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LGBTQ Parenting Post Heterosexual Relationship Dissolution

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Abstract

The chapter examines parenting among sexual and gender minorities post heterosexual relationship dissolution (PHRD). Reviewing the literature around intersecting identities of LGBTQ parents, we consider how religion, race, and socioeconomic status are associated with routes into and out of heterosexual relationships and variation in the lived experience of sexual and gender identity minorities, in particular how LGBTQ parents PHRD feel about being out. Further consideration is given to examining how family relationships change and develop as parental sexual and/or gender identity changes. We also explore the impact of PHRD identity and parenthood on new partnerships and stepfamily experiences. The chapter addresses the reciprocal relationship between research on LGBTQ parenting and policy and legal influences that impact upon the experience of LGBTQ parenting PHRD when custody and access are disputed. Finally, the chapter includes future research directions and implications for practice in an area that has been revitalized in recent years.

Keywords: coming out, custody, divorce, family processes, family structure, LGBTQ parents, parenting, post-heterosexual relationship, same-sex relationships, stepfamilies

LGBTQ-Parenting Post-Heterosexual Relationship Dissolution

Various commentators have noted different sociohistorical trends in research on sexual and gender minority parenting and these trends contextualize the lives of LGBTQ people parenting a child or children from a post-heterosexual relationship dissolution (PHRD; Golombok, 2007; Johnson, 2012). For example, Johnson (2012) delineated three waves of research on lesbian parenting. The first wave consisted of lesbians who became parents while in heterosexual relationships who subsequently came out and decided to separate from their child's father. The second wave contained lesbians who then decide to have children (planned, primary, or "de novo" families). Johnson's third wave then saw research re-focus away from negating deficit arguments (i.e., establishing no difference comparisons with heterosexual parent families) and turned attention to evaluate the unique challenges experienced within lesbian headed families. Johnson acknowledged that parenting PHRD has continued beyond the crest of the first wave of research on lesbian parenting. Nonetheless PHRD parenting has become a forgotten research backwater in recent decades (Tasker & Rensten, 2019).

In this chapter, we provide an updated version of what Tasker (2013) discussed, namely, what we currently know about LGBTQ-parenting PHRD. We begin by reviewing the key theoretical perspectives employed in the field. We then present the demographics and social trends currently known and understood in addition to examining how religion and race impact LGBTQ parenting PHRD. With the demographic context and intersectional identities in mind, we consider legislation and the well-being of LGBTQ parents PHRD. Next, we discuss the ongoing challenges of coming out PHRD, forming new partnerships, same-gender stepfamilies, and legal and policy impacts on well-being of LGBTQ parents PHRD. Finally, we discuss future research directions and implications for practice.

Theoretical Perspectives

Theoretical perspectives, and the sociohistorical trends that contextualize them, have influenced the waves of research on LGBT parenting PHRD. Against a background of contested custody cases, early quantitative research studies often derived hypotheses to test out developmental deficit approaches that the absence of two parents of different genders in the child's home would be detrimental to child well-being (Farr, Tasker & Goldberg, 2017; Golombok & Tasker, 1994; see also Pollitt, Reczek, & Umberson, this volume). More recently, some social scientists have employed deficit comparisons to mount a challenge to the “no differences” consensus reached in earlier studies (Allen, Pakaluk & Price, 2013; Regnerus, 2012; Sullins, 2015) yet crucially failed to control for confounding factors accounting for disadvantage (Cenegy, Denney & Kimbro, 2018; Gates et al., 2012; Potter & Potter, 2017; Rosenfeld, 2013).

Feminist theories also have influenced the research on LGBTQ parents PHRD from earlier studies (Ainslie & Feltey, 1991; Gabb, 2005) and in more recent years have emphasized the critical intersection of identities as the key factor contextualizing experience (Moore, 2008; Nixon, 2011). More recently, studies have begun to consider tenets from life course perspective (Bengtson & Allen, 1993; Elder, 1998), namely cohort effects and linked lives (e.g., Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Delvoye & Tasker, 2016). Researchers also have begun to employ queer theory (Bermea, van Eeden-Moorefield, Bible, & Petren, 2018; Carroll, 2018) and minority stress theory approaches to enlighten understanding of the unique context of parenting PHRD (Lassiter, Gutierrez, Dew, & Abrams, 2017). In addition, some pieces of work have assessed the relevance of specific models in relation to understanding LGBTQ parenting PHRD, for example, the concept of boundary ambiguity has been evaluated in relation to gay father stepfamilies (Jenkins, 2013).

Demographics, Social Trends, and LGBTQ Parents PHRD

While scholars do not have exact numbers, it is agreed that the majority of children under the age of 18 who are in same-sex households entered them following a heterosexual relationship dissolution rather than through planned same-sex families using donor insemination, surrogates, or via foster care or adoption (Gates, 2015; Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014; Lynch & Murray, 2000; Potter & Potter, 2017; Robitaille & Saint-Jacques, 2009; Tasker, 2013). Approximately 28% of gay fathers and 37% of lesbian mothers with children became parents in the context of their current relationship (Henehan, Rothblum, Solomon, & Balsam, 2007), thus roughly 60-70% of LG parents had children in a previous relationship. Additionally, using data from the National Survey of Family Growth, over 60% of lesbian mothers in the United States (U.S.) report having been married (Brewster, Tillman, & Jokinen-Gordon, 2014). Data from the 2011 Canadian census indicated that one in eight stepfamilies headed by a same-gender couple contained residential children (Feret, 2012). Within the Australian context, 40% of gay men became a parent while in a heterosexual relationship (Power et al., 2012). As societal acceptance leads to more people claiming a sexual minority identity at earlier ages and creating planned families using available medical technologies, it can be expected that fewer children in same-sex parent headed households will be entering this family structure following heterosexual relationship dissolution as (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Dunlap, 2016; Gates, 2015; Goldberg & Gartrell, 2014; Tasker, 2013; Tornello & Patterson, 2015).

