LGBT Parents and their Children
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Introduction
Recently, international groups that advocate on the behalf of LGBT families have declared May 6, 2012 to be International Family Equality Day[1]. While this day is meant to highlight to increasingly visibility of LGBT families it is also a celebration of the diverse forms that families can take on. This is just one of the many changes that have occurred since the first version of this document was published, in 2003. Over the course of the past eight years, six states and Washington D.C. have come to legally recognize same-sex marriages, the Defense of Marriage Act is no longer being enforced, Don’t Ask Don’t Tell was repealed, and same-sex couples can now adopt in a number of states, including Florida[2]. Traditionally, depictions of the family have often centered on the heteronormative nuclear family of mother, father, and child(ren). However, as time has gone on we have seen that family forms have become increasingly diverse and include: single parents, child-free couples, parents who adopt or are foster parents, multiracial couples and their children, stepfamilies, etc. Parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), and their children are contributing to this societal shift that is broadening the traditional and idealized notion of family.

The presence of LGBT families in media, courts, and research has grown over the last ten years. What may have been a previously labeled as the “gayby boom”[3] is now becoming a more commonly recognized by individuals and professionals means of forming a family. Mainstream TV shows such as Modern Family have highlighted that there is something to be gained from embracing the diversity of LGBT families. This highlights that there is progress that may be due in part to the contemporary scholars who research “LGBT” or “Queer” families (these are the most inclusive descriptors for these families[4]). Regardless of how these families are referred to, they are becoming increasingly visible and are challenging definitions of what it means to be a family. According to one of the most respected experts in this field, Judith Stacey, “Gay and lesbian families represent such a new, embattled, visible, and necessarily self-conscious genre of kinship, that they help to expose the widening gap between the complex reality of contemporary family forms and the dated family ideology that still undergirds most public rhetoric, policy, and law concerning families.”[5]

The grassroots gay liberation movement of the 1960s-70s led to an increase in the acceptability of LGBT identities. Yet, it was not until this past decade that “having a family” was an option available to lesbian and gay individuals and couples. Policies and laws are now being challenged in the nation’s and world’s courts, since existing legislation does not accurately represent the current needs of LGBT families. Although there has been progress, there has also been backlash. Laws vary from state to state and county to county. Some courts represent these families fairly while others persist in denying their legitimacy as well as their very existence.

The legal system has historically been unfair to LGBT persons and families, which means that social scientists have played a major role in building the case that LGBT families are valid and their children are not adversely affected by their upbringing. Over the course of the past 40 years, a number of studies have been conducted by family sociologists, psychologists, and other scholarly researchers. Repeatedly these experts conclude that no evidence exists to demonstrate that lesbian and gays are unfit as parents or that their children are psychologically or physically harmed by having lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender parents.

What we know about LGBT Parents and their Children[6]

What do LGBT families look like?
Similar to heterosexual families, there is no singular LGBT family form, because the makeup of all families varies greatly. Not only do differences exist in terms of family relations, sizes, and forms, there is also diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, political affiliation, physical ability, religious tradition, etc. Some examples of LGBT family forms include a gay male couple who foster or adopt one or more children, or a lesbian couple who used a sperm donor to create a child. Much of the earliest research on LGBT parents and families involved a lesbian woman or gay man who was previously in a heterosexual marriage. After divorcing (often coinciding with their “coming out”), they negotiated custody with their former spouse. LGBT families also include single gay fathers and single lesbian mothers who are single by choice or following the death of a partner. Some LGBT families consist of combinations of LGBT individuals who raise children as platonically co-parents. Again, as with heterosexual families, LGBT families can take on many forms and these are only a few examples of them.

How many families are headed by LGBT parent(s)?
There is little consensus among experts as to the prevalence of LGBT parents and their children. Estimates have varied greatly, ranging from 1-20 million children in the United States under the age of 18 who have one or more gay or lesbian parent. An accurate number is, understandably, difficult to calculate. LGBT families are often invisible and for some, it is still unsafe for them to be “out.” A widely accepted statistic of 6 million children was first introduced in 1987[7]. While social climate has changed dramatically in nearly two decades, the most frequently cited number has remained static. According to analyses of Census 2000[8], 1 in 3 lesbian couples and 1 in 5 gay male couples have at least one child under the age of 18 in their household. Of the more than 900,000 self-identified same-sex

