

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families

A Literature Review prepared for The Australian Psychological Society

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Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families

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Overview

This review provides an overview and summary of the main bodies of research about parenting by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)¹ people, as well as relevant information about the wider family studies field within which this research is situated, and background information on the Australian context. This review will assist psychologists to provide effective and appropriate services to people in such families. The review will also assist psychologists in contributing, where appropriate, to public debates in relation to legal and public policy reform of the type that has occurred extensively over the last five years in Australia (for example, about which family relationships should be recognised in law, and who should be able to access fertility services or adopt children), and which can be expected to continue into the future. Given the importance of psychologists promoting accurate understandings of scientific research, a primary focus of this review is the role that psychological research can play in such debates, and the contribution of psychologists to promoting well-being for children, parents, families and the general community.

As detailed in this review, the family studies literature indicates that it is family *processes* (such as the quality of parenting and relationships within the family) that contribute to determining children's well-being and 'outcomes', rather than family *structures*, per se, such as the number, gender, sexuality and co-habitation status of parents. The research indicates that parenting practices and children's outcomes in families parented by lesbian and gay parents are likely to be at least as favourable as those in families of heterosexual parents, despite the reality that considerable legal discrimination and inequity remain significant challenges for these families. The Australian Psychological Society (APS) is committed to contributing the knowledge of psychology in the public interest, and to fostering a social environment in which all children and their families experience support, recognition, and are valued, and in which discrimination and prejudice have no place.

Background

Over the past forty years, we have witnessed a significant diversification of family forms in Western societies, and this has been accompanied by a rapidly expanding literature on the diverse forms that families take.

Increased Family Diversity

Increasingly, we are witnessing the diversification and recognition of a wider range of family types than simply the heterosexual-parented nuclear family, including intentionally childless families, families of separated parents, single-parent families, step-families, blended-families, families of same-sex parents, and families in which the children are conceived with donated gametes and/or reproductive technologies (e.g., see de Vaus, 2004; McNair, 2004; Wise, 2003). One aspect of this diversification has occurred as a result of what is sometimes referred to as the "lesbian baby boom" or a "gayby boom", which has occurred and intensified since the 1970s. In addition to the many people who have children within a heterosexual relationship and who subsequently identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgendered, there are increasingly large numbers of children being born into a family with

¹ Issues of language play a significant role in scientific discussions on the lives of LGBT people and members of their families. The term 'LGBT' itself represents a highly contested category, and its claims to representativeness or inclusivity must be viewed carefully for its potential to mask significant differences amongst lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. Whilst the term is used throughout this literature review, significant effort has been made to clarify gender- and sexuality-specific issues.

one or more same-sex attracted parents. Predominantly, these families are headed by female couples. One recent Australian estimate suggests that 50-70% of children being raised in lesbian-parented households are children who were born into that family (Millbank, 2003). In many lesbian-parented families, each member of the couple gives birth to one or more children. Such families are also constituted through blended and step-parents, and may involve multiple parents. Gross (2006) makes an important distinction between what she terms 'biparental' and 'multiparental' families, the former being constituted through one or two primary parents, and the latter involving multiple parental relationships. Such family forms may change over time, and will often develop both in response to the relationships between adult members, and as a result of the needs of adult and children members (as is the case with heterosexual-headed families).

Some lesbian women and gay men are also parenting children through fostering and adoption, although the latter is rare as there remain considerable restrictions on same-sex attracted people adopting children across most of Australia (see Duffey, 2007, for a summary of adoption laws across Australia). Some gay men have also more recently become parents through surrogacy arrangements and through co-parenting arrangements with single women or lesbian couples. As Ruth McNair summarised, "it seems anecdotally that more gay men are now looking to have a primary parenting role, however, there are still very few in this position in Australia" (2004, p. 55).

Much like the rest of the population, LGBT-parented families are diverse, and family members come from a variety of ethnic, racial, cultural, and class groups. The primary difference between LGBT-parented and heterosexual-parented families is that the former live in a legal, public policy, social, and discursive context in which discrimination and prejudice on the basis of the parents' gender or sexuality are a feature of day-to-day life.

Increasing Family Studies Research

Largely in response to the increased visibility of diverse family forms, family research has burgeoned. In part, this has been undertaken to explore and document increasing numbers of newly emerged family forms, and to investigate concerns that have been expressed by some about families other than those headed by co-habiting married heterosexual couples who are the biological parents of their children. Research has examined how this particular family type has repeatedly been promoted as the 'ideal', and has often been depicted as the only 'real' family type, in contrast to other family types that are constructed as less desirable and less able to meet the needs of children (e.g., see Biblarz & Stacey, 2006; Millbank, 2003; Rickard, 2002). In Australia since the late 1990's (as in some other countries, e.g., see Biblarz & Stacey, 2006), the notion that all children 'need' or 'do better' with both a mother and a father has repeatedly been used as justification for retaining or even extending discrimination in the area of family-related laws and policies, such as who should have access to fertility services and who should be able to get married (see Flood, 2003; Short, 2007a, 2007b). As noted by Jenni Millbank (2003), "Much of the recent overt objection to lesbian-mother families, for instance, has centred on father absence rather than lesbian sexual orientation *per se*" (p. 545) and "there remains a presumption in much legal and social policy that lesbian and gay parenting is suspect, second-rate or harmful to children" (p. 541-542).

In this context, a very large body of research has been conducted by psychologists and researchers in related disciplines comparing different family types on parenting practices and children's 'outcomes'. Substantial and justified critiques of comparative family research have highlighted how this research has tended to inadvertently: a) follow the agenda set by those prejudiced against LGBT parents and their families; b) restate or frame certain research questions as legitimate or reasonable concerns rather than prejudice; and c) down-play research findings of better levels of functioning by same-sex parents or the children of same-sex parents (e.g., see Clarke, 2000a; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2004; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). However, one positive result of this comparative research is that the negative assumptions about families other than those of heterosexual married parents have been extensively empirically investigated, and researchers have been able to distinguish between family factors that do contribute to children's outcomes and well-being, and those that, in and of themselves, *do not*.

Legal, Public Policy, Social and Discursive Contexts of LGBT-Parented Families

Over the last ten years, there have been significant legislative changes in many parts of the world to recognise the family relationships of gay and lesbian people, and of their children. In many countries, including, for example, Belgium, Canada, The Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, and parts of the United States of America, people are now able to marry the partner of their choice, regardless of their gender. Many other countries, including, for example, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Israel, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom, have amended laws so as to recognise same-sex couples and provide them with all or most of the benefits and privileges that different-sex couples are accorded. In Australia, all state and territory governments have amended legislation so as to recognise same-sex couples as de facto couples for all or many purposes, and there is capacity in many jurisdictions for registration of relationships.

In Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, and [2008 update] New South Wales, laws have been passed to allow a birth mother's *female* partner to be automatically recognised and registered as the legal parent of a child born to her partner in the same way that a woman's *male* partner can be, Australia-wide, whether or not he is the biological parent (e.g. after donor insemination). [2008 update: legislation on this issue is expected to come before the Tasmanian and Victorian parliaments in 2008]. Over the last ten years, in many countries and states, laws and policies that previously restricted access to fertility services to women with a male partner have been amended, so as to provide access to fertility services to women who need them, without consideration of their sexuality or the gender of their partner (or, whether or not they have a partner). Same-sex couples and single people can now be assessed as suitable foster parents across most of Australia.

The above changes have been called for by governments, legal reform bodies, human rights organisations, child welfare groups, academics, and people in same-sex parented families around the world, and such changes can be expected to increasingly be called for and enacted over the next ten years. It is increasingly recognised that family-related discrimination and non-recognition for many children, parents and extended family members leads to significant practical and financial disadvantage, and potential social difficulties and emotional distress that can in no way be justified by findings in the family studies literature (e.g. see Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2007a, 2007b; Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2007). Further, such discrimination fails to meet human rights obligations and principles such as those set out in the Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As an example of the momentum to remove discrimination, to recognise human rights, and to enhance the well-being of families and children, in 2007, two Australian legal inquiries recommended significant family-related law reform. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2007a) identified a large number of "federal laws which discriminate against same-sex couples and their children" (p. 2). [2008 update: The recommended removal of discrimination in federal legislation has been and/or is in the process of being made]. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission recommended continuing "changes to federal, state and territory laws to recognise the relationship between a child and both parents in a same-sex couple", noting that this "would better protect the best interests of the child", and that the current discrimination "breaches human rights" (p. 2-3). Similarly, and with a more specific focus on Victorian state laws, the Victorian Law Reform Commission extensively documented the ways in which children of same-sex couples "lack many of the rights and protections afforded to all other children" (2007, p. 7). Having reviewed family-related laws, the negative effects of the laws, human rights obligations, and the family studies research, they recommended significant family-related legislative reform, including that "[l]egal recognition of non-birth mothers should be achieved in the same way as for non-biological parents of donor-conceived children born to heterosexual couples: by way of automatic statutory presumption" (p. 7).

However, significant discrimination remains in Australia. For example, marriage is restricted to opposite-sex couples. Under state law, in some parts of Australia, if a woman who gives birth has a female partner, she still receives no recognition as a parent, even though a male partner without a biological relationship to the child would be recognised and registered as the child's parent. Further, Victoria and South Australia still have legislation restricting or denying access to fertility services if women do not have a male partner, at the same time rendering artificial or alternative insemination in contexts other than fertility services a criminal offence (including insemination by a woman's partner). (For details on the above material see Millbank, 2003; 2006a; 2006b).