As of yet there are minimal data on trans parents to know much about the demographics on the route to parenthood. Stotzer, Herman, and Hasenbush (2014) reviewed over 50 studies on trans parents to conclude that between one-quarter and one-half of trans people reported being parents. Using data from the Trans PULSE Project in Ontario, Canada, Pyne, Bauer, and Bradley

(2015) found that trans parents were likely to be older rather than younger, were more likely to have had children prior to transitioning, and were more likely to be (or have been) married previously. Data from this Canadian survey also revealed that transgender individuals with children were more likely to be transwomen than transmen and were less likely to be engaging in medical transition (Pyne et al., 2015). Also, while *queer* is an identity for many, especially younger cohorts, and an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities, there are minimal data specific to either queer or indeed bisexual identified parents, as many scholars refer to parents in same-sex or same-gender headed families as *lesbian* or *gay*.

Intersections of Religion and Race and Doing LGBTQ Parenting PHRD

While rare, more research has begun to focus on exploring the intersection of identities in lived experience focusing on religion and race or ethnicity around LGBTQ parenting, including PHRD. Historically, religious groups, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, have not affirmed same-sex or same-gender attraction and relationships (Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Lytle, Foley, & Aster, 2013; see also Acosta, this volume). Religious communities have barred LGB people from leadership positions and have not been willing to perform or sanction same-sex marriage ceremonies (Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Lytle et al., 2013; Woodell, Kazyak, & Compton, 2015). While some denominations and communities do affirm LGBTQ individuals and same-sex marriage, belonging to a non-affirming religious group or denomination can lead to additional stress and internal homophobia in LGBTQ persons (Barnes & Meyer, 2012). Being a member of a non-affirming religious group may be a challenge in disclosing a LGBTQ identity because heterosexual marriage feels like the only way to have children or indeed a recognized partnership (Tuthill, 2016).

Little is known about the experience of exiting a heterosexual relationship for LGBTQ parents who have different religious faiths. Lytle, Foley, and Aster (2013) studied 10 adult children's perceptions of growing up when one parent was LG and one parent was heterosexual and the family attended a Christian or Jewish place of worship. The adult children indicated that family break-up was the most difficult aspect of their experience, more so than the discovery that a parent was gay or lesbian or the process of redefining their relationship with religion. Positive aspects of having a LG parent also were identified, such as being more open minded and accepting of people. A rare example of the experience of being in a non-affirming religious atmosphere and parenting PHRD is outside the academic literature. In *Our Family Outing: A Memoir of Coming Out and Coming Through* (2011), Leigh Anne Taylor and Joe Cobb discuss their family's experience of Joe coming to terms of his sexuality as an ordained minister in the non-affirming United Methodist Church. Initially it was easier for Joe to keep the closet door closed when religious colleagues around Joe debated and cast doubt upon the existence of LGBTQ individuals in the faith. The memoir then covered their individual and joint crisis, their divorce and continued co-parenting, the formation of their new families, and ended with Reverend Cobb leading a Metropolitan Community Church congregation. Thus, through finding an affirming religious community, Reverend Cobb was able to hold the tension of various aspects of his identity together, as well as make family transitions.

For some LGBTQ people, their ethnicity or race may add additional challenges or pressures around sexual orientation identity disclosure (Aranda et al., 2015; Bowleg, Burkholder, Teti, & Craig, 2008; Greene, 1998; Moore, 2010). Racial and ethnic minority couples have higher rates of parenting than White same-sex couples and as many mothers became parents while in a prior heterosexual relationship, scholars estimate that many PHRD parents are also

parents of color (Goldberg et al., 2014). Racial integration within LGBTQ parenting community groups has been noted as a challenge. For example, gay fathers recruited for participant observation and interviews via gay parenting support groups in California, Texas, and Utah felt that gay parenting groups were gradually becoming more racially diverse but feelings of marginalization from the LGBTQ parenting community were prominent in the responses of the Black (11%) and Hispanic/Latino (9%) gay fathers interviewed (Carroll, 2018). In Carroll's study, single gay fathers, gay fathers of color, and PHRD gay fathers rarely attended gay father community events in any of the three states sampled due to feelings of being an "other" (p. 110).

Communities of color (particularly Black, African American, Hispanic, and Latinx) are put forward as less accepting of LGBTQ individuals, partly due to conservative Christian values (Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Greene, 1994; Morris, Balsam, & Rothblum, 2002; Tuthill, 2016).

Lassiter, Gutierrez, Dew, and Abrams (2017) found of 305 LG parents that parents of color ($n = 80$) were less out to faith communities, had higher identity confusion, but felt a lower need for privacy and tended to rely on their religious community for support. They also found that younger parents across race and ethnicity were less out than older parents to their religious communities (Lassiter et al., 2017). Carroll (2018) found that 90% of the PHRD gay fathers recruited to the study via a support group in Utah had belonged to the Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints Church and some still felt depressed and guilty for breaking up the church expected family life.

In her groundbreaking work on lesbian mothers of color, Moore (2008, 2011) also found most had children within a prior heterosexual union. Lesbian mothers struggled to be seen as "good mothers" as shaped by gender, sexuality, and race specifically as defined within religious Black communities (Moore, 2011). Tuthill (2016) utilized the same framework as Moore (2011)

to interview 15 Hispanic lesbian mothers living in Texas parenting biological, adopted, and step children. The lesbian mothers in Tuthill's sample found different solutions to their dilemma: retaining their spiritual beliefs while maintaining loose ties with Catholic traditions; redefining religious meanings such as the concept of sin and the authority of clergymen; or keeping their distance from formal religion by maintaining their Catholic identity without a church affiliation or developing beliefs that fit their lived experience and own understanding of faith.

Legislation Rights and Well-Being of LGBTQ Parents

The legal rights of LGBTQ parents have been fraught for decades (see Shapiro, this volume). For many, the risk of losing their child by leaving a heterosexual relationship and coming out and/or entering a same-sex relationship influenced their decision on whether and how to disclose their sexuality. We first review the current legal situation for LGBTQ parents PHRD in the U.S. and other nations with more developed equal rights legislation. We then consider how social science research on lesbian parenting in particular has contributed to the equal rights debate in this regard.

In divorce settlements involving dependent children, the best interests of the child is seen as the paramount legal principle under which the court operates. Under the best interests principle, a key factor taken into consideration would be whether the child would be harmed or negatively impacted by being separated from a parent (Haney-Caron & Heilbrun, 2014; Holtzman, 2011). When there are custody and access disputes involving dissolution of a heterosexual relationship in which one partner has a new sexual identity, states that do take sexual orientation into account now note that sexual orientation cannot be the only factor considered (Haney-Caron & Heilbrun, 2014). This has led to courts scrutinizing the particular

sexual activities of an LGBTQ parent and allowing this to influence legal decision-making (Haney-Caron & Heilbrun, 2014; Tasker & Rensten, 2019).

