

“Second Generation” Voices: Queer Youth with Lesbian/Bisexual Mothers

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Received: 5 June 2008 / Accepted: 1 August 2008
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Abstract Research on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth with LGBTQ parents is absent in the social science literature. The present qualitative, exploratory study utilized a social constructionist and queer theoretical lens through which to explore the sexual/gender identity formation and disclosure experiences of 18 LGBTQ young adults with lesbian/bisexual mothers. Findings suggest that LGBTQ parents may have a uniquely positive influence on their LGBTQ children in regard to their sexual and gender identity development. However, some participants reported perceiving societal scrutiny related to their mothers’ lesbian/bisexual identities and, thus, felt pressure to be heterosexual and gender-conforming. Furthermore, some participants did not necessarily utilize or view their lesbian/bisexual mothers as sources of support in relation to their own sexual/gender identity formation. While much more research is needed that examines the experiences of LGBTQ children with LGBTQ parents, this study represents a first step in addressing the existing literature gap.

Keywords Coming out · LGBTQ parents · LGBTQ youth · Qualitative research · Queer identity · Social constructionist

Introduction

Lesbian and gay parents and their children have received increased attention in the social science literature over the past few decades, as the legitimacy of lesbian- and gay-parent families continues to be a hotly debated topic with advocates on both sides invoking scientific research to substantiate their claims (Herek 2006). Some social scientists have explored gender and sexual identity development among children with lesbian and gay parents (e.g., Tasker and Golombok 1997) in response to the commonly held belief that lesbian and gay parents will raise children who are “confused” about their gender and sexual orientation. Although researchers have generally reported that a large majority of children with lesbian and gay parents identify as heterosexual and exhibit “normal” gender development, they acknowledge that a minority do report non-heterosexual and non-gender-conforming identities (Bailey et al. 1995; Kosciw and Diaz 2008; Tasker and Golombok 1997). This aspect of these individuals’ lives, however, is rarely discussed in depth in existing studies. Although researchers have generally “deflected analytic attention” from the differences in sexual/gender attitudes and behaviors between children of lesbian and gay parents and children of heterosexual parents (Stacey and Biblarz 2001, p. 171), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) children with LGBTQ parents do exist. In fact, non-academic writers and queer activists have been raising awareness regarding “second generation” issues for more than 15 years (Garner 2004; Kirby 1998).

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There are a number of possible reasons why social science researchers have not yet focused on queer-identified youth of queer parents.¹ First, due in part to the challenge of accessing queer-parent families (Stacey and Biblarz 2001), there are still relatively few studies of children with lesbian and gay parents in general, and even fewer studies that include children of bisexual and transgender parents. Therefore, researchers are only beginning to conduct studies that examine the lives of the majority of children with queer parents (i.e., non-LGBTQ-identified children); recruitment of “second generation” youth, a sub-group of an already difficult-to-access population, is likely to be an even greater challenge. Second, some researchers may be wary of highlighting the experiences of queer youth with queer parents for fear that critics of queer families will utilize the research as evidence for the argument against LGBTQ parenting (i.e., that LGBTQ parents will “make” their children LGBTQ; Stacey and Biblarz 2001). As a result of both of these factors, however, the experiences of this (perhaps) doubly-marginalized group of children with queer parents are overlooked. Goldberg (2007), who studied how individuals with LGB parents negotiate disclosure about their families as adults, noted that research on queer youth with queer parents “is essential, as there may be ways in which having a gay parent eases one’s own coming-out processes; alternatively, these individuals may also feel doubly marginalized and may experience greater pressure to identify as heterosexual” (p. 127).

Research is needed that explores the experiences of queer youth with queer parents, especially in regards to processes of sexual/gender identity development and disclosure; indeed, research on the psychosocial development of LGBTQ youth has focused exclusively on adolescents who are presumed to have heterosexual and gender-conforming parents. Queer identity formation can be a lengthy and arduous process for some LGBTQ youth (Savin-Williams 1996), as queer adolescents are believed to internalize negative, heterosexist messages from society and, often, family (Morrow 2004). Disclosure to others, especially heterosexual and gender-conforming parents, has been found to be a difficult task for many queer youth in that they (realistically) fear rejection (Savin-Williams 1996). In turn, LGBTQ individuals may experience feelings of isolation (Williams et al. 2005) which may contribute to mental health problems. For example, research suggests that queer adolescents may be at increased risk for emotional difficulties such as depression,