Psychology and the Public Interest

Over the last ten years, many expert and professional bodies have made public statements about research findings in relation to parenting in diverse families, and in particular parenting by lesbian women and gay men, with a focus on addressing misrepresentations, or what Biblarz and Stacey (2006) have referred to as "abuses of the social sciences literature" (p. 8), and have called for discriminatory family-related laws and policies to be amended. Such statements are particularly necessary in political climates where the rights of marginalised groups continue to be denied. For example, the main reason given (by law makers) for not allowing people to marry the person of their choice if that person is of the same gender has been the inaccurate assertion that this is in the best interest of children, and that children 'need' or 'do better' in a family with one parent of each gender. As the reviews, statements, and recommendations written by these bodies indicate, this assertion is not supported by the family studies research, and in fact, the promotion of this notion, and the laws and public policies that embody it, are clearly *counter* to the well-being of children. As noted by Professor Judith Stacey, of New York University: "Rarely is there as much consensus in any area of social science as in the case of gay parenting, which is why the American Academy of Pediatrics and all of the major professional organizations with expertise in child welfare have issued reports and resolutions in support of gay and lesbian parental rights" (cited in Cooper & Cates, 2006, p. 36).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2002), for example, has reported that "no data have pointed to any risk to children as a result of growing up in a family with one or more gay parents", and assert that "Children who are born to or adopted by one member of a same-sex couple deserve the security of two legally recognized parents" (p. 339). The American Society for Reproductive Medicine has documented commonly expressed concerns about the well-being of children in families with gay and lesbian parents, including that: "children need a father"; children of gay fathers and lesbian mothers "will experience social isolation and gender-identity or sexual-orientation problems"; men are "less caring and nurturing than women"; and "children of single men or of gay-male couples are at greater risk for sexual abuse, paedophilia, or other mistreatment". They reported "the evidence to date, however, cannot reasonably be interpreted to support such fears" (2006, p. 1334). They noted that although there is less research on the children of gay men, "the literature that does exist, however, found no evidence that being raised by a homosexual father had any negative effect on children... Indeed, identified differences tended to favour gay fathers" (p. 1334). Some professional bodies have revoked the membership of people who are seen to promote discrimination against the families of lesbian and gay parents by making derogatory claims about gay and lesbian-led families, and falsely claiming that research supports such a position (e.g., see Cooper & Cates, 2006; Herek, 2006).

The American Psychological Association (APA) has long contributed its expertise to this area of public interest. For example, the APA in 1975 deplored "all public and private discrimination against gay men and lesbians" and urged "the repeal of all discriminatory legislation against lesbians and gay men" (Conger, 1975, cited in Paige, 2005, p. 498). In 2004 the APA resolved to "take a leadership role in opposing all discrimination in legal benefits, rights, and privileges against same-sex couples" and "in matters of adoption, child custody, and visitation, foster care, and reproductive health services". They resolved to "provide scientific and educational resources that inform public discussion and public policy development regarding sexual orientation and marriage" and "discrimination based on sexual orientation in matters of adoption, child custody and visitation, foster care, and reproductive health services" (Paige, pp. 498-500).

In Australia, despite important debates and inquiries that have occurred across the country since the mid 1990's, child-welfare related professional bodies have been comparatively slow to contribute their expertise. As Millbank (2003) noted in a review of the relevant family studies literature, whilst "the number of adults and the sex of the adults in a household has no significant bearing on children's well being – one adult or two, female or male, heterosexual or homosexual... the happiness of the *relationship between adults* in the household, and the openness of warmth and communication *between the adult/s and the children* do have a major impact on the child" (p. 571, original emphases). This knowledge, she suggests, "remains under-utilised in Australian social policy and legal forums" (p. 561). This is highly problematic given that, as she concluded, "it is no longer possible to formulate or defend discriminatory regimes – such as restricting access to fertility services or adoption – on the basis that it is in children's best interests to do so. This position is simply unsupportable in any empirical sense" (p. 571). Further, as summarised by O'Hanlon, Dibble, Hagan and Davids (2004), research indicates that "the public discriminatory attitudes and second-class legal status cause physical, emotional, and financial harm to lesbians, their families, and their children" (p. 227).

The current situation behoves psychologists, widely regarded as experts on the well-being of children and families, to contribute the expertise of their discipline in the public interest. However, as Kelly (2003) notes, many professionals, including mental health professionals, are not familiar or up-to-date with the relevant child development literature: "Too often, what they know is simplistic or old, and has not been updated by more reliable, differentiated knowledge" (p. 52). The remainder of this review therefore presents an updated account of research relevant to LGBT-parented families. The primary focus of this review is research on planned same-sex parented families rather than the families of same-sex parents with children born in prior heterosexual relationships, as this earlier work has been reviewed more extensively elsewhere (e.g., see APA, 1995; 2005; Patterson, 1995b; 2000; 2005; Tasker, 2000; 2005).

The Family Studies Research

Since the 1970s, it has become increasingly clear that it is family *processes* (such as the quality of parenting, the psychosocial well-being of parents, the quality of and satisfaction with relationships within the family, and the level of co-operation and harmony between parents) that contribute to determining children's well-being and 'outcomes', rather than family *structures*, per se, such as the number, gender, sexuality and co-habitation status of parents (e.g., see Chan, Brookes, Raboy and Patterson, 1998; Chan, Raboy & Patterson, 1998; Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000; Featherstone, 2003; Flood, 2003; Golombok, 2000; Kelly, 2000, 2003; McIntosh, 2003; McNair, 2004; Millbank, 2003; Patterson, 1995a, 1998, 2001; Patterson, Fulcher & Wainright, 2002; Savin-Williams & Esterberg, 2000; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999; Tasker, 2005; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998; Wainright, Russell & Patterson, 2004; Walker & McGraw, 2000; Wise, 2003). As Walker and McGraw (2000, p. 563) conclude in relation to the frequently made assertion that all children 'need' or will 'do better' with the involvement of a father (as well as a mother), "although there might be an ideological basis to this assumption, it lacks empirical support". Similarly, as Biblarz and Stacey (2006) summarise, "studies have not 'shown that the ideal is where a child is raised by their own married mother and father'. No evidence supports the view that the ideal gender mix of parents is a man and a woman" (p. 43).

Specifically, and regardless of family structure, children are likely to do well in a family environment characterised by an absence of conflict; high levels of co-operation, trust, ease and cohesion; high levels of warmth and care; and high levels of social connection and support. The main family factors related to poor outcomes for children are high levels of conflict, with compromised or poor mental health and well-being of primary care-givers also being a key factor (e.g., see Amato & Keith, 1991; Depner, 2002; Featherstone, 2003; Flood, 2003; Golombok, 2000; McIntosh, 2003; Kelly, 2000; 2003; McNair, 2004; Lipman, Boyle, Dooley & Offord, 2002; Sanson & Lewis, 2001; Spruijt & Iedema, 1998; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998; Wise, 2003).

Findings from studies that specifically compare children both from lesbian-parented and heterosexual-parented families, and children from one and two parent families, provide further weight to the conclusion that it is process rather than structure that is key to positive outcomes. Drawing on a sample of 80 families from the records of The Sperm Bank of California, and using standardised instruments (completed by parents, children and teachers) to compare children who had been conceived with donated sperm in four types of families (single parent and two-parent families, lesbian-parented and heterosexual-parented families), Chan, Raboy and Patterson (1998) found that neither the number nor gender-mix of parents influenced children's psychological adjustment. However, for all family types, increased levels of parenting stress, conflict and relationship dissatisfaction were associated with increased behaviour problems.

In the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (a study based on a representative sample of 1200 ethnically diverse American adolescents and their families), researchers compared adolescents from carefully matched families headed by female couples and those headed by heterosexual couples and found no differences on all measures of adjustment and well-being, including self-esteem, anxiety, grade averages, reported substance abuse, delinquency, and peer victimisation. Researchers did find a difference in how connected the children felt to people at school, whereby children with same-sex parents showed a greater connection. However, across family types, the *quality* of relationships was related to adolescents' well-being and outcomes (Wainright et al., 2004; Wainright & Patterson, 2006).

In a study comparing children from 39 lesbian-parented families (including single and couple-parent families, and both step-parent and planned lesbian-parent families), 60 families with a heterosexual single mother, and 74 families with coupled heterosexual parents, using standardised interviews and questionnaires with parents, children and teachers, researchers found that although sexual orientation or family structure were not related to level of children's psychological adjustment, children of mothers who showed greater warmth and lower levels of parenting stress exhibited fewer emotional and behavioural problems (Golombok et al., 2003). Researchers have also found that higher levels of equality in caring for children between lesbian parents, and higher levels of satisfaction with the distribution of caring for children, is associated with higher scores on measures of children's psychological adjustment (Chan, Brooks et al., 1998; Patterson, 1995a).

