstacles may encourage married couples to work toward improving a declining relationship, rather than ending it. In contrast, systematic comparisons find that gay men and lesbians experience significantly fewer banners to ending their relationships than do married heterosexuals, and for all couples, barriers are a significant predictor of relationship stability (Kurdek, 1998). A recent path analysis of data from 301 lesbian couples provided support for the idea that attractions, barriers, and alternatives each significantly predicts psychological commitment that, in turn, predicts relationship stability over time (Beals et al., 2002).

Conflict can also detract from the happiness and stability of same-sex couples, depending on how successfully partners manage their disagreements. Available research documents many common sources of conflict. For example, Kurdek (1994) found that gay male, lesbian, and heterosexual couples had similar ratings of the topics they most often fought about, with intimacy and power issues ranked at the top.

The Division of Labor and Power

A common stereotype is that same-sex couples adopt husband-wife roles as a model for their intimate relationships. Traditional heterosexual marriage has two core characteristics: a division of labor based on gender and a norm of greater male status and power. Most lesbians and gay men today reject both of these ideas.

Several studies have examined the division of labor in same-sex couples (see review by Peplau & Spalding, 2000). Most lesbians and gay men are in dual-earner relationships, so that neither partner is the exclusive breadwinner and each partner has some degree of economic independence. The most common division of labor at home involves flexibility, with partners sharing domestic activities or dividing tasks according to personal preferences or time constraints. In an illustrative study, Kurdek (1993) compared the allocation of household labor (e.g., cooking, shopping, cleaning) in cohabiting gay and lesbian couples and heterosexual married couples. None of the couples had children. Among heterosexual couples, wives typically did most of the housework. In contrast, gay and lesbian couples were likely to split tasks so that each partner performed an equal number of different activities. Gay male partners tended to arrive at equality by each partner specializing in certain tasks; lesbian partners were more likely to share tasks.

Many lesbians and gay men seek power equality in their relationships. In an early study, 92% of gay men and 97% of lesbians defined the ideal balance of power as one in which both partners were "exactly equal" (Peplau & Cochran, 1980). In a more recent study (Kurdek, 1995b), partners in gay and lesbian couples responded to multi-item measures assessing various facets of equality in an ideal relationship. On average, both lesbians and gay men rated equality as quite important, although lesbians scored significantly higher on the value of equality than did gay men. Not all couples who strive for equality achieve this ideal. Social exchange theory predicts that greater power accrues to the partner who has relatively greater persona] resources, such as education, money, or social standing. Several studies have provided empirical support for this hypothesis among gay men. In

their large-scale couples study, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) concluded that, "in gay male couples, income is an extremely important force in determining which partner will be dominant" (p. 59). In contrast, there is some evidence that lesbians strive to avoid letting financial resources affect power in their relationships.

Needed Research on Gay and Lesbian Couples

One useful approach to studying gay and lesbian couples has been comparative. Studies comparing lesbian, gay, and heterosexual relationships can dispel harmful myths about gay and lesbian couples by documenting the many commonalities across all couples regardless of sexual orientation. Comparative research can also test the generalizability of theories originally developed with heterosexuals. Most comparative research has assessed individual levels of love and satisfaction or such structural characteristics of relationships as the balance of power or the division of labor. Consequently, little is currently known about the patterns of interaction in gay and lesbian couples—the specifics of how gay and lesbian partners talk to each other and seek to resolve the conflicts of interest that inevitably arise in close relationships. These topics of investigation are of interest in their own right but also hold the promise of illuminating ways in which gender influences close relationships. Several interactional topics warrant further examination, including conversational patterns (e.g., Kollock, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1985), influence tactics (e.g., Falbo & Peplau, 1980), styles of problem solving (e.g., Kurdek, 1998), intimate communication (e.g., Mackey, Diemer, & O'Brien, 2000), and relationship maintenance behaviors (e.g., Gaines & Henderson, 2002). Research might also fruitfully investigate such topics as self-disclosure between partners, the provision and receipt of help and social support, and efforts to resolve conflicts.