and destructive behaviors such as substance abuse (Morrow 2004). With no existing studies focusing on queer youth with queer parents, it is unknown whether these findings can be generalized to this sub-population and/or whether queer youth with queer parents experience unique challenges and/or advantages as a function of their particular circumstances. Indeed, a recent survey by Kosciw and Diaz (2008) on the school experiences of LGBT parents and their children found that, not surprisingly, LGBT-identified youth reported more experiences of harassment than the non-LGBT youth; however, notably, these LGBT youth with LGBT parents were more likely to report those incidents of victimization to their parents than were LGBT youth with heterosexual parents in previous surveys (Kosciw and Diaz 2008). Thus, although queer youth with queer parents may face discrimination in relation to their own and/or their parents’ sexual orientation or gender identity, they may have more familial support than queer youth with heterosexual parents to help them cope (Kosciw and Diaz 2008).

The lack of attention to the experiences of queer youth with queer parents leaves many questions unanswered. For example, what is it like to identify as LGBTQ when one also has LGBTQ parents? What is it like to “come out” to oneself, as well as one’s parents? Do queer parents serve as positive role models for these youth, thereby acting as protective buffers against societal heterosexism? In an effort to shed some light on the answers to these questions and to initiate a scholarly discussion regarding this understudied group, the present, qualitative study is a secondary data analysis that explored the experiences of 18 LGBTQ young adults with lesbian and bisexual mothers.

Theoretical Framework

The current study utilizes an integrated theoretical framework that draws from social constructionist and queer theories to explore the experiences of “second generation” young adults. A social constructionist approach views families, sexuality, and gender as socially and materially constructed (Oswald et al. 2005) and contests the heteronormative practice of legitimating only those relationships that are based on biological and legal ties (Dunne 2000). A social constructionist perspective does not reduce sexual feelings and gender identity to essential qualities with which a child is born; rather, a diverse range of factors are acknowledged as impacting behavior and identity, including biological (Hines 2004) and social processes (Kitzinger 1987). Indeed, according to a social constructionist approach, individuals use their available social context to understand, create meaning out of, and assign labels to their experiences, behaviors, and

¹ *Queer* is used throughout this paper as a general term to refer to “any person who transgresses traditional categories of gender or sexuality” (Burdge 2007, p. 244), thus including all LGBTQ persons; it is also used to refer to some individual participants’ identities when they specifically utilized the term to describe themselves.

identities. Sexual identity formation in particular is understood as an interactive and continual process that occurs between the individual and their social environment (Horowitz 2001). From this perspective, some children of queer parents may ultimately identify as queer because of shared genetic or biological influences, and/or social processes in their environment that permit gender non-conformity and/or same-sex exploration without fear of punishment or censure. Likewise, the unique familial environment of queer youth may ultimately influence their coming out processes, such that they may experience coming out as easier (or harder) because of their parents' sexual/gender identities.

Queer theory is a theoretical framework that can be used to deconstruct the binaries of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and real families/pseudo families, and it has the capacity to reveal the complexity of family, sexuality, and gender relations (Oswald et al. 2005). Queer theorists (e.g., Oswald et al. 2005) have argued for a more critical and nuanced examination of heteronormativity as an ideology that treats traditional gender roles, heterosexuality, and the nuclear, biologically-related family as normative. "Queering," in turn, refers to ideas, perspectives, and behaviors that resist heteronormativity by contesting gender, sexuality, and/or family binaries (Oswald et al. 2005). It is possible that LGBTQ children of LGBTQ parents may "queer the family" in interesting, undocumented, and complex ways, as a function of their familial environment (i.e., an environment in which non-heterosexuality is not likely to be stigmatized). For example, they may resist traditional, heteronormative self-descriptions of "male" and "female," preferring to describe and enact their gender identities in more nuanced ways. Similarly, they may also challenge traditional notions of sexuality, rejecting self-labels of "gay" and "straight" and choosing to define their sexuality in rich and innovative ways. At the same time, they are inevitably influenced by multiple contexts outside the family. How they balance and negotiate these contexts (and, in turn, societal valuing of heterosexuality and gender norms) with their family experiences are unknown and of interest.

Prior to describing our study methods and results, a brief overview of the literature on the gender development and sexual orientation of children with lesbian and gay parents will be provided. This literature suggests that in many ways, these children's gender and sexuality development appears to unfold similarly to that of children of heterosexual parents, but that in some ways, their development may be uniquely shaped by having queer parents. In turn, this literature provides a context for exploring and speculating about the experiences of queer youth, whose experiences have been understudied and perhaps even avoided by researchers.