In addition to custody and access decisions, there are legal and social barriers restricting how people parent PHRD (Park, Kazzyak, & Slauson-Blevins, 2016), such as legal challenges of adding parental figures when a child already has two parents. Thus, the LGBTQ stepparent who is not legally recognized as having a parenting role, might face a lack of institutional support for their parenting (Moore, 2008; Park et al., 2016). For example, marriage alone does little to protect the rights of same-sex couples, leaving parent-child relationships legally vulnerable, especially in the case of a parent's death (Acosta, 2017). Acosta (2017) found that lesbian stepfamilies had three paths for planning to preserve stepparent-child relationships in the event of parent-of-origin death: relying on family members, using wills for extended family members to follow, and if the children were old enough that children would choose for themselves. All of the paths leave some ambiguity as to what will actually happen in the event of parent-of-origin death, especially if there is strain in the relationship with the co-parent or extended family (Acosta).

Historically, the newly identifying lesbian mother feared the loss of custody of her children (Tasker, 2013). In a number of high-profile legal cases in the U.S., lesbian mothers lost custody, or had visitation restrictions imposed upon them; for example, in *Bottoms v. Bottoms* (1995) a child's grandmother was awarded custody because their mother's conduct was judged immoral. Seminal studies—such as those by Golombok and colleagues (1983) and Green and colleagues (1986)—found nothing to distinguish children raised by lesbian or heterosexual mothers PHRD and contributed to the “no differences” conclusion (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). In an interview about her work Golombok ascribed her initial research interest being kindled by

reading about lesbian mothers in the U.K. losing custody upon exiting a relationship with their child's father (Florance, 2015). Subsequent reviews of research on the well-being of children in LGBTQ-parented families concluded that children in these families were not developmentally disadvantaged (LaSala, 2013; Manning, Fetto, & Lamidi, 2014; Patterson, 1992; Tasker, 2005) with only a minority of authors dissenting (American Psychological Association Amicus Brief, 2014).

Gradually through the work of legal activists and test cases, the “no difference” consensus began to hold sway in legal cases and precedents for custody and visitation were established (Tasker & Rensten, 2019). Further, the nexus principle governing admissible evidence—the direct association between the behavior in question and the likelihood of harm had to be clear—became a cornerstone of family law (Logue, 2002). Therefore, as long as the no differences conclusion remained, the nexus principle would ensure that sexual identity per se was not seen as grounds to discriminate against an LGBTQ parent PHRD.

Nonetheless, in recent years the “no differences” principle has come under challenge from reviews emphasizing the limited convenience sampling of LGBTQ parents conducted in many of the earlier studies (Amato, 2012; Marks, 2012). Linked to these critiques new studies were generated that loosened sampling criteria to obtain larger samples (Allen et al., 2013; Regnerus, 2012; Sullins, 2015), crucially at the expense of accurately defining the groups of LGB parents purportedly studied, thus accentuating family type differences (Baiocco, Carone, Ioverno, & Lingiardi, 2018; Gates et al., 2012; Gates, 2015). Other studies have indicated that controlling for socioeconomic status and family instability—the history of exit and entry transitions surrounding the formation of single parent or stepfamily forms—can nullify differences between young people from different family backgrounds that might otherwise be

evident (Cenegy et al., 2018; Potter, 2012; Potter & Potter, 2017; Rosenfeld, 2013). Similarly, several major studies on the general effects of parental separation and divorce have implicated family instability as the major factor alongside socioeconomic disadvantage accounting for disparity in children's psychosocial adjustment and achievements not the family form itself (Fomby & Cherlin, 2007; Fomby & Osborne, 2017; Lansford, 2009). Notwithstanding the association of family instability and well-being, the combined vulnerability of being a newly out parent intersecting with class, race, religion, and cohort factors means that legal disputes involving LGBTQ parents do not happen within a neutral arena.

The Ongoing Challenge of Coming Out PHRD and Forming New Partnerships

Despite the increased visibility of LGBTQ communities and equal rights legislation to acknowledge same-gender partnerships across much of the Western world, the psychosocial challenges of coming out as a LGBTQ parent with children from a prior heterosexual relationship are not to be underestimated. Single parenting, non-residential parenting, and forming a new same-gender partnership, all present complex challenges for the LGBTQ parent PHRD. First, we consider the LGBTQ parent's route into and out of heterosexual parenthood and then consider how this frames the LGBTQ parent's process of awareness and coming out later in life. Second, we consider how LGBTQ parents PHRD feel a powerful mix of stigma and pride in coming out with the complex intersections of class, race, religion, and cohort effects. Third, we review how disclosure is broached within their heterosexual relationship. Fourth, we examine how PHRD family relationships change and develop during this process. Lastly, we consider new same-gender partnerships and LGBTQ-parent stepfamily experiences PHRD.

LGBTQ Parenting Via Heterosexual Parenthood and Coming Out Later in Life

LGBTQ parents with children from a previous heterosexual relationship might encounter incredulity or suspicion from a variety of sources and feel called to account for their relationship history. Researchers have explored the varied reasons why an LGBTQ parent may have had children within a heterosexual partnership to reveal a mix of reasons. For example, in Figueroa's (2018) qualitative study of PHRD lesbian mothers in Chile, some had identified feelings for other women as teenagers. In a strongly conservative and predominantly Catholic milieu, Chilean lesbians assumed there was no option but to marry a man, especially if they wanted to have children.

In disentangling a complex mix of gender identity and sexual identity to understand relationship desires, many on the trans and gender non-conforming spectrum often identify later in life (Dierckx, Motmans, Mortelmans, & T'sjoen, 2015; Stotzer et al., 2014). Additionally, from clinical work and qualitative research, Mallon (2017) indicated that for many LGBTQ people, gender and sexual identity are not so clear-cut when they embarked upon a heterosexual partnership. For instance, some of the other cisgender women in Figueroa's (2018) study of Chilean lesbian mothers described experiencing a change in their sexual identity from heterosexual to lesbian, not a rekindling of desire.