However, it is important to note that the ways in which family life is conducted is not *unrelated* to the sexuality and gender of the parents, nor are the efforts that parents put into having their children. As following sections of this review indicate, it is well documented that same-sex parents (with most research being about female couples), and particularly those couples who have planned to have a child together, organise family life and caring for children far more equitably than heterosexual partners usually do, and that people (including same-sex couples and same-sex attracted individuals) who have undertaken assisted fertility form a highly motivated group of potential parents. Hence, it is not surprising, and is in keeping with the conclusion that it is family processes rather than family structures *per se* that are important to children's outcomes and well-being, that research increasingly indicates some positive benefits for children conceived via surrogacy or assisted reproduction, and for those in families with same-sex parents. For example, in the large European Longitudinal Family Study, which compared parenting and children's outcomes in families in which the children had been conventionally conceived, conceived with donated sperm, conceived with IVF but not donated gametes, and adopted in infancy, several advantages have been found in terms of quality of parenting, family relationships, and behavioural outcomes for the children who have been conceived other than by conventional conception, and particularly, for those who have been conceived with donated gametes (e.g., see Golombok, Tasker & Murray, 1997; Golombok, MacCallum, Goodman & Rutter, 2002; see also reviews by Brewaeys, 2001; McNair, 2004).

LGBT Parenting and Families Literature

Three main areas of research and critical inquiry have been conducted in relation to parenting by LGBT people: 1) comparative research on parenting and children's outcomes across family types; 2) studies that map, explore and document aspects of family life, with some consideration given to the legislative, policy and social context; and 3) discursive and theoretical critiques around social discourses and assumptions about 'the family' and parenting by non-heterosexual people. As this literature review demonstrates, the area of comparative research is both the largest and the one with clearest implications for public policy and legal reform. However, empirical outcomes, critical theory building, and exploratory findings arising from these broad areas of LGBT family research will of course overlap, and thus all contribute to legal reform. All three areas of research have been undertaken by sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, health and family researchers, as well as by psychologists. Broadly in keeping with the distribution of parents within the category 'LGBT parents', the research literature on lesbian-parented families is now fairly large, with research on gay-parented families being significantly smaller (with the majority being about gay men who parent post heterosexual relationship), and research on the families of transgender and bisexual parents is relatively scant.

Comparative Research

Comparative research has compared lesbian mothers with heterosexual mothers (both single and partnered) and fathers, and, to a lesser extent, with known population norms. A small amount of research has compared gay fathers with heterosexual ones, and with lesbian parents. In the last ten years a number of large, well controlled studies of parenting in diverse family forms (including same-sex parented families) have been undertaken, shedding significant light on how gender, sexuality, number of parents, whether or not parents are biologically related to children, and whether or not assisted fertility methods were used relate to parenting practices and children's outcomes. These findings are summarised in the following main section.

Researchers conducting comparative research have used a wide variety of techniques, including observations, standardised interviews, a wide range of standardised social and psychiatric testing materials and procedures, reports by children, parents and teachers, ratings by psychiatrists, and time analysis diaries. Both small and large-scale studies, as well as population, prospective, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, and meta-analyses have been undertaken. Although some, and particularly earlier studies, relied on volunteer and convenience samples (like much of the family studies research, and particularly that on stigmatised groups), increasingly researchers have carefully matched groups, used a comparison group from known populations (such as users of the same fertility clinic), or drawn the sample from a representative or population sample. Judith Stacey said the following of her 2001 review of the literature (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001) about parenting by same-sex parents:

because many lesbians and gay men remain in the closet, we cannot know if the participants in the studies are representative of all gay people. However, the studies we reviewed are just as reliable and respected as studies in most other areas of child development and psychology. They generally compare well-matched groups of children with heterosexual and lesbian or gay parents. The studies we discussed have been published in rigorously peer-reviewed and highly selective journals, whose standards represent expert consensus on generally accepted social scientific standards for research on child development. Those journals include *Child Development and Developmental Psychology*, the two flagship journals in the field of child development. The first is published by the 5,000-member academic Society for Research in Child Development, and the second is published by the American Psychological Association. (cited in Cooper & Cates, 2006, p. 35)

In their updated review, Biblarz and Stacey (2006) noted that significant intensification and advancement of the comparative research has occurred since 2001, including increased sample sizes, more studies with representational samples, and an increase in the age, into adolescence, of children in longitudinal studies of planned lesbian-parented families in the US, the UK and Europe.

Mapping and Exploratory Studies

Alongside, and partly on the basis of the body of comparative research, researchers in many countries have explored and documented a large array of aspects of life in lesbian-parented families, including: decisions regarding having a child, and patterns of and reasons for choosing known and unknown donors (e.g., Almack, 2006; Short, 2007b; Touroni & Coyle, 2002); descriptions of family life in the legal and policy context (e.g., Benkov, 1994; 1998; Lewin, 1993; 1998; Nelson, 1996); ways of forming families in varying contexts, including the impact of laws and policies on family formation (e.g., Griffin, 1998; Ryan-Flood, 2005; Short, 2007b); child-rearing goals (e.g., Bos, van Balen & van den Boom, 2004); negotiating and working with gendered understandings and discourses of family life (e.g., Dalton & Bielby, 2000; Donovan, 2000; Dunne, 2000; Hequembourg, 2004; Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999); the significance of surnames and language (e.g., Almack, 2005; Brown & Perlesz, 2007; Gabb, 2005); the experience of finding known donors and relationships with them (e.g., Dempsey, 2005; Ripper, 2007; Short, 2006; Touroni & Coyle, 2002); ways of 'doing family' and communicating family roles and relationships both privately and publicly (e.g., Perlesz et al., 2006a; 2006b); social support (e.g., Bos et al., 2004); how lesbian women speak to their children about conception and families (e.g., Dundas & Kaufman, 2000; Mitchell, 1998); family experiences of adults who grew up with lesbian mothers and/or gay fathers (e.g., Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Barrett & Tasker, 2001); ways that people who grew up with lesbian and/or gay families speak about their families (e.g., Goldberg, 2007); children's relationships with extended family members (e.g., Patterson, Hurt & Mason, 1998); family members' interactions with health care providers and schools (e.g., Perlesz et al., 2006b; Ray & Gregory, 2001); experiences of health care during pregnancy and birth (e.g., Ross, Steele & Epstein, 2006); strengths and sources of pride (e.g., McNair, Dempsey, Wise & Perlesz, 2002; Perlesz & McNair, 2004; Short, 2007b); social support (e.g., Speziale & Gopalakrishna, 2004); the benefits for children of laws which allow a child's parents to be legally recognised as parents, regardless of gender (e.g., Short, 2007a); aspects of the organisation and experience of family life such as the roles and experiences of biological and non-biological parents in caring for children (e.g., Ciano-Boyce & Shelley-Sireci, 2002; Dunne, 1998; 2000; McCandish, 1987; Sullivan, 1996; van Dam, 2004); and lesbian-parented step-families (e.g., Elera & Fredriksen, 1999; Hall & Kitson, 2000; Wright, 1990).

In relation to gay male parents or intending parents, researchers have explored interconnected aspects such as: the desire and decision to parent (e.g., Beers, 1996; Sbordone, 1993); parenting arrangements and satisfaction (e.g., McPherson, 1993); social support and parenting in families following adoption (e.g., Erich, Leung, Kindle & Carter, 2005); gay men negotiating the legal system as parents (e.g., Violi, 2004); relationships with women who give birth following insemination with the man's sperm (e.g., Dempsey, 2005; van Reyk, 2004); experiences of assessment for adoption, fostering (e.g., Hicks, 1996) and surrogacy (e.g., Lev, 2006); parenting arrangements (e.g., Beers, 1996); the experiences of the children of gay men (e.g., Barrett & Tasker, 2001; Mallon 2004); fatherhood practices (e.g., Schacher, Auerbach & Silverstein, 2005; Silverstein, Auerbach & Levant 2002); gay men parenting post-heterosexual divorce (Benson, Silverstein & Auerbach, 2005; Hicks, 2004); gay men negotiating step-parenting (Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht, 1993; Current-Juretschko, 2005); the specific experiences of gay men who parent post heterosexual divorce (e.g., Violi, 2004); and summaries of these research areas (Barrett & Tasker, 2002).

Whilst research on parenting by bisexual and transsexual people is scant, it nonetheless is growing, and highlights the particular needs of such parents and their families (e.g., Arden, 1996; Morris, Balsam & Rothblum, 2002; Orel & Fruhauf, 2006). Existing research has explored and documented experiences of transitioning from one gender to another, and how this affects family relationships (e.g., Hines, 2006; Israel, 2005), and a small amount of research has been conducted on the experiences of children with transgendered parents (Green, 1978; 1998). Hines (2006), for example, suggests that research on parenting by transgender people must consider not only the relationships between parents and children, but also the shifting dynamics *within* the parenting relationship if it involves two or more parents, particularly when transitioning occurs within the family unit. As research on bisexual people more broadly has highlighted, there is a common tendency to assume non-monogamy to be a feature of the lives of bisexual people. Not only is this a problematic assumption, but it has been negatively

applied to (most often legal) discussions about bisexual parents (Tye, 2003). It will be important that future research continues to explore the experiences of bisexual parents. Such research needs to challenge the often-made assumption that bisexual parents are non-monogamous; nonetheless, it should recognise that bisexual parents, like all parents, may not identify as monogamous (see Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2006, for a discussion of this in relation to parenting and non-monogamy).

There have also been numerous collections of interviews or autobiographical and family narratives written by same-sex parents and the children of lesbian and gay parents (e.g., Borthwick & Bloch, 1993; Drucker, 1998; Pollack & Vaughan, 1987; Rosier & Hauschild, 1999; Saffron, 1996; Riggs, 2007a; Wakeling & Bradstock, 1995; Wells, 2000).