Gender Development

Parental sexual orientation does not seem to be a relevant indicator of successful child development (Patterson 2006), as studies comparing children with lesbian and gay parents and those raised by heterosexual parents have revealed few differences in cognitive functioning and school achievement (Wainright et al. 2004), behavioral adjustment (Brewaeys et al. 1997), and social and emotional development (Golombok et al. 1997). Researchers have also explored two aspects of gender development among children with lesbian and gay parents: gender identity and gendered role behavior. *Gender identity* concerns self-identification as female or male, and *gendered roles* refers to those behaviors and attitudes that are regarded by a particular culture as appropriately female or male (Bem 1974). It is important to point out the values and biases that may be inherent in research questions that explore these aspects of children's gender development. For example, assessment of gender role behavior in order to determine whether or not children are developing satisfactorily assumes there are behaviors and roles that are appropriate and "normal" for females and males, and, therefore, affirms and reinforces gender-role stereotypes (Fitzgerald 1999). However, at the same time, studies that have explored the gender development of children with lesbian and gay parents are important, as they have helped to debunk myths about LGBTQ-parent families (Fitzgerald 1999; Stacey and Biblarz 2001).

Indeed, studies that focus on gender development have found no differences regarding gender identification between children of lesbian parents and children of heterosexual parents (Golombok et al. 1983; Gottman 1990; Green et al. 1986), and have found "appropriate" displays of gendered behaviors/attitudes among children of lesbian parents (Brewaeys et al. 1997; Golombok et al. 1983, 2003; Gottman 1990; MacCallum and Golombok 2004). A few studies, however, have found some group differences in gendered role behavior/attitudes; for example, Green et al. (1986) reported that girls of lesbian mothers were more likely to prefer some boy-typical activities (e.g., playing with trucks) and to aspire to male-typed careers (e.g., doctor, lawyer) compared to daughters of heterosexual mothers. In a study comparing 29 children of lesbian mothers with 28 children of heterosexual parents, boys and girls were asked to assess the acceptability of gender transgressions committed by other children (Sutfin et al. 2008). Children of lesbian mothers held less traditional gendered role attitudes than the children of heterosexual parents; importantly, lesbian mothers also reported more liberal attitudes about gender than heterosexual parents. It should be noted that the majority of these studies on gender development have been conducted with *young children* of

lesbian parents; few studies have explored gender-identification among adolescents or young adults with LGBTQ parents.

Sexual Orientation

A number of studies have explored sexual orientation identification of children with lesbian and gay parents, in the interest of determining whether these children are more likely to identify as non-heterosexual than children of heterosexual parents. A value judgment seems to underlie this research question, in that it suggests that it is “bad” if children of queer parents turn out to be non-heterosexual (Fitzgerald 1999). Indeed, Herek (2006) noted that the relevance of this question to children’s psychosocial adjustment is “dubious because homosexuality is neither an illness nor a disability, and the mental health professions do not regard a homosexual or bisexual orientation as harmful, undesirable, or requiring intervention or prevention” (p. 613). That said, the existing research nevertheless suggests that lesbian and gay parents are no more likely than heterosexual parents to raise queer children. Studies report that the vast majority of youth/adults with lesbian/gay parents identify as heterosexual, and/or are no different from youth/adults with heterosexual parents in regards to experiences of same-sex attraction (Bailey et al. 1995; Gottman 1990; Tasker and Golombok 1997; Wainright et al. 2004). Inevitably, some studies (the majority of which utilized convenience sampling) indicate that some children of lesbian and gay parents do identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. In most cases, these numbers do not tend to exceed population-based estimates (Patterson 1997); where they do, it is possibly a function of the volunteer nature of the sampling strategy. Until large, population-based studies that intentionally include children of both heterosexual and same-sex couples are available, it will be impossible to draw definitive conclusions about whether LGBTQ parents are more likely than heterosexual parents to have LGBTQ children.

One previous study, however, did reveal complex findings regarding the sexual orientation of children of lesbian parents. Tasker and Golombok (1997) compared 25 young adults with lesbian divorced mothers with 21 young adults with heterosexual divorced mothers. Study findings revealed no significant differences between groups with respect to sexual identity or experiences of same-sex sexual attraction. However, young adults from lesbian families were more likely to have considered the possibility of having a same-sex relationship and to have actually been involved in a same-sex relationship. Tasker and Golombok suggested that, consistent with a social constructionist perspective, having a lesbian mother appeared to broaden young adults’ views about their potential sexual

relationships (i.e., they were open to the possibility of entering into a same-sex relationship).