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2 See Lesbian/Gay Law Notes: Summer 2011
4 Alternative families” is limiting because it presumes that research will be presented in a defensive stance, setting heterosexual families as the standard to which LGBT parents and their children should be compared. “Same-sex parents” is problematic because it excludes a significant population of LGBT parents, specifically lesbian mothers or gay fathers who are single by choice or circumstance, as well as combinations of gay men and lesbian women who are co-parenting together.
6 Numerous meta-analyses have been conducted in the last 10 years summarizing the current state of research on LGBT families. For the purposes of this fact sheet the major articles that were drawn on to create this summary were drawn from a review of the articles listed under the “Major Research Articles Section.”
couples in the 2010 Census, approximately 22% of them are raising children. This statistic solely focuses on couples and excludes single LGBT parents, which has been noted as a limitation of certain data collection methods that cannot accurately capture the presence of LGBT families in the U.S. (i.e. the U.S. Census).

What are the research conclusions about LGBT parents and their children? Historically, assumptions that LGBT parents were unfit threatened their right to raise children. All of the existing social research studies (appearing in rigorously peer reviewed journals such as the Journal of Marriage and Family, American Journal of Sociology, and Child Development) outlined in the meta-analyses listed in the Major Research Articles section below dispute this notion, instead asserting that LGBT individuals and couples are just as fit and effective parents as their heterosexual counterparts. Families headed by LGBT individuals and couples show few significant differences from other families. Indeed, children of LGBT parents are also just as healthy and well-adjusted as other children and their parents spend much of their everyday lives engaged in typical parenting activities such as getting the kids ready for school, arranging extracurricular activities, struggling to juggle the demands of work and family life, etc.

_An overview of the existing research indicates that there are also no significant differences on the following dimensions:_

- Gay and lesbian parents are similar to heterosexual parents in the areas of mental health, self-esteem, approaches and skills related to parenting, as well as ability and commitment to parenting.
- Unlike the persistent myths portraying LGBT individuals as sexual predators, they are actually no more likely than heterosexuals to abuse their children.
- Children of LGBT parents are likely to develop gender-roles that are much like those of children raised by heterosexuals, with some exceptions, as explained in "advantages."
- Multiple measures of children’s psychological well-being and social adjustment (e.g. self-esteem, anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, performance in school and extracurricular activities, IQ, ability to make friends, sociability and quality of relationships with peers and intimates, etc.) indicate no difference compared with their peers.
- Children with lesbian mothers develop closer relationships to their mother’s new female partner when compared to the level of closeness that children of single heterosexual mothers report having with their mother’s new male partner.
- Lesbian co-parents are more egalitarian in terms of parenting and family responsibilities than are heterosexual couples.

_Advantages: Positive outcomes experienced by LGBT parents and their children_  

- While there is an assumption that children raised by LGBT parents lack relationships and positive role models with adults of a gender other than that of their parent(s), research suggests the contrary. Same-sex parents provide their children with a wide array of role models from both genders (i.e. extended family members and affiliated kin).
- LGBT parents are somewhat more nurturing and tolerant than heterosexual parents.
- Children of LGBT parent(s) are more open-minded, less prejudiced, and express a greater sense of social responsibility than their peers.
- Daughters of lesbian mothers have higher self-esteem and aspire to future careers and occupations outside of those typically considered to be roles for women, such as nursing or teaching. In fact, they are more likely to aspire to be doctors, engineers, and astronauts than are daughters of heterosexual mothers.
- Sons of lesbian mothers are less physically aggressive, more caring, and more capable of communicating their feelings. They have higher levels of self-esteem and aspire to a wider range of career opportunities than do sons of heterosexual mothers.

_Challenges faced by LGBT parents and their children_  

- LGBT parents who come out of a heterosexual marriage experience more difficulty arranging custody visits than heterosexual parents; yet the children benefit from more contact with their non-custodial parent than children of divorced heterosexual parents.
- Young adults of LGBT parents are more likely to experience stigma from their peers regarding their own sexuality than are the kids of heterosexual parents.
- Current federal and state legislation both in the United States and internationally continue to pose a challenge for many families although not as much as they have in the past. See the tables below.
- Overcoming legal discrimination and social prejudice are difficulties faced by many LGBT parents and their children. Not only are LGBT families largely culturally invisible, they often struggle to deal with homophobia and heterosexism.