Arising directly or indirectly in many of these studies is evidence of hardships, discrimination and difficulties faced, particularly in terms of public policy and laws, and the lack of recognition of family relationships. Also evident in these studies, as in the comparative research, are resources used and strengths developed and demonstrated in the face of these difficulties, particularly in terms of quality of family relationships, commitment to family and parenting, and richness of social connections. Hence, researchers have increasingly turned attention to the issue of resilience and thriving, and explored how and why it is that people in these families often function comparatively highly, despite very significant discrimination (e.g., see Connolly, 2005; Hequembourg, 2004; Hequembourg & Farrell, 1999; Johnson & O'Connor; Kershaw, 2000; Lambert, 2005; McNair, 2004; Perlesz & McNair, 2004; Short, 2007b).

Discursive and Theoretical Research

Alongside and intertwined with this comparative research and explorations of lived experience of life in families parented by non-heterosexual parents is a body of critical and discursive research by psychologists and others which locates and critiques the discourses and assumptions that people, including parents, researchers, psychologists, and others, use when discussing families, and in particular, gay and lesbian-parented families.

In her extensive work on lesbian and gay parenting, Clarke elaborates some of the ways in which lesbian and gay parents are expected to conform to a model of parenting that privileges heterosexual families. In particular Clarke (e.g., 2000b, 2000c, 2002) demonstrates how the notion of sameness (i.e., that lesbian and gay parents are 'just like' heterosexual parents) works to promote parenting by heterosexual people as the 'gold standard'. This theme of sameness thus discounts the potential differences that parenting by lesbian and gay people may engender, and the implications of this for challenging heterosexism within parenting practices. Similarly, Clarke and Kitzinger (2004) suggest that this denial of difference encourages lesbian and gay parents to adopt either a defensive or apologetic framework when talking about their parenting practices. They suggest that this promotes a 'second best approach', whereby lesbian and gay parents have to prove their ability to parent 'as well as' heterosexual parents. Clarke (2001) also suggests that this encourages lesbian women and gay men to minimise their political and personal opinions, and instead to accept parenting practices that they themselves may have found oppressive.

Malone and Cleary (2002) suggest that research on parenting by lesbian and gay people often compartmentalises their experiences in order to dispel myths about homosexuality. Yet, as they suggest, this may only serve to reinforce the priority that is given to heterosexual parents, by encouraging lesbian and gay parents to deny the aspects of their sexuality or relationships that may shape their parenting practices. Malone and Cleary also suggest that the dismissal of sexuality in research on parenting by lesbian and gay parents works to promote a model of the 'perfect lesbian or gay parent', which discourages lesbian and gay parents from speaking out about the negative experiences of parenting they may have.

This 'desexualising' of lesbian and gay parents is also reported in research on lesbian and gay adoption and fostering. Hicks (1996; 2000) reports in his research on foster care assessment in the UK that lesbian women and gay men are encouraged to downplay their political views, and to outline the ways in which they can provide care that is 'just as good' as that provided by heterosexual foster parents. This results in a mentality whereby lesbian women and gay men are considered to be 'substitutes' for 'real families'. This point is explored in research by Riggs (2004; 2005; 2006a; 2007b), which suggests that the foster care system in Australia is structured around a set of assumptions about what constitutes a 'real family', namely, the white, middle-class, heterosexual-parented family. Riggs (e.g., 2005) suggests that psychological knowledge is often used within the foster system to reinforce parenting by heterosexual people as the norm, and thus to implicitly position lesbian and gay foster carers as deviant.

As a whole, recent psychological research on parenting by LGBT people has made a move away from explaining or proving the suitability of LGBT people as parents, and instead has sought to explore why such questions have been asked in the first place. Whilst such research is at times critical of psychological knowledge, it also recognises the utility of working within a psychological framework in order to promote social justice. In particular, this research suggests that the discipline of psychology needs to continue to respond to the experiences of LGBT people, and to do so by valuing these experiences, rather than imposing a set of beliefs based upon the experiences of heterosexual parents. Finally, this research has demonstrated the need for further research on parenting by LGBT people to examine parenting not only in regards to sexual identity, but also to explore the intersections of other identities such as those related to race, gender, class and ethnicity (Riggs, 2006b). Otherwise, it is suggested, research on LGBT parenting may run the risk of promoting a focus primarily on the experiences of white middle-class LGBT parents (Riggs, 2007c).

Specific Findings From Research on Parenting by LGBT People

As mentioned earlier, the primary focus of this review is research on planned same-sex families rather than the families of same-sex parents who had their children in prior heterosexual relationships. Earlier researchers and reviewers frequently orientated to and used the language of "no detriment" or "not disadvantaged" when reporting findings of no differences (and even when reporting indications of advantages or higher functioning by same-sex parents and their children). In recent years, seemingly partly on the basis of advances in the robustness of the body of research, reviewers have been more confident to state that not only has research indicated that parenting by same-sex parents is *not* poorer, but that it appears, in some aspects at least, likely to be somewhat better. Similarly, research has not only indicated that the outcomes of children of same-sex parents are *not* poorer, but that outcomes would seem to be likely to be at least as favourable (e.g., see Biblarz & Stacey, 2006; Coontz, 1997; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Kershaw, 2000; McNair, 2004; Millbank, 2003; Patterson, 2000; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Tasker, 2005; VLRC, 2007). Reviewers have also increasingly taken note of the links between positive parenting practices and children's experiences and outcomes. For example, summary statements from recent reviews include:

[S]ome new research suggests that lesbian and gay families are in some respects better for children than heterosexual families... Research on the division of parenting and household labour among lesbian co-parents and gay-co-parents has shown a distinct pattern of equality and sharing compared to heterosexual parents, with corresponding positive well-being for the partner's relationship with each other, and the child's adjustment. (Millbank, 2003, pp. 546-547)

What differences have emerged, however, suggest that gay and lesbian parents tend to be more responsive to their children, more child oriented, and more egalitarian in their sharing of the workload, characteristics associated with a more positive child outcome. (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002, p. 67)

Significant, reliable social scientific evidence indicates that lesbian and gay parents are at least as fit, effective, and successful as heterosexual parents. The research also shows that children of same-sex couples are as emotionally healthy and socially adjusted and at least as educationally and socially successful as children raised by heterosexual parents. No credible social scientific evidence supports a claim to the contrary. (Stacey, in Cooper & Cates, 2006, p. 34)

Some reviewers have emphasised that these positive findings exist despite significant discrimination remaining (e.g., Foster, 2005; McNair, 2004; Millbank, 2003; Parks, 1998; Patterson, 2000). Typical comments include:

[C]entral results of existing research on lesbian and gay couples and families with children are exceptionally clear. Beyond their witness to the sheer existence of lesbian and gay family lives, the results of existing studies, taken together, also yield a picture of families thriving, even in the midst of discrimination and oppression. (Patterson, 2000, p. 1064)

Lesbian couples are confronted by an environment that disavows their unions, challenges their right and fitness to parent, and denies them basic civil and legal protections to individual and family security. Yet, they have succeeded in creating nurturing, egalitarian families in which they are bearing and raising well-functioning, well-adjusted, and socially tolerant children. (Parks, 1998, p. 376)

Division of Care in Different Types of Parenting Couples

A predominantly equitable pattern of caring for children in planned lesbian-parented families, with the non-birth mother's level of involvement in parenting being higher than fathers generally undertake, and being on a par with that of the birth mother, is well-documented (e.g., see Baetens & Brewaeys, 2001; Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall, & Golombok, 1997; Chan, Brooks et al., 1998; Ciano-Boyce & Shelley-Sires, 2002; Dunne, 1998; 2000; Gartrell et al., 1999, 2000, 2005, 2006; McCandish, 1987; McNair, 2004; Millbank, 2003; Patterson & Chan, 1999; Short, 2007b; Steckel, 1987; Sullivan, 1996; Tasker & Golombok, 1998; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen & Brewaeys, 2003).

The research that has investigated this issue with gay male parenting couples has also found that they undertake parenting more equitably than heterosexual partners, although not as equitably as lesbian couples do (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; McPherson, 1993; Patterson & Chan, 1999). Some research has found lesbian and gay couples both to be more egalitarian in their division of tasks than heterosexual couples usually are, with the level of equality actually achieved seeming to be greater between and possibly of more importance to lesbian couples than it is to gay couples (see Herek, 2006; Savin-Williams & Esterberg, 2000).

The difference between these patterns of caring for children and the predominant pattern of caring for children in families headed by heterosexual couples (in which the vast majority of the practical care of children is undertaken by the mother) is striking. For example, in his recent review, Flood (2003) reported that in heterosexual parenting couples, women continue to bear "the overwhelming responsibility" for child care and domestic work, and that men "share physical care of children equally in only 1-2 per cent of families, and are highly involved in day-to-day care in only 5-10 per cent of families" (p. viii; see also Craig, 2003; Golombok, 2000; Howard, 2003). For heterosexual parents who have separated, mothers also still undertake the vast majority of parenting, with more than one third of Australian separated fathers having no face-to-face contact with the children (Flood, 2003, p. viii).

Tasker & Golombok (1998) explored the role of the parents in three types of two-parent families (n= 99) with children whose average age was 6 years: those parented by lesbian couples in which the children had been conceived via donor insemination, those parented by heterosexual couples in which the children had been conceived via donor insemination, and those parented by heterosexual couples in which the children had been conceived conventionally. In contrast to the reports of the mothers in both types of heterosexual-parented families, and most particularly with those in which the children had been conventionally conceived, the vast majority of the birth mothers in the female couples

reported that their partner was at least as involved in parenting as they were (Tasker & Golombok, 1998). Similarly, a study in Belgium of these three types of families (n=98), with children aged 4-8 years, also found that the non-birth mothers were more heavily involved than both types of fathers, and particularly, more so than fathers who were biologically related to their children (Brewaeyts et al., 1997). Even in a study in which the participants had all conceived their children via donor insemination, (which hence included only couples who had undertaken significant planning to have their children), the female couples shared the task of parenting far more equally than did the heterosexual couples, and the non-birth lesbian mothers were more involved in caring for their children than were the fathers in the heterosexual couples (Chan, Brooks et al., 1998).