Although Tasker and Golombok (1997) found no significant differences between young adults with lesbian mothers and young adults with heterosexual mothers in relation to self-reported sexual orientation, of interest are the two participants with lesbian mothers who identified as non-heterosexual. These two participants reported that having a lesbian mother “helped them to come out as lesbian” (p. 112) by providing an atmosphere of acceptance. One participant said “I think it’s made it easier for me to have, yeah, lesbian relationships. Because other friends have had horrendous times telling their parents.... I haven’t had problems like that” (p. 113). This same participant went on to say that having lesbian parents made it “very easy for me to accept that I can have feelings like that and not hide them” (p. 113). Perhaps having a queer parent, as opposed to heterosexual parents, makes the processes of queer identity formation and disclosure easier and less stressful in terms of expected familial reactions and acceptance. To explore this possibility, more research on the sexual and gender identity development among children with lesbian and gay parents is needed.

Research Questions

Our social constructionist/queer theoretical perspective led us to wonder, at the most general level, about how queer youth with queer parents subjectively interpret and construct their own sexual and gender identities, and to what extent their unique social context (e.g., the presence of queer parents) served to impact these constructions by “queering” their very notions of gender and sexuality. Thus, the following two research questions framed the data analysis for the current study:

1. (How) is one’s queer identity formation and disclosure influenced by having queer parents?
2. (How) does societal heteronormativity influence identity formation and disclosure among queer youth with queer parents?

Method

The current study is a secondary data analysis, the data for which were drawn from two separate qualitative research projects. The first author conducted a study that was designed to explore the experiences of young adults (ages 18–25) raised by lesbian mothers, with a specific focus on how they navigated experiences of heterosexism during adolescence. Of this group, 13 participants (of 32) identified as LGBTQ by adulthood. The second author conducted

a study of 46 adults (ages 18 and above) with LGB parents; the focus was also on their experiences growing up, with special attention to experiences of coming out/disclosing about their parents' sexual orientation. Of this group, eight identified as LGBTQ. Given the open-ended nature of the questions that were asked by both investigators, all participants had the opportunity (if they desired) to reflect on the intersections between their own sexual orientation and gender identity and that of their parents. As the data revealed, many individuals did choose to comment on and reflect upon such intersections. These two sub-samples, then, were combined and a subset analysis (Radina and Downs 2005) was performed.

All 13 of the queer-identified participants from the first author's original study, and five of the eight queer-identified participants from the second author's original study, were included in the present study. Three participants from the second author's original study were not included, because: (a) after reading through transcripts, it was determined that one participant had participated in both authors' studies; and (b) two participants in the second author's subset were considerably older than the rest of the participants (48 and 50 years old; 13 years older than the next oldest participant); this age discrepancy became apparent when one of these participants spoke about how, while she was growing up, homosexuality was still considered a disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. This contextual factor was deemed significant enough to warrant the dropping of these two participants.

Subsequently, the total sample for the present study consisted of 18 young adults (ages 18–35 years; $M = 23.2$ years; $SD = 4.22$). See Table 1 for a summary of each participant's background information. Regarding gender, 11 participants were female, three were male, and four were transgender; of the four transgender participants, three identified specifically as "genderqueer" and one as "gender-ambiguous." The term *genderqueer* refers to individuals who identify as neither male nor female, and who may have some combination of masculine and feminine traits, and/or who view their gender as "unidentifiable in U.S. culture" (Wyss 2004, p. 714). Regarding sexual orientation/identity, one participant identified as lesbian, three as gay, seven as bisexual, one as "mildly bisexual," five as queer, and one as a "tranny-dyke." Sixteen participants had lesbian mothers, one had a bisexual mother, and one participant had one lesbian mother and one bisexual mother. The majority of participants ($n = 13$) were born into a heterosexual union and had mothers who subsequently came out as lesbian/bisexual, while three participants were born via donor insemination to their two lesbian/bisexual mothers, and two were born to single lesbian mothers. The vast majority ($n = 17$) of the participants were White/Caucasian; one participant identified

as biracial (Chicano and White). In terms of where participants lived during their childhood/adolescence, six participants grew up in the Northeast (MA, NY, or PA), six participants lived in the West (CA, OR, or WA), three lived in the South (FL or VA), two grew up in the Midwest (OH), and one was from the United Kingdom. In terms of highest level of education attained, one participant had earned her Ph.D., eight had received undergraduate degrees (two of whom were currently in graduate school at the time of data collection); eight had completed high school (five of whom were currently in college); and one participant had left high school after the 10th grade.