Using a life course perspective, qualitative research has begun to explore cisgender bisexual women's accounts of experiencing attractions to both women and men and how these intertwine with their perceptions of motherhood. The eight British and Irish bisexual mothers in Tasker and Delvoye's (2018) study had children through a relationship with a man in a variety of different family arrangements: some were now parenting PHRD while others were not. The mothers reported a complex mix of emotional and sexual attractions encountered as they self-defined their sexual identity across their life course (Delvoye & Tasker, 2016). Some of the

cisgender women felt some degree of relief when they fell in love with a man because the normative pathway to marriage and having children then opened up. Participants felt perplexed, misunderstood, socially isolated, or invisible in their nascent bisexual identity until they made contact with the bisexual community (Tasker & Delvoye, 2015).

Life course and feminist approaches also have been useful in framing the reflections of lesbian and bisexual grandmother when reflecting upon their lives. For example, the U.S. lesbian and bisexual grandmothers in Orel and Fruhauf's (2006) study said that when younger they saw their future only terms of marriage to a man, even if they were aware at that time of something lacking in their lives. Lesbian grandmother's in Patterson's (2005a) study recalled three distinct time periods in their lives. Initially, when growing up as young women, if they had claimed a lesbian identity they could have been subjected to a criminal prosecution or labeled with a mental health problem. Consequently, most of Patterson's lesbian grandmothers had regarded a lesbian identity as simply taboo. Later in the 1970s and 1980s while lesbians were becoming steadily more visible, lesbian mothers were still seen only in the margins, including within the often childfree and separatist lesbian communities. Some of Patterson's lesbian grandmothers did begin to come out during the 1970s and 1980s, but felt they risked their relationship with their children in doing so given the hostile judicial climate. Greater openness had only been feasible when equal rights legislation had led lessened the possibility of experiencing discrimination and prejudice.

Stigma and Pride in Coming Out: Experiencing the Intersection of Class, Race, Religion, and Cohort

Post *Obergefell* and equal rights legislation, we speculate that contemporary White middle-class LGBTQ parent PHRD may find coming out an easier prospect than did their

counterparts in previous cohorts (Tasker & Rensten, 2019). Nevertheless, there are as yet few if any published studies that have investigated the polar experiences of stigma and pride and the intersection of LGBTQ parenting PHRD, social class, race, ethnicity, religion, and cohort.

Without formal educational and economic resources, working-class parents transitioning into a new sexual or gender identity are in a more vulnerable position in relation to disclosing their sexual identity and may not have the resources to fight any legal battles (Tasker & Rensten, 2019). In one study of White working-class mothers in the U.K., even identifying as lesbian was a major challenge for some women who were in effect dependent upon their ex-husband for financial support for their children (Nixon, 2011). Furthermore, the women in Nixon's research recalled their own unhappy and marginalized experiences as young lesbians at school. These prior experiences, arising from the intersection of social class and sexual identity, spurred on the desires of these mothers to protect their children from being bullied by avoiding disclosure and fostering their child's ability to be independent.

Stigma is likely still a major part of the experience of LGBTQ parenthood in more socially conservative areas. One survey of over 60 mostly White and middle-class gay fathers compared respondents residing in California with those in Tennessee (Perrin, Pinderhughes, Mattern, Hurley, & Newman, 2016). Half of the gay men in the Tennessee group parented PHRD, whereas the large majority in California had planned fatherhood as gay men. Gay fathers in Tennessee were more likely to report worrying about stigma than were those in California. Surveying over 300 participants at a gay pride event in a city in a southern state in the U.S. Lassiter and colleagues (2017) found intriguing differences in the responses of the lesbian and gay parents they surveyed. Older respondents were more likely to feel under pressure than were younger participants suggesting a cohort effect such that older generations were still more likely

to feel vulnerable to sexual minority stress, despite a more accepting current zeitgeist. Plausibly older cohorts were more likely than younger cohorts to contain PHRD LG parents, although route to parenthood was not recorded in the survey. Compared to the lesbian parents surveyed, gay parents not only reported on the lack of social acceptance they experienced but also felt more directly threatened by their external environment. Gay parents additionally experienced more internalized homophobia than did lesbian parents. Both lesbian and gay parents of color (about 25% of the sample) reported more feelings of identity confusion than did White lesbian and gay parents (Lassiter et al., 2017). Carroll (2018) has drawn attention to the particular circumstances of PHRD gay fathers in Utah versus those attending community groups in California (predominantly fathers via surrogacy or adoption) and Texas where route to parenthood varied. Gay fathers PHRD felt marginalized in society and in relation to the LGBTQ communities in all three states, but gay fathers in California appeared to be particularly isolated from community assistance because of their minority within a minority status.

The negative effects of stigma and fear of stigmatization has featured in the clinical case accounts of children of trans parents (Freedman, Tasker, & Di Ceglie, 2002; White & Ettner, 2004). Similarly, dealing with stigma, or the possibility of experiencing stigma, has been noted as a major aspect of life experience in survey research on transgender parents (Haines, Ajayi, & Boyd, 2014) and the adult children of transgender parents (Veldorale-Griffin, 2014).

The stark contrast between the socially privileged world of the parent who is read by others as heterosexual simply because they are in a different gender partnership and the parent who is read as lesbian or gay is crystalized in the difficulties bisexual parents have in achieving recognition both within their family of origin and in their friendship circles (Delvoe & Tasker, 2016). Bisexual mothers met separatist lesbian opposition and were rendered invisible as

mothers overwhelmed by the presumptions of heteronormative motherhood (Tasker & Delvoye, 2015). Furthermore, the women in Tasker and Delvoye's study positioned themselves as mothers first and foremost as they recollected prioritizing the needs of their children over and above their own identification as a bisexual woman on various occasions. For example, some bisexual mothers avoided giving any clues as to their sexual identity while children were of school age and did not challenge others when they presumed heterosexuality (Tasker & Delvoye, 2015). Nonetheless, mothers took the opportunities they felt they could to raise the profile of LGBTQ equal rights issues within their local neighborhood.