_Are Children of LGBT Parents more likely to grow up to be LGBT themselves?_  

Evidence from the existing studies are unclear regarding this question.

- Extensive studies have been published looking at the fitness of LGBT individuals as parents and compare the children of LGBT parent(s) with those of heterosexual parents indicate that there are no significant differences in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation (see Biblarz & Savi 2010, Committee on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns 2005, Johnson & O’Connor 2002, and Patterson 1995).
- One of the first studies that followed LGBT parents until adulthood found no difference in the proportion of those identifying as LGBT compared to the general population. However, children of lesbian mothers were more likely to have considered the possibility of having a same-sex relationship or have experienced one (see Golombok and Tasker 1996). A follow-up study was conducted that confirmed the results of the initial study (MacCullum & Golombok 2004).
- Children raised in LGBT families express greater openness to homosexuality or bisexuality reducing the risk of denial or self-loathing for those children who may question their sexuality. According to Stacy, "It seems likely that growing up with gay parents should reduce a child’s reluctance to acknowledge, accept, or act upon same-sex sexual desires if they experience them. Beyond the urban, white, middle class children parented by self-identified lesbians or gay men is just now reaching adulthood, it is too soon to know if the finding in that one study will prove to be generally true" (See Why it’s Wrong: The Social Science Case, A Conversation with Professor Judith Stacey).

What we do not know about LGBT Parenting and Children  

At the time that this fact sheet was first constructed the majority of studies on LGBT families were based on small scale, self-selected, convenience samples. Oftentimes snowball sampling led to a very small portion of the LGBT population being heard leading to samples that were mostly urban, white, and affluent. Early research on lesbian and gay parenting emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s to “test” whether lesbian women or gay men were “fit” parents in custody cases. These studies tended to come from a “deviance” perspective, comparing LGBT families to the assumed heteronormative “ideal.” More recent studies have sought to be more

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Areas that Need Continued Exploration Regarding LGBT Families

- Continued efforts to see more inclusive representations of LGBT families. This means being aware of different ages, races, ethnicities, incomes, level of education, and geographic locations.
- How do the different statuses that LGBT parents and children impact their lives?
- What challenges do bisexual and transgender parents face and how are they similar or different to other family structures?
- How do perceptions of LGBT family structures vary internationally and what challenges do these perceptions present?

Position Statements of Major Organizations and Associations

For over 30 years experts and major professional associations have asserted that there is nothing deviant or pathological about LGBT sexual orientations. The number of researchers, professors, physicians, psychologists and other experts who have voiced their support for LGBT parents and families has continued to grow. In the interest of space, only the position statement of the American Psychological Association is included in this factsheet. Other organizations make similar assertions that may be obtained through their websites. Links to the policy statements for the organizations listed below are available at: http://web.clas.ufl.edu/users/krisj/LGBTQfamilies/policystatements.html

- American Psychological Association (1976)
- American Bar Association (1995)
- American Counseling Association (1999)
- American Psychiatric Association (2002)
- American Psychoanalytic Association (2002)
- American Medical Association (2004)
- Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (2006)
- Voice for Adoption (2006)
- National Adoption Center (Revised in 2008)
- National Foster Parent Association
- National Association of School Psychologists

U.S. State Policies & Legislation

Policies and Legislation regarding the legal rights of LGBT parents are constantly fluctuating. Beyond this there is a wide range of perspectives that the individual states take on these families. States indicated with an (*) have laws that explicitly allow LGBT parents a given right while the additional states listed do not explicitly prohibit those rights and have not had previous instances of denying them. (Current as of August 31, 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Custody and Visitation</th>
<th>States that have not been found to discriminate against sexual orientation in custody/visitation rulings:</th>
<th>Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, D.C., Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second Parent</td>
<td>States allowing lesbian and gay individuals to adopt:</td>
<td>Forty-eight states and D.C. allow single individuals to adopt. Nebraska and Utah have provisions stating that individuals who are known to be homosexual cannot adopt, nor can single individuals who are in a cohabitating relationship. In the remaining states the restrictions that are place on who can adopt are based on the living environment is the best choice for the child(ren).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foster Parenting


**Note that while some states may not explicitly prohibit LGBT individuals and couples from adopting that there are restrictions placed in terms of the adoptees needing to be married.