Participants were recruited via both purposive and snowball sampling. Both authors advertised their studies through COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), a non-profit organization run by and for children of LGBTQ parents, as well as Families Like Mine, another organization (now defunct) for children of queer parents. Both authors also advertised their studies in numerous PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) chapters throughout the country, as well as through Rainbow Families, an organization serving LGB-parent families in the Midwest. People were asked to share study information with individuals who might qualify for participation. Both researchers included their contact information in the study description, and interested individuals were asked to contact them for more information. At that point, the study was explained to the participant. If interested and eligible, participants were mailed a consent form assuring confidentiality and detailing the conditions of participation, and an interview was scheduled.

All participants completed a one-on-one, in-depth telephone or in-person interview that followed a semi-structured interview format. Participants were asked to describe their families and to answer questions, such as "How did you feel about having a lesbian parent during middle/high school?", "How open were you with others about having a LGB parent?", and "How did growing up with an LGB parent influence who you are today?" The second author specifically asked her participants how their sexual and gender identities were (or were not) influenced by having queer parents. Participants came to share their own sexual and gender identities in the context of answering these questions. Length of interviews ranged from 45 min to 2 h, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect confidentiality; these pseudonyms are utilized in this report.

After informally discussing our individual studies, both authors agreed that, given the paucity of research on the experiences of "second generation" queer persons, it would be interesting and worthwhile to combine subsets of our data and to more deeply analyze the experiences of

Table 1 Summary of participants

Name*	Age	Gender identity	Sexual identity	Family context
Amy	20	Female	Queer	Born to a single lesbian mother; Amy lived with her mother during her childhood and adolescence; although Amy's mom was out before Amy was born, Amy became fully aware of her mother's sexuality when she was 11 years old; mom had female partner during Amy's adolescence; Amy's heterosexual father was involved in her life
Charlie	22	Male	Gay	Born into a heterosexual union; parents divorced when he was 5 years old; Charlie lived with lesbian mother, who remained single throughout his childhood/adolescence; he became fully aware of his mother's sexuality when he was 11 years old; his heterosexual father was actively involved in his life
Christina**	24	Female	Bisexual	Born via donor insemination to a single lesbian mother; her mother had several long-term female partners during her childhood; she lived with her mother throughout her childhood and adolescence
David	23	Male	Bisexual	Born via donor insemination to two lesbian mothers who were together throughout his childhood and adolescence; David's donor has been involved in David's life
Eve**	31	Female	Bisexual	Born into a heterosexual union; parents divorced when Eve was three; her mother came out to her when she was four in the context of meeting and moving in with a female partner; Eve lived with her mother throughout childhood/adolescence; her father was very involved in Eve's life and is supportive of her sexuality
Jason	19	Genderqueer	Gay	Born into a heterosexual union; parents separated before Jason was born; Jason lived with lesbian mother throughout childhood/adolescence; Jason became aware of mother's sexuality at 7 years old; Jason's father has not been involved in Jason's life
Jesse	22	Genderqueer	Queer	Born into a heterosexual union; parents divorced when Jesse was 1 yr old; Jesse lived with mother and mother's female partners throughout Jesse's childhood; Jesse became aware of mother's sexuality at 4 years old; younger sibling to Nora; Jesse and Nora's heterosexual father was somewhat involved in their lives
Kara	18	Gender-ambiguous	Bisexual	Born via donor insemination to one lesbian mother and one bisexual mother; Kara's moms were together throughout Kara's childhood and adolescence; Kara's donor has been somewhat involved in Kara's life
Kim	22	Female	Queer	Born into a heterosexual union; parents divorced when she was 6 years old; Kim lived with mother and mother's female partners throughout her childhood/adolescence; she became aware of her mother's sexuality when she was in elementary school; Kim's heterosexual father was involved in her life
Laura	23	Female	Bisexual	Born into a heterosexual union; parents divorced when she was 12 years old—she also became aware of her mother's sexuality at this time; she lived with mother and mother's female partner throughout rest of her adolescence; Laura's heterosexual father was involved in her life as a primary caretaker
Lisa	25	Female	Mildly bisexual	Born into a heterosexual union; parents divorced when Lisa was 5 years old; her mom came out to her when she was 6 years old; Lisa lived with mother and mother's female partner throughout her childhood and adolescence; her heterosexual father was actively involved in her life
Marni**	22	Female	Lesbian	Born into a heterosexual union; parents divorced when Marni was 10 after her mother had a relationship with a woman (and thus came out); Marni lived with her mother and her mother's partner throughout her childhood/adolescence
Nora	24	Female	Queer	Born into a heterosexual union; parents divorced when Nora was 3 years old; Nora lived with her mother and her mother's partners throughout her childhood/adolescence; she became aware of mother's sexuality at about age 4; older sibling to Jesse
Rachel	18	Female	Bisexual	Born into a heterosexual union; parents separated before she was born; Rachel lived with her lesbian/bisexual mother and her mother's female partner during her childhood/adolescence; she became aware of her mother's sexuality in early elementary school; Rachel's father was not involved in her life
Shelley**	35	Female	Bisexual	Born into a heterosexual union; mother is bisexual and came out to Shelley when Shelley was in college; Shelley lived with her mother throughout her childhood and adolescence. Shelley had a distant relationship with her father during her youth and adolescence
Tara**	26	Female	Queer	Born into a heterosexual union; mother came out when Tara was 15 and mother simultaneously divorced Tara's father and began a relationship with a female partner. Her father is somewhat involved in her life but is unsupportive of her sexuality