As well as being higher than male partners in heterosexual-parented families, the level of involvement of non-birth lesbian mothers in planned two-mother families in the care of their children has been found to be generally of the same level of the biological mother (e.g., see; Chan, Brooks et al., 1998; Dunne, 2000; McNair, 2004; McCandish, 1987; Millbank, 2003; Short, 2007b; Tasker & Golombok, 1998; Vanfraussen et al., 2003). For example, Vanfraussen, and colleagues found that “unlike fathers in heterosexual families, the lesbian social mother is as much involved in child activities as is the biological mother” (p. 78). In research in the US with 360 mothers from 180 two-mother families, which included step-families as well as two-mother families into which the children were born, it was found that in half of each family type, the mothers had egalitarian roles in caring for the children. In the other half, in which one mother undertook a larger proportion of the care, this was not related to being the birth mother rather than the non-birth or the step-mother (van Dam, 2004). Golombok et al (2003) also found no significant differences between lesbian co-mothers/non-birth mothers (i.e those who had planned the baby with their partner, and parented since the child’s birth) and lesbian step-mothers in terms of their level of emotional involvement with their children. In some contrast, Australian researchers found that the step-mothers in lesbian-led families in their sample (n=21) were less likely than the co-mothers/non-birth mothers in planned two-mother families to share an equal role in parenting with the lesbian birth mother (Brown & Perlesz, 2007; Perlesz et al., 2006b).

Related to the way in which responsibility for parenting tends to be allocated differently in same-sex and different-sex couples, research indicates that in lesbian-parented families (and especially in families into which the children were born rather than step-families), the role of income earner is undertaken much more equally than it generally is by heterosexual couples. The predominant pattern found in recent research has been that both partners undertake less than full time paid work, or alternate the role of main income earner, so that both hands-on parenting and income-earning is undertaken more equitably (e.g., see Dunne, 2000; Gartrell, et al, 2005; 2006; Millbank, 2003; Patterson, Sutfin & Fulcher, 2004; Short, 2007b; Sullivan, 1996).

Parenting Practices and Quality

Given what we know about which parents usually *do* the day-to-day parenting in various couples, as well as the fact that parents in planned same-sex parented families often have to overcome many obstacles in order to become parents, it is perhaps not surprising that researchers who have compared lesbian mothers with heterosexual mothers and/or fathers, or with population norms, or gay with heterosexual fathers, have found either that there is no difference, or that the quantity or the quality of the parenting practices, attitudes, knowledge or skills being examined is higher for lesbian or gay parents (e.g., Brewaeyts, 2001; Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua & Joseph, 1995; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001, and see below). Recent summary statements by reviewers on quality of parenting include the following:

Results of some studies suggest that lesbian mothers’ and gay fathers’ parenting skills may be superior to those of matched heterosexual parents. (APA, Policy Statement on Sexual Orientation, 2004)

[G]ay and lesbian parents show strengths in the security of attachment to their children; in their parenting styles, including how they discipline their children; in the quality of their own couple relationships; and in how they share the work associated with raising children and running a household. (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002, p. 171)

Parenting Practices: Lesbian Couples Compared to Heterosexual Couples

The most commonly found difference in this literature that is related to the overall quality of parenting is that between mothers (including heterosexual and lesbian, single and partnered) and heterosexual fathers in two-parent families (e.g., see Baetens & Brewaeys, 2001; Biblarz & Stacey, 2006; Brewaeys et al., 1997; Millbank, 2003; Patterson & Chan, 1999; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Vanfraussen et al., 2003). As reported by Stacey & Biblarz, "in these studies of matched lesbian and heterosexual couples, women in every category – heterosexual birth mother, lesbian birth mother, non-birth lesbian social mother – all score about the same as one another but score significantly higher than the men on measures having to do with the care of children" (p.175).

For example, Brewaeys and colleagues (1997) reported that in their study comparing 3 types of two-parent families with children 4-8 years, – heterosexual couples whose children were conventionally conceived, heterosexual couples whose children were conceived by donor insemination, and lesbian couples whose children were conceived by donor insemination (n=98) – "the quality of the interaction between the social mother and the child in lesbian families was superior to that between the father and the child in both groups of heterosexual families" (p. 1349)². Flaks and colleagues (1995) used the Briklin Parent Awareness Skills survey to compare 30 lesbian and heterosexual parenting couples on parenting awareness skills. They reported that the "lesbian couples had more parenting awareness skills than heterosexual parents... lesbian couples were more aware of the skills needed for effective parenting, better able to recognise problems in parenting and envisage solutions to them" (pp. 111-112), with the difference related to gender: "Both heterosexual and lesbian mothers demonstrated an awareness of parenting skills that was superior to that of heterosexual fathers" (p. 112). Vanfrauseen and colleagues (2003) found that "unlike in lesbian families, where children showed no preference for either of their parents, the majority of the children in heterosexual families preferred discussing emotional things with their mother according to both parents and children" (p. 88).

Compared with heterosexual fathers (as well as with heterosexual mothers) lesbian parents have also been found to be less likely to use or to endorse the use of physical punishment (Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, Peyser & Banks, 2005; Gartrell et al., 2006; Golombok et al., 2003; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002); engage in more imaginative and domestic play (Golombok et al, 2003); and be less gender-stereotyped in their choice and approval of toys, games, and dress (Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray & Smith, 1986; Hoeffler, 1981).

Researchers undertaking a longitudinal British study on planned lesbian-parented families have found that at the age of 10 years, the children in the 78 families had been sexually abused at rates "strikingly" lower than national rates, with none experiencing sexual abuse by family members (Gartrell et al., 2005, p. 523; Gartrell et al., 2006).

² Their sample of lesbian parents were those who accessed fertility services at the Fertility Department of the Brussels University Hospital, and the heterosexual couples were recruited from the Fertility and the Obstetrics department of a university hospital. The parents were matched as closely as possible with respect to the age of the biological mother, age of child and family size, and there were no differences between the groups in terms of proportion of parents who were religious, who lived in rural and urban environments, and on family size. The research instruments included standardised interviews with the parents (an adaptation of Quinton & Rutter, 1988). Twenty-seven of the interviews were checked by a second rater who was 'blind' to the family type. Measures used with children included the Family Relations Test, the Achenbach Child Behaviour Checklist, and the Preschool Activities Inventory.

Parenting Practices: Lesbian Mothers Compared to Heterosexual Mothers

Even though most studies have found that the quality of parenting tends not to differ between various types of mothers (such as heterosexual single, heterosexual partnered, lesbian birth mother and lesbian non-birth mother), some differences have been reported by researchers, and in each of these, lesbian mothers have been found to compare favourably with the comparison heterosexual mother group on the parenting skills or attitudes or quality being examined (e.g., see Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). For example, researchers who have compared lesbian mothers with heterosexual mothers (either directly or with population norms) found:

- lesbian mother/child dyads exhibited more expressiveness in their communication than a matched group of heterosexual mother/child dyads (Kunin, 1998);
- lesbian women who had had their children in a prior heterosexual relationship or who were step-mothers to their partner's biological children were rated as more child orientated in certain child-care situations and in their discipline techniques (Miller, Jacobsen & Bigner, 1981);
- lesbian mothers to be less gender-stereotyped in choice and approval of toys and activities (Green et al., 1986; Hoeffler, 1981); and
- lesbian mothers to be less likely to use or endorse the use of physical punishment (Gartrell et al., 2005, 2006; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Golombok et al., 2003).

These findings may relate to a range of factors, including: that lesbian women who become parents comprise a group of highly motivated parents; that lesbian mothers are more likely than many single heterosexual mothers to have actively chosen their particular family structure; that lesbian partnered women are more likely to have a partner who undertakes an equitable share of parenting than are heterosexual partnered women; commitment to feminism; feelings of being under higher levels of scrutiny than heterosexual mothers are; and gendered expectations and patterns of relating (see Biblarz & Stacey, 2006, for further discussion).

The picture emerging is quite complex and more research is needed to explore it further. Some research seems to indicate that women parent somewhat differently according to whether they are parenting with a man or not, and whether they are being assisted in that parenting by the presence of an extra woman in the house. There also needs to be further research on sole lesbian-parenting by choice. In a study of what they termed 'fatherless families', researchers used "a battery" of standardised assessments with children, standardised interviews and questionnaires with parents and teachers to compare 113 families according to the presence or absence of a father. The 'fatherless families' included single heterosexual mothers, and single and partnered lesbian mothers, all of whom had been parenting their children with no father or father-figure since the first year of their child's life, and the 'father present' families were the families of heterosexual couples. It was found that "children raised in fatherless families from infancy experienced greater warmth and interaction with their mother, and were more securely attached to her" (Golombok et al., 1997, p. 783). When the lesbian mothers were compared with the heterosexual single mothers, it was found that the lesbian mothers interacted more with their children. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the 'lesbian mother' group included partnered as well as single mothers, and that unlike single women, partnered lesbian co-parents are likely to have a partner who shares the tasks involved in raising children, including earning an income.