Another timely research direction concerns unique issues facing gay and lesbian couples. For example, how do same-sex partners cope with problems created by sexual prejudice both at work and in their social lives? In a recent review, Oswald (2002) outlined some of the strategies that gay men and lesbians use to legitimize and support their relationships, including the creation of "family" networks that combine kin and friends, and the use of rituals such as commitment ceremonies to strengthen relationships. Further, how do partners negotiate issues about concealing versus disclosing their own sexual identity and the nature of their couple relationship to other people (e.g., Beals & Peplau, 2001)? To what extent do couples incorporate elements of gay or lesbian culture into their couple activities, for example, in the social events they attend; the holidays they celebrate; their choice of residence, dress, or friends? How do individuals and couples integrate being gay or lesbian into other important aspects of the lives including religion and ethnicity? How has the AIDS epidemic affected gay and lesbian dating and relationships (e.g., Haas, 2002)?

GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

In 2002, gay and lesbian parenting took center stage in the U.S. med'a when popular television talk show host Rosie O'Donnell revealed on national TV that she is a lesbian mom. O'Donnell and her partner, Kelli Carpenter, went public in part to lend support

to a gay couple in Florida who are challenging the state's ban on gay adoption. In the past, most gays and lesbians became parents while in a heterosexual relationship. Today, however, many gay men and lesbians, like Rosie O'Donnell, are deciding to have children either alone or in a same-sex partner relationship. Gay men and lesbians who want to become parents use a variety of approaches including adoption, which is legal in most states, artificial insemination for lesbians, and surrogate mothers for gay men (see review by Buell, 2001). It appears that a growing percentage of gay men and lesbians are considering parenthood. In a recent national poll, 49% of gays and lesbians who were not parents said they would like to have or adopt children of their own (Kaiser Foundation, 2001). Given the obstacles to parenthood faced by self-identified gay men and lesbians, there is a high likelihood that their children are strongly desired and planned.

The best information about the frequency of lesbians and gay men raising children comes from analyses of U.S. census data and other national polls. Black, Gates, Sanders, and Taylor (2000) recently estimated that 22% of partnered lesbians and 5% of partnered gay men currently have children present in the home. A large-scale survey of .African American lesbians and gay men found very similar results: 25% of women and 4% of men said they lived with children (Battle et a]., 2002). These percentages compare to 59% of married heterosexuals and 36% of partnered heterosexuals who have children at home (Black et al., 2000).

In this section, we review the small body of research about the family lives of gay and lesbian parents, focusing first on the parenting couple, then on their children, and last on special concerns of gay and lesbian parents.

Gay and Lesbian Couples With Children

How does the transition to parenthood affect gay and lesbian couples? For married heterosexuals, parenthood often creates a less balanced division of domestic work, with mothers providing the bulk of childcare and household labor. Does parenthood alter the ideology of equality that often characterizes lesbian and gay relationships? Although limited, available research indicates that parenthood does not change this genera] pattern of shared family responsibilities (see review on lesbian parenthood by Parks, 1998). For example, Chan, Brooks, Raboy, and Patterson (1998) compared 30 lesbian couples and 16 heterosexual couples, all of whom became parents using anonymous donor insemination and had at least 1 child in elementary school. In this highly educated sample, both lesbian and heterosexual couples reported a relatively equal division of paid employment, housework, and decision making. However, lesbian couples reported sharing child-care tasks more equally than did heterosexual parents.

Very little is known about gay male couples with children (see Bigner & Bozett, 1990, for a general review of research on gay fathers). One study found a more even division of childcare and housework among gay male parenting couples than among heterosexual couples (McPherson, 1993, cited in Savin-Williams & Esterberg, 2000). Additional studies of gay couples who become parents by choice would provide a unique perspective on fathering. Gay couples who adopt or use surrogate mothers are highly motivated to parent and know that there will not be a woman in the home to provide childcare. How do these men perceive the father role and how do they handle their parental responsibilities?