One recurrent finding from earlier research on gay fathers and lesbian mothers exiting heterosexual relationships was that many expressed self-pride in their honesty and achievement in coming out, especially in the face of obstacles and opposition (Bigner & Bozett, 1990; Bozett, 1987; Coleman, 1990). A sense of achievement also featured in the early accounts of single Black lesbian mothers (Hill, 1987). As they reached young adulthood, some of the offspring of lesbian mothers also reported feeling proud of their mother and their family background (Tasker & Golombok, 1997). Nonetheless, expressing pride may have been more difficult for mothers, fathers, and children who came from PHRD backgrounds than for parents and children in planned LGB-parent families (Goldberg, 2007; Perlesz et al., 2006; Van Dam, 2004). Nixon's (2011) research has indicated that pride is not just confined to middle-class samples as their children's displays of tolerance and equality were qualities praised by working-class lesbian mothers too.

For older cohorts of PHRD lesbian and gay parents continuing difficulties of feeling out-of-step with much younger LGBTQ parents also contribute to feelings of stigma and pride. Only with more recent cultural shifts marking the value of diversity have the Canadian lesbian

grandmothers in Patterson's (2005b) study felt more valued and able to make a positive contribution towards political change. Reflections on pride in personal growth also were emphasized by the middle-aged and older Israeli PHRD gay fathers, who significantly differed from the comparison group of heterosexual fathers in this respect (Shenkman, Ifrah, & Shmotkin, 2018). Furthermore, Shenkman and colleagues noted that feelings of personal growth and purpose in life were rated more highly by gay fathers than by those in the comparison group of childfree gay men.

Broaching Disclosure Within a Heterosexual Relationship

Speaking as a clinician, Mallon (2017) highlighted the emotional and social complexities for newly identifying LGBTQ parents in coming out within the context of an established heterosexual partnership in which children have been nurtured. The parent beginning their journey to self-actualization is faced with twin desires for authenticity and wanting to live a fuller life. Yet a painful sense of loss may ensue because they may feel deeply attached and committed to the children they share with their partner. Furthermore, emotional and/or sexual feelings for their partner may possibly linger after leaving the relationship. New excitement is thus tinged with sadness at the thought of what could be lost.

Diverse reflections over time upon the challenges and pleasures of coming out as a LGBTQ parent can be seen in the moving qualitative accounts of lesbian grandparents coming out to their adult children and grandchildren (Patterson, 2005b). Most of the women in Patterson's sample of Canadian lesbian grandmothers stressed the transformation of their lives through a late in life discovery of their feelings for another woman. Most did not manage or hide their feelings for women over a long period of time. Similarly, Orel and Fruhauf (2006) reported

accounts by lesbian and bisexual grandmothers in a U.S. sample of women who realized their own sexual identity later in life just prior to embarking on a relationship with another woman.

Leaving the security of a heterosexual future and coming out to their presumably heterosexual partner is often a tense process (Patterson, 2005a). On the one hand, the LGBTQ parent may have spent some time working out what their sexual feelings meant, or the realization may have suddenly dawned and helped to make sense of past experiences. On the other hand, their former partner is less likely to have been prepared, even if they had an inkling that something had changed in the relationship. Therefore, the reality of coming out will be linked into the re-configuration of an existing family system formed around bringing up children. Sometimes the parenting couple may be able to reach a new accommodation in a mixed orientation marriage and one or both of them may be keen to try this (Buxton, 2005; 2012). If a new accommodation within an existing parenting partnership is to work, then open communication is important (Mallon, 2017). If the partners are no longer prepared to be patient with or tolerate each other, then separation seems an inevitable consequence.

Being unfettered by a heterosexual partnership that is no longer sustainable, an LGBTQ parent has a chance to redefine both self and family relationships in a way that can be authentic and more meaningful (Benson, Silverstein, & Auerbach, 2005). Nevertheless, as with any relationship break-up, and especially that of a partnership with children, the whole family system is challenged to redefine around a new reality. Mallon (2017) suggested that LGBTQ parents will likely experience challenges that are often more to do with solo parenting than with sexual identity. As a single parent, the LGBTQ parent will have the strain of sole day-to-day parental responsibility in the home and may experience multiple role strain if taking on additional responsibilities for paid employment (Amato, 2014; Braver, Shapiro, & Goodman, 2006). The

non-residential LGBTQ parent PHRD has to face legal, financial, and/or psychological consequences as family relationships reconfigure around two separate residences (Amato & Dorius, 2010).

PHRD Family Relationships: Conflict, Acceptance, and Building New Relationships

Earlier studies of lesbian or gay parents PHRD highlighted conflict with the child's other parent around the ending of the lesbian or gay parent's intimate heterosexual relationship as a critical influence on the LG parent's feelings about coming out (Bigner, 1996; Hare & Richards, 1993; Lott-Whitehead & Tully, 1992; Lynch & Murray, 2004; Morris et al., 2002). In the U.S. and elsewhere the establishment of the nexus principle has meant that custody or visitation disputes are less likely to be enflamed by resentment over an ex-partner's sexual identity ostensibly lessening conflict between the LGBTQ parent and their ex-partner (Tasker & Rensten, 2019). Nonetheless, as Bermea and colleagues' (2018) in-depth case study of two non-residential gay fathers parenting and step-parenting together revealed, ex-partners are in a legally powerful position to limit children's visits. In other countries where sexual identity is a more openly contested issue, conflict still features in accounts of PHRD lesbian mothers (Figueroa, 2018).

High levels of conflict between the trans parent and the child's other parent have been noted in survey research with transgender parents (Haines et al., 2014; White & Ettner, 2007). Parental conflict also featured in analyses of clinical accounts of children of transgender parents (Freedman et al., 2002; White & Ettner, 2004). In the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey over 20% of trans parents reported that at least one of their children stopped seeing or speaking to them because of transition (James et al., 2016). Pyne and colleagues (2015) found that less than half of the transgender parents in the Canadian Trans PULSE survey reported receiving strong endorsement from their children regarding gender identity. Furthermore, 18% of trans parents

surveyed had no legal access to their child and 18% reported having lost or reduced custody because they were transgender. Moreover, Green (2006) has pointed to parental alienation syndrome as a concern for trans parents (when a child's co-parent attempts to sever the child's connection with the child's transgender parent). Nonetheless, one in-depth U.K.-based case study found considerable variation in the partnership and parenting experiences reported by three transgender parents who transitioned post-parenthood (Hines, 2006). Hines indicated that family responses ranged from irreconcilable separation to a re-configuration of family relationships around authenticity and celebration of gender nonconformity or romance.