In a follow-up study when offspring were adolescents, although the difference between the 'lesbian' and the 'single heterosexual' mothers was not found, there was still a difference between the mothers in the 'fatherless family' group as a whole when compared to the mothers parenting with a male partner: "children in fatherless families experienced more interaction with their mother, and perceived her as more available and dependable than their peers from father-present homes" (p. 1407), and "perceived their mothers to share more interests and activities with them" (MacCallum & Golombok, 2004, p. 1413).

Parenting Practices: Parenting by Gay Fathers

A study using self-report measures with a sample of 33 gay and 33 heterosexual fathers found that although the two groups rated themselves as similar in terms of level of intimacy and involvement in the children's lives, the gay fathers reported that their behaviour was characterised by greater responsiveness and warmth, more reasoning, and more limit setting than did the heterosexual fathers (Bigner & Jacobson, 1989). Gay male couples have been found to share parenting more equally and with less of a polarisation in levels and type of interactions than heterosexual couples, although to a lesser extent than female parenting couples do (Biblarz & Stacey, 2006; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; McPherson, 1993). Biblarz & Stacey (2006) concluded, "numerous qualitative studies offer evidence that when two (gay) men co-parent, they do so in a number of ways that seems closer, but not identical, to that of two (lesbian) women than to a (heterosexual) woman and man" (p. 35).

Positive findings about intentional gay parenting couples would seem likely to be related not just to the different patterns of organising family life that arise when both members of a couple are of the same gender, but to the fact that gay men who choose to parent need to have a high level of motivation to parent, along with the range of skills required to successfully apply and be assessed for adoption or fostering, to negotiate co-parenting arrangements with women who want to conceive, or to organise surrogacy. Further, they are choosing to parent in a situation in which there is not another person who can be assumed to be likely to take on a greater proportion of the day-to-day parenting tasks.

Satisfaction with Shared Responsibility and Patterns of Parenting Practices

Perhaps, given the above, it is not surprising that researchers who have examined the question have found lesbian mothers to be more satisfied than heterosexual partnered mothers with their partner as someone to co-parent with (e.g., see Bos et al., 2004). It has been noted that this satisfaction, as well as the practical situation underlying it, may be a protective factor for lesbian birth mothers, given that burden and dissatisfaction with inequitable division of labour following the birth of a child are risk factors for post-partum distress (Ross, 2005). Related to this, lesbian parents report being aware and pleased about the patterns of shared responsibility in caring commonly enacted by lesbian couples compared to heterosexual couples, and about strengths often experienced in their ability to communicate and effectively negotiate family-related distribution of tasks (e.g., Dunne, 2000; Perlesz & McNair, 2004; Short, 2007b). In his review of the couple literature, Kurdek reported that "nearly all available evidence indicates not only that gay men and lesbians, are, on average, satisfied with their relationships, but that their level of satisfaction is at least equal to that reported by spouses from married heterosexual couples" (2005, p. 252). Kurdek (2007) reported that satisfaction with the division of household labour within lesbian and gay couples is related to relationship satisfaction and to relationship stability.

As well as the documented greater commitment to equitable parenting practices, and relatively high levels of satisfaction, other factors that may underlie equitable parenting practices and both support and be supported by them include common characteristics of lesbian couples that have been reported in the literature, including high levels of intimacy, cohesion, commitment to equality, co-operation, and communication (e.g., see Dunne, 2000; Kurdek, 1998; 2001; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; Patterson, 1995a, Patterson, 1998; Tjaden, Thoennes & Allison, 1999). For example, comparing two-parent lesbian and heterosexual couples, using a measure of dyadic adjustment, Flaks and colleagues (1995) found that the lesbian parenting couples scored higher "in every area of dyadic adjustment" (p. 112). Compared even to heterosexual couples conceiving at a clinic (a more cohesive group of parents than the general population), lesbian couples seeking donor insemination at a clinic reported greater cohesion as a couple than did the heterosexual couples seeking donor insemination at the same clinic (Jacob, Klock & Maier, 1999). Hence, as Stacey & Biblarz (2001) summarised, "lesbian co-parents may enjoy greater parental compatibility and achieve particularly high quality parenting skills... the evidence suggests that two women co-parenting may create a synergistic pattern that brings more egalitarian, compatible, shared parenting and time spent with children, greater understanding of children, and closeness and communication between parents and children" (p. 175). As previously noted, gay male

couples also have been found to share caring for children far more equally than heterosexual couples, and to be satisfied with that equality (McPherson, 1993). These characteristics and practices may underlie the fact that the evidence to date suggests that same-sex parenting couples have similar rates of relationship dissolution as heterosexual parenting couples. For example, Gartrell and colleagues (2006) explored the issue of relationship stability of parenting couples. They compared the relationships of lesbian mother couples in their sample (n=78) with those mothers' married heterosexual sisters. They reported that "stereotypes about relationship brevity in lesbian couples were not substantiated when the NLFS mothers were compared with their married heterosexual sisters who had children" (2006, p. 187).

Research on the Children of Gay Men and Lesbian Women

As with research on parenting in diverse families, comparative research has been undertaken to explore aspects of children's experiences in diverse families, and to investigate claims made, including by courts and legislators, that growing up in a family other than one with heterosexual parents who are partnered and co-resident will have a negative impact on children. Research focusing on the children of lesbian and gay people sits amongst the extensive body of comparative research about other family types such as those of single parents and step and blended families. This increasingly large body of academic comparative research does not support negative assumptions about the experiences or outcomes of children of lesbian mothers. According to Professor Judith Stacey, and in keeping with the conclusions of other academic reviewers of the literature, there is not "a single social scientist conducting and publishing research in the area of children's development who claims to have found that gay and lesbian parents harm children" (cited in Cooper & Cates, 2006, p. 29). The studies conducted to date indicate that although there are usually no differences found between the children of lesbian women and the children of heterosexual women in most of the areas that have been investigated, some differences exist, and when they do, they usually favour children of lesbian women. In their recent review Biblarz & Stacey (2006) report that for every finding of differences between the children of same-sex parents and the children of heterosexual parents, there have been approximately four findings of no differences between groups.

As the body of research has matured and grown, reviewers have more clearly indicated that differences have been found, and that nearly all of these are positive. For example, McNair (2004) reported that:

A range of rigorous studies has shown that children in lesbian families do at least as well as children in heterosexual families... There is sound evidence of equal or more positive outcomes for children born into families with non-biological parents, same-sex parents and through surrogate arrangements. These apply both to children's emotional, social and psychological developments, and to parenting styles and family functioning. (p. 7, p. 9)

Psychological Well-Being and Behaviour

A large number of studies have compared such things as the characteristics, behaviours, emotional and psychological health, gender orientation, sexuality, academic achievement, social relationships, popularity and self esteem of children of lesbian parents with children of heterosexual parents (e.g., see reviews by Anderssen, Amlie & Ytteroy, 2002; Brewaeys & Van Hall, 1997; Fitzgerald, 1999; Kershaw, 2000; McNair, 2004; Millbank, 2003; Parks, 1998; Patterson & Chan, 1999; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Tasker, 1999; 2000).

Examples of studies that have reported no differences in their samples according to the gender mix or sexuality of the children's parents include no differences in: cognitive ability (e.g., Kirkpatrick, Smith & Roy, 1981; Green et al., 1986; Flaks et al., 1995); social competence and level of behavioural problems (Patterson, 1994); psychiatric rating (Kirkpatrick et al., 1981); and self-esteem (Huggins, 1989). Recent controlled studies in the US, the UK and Europe with children in intentional lesbian-parented families have found no difference in such things as anxiety, psychological adjustment, and school adjustment (e.g., MacCallum & Golombok, 2004; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen & Brewaeys, 2002;

Wainright et al., 2004). For example, in their study involving early adolescent children from what they termed 'father-present' families (two heterosexual parents, n=38) and 'father-absent' families (which included 25 families of lesbian mothers and 38 families of single heterosexual mothers), MacCallum and Golombok (2004) found no differences in psychological adjustment as measured by a battery of standardised measures, including a standardised interview with the mothers, interviews with children using the Child and Adolescent Functioning and Environment Schedule (1991), completion of the Social Adjustment Inventory for Children and Adolescents (1987) by the children, and completion of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (1994) by mothers and teachers. Using the Child Behaviour Checklist, Gartrell and colleagues (2005, 2006) found no differences in psychological adjustment between children in planned lesbian-parented families who were conceived with sperm from a known donor and those who were conceived with sperm from an unknown donor.

Some studies have found fewer indications of behavioural or emotional problems in children with two mothers compared with either direct comparison groups of children with heterosexual parents or with population norms (e.g., Flaks et al., 1995, Golombok et al., 1997; Brewaeys et al., 1997; Vanfraussen et al., 2002). Gartrell and colleagues (2005) found that the girls in their sample of children born into planned lesbian-parented families had externalising behaviour scores significantly below the norm. Children in mother-only families were rated more highly by researchers on a measure of attachment and security of attachment than those in a family with one mother and one father (Golombok, et al., 1997). In a Spanish study comparing 28 families of children of either gay fathers or lesbian mothers, with children aged 3-16, with two samples of classmates with heterosexual parents, researchers reported that "boys and girls growing up in homo-parental families have average to above average scores in academic and social competence and self-esteem" (Gonzalez, Morcillo, Sanchez-Angeles & Chacon, 2004, p, 327). Various researchers have found that their samples of children of lesbian mothers were rated by the children themselves, their parents and/or by their teachers as less aggressive, more 'loveable', affectionate, joyful, sociable, responsive, broad-minded, tolerant, empathic, less aggressive, less domineering, less negativistic, more verbal and more protective to younger children than children of heterosexual parents (e.g., see Patterson, 1994; 1996; Steckel, 1987; Vanfraussen et al., 2002). For example, an anonymous survey of 107 teachers found that they believed that the children of gay and lesbian parents were more mature, tolerant, and self-reliant than other students (Bliss & Harris, 1999).