International Laws

International laws on LGBT relationships and families will vary. Similar to in the U.S. policies regarding marriage are separate from parenting laws and often marriage is a prerequisite to being able to adopt.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joint Adoptions</th>
<th>Countries that allow lesbian and gay parents to jointly adopt: Argentina*, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark*, Iceland*, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway*, Portugal, South Africa*, Spain*, Sweden*, United Kingdom*, United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second Parent Adoptions</td>
<td>Countries that allow second parent adoptions: Australia, Belgium*, Canada, Denmark*, Finland*, France, Germany*, Iceland*, Netherlands*, Norway*, Spain*, Sweden*, United Kingdom*, United States</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates adoption rights are allowed throughout the entire country. All other countries adoption rights are only permitted in certain jurisdictions

Resources:

There are numerous resources for scholars wishing to study LGBT parenting issues as well as LGBT persons who are or are planning to become parents. Below is a list of major national and international organizations, key research articles, books, websites, films, educational curricula, and other resources such as magazines and family events. As categories are rather extensive we have included a small portion of the information in this fact sheet with a more comprehensive resources section (as of August 31, 2011) at: http://web.clas.ufl.edu/users/krisj/LGBTfamilies/resources.html

Organizations

- All Children – All Families
- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Lesbian & Gay Rights
- COLAGE: People With a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer Parent
- Family Equality Council
- Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
- Human Rights Campaign (HRC): Family Project
- International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA)
- National Center for Lesbian Rights
- National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF): Parenting & Family
- Our Family Coalition
- Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
- Welcoming Schools Project
- The Williams Institute

Major Research Articles:


Books about LGBT Families and Parenting


Websites:

In addition to the websites of the organizations mentioned above there are other sites on the internet that provide much important information and resources and are a place for members of LGBT families to connect.

Families Like Ours – Online resource for families at various stages in the adoption process (http://www.familieslikeours.org/)

Family Diversity Projects – Art exhibits that depict various families (i.e. multiracial, LGBT families, religion and LGBT individuals, and trans individuals) (http://familydiv.org/)

Love Makes A Family http://www lovemakes afamily.org/)

Kids of Trans Resource Guide – A resource for children who have trans parents that was compiled by COLAGE (http://www.colage.org/resources/kot/)

ProudParenting.com serves as an online portal for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender parents and their families worldwide.
R Family Vacations – An LGBT friendly travel company that helps families find the ideal vacation spot. (http://www.rfamilyvacations.com/)

The Williams Institute – Research institute at UCLA that looks at sexual orientation law and public policy. Current Census stat on LGBT families is available at (http://www3.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute/home.html)

TransFamily – A support group for transgender families in Ohio with resources on the local and national level (http://www.transfamily.org/)

TransParentcy – A website geared towards transgender parents and children (http://www.transparentcy.org)

Videos:
- Both of My Moms’ Names Are Judy: Children of Lesbians and Gays Speak Out
- Daddy & Pappa
- In My Shoes: Stories of Youth with LGBT Parents
- It’s Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School
- Living Adoption: Gay Parents Speak Out
- No Dumb Questions
- Our House: A very real documentary about kids of gay and lesbian parents.
- That's a Family

Educational curricula about diverse families:
- Framing the Family Tree: How Teachers Can Be Sensitive to Student’s Family Situations (http://www.stcloudstate.edu/socialresponsibility/articles/documents/RethinkingSchoolsKidsStuffSR.pdf)
- Making Room in the Circle: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Families in Early Childhood Settings Curriculum designed to educated children about LGBT families (http://www.parentservices.org/lgbt.php)
- The Pride Education Network (http://www.pridenet.ca)
- Fiction & Non-Fiction Titles for K-12 (http://www.galebc.org/books.pdf)
- Opening Doors: Education Issues for LGBT Parents, By the Educational Advocacy Committee of Family Equality Council (Formerly the Family Pride Coalition) (http://www.familypride.org/publications/openingdoors.pdf)
- Opening More Doors: Creating Policy Change to Include Our Families, By the Family Equality Council (Formerly the Family Pride Coalition) (http://www.familypride.org/publications/openingmoredoors.pdf)
- Talking to Children About Our Families, By Margie Brickley and Aimee Gelnaw for the Family Equality Council (http://www.familyequality.org/pdf/talkingtochildren.pdf)