In the U.S. and Canada the continuing aftermath of relationship dissolution conflict between the LGBTQ parent and their former heterosexual partner is often associated with the ongoing quality of LGBTQ parent-child or LGBTQ grandparent-grandchild relationships. For example, Orel and Fruhauf (2006) reported that the lesbian and bisexual grandmothers they interviewed often attributed any ambivalence that adult children displayed to unresolved feelings about parental divorce or earlier difficulties in childhood. Analogous to this, studies with adult children of lesbian or gay parents have emphasized that feelings about their parent's sexual identity are complicated by their feelings about the ending of their parents' relationship (Daly, MacNeela, & Sarma, 2015; Lytle et al., 2013). The lesbian grandmothers in Patterson's (2005b) study also spoke of family members, particularly children, opportunistically using homophobia to keep themselves distant and create opposition. Clearly some grandmothers in Patterson's study had worked very hard to rebuild relationships with adult children. For some lesbian grandmothers an ex-husband had given support to mediate family relationships (Orel & Fruhauf, 2006).

While most children of PHRD lesbian or gay parents seem to reach acceptance or at least tolerate to their parent's sexual identity over time, a few lesbian or bisexual grandmothers in both Patterson's (2005a) and Orel and Fruhauf's (2006) studies reported that family gatherings were still difficult or that adult offspring had excluded them from their lives. An additional consequence was that the quality of participants' relationships with their adult children set the terms of engagement with grandchildren, for instance, in whether grandmothers could be open about their sexual identity (Orel & Fruhauf, 2006). Intergenerational family relationships that were accepting enabled lesbian and bisexual grandmothers to give their grandchildren unique insight into open-minded acceptance of diversity, on top of the usual support they would give their grandchildren (Whalen, Bigner, & Barber, 2000). In contrast lesbian and bisexual grandmothers who could not be open with their grandchildren reported feeling distant from their grandchildren because of this lack of honesty (Patterson, 2005a).

The experiences of gay grandfathers in coming out to children and grandchildren appear to be similar to those described by lesbian and bisexual grandmothers. The 11 grandfathers in Fruhauf and colleagues' (2009) study all said they found it easier to come out to grandchildren compared to their children, partly because their adult children had helped to smooth the disclosure process (Fruhauf, Orel, & Jenkins, 2009). Nevertheless, experiences varied. Some grandfathers said they feared disclosing, because they might lose their grandchildren's regard and affection. In other instances grandfathers had at best minimal contact with their grandchildren because their adult offspring had blocked this. Other gay grandfathers described their relationship with their partner as part of the taken for granted everyday fabric of their grandchildren's lives.

Church, O’Shea, and Lucey (2014) reported that most of the 14 Irish trans parents they surveyed indicated good relationships with their children (i.e., for 25/28 children parented). Another study of seven Italian male-to-female trans parents indicated that they centered parenting not on gender but on affection for their child (Faccio, Bordin, & Cipolletta, 2013). One Australian survey of trans adults highlighted three components of hostility from different family members directed toward the trans person: refusal to use preferred pronouns, exclusion from family events, and pathologizing responses (Riggs, von Doussa, & Power, 2015). Other findings from the same survey indicated that trans parents’ general perception of family support correlated with feeling of specifically supported in their parenting (Riggs, Power, & von Doussa, 2016). In the U.S., Tabor (2019) concluded that most of the 30 adult offspring interviewed were actively engaged in working to improve their relationship with their trans parent and only 10% described having disconnected from their trans parent. Over two-thirds of Tabor’s participants spontaneously spoke about working on various ways to resolve role-relational ambiguity—that is, the disjuncture between gender role and designated relational status of their parent (as mom or dad). Reviewing the field of LGBTQ parenting from a clinical systemic perspective, Lev (2004) emphasized consideration of family relationships and adjustment to parental gender identity, which may include a medical or legal transition, as processes over time, in relation to the whole family.

Same-Gender Partnership and Stepfamily Formation

While some LGBTQ parents remain single PHRD, many will re-partner at some point, either prior to the end of their heterosexual relationship, during the process of dissolving their heterosexual union, or subsequent to separation. Here we consider the limited research on same-

gender dating relationships PHRD, before moving on to consider the couple relationship dynamics of PHRD re-partnerships, and then the quality of stepfamily relationships.

Early research on gay fathers emphasized the difficulties PHRD gay fathers faced in trying to find a new gay partner as they entered the gay arena at a later age than most (Bozett, 1987; Miller, 1978). However, recent research on Israeli middle-aged and older gay men has indicated that more PHRD gay fathers compared to childfree gay men reported being in a committed romantic relationship (Shenkman et al., 2018). While dating may be difficult PHRD, it seems that gay fathers PHRD look to form, and often find, a committed same-gender partnership as Bigner (1996) previously suggested. Nonetheless, in Shenkman et al.'s (2018) study separated or divorced gay fathers were less likely than separated or divorced heterosexual fathers to be in an intimate partnership.

Dating was not the center of attention in research investigating the same-gender partnerships formed by lesbian, bisexual women, or trans parents PHRD. Instead many of the early feminist studies on lesbian motherhood PHRD focused upon how PHRD lesbian mothers were attempting to put feminist principles into practice in their relationships (Tasker, 2013). Thus, many lesbians aspired to feminist principles of equality in their new relationship with another woman, yet those with children from a prior relationship often shouldered a disproportionate amount of child care labor compared to their partner (Rawsthorne & Costello, 2010). This seemed to apply to Black lesbian mothers in the U.S. (Moore, 2008) and also to White working-class lesbian mothers in the U.K. (Gabb, 2004).

Research on the division of child care and domestic labor has now explored how gay fathers with children from a previous heterosexual relationship divide up responsibilities in their new same-gender partnership. An online survey of gay couples with children less than 18 years-

old conducted by Tornello, Sonnenberg, and Patterson (2015) found that PHRD gay fathers with resident, or partially resident, children were less likely to share childcare with a partner than were gay couples who became fathers in the context of the same-sex relationship. Nevertheless, household chores were likely to be divided equally in both types of partnership. Furthermore, just like the gay fathers in planned families, those parenting children PHRD found that their desire for a more equal division of labor was subject to other time constraints namely the number of hours each partner spent in paid employment (Tornello et al., 2015).