Although the majority of findings of the comparative research indicate possible advantages or are positive for the children of gay and lesbian people, not all are in agreement. In contrast to Flaks and colleagues (1995), who found no differences in teachers' ratings between children of female and children of heterosexual couples, Belgian researchers Vanfraussen and colleagues (2002) who gathered information from children, parents and teachers found that the teachers rated the children of lesbian women as having more attention and behaviour problems than the children of two heterosexual parents. The researchers noted that this was somewhat out of keeping with the teachers' other ratings of the children, and this was not indicated in the ratings completed by either the children or the parents. An Australian study by Sarantakos (1996) of 174 children born into heterosexual relationships and later parented by their heterosexual married parents, or by co-habiting heterosexual parents, or by lesbian or gay step or blended families, found that although children being parented by lesbian or gay couples achieved slightly better in social studies and were regarded as more polite and reserved, children parented by married couples scored higher in language, maths and sport. Reviewers have pointed to the fact that this study is at odds with the body of evidence on children parented by lesbian women and gay men, but is somewhat consistent with other studies that compare children who have experienced family conflict with those who have not. Like the author himself, these reviewers have urged caution on how to interpret the findings of the study (e.g. APA, 2005; VLRC, 2007).

In a US study, children of lesbian mothers rated themselves as having a higher level of general well-being, feeling more joy and contentment, and more comfortable with themselves than a comparison group of children of heterosexual parents, but also rated themselves as having more emotional reactions to stress, such as feelings of anger and anxiety (Patterson, 1994). These findings may indicate that the children of the lesbian women actually had lives which they experienced as more joyful and pleasing, and that they actually experienced more stress in their lives, or, as Patterson suggested, possibly that the children of the lesbian mothers more readily acknowledged emotions.

In the first data collection of a UK longitudinal study about what the researchers term 'fatherless' families (n=113), 6 year old children of single (heterosexual and lesbian) mothers and children of lesbian-couple parents rated themselves as less cognitively and physically able than children with a mother and a father (Golombok et al., 1997). The researchers suggested that given this is unlikely to be the case (as noted above, some researchers have compared the IQ of children according to the sexuality of their mothers and found no differences), this finding may be related to stigma. Interestingly, in a follow-up study (n=101 families), no differences were found between those who had a father and those who did not in this area when children were approaching adolescence (MacCallum & Golombok, 2004). The researchers suggested that this change over time may relate to increasing recognition and acceptance of family diversity in society.

Behaviours and Preferences Commonly Believed to be Gender Related

Some research into gender and sexuality in relation to having a gay and/or lesbian parent has been undertaken. This has partly been to explore the concern, expressed by some in the public arena, that a child who grows up without one mother and one father will be less likely to conform to normative gender and sexual behaviour. Many have pointed to the offensive nature of this kind of concern and challenged the assumptions within it. However, given the importance of the arenas in which these concerns arise and the deleterious effects they have on people's lives, many have also attempted to deal with these concerns within the terms, language, and framework of the concerns, and explored whether children of gay and lesbian parents will, in fact, be more likely to be either gender 'atypical' or other than strictly heterosexual. For those who are interested in this information, the following is provided; however, it is important that psychologists be aware that it is counter to people's well-being and offensive to many to assume that heterosexuality and stereotypical gender expression is preferable or superior to non-heterosexuality and less common forms of gender or gender expression.

Many findings of no differences between groups of children on various measures in some way related to gender and gendered-behaviour have been reported (e.g., Brewaeys et al., 1997; see reviews by Kershaw, 2000; McNair, 2004; Tasker, 2005). However, some differences have been found between children parented by same-sex parents and those parented by heterosexual parents that indicate potentially favourable or advantageous differences for the former. In general, the theme of these differences is to be less rigidly sex-typed than children who live with heterosexual parents. Researchers have found the sons of lesbian women in their samples to be more self-aware, more adept at communicating their feelings, more sensitive to others, more thoughtful and measured, less physically aggressive, less 'sex-typed' in their choice of toys and games, and to exhibit more empathy for people than the comparative groups of sons of heterosexual parents (Brewaeys et al., 1997; Drexler & Gross, 2005; Green et al., 1986; Sarantakos, 1996; Vanfraussen et al., 2002). Drexler, who has compared boys raised by lesbian couples and boys raised by heterosexual couples, has reported differences along these lines, and particularly, that boys of lesbian mothers demonstrate relatively higher levels of sensitivity and relationship orientation than do boys who are parented by a male/female couple (Drexler, 2002; Drexler & Gross, 2005). In the UK study comparing 'father-present' and 'father-absent' families (n=101 families), early adolescent boys who had been raised from infancy by mothers only (either single heterosexual or lesbian women, or female couples) were found to rate themselves at the same level on a scale of 'masculinity' as did boys who had a father, and more highly on the 'femininity' items (MacCallum & Golombok, 2004).

Some researchers have found daughters of lesbian mothers to have higher aspirations to non-traditionally gendered occupations and somewhat less 'sex-typed' play (Green et al., 1986; Steckel, 1987). Research undertaken on sons of divorced gay fathers suggests that such fathers also promote some flexibility in adherence to stereotypical gendered behaviours and ways of relating (Bigner, 1999).

In terms of sexual orientation, the research is fairly scant. Findings seem to suggest that offspring who were raised by a same-sex attracted parent may feel more comfortable to either consider the possibility of having a same-sex relationship, to have one, to feel more comfortable with their sexuality, and/or more able to discuss issues of sexuality with their parents (see Golombok & Tasker, 1997; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Tasker, 2005, 1997).

Quality of Peer Relationships of Children in LGBT-Headed Families

Comparative and explorative research has been conducted in regards to the social and peer relationships of children of lesbian and gay parents. This has been undertaken largely in response to the view that children will suffer because of the discrimination that their parents face, and it has thus been deemed necessary to evaluate the view that children who do not have both a mother and a father will suffer socially as a result. Many researchers who have looked at such things as the popularity, friendships, and peer experiences of children of lesbian mothers compared to children of heterosexual parents have found no differences between groups in their sample according to the sexuality or gender of parents (e.g., Golombok, Spencer & Rutter, 1983; Golombok et al., 1997; Gonzalez et al., 2004; Green, et al., 1986). UK researchers found that children from planned lesbian-parented families, single parent families, and two heterosexual parents did not differ in their levels of peer relationship problems, as measured on standardised interviews and questionnaires (MacCallum & Golombok, 2004). Researchers from the UK Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children found that even though lesbian mothers reported that their children experienced a slightly higher (not statistically significant) level of difficulty with peers than the heterosexual parents did, the children themselves reported difficulties at the same level as did the children of heterosexual parents (Golombok et al., 2003). In keeping with this, children born into 78 lesbian-parented families via donor insemination were found to be well-adjusted and to relate well to their peers (Gartrell et al., 2000). Research on a United States nationally representative sample found that adolescent children of same-sex parents felt more connected with their school than did children of heterosexual parents (Wainright et al., 2004). In some contrast, and possibly related to children being subjected to some prejudice, the 107 teachers who responded to the anonymous survey by Bliss and Harris (1999) indicated that even though they regarded such children as more mature, tolerant and self-reliant than other children, they saw them as experiencing more problems in social interactions.

Negative Peer Experiences Related to Heterosexism and Prejudice

Although the quality of peer relationships seems to be generally similar, it seems that many children of same-sex parents, like their parents, experience homophobia and discrimination. As Lindsay and colleagues (2006) note, "children share the stigma of their parents' sexual orientation" (p. 1067). Researchers from the National Lesbian Family Study found that by 5 years of age, 18% of the children in their sample of 78 lesbian-parented families had experienced some form of discrimination or homophobia from peers or teachers (Gartrell et al., 2000), and that by the age of 10 years, this had risen to 43% (Gartrell et al., 2005).

In an Australian study, even though having lesbian parents was seen as somewhat "cool" by the teenage years, 44% of the grade 3–6 children (aged 8–12 years) had experienced teasing, bullying or derogatory language in relation to their family, and in grades 7–10 (aged 12–16 years), 45% had been bullied (Ray & Gregory, 2001). Such behaviours "ranged from verbal abuse, teasing, and joking to physical and sexual violence" (p. 8). Examples of the homophobic and stigmatising behaviour experienced by Australian children of lesbian mothers involve peers, teachers and school principals, and research indicates that such experiences have made it harder or more anxiety-provoking for some children to talk about their families with their peers or at school, that some are more reluctant to have

children to their home to visit, and that they, like their parents, develop a range of strategies to prevent being stigmatised, discriminated against, or treated poorly (Lindsay et al., 2006; Perlesz & McNair, 2004; Perlesz et al., 2006a; 2006b; Ray & Gregory, 2001; Sarantakos, 1996). Such difficulties have been reported to be less likely to occur in inner-urban, cosmopolitan areas, and in areas where there is a visible presence of families parented by same-sex couples, including in the school.