Many questions about the family lives of gay and lesbian parents remain. Available descriptions of gay and lesbian parents tend to be based on relatively older, well-educated, financially secure couples with young children. Lesbian mothers in these studies are likely to have liberal and feminist attitudes. Research is needed with larger, more representative samples. One question concerns the impact of children on the parents' relationship satisfaction. Among heterosexuals, the transition to parenting is often accompanied by a decline in marital satisfaction, sometimes attributed to the uneven division of labor in the couple and the stress of parenting. Does this occur among same-sex couples, or does a pattern of more equal sharing of family work counteract this effect (see, for example, Koepke, Hare & Moran, 1992)? Longitudinal studies of the transition to parenthood among gay and lesbian couples would be particularly valuable.

Another question relevant to some same-sex couples is whether the biological and nonbiological parent are equally involved in childcare and paid work. To date, studies on this topic have examined lesbian mothers only, and the results have been inconsistent. Studies of gay male couples with a biological and nonbiological parent would be informative. Finally, it appears that lesbians and gay men who adopt children often parent children from different cultural and racial backgrounds. What impact does this have on their family life?

Children of Gay and Lesbian Parents

A top priority for researchers studying the children of lesbian and gay parents has been to debunk stereotypes that homosexuals are unfit parents whose children are at risk for a variety of psychosocial problems. Several studies have been conducted, most involving children of lesbian mothers (see reviews by Parks, 1998; Patterson, 2000; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

There is no evidence that the children of gay and lesbian parents differ systematically from children of heterosexual parents on standard measures of psychological functioning. No significant differences have been found in psychological well-being, self-esteem, behavioral problems, intelligence, cognitive abilities, or peer relations. A recent report by the American Academy of Pediatrics concluded that "no data have pointed to any risk to children as a result of growing up in a family with 1 or more gay parents" (Peirin, 2002, p. 343).

A related research question has been the possible impact of gay and lesbian parents on a child's gender identity and gender-typed behavior (see review by Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). There is no evidence that the children of gay and lesbian parents are confused or uncertain about their gender identity, that is, their self-knowledge that they are male or female (Patterson, 2000). Stacey and Biblarz (2001) suggested that these children may be somewhat more flexible or nontraditional in their views about a range of gender-typed behaviors including clothing, play activities, school activities, and occupational aspiration. Currently, support for this plausible hypothesis is extremely limited. In one study, for example, 53% of the daughters of lesbians aspired to professional careers such as doctor, lawyer, or astronaut compared to 21 % of the daughters of heterosexuals (Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray, & Smith, 1986). Additional research on children's gender-typed interests and behaviors would be useful.

A final research question concerns the sexual behavior and sexual orientation of children raised by gay and lesbian parents. For gay rights advocates, this research has the potential to counter the argument that children of lesbian moms and gay dads are at "increased risk" of becoming gay or lesbian themselves. Of course, in a completely accepting society, this would not be a fear, but in our climate of sexual prejudice, this argument has been used in court cases and legislative decisions to limit gay parenting. This research also provides important information about the influence of parents' sexual orientation on child outcomes. Unfortunately, as noted by Patterson (2000), Stacey and Biblarz (2001), and by others, available studies are limited in scope and methodology. Specifically, current research is largely based on small, nonrepresentative samples of White, middle-class, well-educated gay men and lesbians. Most studies rely on self-report questionnaires or interviews collected at one time point. Studies using longitudinal designs or observational methods are not available.