Not all new same-gender partners will want to become involved in their partner's children's lives. Similarly, some LGBTQ parents may want to keep partnership and parenting separate (Tasker & Delvoye, 2015). If partners do become involved, then there are challenges to be overcome in forming a new stepfamily (Ganong & Coleman, 2017). For example, partnered grandmothers in Orel and Fruhauf's (2006) study described the difficulties they and their same-gender partners experienced in gaining recognition of their partner's status in the family circle, initially as a parental figure and later as a co-grandmother. Sometimes partners felt painfully excluded. Similarly, in Patterson's (2005b) study, non-biological grandmothers were often faced with the need to give an explanation of how they came to be a grandmother if they wanted recognition outside the home. Patterson considered how Canadian laws to permit same-sex marriage (Bill C-38, 2003) had impacted upon the lives of the lesbian grandmothers she interviewed. Most of Patterson's participants greeted the legislation as a positive step toward equal rights. Nevertheless, the partnered older women in Patterson's sample differed on whether they had married or not: some felt that marriage had helped others to recognize their relationship, while other women felt that they did not want their relationship constrained by heteronormative rules.

Earlier research often used Cherlin's (1978) incomplete institutionalization concept to research stepfamilies led by a lesbian or gay couple (e.g., Berger, 1998; Hequembourg, 2004). Building up on the idea of incomplete institutionalization, recent work has considered that LGBTQ-parent families may experience boundary ambiguity. Boundary ambiguity has been defined as the lack of common agreement on who is part of the new family and thus privy to stepfamily matters (Boss & Greenberg, 1984; Brown & Manning, 2009). In turn greater boundary ambiguity may create conflict and stress leading to weakened family ties and access to family resources. For example, Jenkins (2013) interviewed and explored the experiences of nine gay non-residential fathers with children from a previous heterosexual union and nine gay stepfathers. Both gay fathers and stepfathers were proud and clear about who counted as family, but felt that they had struggled to blend their respective families together. Blending difficulties were encountered particularly when a child did not accept their father's gay identity, or saw his new same-gender partner as emblematic of this. Fathers in these situations mentioned that they had two equally close but distinct relationships: one with their child and one with their partner. Some gay fathers even described the stressful clash of preserving their relationship with their child at the expense of their relationship with their partner. Jenkins (2013) argued that members of gay-parent stepfamilies experienced more self-definitional challenges than did members of heterosexual stepparent families, because heterosexism and prejudice worked together to invalidate a same-gender partnership. Jenkins identified different pressures on gay father stepfamilies from both institutional sources, namely legal obstacles or conservative religious beliefs, which operated often in conjunction with interpersonal challenges from children or ex-partners.

Writing from the perspective of a therapist who has counseled members of stepfamilies formed by a gay father, Gold (2017) suggested the couple must initially resolve how to address and delineate the role of the new gay stepparent and how he should interact with the children. As with any new parental relationship, Gold contended that the children involved may wonder whether their parent will be taken away from them by the presence of a new partner or how this will affect their own lives. In addition, older children might worry about the reaction of their peers if a parent's new relationship is disclosed (Papernow, 2018). Despite these challenges to stepfamily definition, the very lack of a role prescription for a new same-gender partner may also be an advantage in some instances as this can give stepfamily members the freedom to form relationships that suit them at the pace they want to do so (Tasker & Golombok, 1997). Gold also suggested that fostering a growing sense of appreciation of diversity within the LGBTQ community may assist in developing creativity and cooperation in new stepfamily relationships.

A further challenge for same-gender partnership stepfamilies is that the arrival of a same-gender partner may unsettle a previously cooperative relationship between ex-partners. For instance, it may only be when they hear about the LGBTQ-parent's new partnership that an ex-partner finally decides to let go of the relationship and comes to terms with the LGBTQ-parent's sexual identity (Gold, 2017). Gay fathers and stepfathers described how ongoing difficulties between the father and his ex-wife put pressure on the children's relationship with their father and simultaneously hindered the children from forming a relationship with their new stepparent (Jenkins, 2013). Indeed, continuing issues with an ex-partner can challenge relationships in any newly formed stepfamily (Ganong & Coleman, 2017). Nevertheless, LGBTQ-parent stepfamilies face the additional challenge of an ex-partner's indignation being endorsed by some parts of society and children internalizing the prejudice they have heard at home to feel embarrassed or

ashamed of their father's relationship (Jenkins, 2013). For example, some of the gay fathers interviewed by Jenkins feared that their children would not be able to visit at all if they did not acquiesce to direct or indirect restrictions on their new partner's presence, such as not showing affection to each other in the children's presence. Thus, tensions arising from boundary ambiguity in the stepfamily, namely the inability of being able to include the LGBTQ stepparent in the children's lives, can make stepfamily relationships fraught with problems. The strain of not being able to act as a couple may perhaps become too much for some same-gender partnerships. One study, revealed that while gay fathers in stepfamilies reported having the highest level of couple relationship quality compared with other gay men, gay fathers in stepfamilies were generally less out and scored lower on cohesiveness than those in re-partnerships without children (van Eeden-Moorefield, Pasley, Crosbie-Burnett, & King, 2012).

Being able to act in concert as a same-gender couple depends in part upon others acknowledging the partnership, which in turn is facilitated by the disclosure of the relationship. Lynch (2000) discussed how differences in the level of comfort around disclosure of sexual identity could impact upon the couple relationship between the lesbian or gay parent and their new partner. The challenge for the lesbian or gay parent was to come to terms with coming out (Lynch, 2004). New partners, who often did not have children themselves, were often familiar with disclosure issues. However, new partners were unpracticed at how to disclose in a way that was appropriate both for a partner who might be hesitant and children who might be reticent (Lynch, 2005). Gold (2017) argued that this divergence in experience with disclosure is often a crucial issue faced by partners establishing a new same-gender partnership when one parent has children from a prior heterosexual relationship.