Early research conducted with adult offspring of gay men reported that they had fears that their peers would assume they themselves were gay or lesbian and react negatively (Bozett, 1987). One fifth of divorced gay fathers in Wyers' sample (cited in Tasker, 2005) reported that their children had experienced instances of prejudice and discrimination relating to their father's sexuality. Green (1998) reported that some of the 18 offspring of transgender parents who participated in his research indicated that they had been teased, but that this was fairly transient and had resolved. In research that involved an audit of a specialist clinical service, it was found that the children of transsexual parents had experienced some difficulties with peers (Freedman et al., 2002).

Recent research indicates that experiences of stigmatisation can have a negative effect on adjustment and well-being. In a longitudinal study on the children of lesbian couples who had conceived their children by donor insemination (either at home or in a fertility clinic), there was an association between having experienced homophobia or stigmatisation and higher scores on the Child Behaviour Checklist (Gartrell et al., 2005). Another study with 76 adolescents aged 11-18 years with lesbian mothers found that those who perceived greater levels of stigma had lower levels of self-esteem in five of seven areas compared to children who perceived less stigmatisation (Gershon, Tscann & Jemerin, 1999).

Research indicates that children of lesbian or gay parents, like their parents, use a range of strategies in an attempt to lessen the likelihood that they will be treated in a discriminatory or prejudiced way, including being selective in talking about and/or letting people know about the sexuality of the parents in the family or the family structure, or not correcting people's incorrect assumptions about the family, and seeking out contact with other children and families who have same-sex parents (e.g., Barrett & Tasker, 2001; Bozett, 1987; O'Connell, 1993; Ray & Gregory, 2001; Perlesz et al., 2006b; Lindsay et al., 2006; Vanfraussen, et al., 2002). However, researchers who have explicitly compared the amount of victimisation or teasing experienced by the children of lesbian parents and by the children of heterosexual parents have found no differences (see Anderssen et al., 2000; Golombok & Tasker, 1994; Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Vanfraussen et al., 2002; Wainwright & Patterson, 2006).

Issues Pertaining to Sperm Donors and Children

As this review of literature on LGBT-parented families has focused primarily on children conceived within the context of such families, it is important to highlight the complexities associated with the use of donor sperm, and the implications of this for children.

Knowledge of Donor Identity

As McNair notes, (2004, p. 60), donor-conceived children of same-sex parents "are not any different to any other donor child in that some will want to know [the donor's] identity and others will not". Some evidence suggests that children, like their parents, can find it complex and not necessarily appealing to know about or to know their donor. Just as many adopted people have no interest or no inclination to find out about or to meet their biological parents (e.g., Roche & Perlesz, 2000), this would seem to be the case with children who are donor-conceived. For example, less than a quarter of the donor-conceived offspring able to do so have to date contacted the Sperm Bank of California to find out the identity of the man who donated sperm for their conception since this became a possibility in 2005, and few have actually contacted or organised to meet the donor, even though the majority of the offspring are aware that they were donor-conceived and that they are able to find out the identity of the donor if they so choose (Sperm Bank of California, 2007). A Belgian study of children 7-17 years old who had been conceived at a fertility clinic by lesbian women, found that 54% did not want to know

any information about their donor, 19% wanted to know only non-identifying information, and 24% wanted to be able to find out identifying information about their donor (Vanfrauseen et al., 2002). However, unlike heterosexual couples who have conceived their children with assisted reproduction and in the large majority do not tell the children that they are donor-conceived (e.g., see Golombok, Brewaeys et al., 2002; Golombok, MacCallum et al., 2002), it seems that almost universally, same-sex parents do tell their children (e.g., see McNair, 2004).

Level of Contact and Relationship with Known Donors

Research indicates that the role of a known donor in the families of lesbian women is usually fairly limited, with the man being seen as a donor rather than as a parent, and contact with him usually being scant or, in many cases, non-existent (e.g., see Almack, 2005; Dempsey, 2005; Dunne, 2000; Gartrell et al., 1999; 2000; 2005, 2006; Gross, 2005; Haimes & Weiner, 2000; Hare & Richards, 1993; McNair, 2004; Patterson, 1998; Short, 2006; 2007b). For example, in the Bay Areas Family Study which included 37 families of lesbian parents, the majority had conceived with sperm from a clinic. Of the 27% who had conceived with the sperm of a known donor, more than half had had no contact in the previous year, and less than one third had seen the man twice or more (Patterson, 1998). Patterson reported that “sperm donors were not usually regarded as family members of the nuclear or extended families of lesbian mothers or their children, even though the biological connections were acknowledged” (1998, p. 171). In the U.S. National Lesbian Family Study of 78 families, 27 children had been conceived with the assistance of known donors (Gartrell et al., 2005, 2006). The majority of these children did not have contact with the sperm provider (13% saw their donors regularly, and 14% occasionally).

In Australia, a survey of women at the 2000 Sydney Lesbian Parenting Conference (at which most of the mothers would have conceived their children at a time where access to fertility clinics by women who did not have a resident male partner was either very or totally restricted, depending on where the women lived) found that 68% had conceived outside the clinic system with a donor known to them and 8% with a donor not known to them personally. Of these, 31% had no contact, 33% had ‘some contact’, 22% had ‘regular’ contact (e.g., babysitting), and 13% had ‘extensive’ contact with the known sperm provider. The majority described the relationship as one of “friendship” (see Millbank, 2003, pp. 560-561). A survey with Victorian lesbian women indicated that 34% of the donors were unknown, 8% were known to the lesbian parents but not to the child, 18% were known to the lesbian parents and the child but not involved with them, and in 40% of families, there was some level of involvement, ranging from infrequent to frequent (reported in McNair, 2004, p. 61). In recent research with 56 Australian lesbian women, approximately half had conceived or were conceiving their children with the sperm of a known donor (either at home or in a fertility clinic). In only a very small minority of those was the sperm provider regarded as a member of the family or as a parent, or provided any care for the children or any other element of a parenting relationship (Short, 2006; 2007b). Evidence to date suggests that approximately 50-70% of children who have been born to lesbian women in Australia have been conceived with the sperm from a known donor, and that up to a quarter of children who have been conceived by lesbian women in Australia have some contact with the sperm provider (Millbank, 2003). In considering this, it is important to bear in mind that in many cases the known donor is a friend of the mother(s), or a family member of the non-birth mother – which is why he was asked to donate the sperm – and that the contact between the women and the men continues within this prior pattern and relationship.

A number of recent research studies on the daily lives of lesbian women indicate that fear of conflict or actual conflict (with regard family and parenting arrangements, and conceptualisation of the family, between lesbian mothers and sperm providers) are not uncommon (e.g., Almack, 2005; Clarke & Saffron, 2006; Dempsey, 2005; Dunne, 2000; Gross, 2005; Ross, Steele & Sapiro, 2005; Ripper, 2007; Short, 2007b). Indeed, over the last ten years, courts in Australia, Canada, England, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, the USA, and possibly other countries, have dealt with conflicts between lesbian mothers and known sperm providers. However, in an Australian study that involved both

lesbian mothers who had had their children in a prior heterosexual relationship and those who had had their children as lesbian women, McNair and colleagues (2002) reported that levels of satisfaction with the relationship and with the level of contact was fairly high. For instance, of the 81 lesbian parents in Victoria (including both those with children from previous heterosexual relationships and those with children born into same-sex relationships) who reported on their relationship with their children's donors and/or fathers, 82% were very satisfied or satisfied with their arrangements, whilst fewer than 20% were not satisfied, and "there was no statistically significant difference between levels of satisfaction with 'fathers' as opposed to satisfaction with 'donors'" (p. 45). Perlesz and her colleagues (e.g., 2006a; 2006b) also found that the majority of the lesbian parents in their research (in a sample that included families with children born in previous heterosexual relationships and those with children born into same-sex relations) spoke positively about arrangements with fathers and the small number of donors in the study. It should be noted that whatever the level of satisfaction or perceived conflict or actual conflict that exists for any particular family with same-sex parents or with same-sex attracted parents, negotiating family relationships in the current legal, policy and discursive context is understandably complex.

Within the current social, legal and political framework, gay men are restricted in their pathways to intentional, planned parenting, and are limited to the following alternatives: engaging the services of overseas surrogate programs (which are extremely costly and inaccessible to most); fostering (although some agencies still have discriminatory policies excluding lesbian women and gay men which makes this more difficult); or they enter into a co-parenting arrangement with a lesbian couple or single woman. These negotiations are often complex and require a high level of communication and understanding between all adult parties involved, and for some this can be challenging and can lead to difficulties and conflict.

Conclusions

This review has provided an overview and summary of the main bodies of research about parenting by LGBT people, and located the research within the broader family studies field, which it is both informed by and informs. In keeping with the broader family studies literature, the literature discussed here indicates that the family factors that are important for children's outcomes and well-being are family processes and the quality of interactions and relationships. The research indicates that parenting practices and children's outcomes in families parented by lesbian and gay parents are likely to be at least as favourable as those in families of heterosexual parents, despite the reality that considerable legal discrimination and inequity remain significant challenges for these families. Of particular importance, this review has provided information that can assist psychologists to take an informed approach to some of the important debates that will continue to arise in Australia, as people in same-sex parented families and others advocate the removal of the remaining discrimination in laws, public policies, and social attitudes. Like many other expert and professional bodies, the APS is committed to contributing the knowledge of psychology in the public interest, and to fostering a social environment in which all children and their families experience support, recognition, and are valued, and in which discrimination and prejudice have no place.

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