Despite these limitations, two patterns emerge. First, the great majority of children of gay and lesbian parents grow up to identify as heterosexual (Patterson, 2000). Whether the percentage of gay' and lesbian offspring differs depending on the parents' sexual orientation is open to debate, and a final conclusion must await more extensive research. Second, children of lesbian parents appear to be more open to same-sex sexual experiences (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). For example, in the only relevant longitudinal study, Golombok and Tasker (1996) studied 25 lesbian and 21 heterosexual mothers and their children. At the start of the study, the children were on average 10 years old and they were followed into young adulthood. No significant differences were found in the percentage of children identifying as gay or lesbian. However, compared to the children of heterosexual mothers, a greater percentage of children raised by lesbian mothers had had a same-sex sexual relationship or were open to this possibility in the future. Comparable scientific research on the children of gay fathers is not available.

There is a clear need for additional research on the experiences of children of gay and lesbian parents. A promising research direction concerns the resilience of children raised by parents from this socially stigmatized group. Despite teasing and other problems that children of gay and lesbian parents encounter, their psychological adjustment is comparable to that of other children. What processes make this possible? Further, are there compensating benefits of having gay and lesbian parents? For example, are gay and lesbian parents more likely to teach values of tolerance? Stacey and Biblarz (2001) argued that because children of lesbian and gay parents "contend with the burdens of vicarious social stigma" they may "display more empathy for social diversity" (p. 177). As another example, does the lesser concern of gay and lesbian parents about conformity to traditional gender roles provide their children with greater freedom to explore their own individual interests and preferences?

Special Concerns of Gay and Lesbian Parents

The diversity among gay and lesbian parents makes it impossible to characterize a "typical" family. Nonetheless, several issues common to gay and lesbian parenting can be identified (Dundas & Kaufman, 2000; Gartrell et al., 1996). Legal issues are often a major source of worry. Many lesbian and gay parents live in fear that their children can be taken away

from them because of their sexual orientation, and some parents engage in lengthy legal battles with a former spouse or family member who disputes their fitness to parent. For gays and lesbians in a couple relationship, there are issues surrounding the legal status of the second parent. Only a few states allow a second same-sex parent to have legal rights and corresponding parental obligations.

Second, gay and lesbian parents have many concerns about the possible impact of sexual prejudice on the experiences of their children at school, in the neighborhood, with friends, with healthcare providers, and so on. Researchers have not yet examined the strategies that gay and lesbian parents use to shelter their children from negative experiences, to help children cope with instances of prejudice, to build resilience in their children, and to create supportive social networks.

Third, gay and lesbian parents, like single heterosexual parents, may have concerns about the availability of other-sex adults to provide role models for their children (e.g., Dundas & Kaufman, 2000). In some cases, siblings, other family members, and friends may fill this role. Gay and lesbian parents may face special problems not experienced by heterosexuals. For example, single heterosexual mothers may encourage their sons to participate in the Boy Scouts as a way to provide models of male leadership, but the anti-gay policies of the Boy Scouts might be discouraging to lesbian mothers.

Fourth, gay and lesbian parents must communicate with their children about potentially sensitive topics, such as the parent's sexual orientation or, in the case of artificial insemination or surrogate motherhood, how the child was conceived (e.g., Barrett, 1997; West & Turner, 1995). Research will need to examine the different aspects of disclosure to children and the consequences of these decisions.

Finally, the experiences of lesbian and gay parents challenge many popular beliefs about "normal" human development. Conceptual analyses of these issues would be beneficial. For example, models of identity development have often emphasized the role that parents play in socializing their children. Yet most gay and lesbian parents avoid socializing their children to conform to the parents' own sexual orientation. In a qualitative interview study, both lesbian and gay parents thought it most likely that their children would be heterosexual (Costello, 1997). All parents emphasized that they would accept their child's sexual orientation, whatever it might be. Parents often taught the value of accepting people in all their diversity. Asked how she thought her sexual orientation would influence her daughter, one lesbian mother replied, "I hope it helps her realize that we need to be true to ourselves, no matter who we are" (cited in Costello, 1997, p. 79).

AUTHOR NOTE

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