Research has begun to explore PHRD gay fathering as a site for queering family relationships, exploring how forming a new same-gender partnership can create and sustain a queer family against the pressures of heteronormativity. Bermea and colleagues (2018) explored the issues encountered by one family headed by two fathers who each had children from a previous relationship. Despite the relatively positive context of their extended family and local neighborhood, the fathers found that custody decisions went against them. Yet the fathers spoke warmly about the formation of family relationships created through performance, such as family mealtimes spent together when both sets of children visited.

Directions for Future Research

Since the publication of Tasker's (2013) review of LG parenting post heterosexual separation and divorce, data from large scale surveys requesting information related to parental sexual orientation have become available for analyses. Yet, as we have detailed above, large data sets may be imprecise and thus problematic (Baumle & Compton, 2014; Gates et al., 2012). Nevertheless, new studies, such as those by Carroll (2018), Perrin et al. (2016) and van Eeden-Moorefield et al. (2012) in the U.S. and Shenkman et al. (2018) in Israel have increased our knowledge particularly of gay fathers parenting PHRD.

Much of the funding in the field has been for research related to the well-being of children in LGBTQ-parent households, and thus relatively few published studies directly address the concerns of LGBTQ parents PHRD or aim to hear their voices. Nevertheless, research studies have begun to consider wider concerns of PHRD parents and consider the intersection of sexual identity across class, race, ethnicity, religion and cohort groups and to sample beyond the experience of lesbian or gay White, middle class, urban parents.

Additionally, we challenge scholars to use queer theory in their research on PHRD families with one or more gender and sexual minority parent. Legal structures focus on two-parent families, which leaves out families with multiple parents with different identities. As scholars, we can challenge the assumptions of heteronormativity and increasingly, homonormativity (Allen & Mendez, 2018). Queering families can include legal parents, biological parents, and social parents, creating a poly-parenting situation (Park, 2013; Sheff, 2014; see also Pallotta-Chiarolli, Sheff, & Mountford, this volume), which can also include grandparents. By taking a queer theoretical perspective, we can continue to acknowledge the lived experiences of malleable boundaries of sexual identity and of gender within families and be open to alternative relations (Halberstam, 2005; McGuire, Kuvalanka, Catalpy, & Toomey, 2016; Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005).

Many studies sampling LGBTQ parents do not clearly identify the route to parenthood in listing sampling criteria. Research focuses on LGBTQ parents as a whole (e.g., Lassiter et al., 2017) or focus specifically on LGBTQ parents who have adopted (e.g., Farr & Goldberg, 2015) or parents who used a donor or surrogate (e.g., Bos, Kuyper, & Gartrell, 2018). As in the research by Lassiter and colleagues, there are often underlying assumptions made by authors as to how same-sex headed households are formed but these are not always scrutinized within their research. We found that publications need careful reading to determine whether the LGBTQ-parent family formation investigated contained PHRD parents. More generally as researchers we need to explore each participant's self-definition of not only sexual identity but also gender identity (Tasker, 2018). Many rich and meaningful self-definitions of gender and sexual identity exist; however, surveys often provide relatively few options for answer choices, even when allowing for self-definition (Galupo, Henise, & Mercer, 2016; Galupo, Ramirez, & Pulice-

Farrow, 2017). Nevertheless, qualitative studies have begun to reveal the complex issues of identity definition and exploration for trans parents (Hines, 2006) and some studies have explored gender and sexual identity using a life course approach to consider how this intersects with defining family (Delvoye & Tasker, 2016).

Much of the data collected has been via cross-sectional surveys of self-identified LGBTQ parents, another limitation that again in part may be due to funding constraints or recruitment and access to members of the community. Most of our review has been pieced together from different publications detailing the reflections of LGBTQ parents given in a single research interview. Nonetheless, some studies have attempted to investigate family processes over time (Tasker & Golombok, 1997), collect multiple types of data (Gabb, 2005; Tasker & Delvoye, 2018), and consider multiple respondents (Bermea et al., 2018; Perlesz et al., 2006). Thus, while we urge researchers to continue to explore new research methods, our review has highlighted a myriad of processes that potentially influence the lived experiences of LGBTQ parents as they narrate their PHRD journey.

Implications for Practice

When advocating for the best interests of the child and their LGBTQ parent, legal professionals need to be aware of the complexity of factors that need to be taken into account in social science research data (Baumle, 2018; Kazyak, Woodell, Scherrer, & Finken, 2018). Early reviews of clinical practice concentrated on lesbian or gay parents coming out of previous heterosexual relationships (Bigner, 1996; Coleman, 1990). Little is known about the current issues facing lesbian or gay parents PHRD and even less about the issues facing bisexual and trans parents. Professionals assisting parents PHRD need to be aware that family composition

and parental gender and/or sexual identity are projects under construction and may not align in a direct way at any one point in time (Tasker & Malley, 2012).

Professionals should be aware of the complexities facing individuals and families when a parent leaves a heterosexual relationship as a gender or sexual minority. Community members, teachers, therapists, judges, lawyers, legislators and other professionals should be educated on the unique challenges facing LGBTQ parents and families. As family law and social conventions are predominantly based on heteronormative assumptions, it is especially important to acknowledge the various family structures and lived experiences among LGBTQ-parent families (Kim & Stein, 2019; Minter, 2019). This includes polyparenting families and single LGBTQ parent families.

Conclusion

LGBTQ parents who have had children in a previous heterosexual relationship have a unique engagement with their sexual identity through changing their social and/or personal self-identification. Their journey to LGBTQ identification and beyond intersects with multiple identity issues concerning race and ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status. Instead of growing up contending with acceptance and integration into LGBTQ communities as self-maturation occurs, LGBTQ parents PHRD experience a late and often sudden entry into a marginalized group where they may feel disadvantaged not only by chronological age but also by feelings of responsibility for children and personal, social, and economic vulnerabilities from the ending of their previous relationship. The history of exit and entry transitions surrounding the formation of single parent or stepfamily forms is critical to children's well-being too and appears to present more of a challenge in the long term than coming to terms with parental sexual identity. The challenges of leaving the social privileges that come with heterosexual

identification, leaving a heterosexual relationship, and family instability, should not be underestimated. Nonetheless, life course research on LGBTQ parents PHRD conveys a hopeful message of personal growth and meaning in life through authenticity and open-mindedness.

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