Table 1 continued

Name*	Age	Gender identity	Sexual identity	Family context
Terry	22	Genderqueer	Tranny-dyke	Born via donor insemination to two lesbian mothers who were together throughout Terry's childhood and adolescence; donor somewhat involved in Terry's life during adolescence
Tom	22	Male	Gay	Born into a heterosexual union; parents separated when he was 4 years old; Tom lived with his mother and his mother's female partner throughout his childhood/adolescence; he always remembers being aware of his mother's sexuality; his heterosexual father and step-mother were also involved in his life

* Pseudonym

** Participant from the second author's original study

participants who identified as LGBTQ. We shared our respective interview transcripts with one another and proceeded with analysis; themes that emerged across all participants were identified. Data analysis consisted of both open and focused coding (Charmaz 2002), whereby themes of interest emerged. Each author began the coding process separately and then came together to discuss and construct a formal coding scheme. Each author then applied the coding scheme to the data and then came together again to compare findings. The final coding scheme was revised further until both authors were satisfied that the coding scheme and resulting themes accurately reflected the study data.

Results

Several themes emerged from the data as participants described a diverse range of experiences related to queer identity formation and disclosure (i.e., coming out). Major themes were in relation to: (a) discovering one's own sexual/gender identity; (b) experiencing pressures and fears resulting from societal scrutiny and heterosexism; and (c) the role of parental social support in identity formation and disclosure. These major themes, as well sub-themes, are described below.

Discovering One's Own Sexual/Gender Identity

Nine out of the 18 participants articulated their sense that having queer parents had necessarily influenced their discovery of their own sexual/gender identity, typically by contrasting how things "would have been" if they had heterosexual parents with the reality of how their identity formation had actually unfolded. Laura, who identified as bisexual, said: "I definitely think that...addressing my own sexuality would have been a really different thing for me if my parents hadn't been queer." Specifically, three of these nine participants expressed that they felt they had discovered their sexual/gender identity sooner than they would have if they had been raised by heterosexual parents. These

participants believed that having queer parents allowed them to explore and question their sexual/gender identities at a younger age than other youth, which facilitated self-discovery of their own queerness. For example, Marni, who identified as a lesbian, stated: "I think that having a gay parent made me question my own sexuality a lot earlier than most." In addition, awareness of and contact with other queer people were cited by these participants as facilitating an easier and earlier self-discovery of one's own queerness. Jesse, who identified as genderqueer and queer, explained:

If I hadn't had queer moms, it might have taken me a lot longer to come out as queer. And thus as trans, because I wouldn't have been hanging out with queer kids who were talking about gender theory and whatever.

Also related to the major theme of discovering one's own queer identity, seven of these nine participants reported that their parents provided them with more broad and fluid conceptualizations of sexual and gender identities than they may have otherwise been exposed to. For example, Kim, who identified as queer, noted: "[My mom] definitely, like, gave me a wider picture of what my sexuality could be." Tara, who also identified as queer, explained: "I was raised with an openness.... My mom was always like, 'people are people.' Because I never thought it (homosexuality) was wrong, I was more open to the possibility." Thus, Kim, Tara, and others spoke to ways in which their growing-up experiences had necessarily "queered" their notions of sexuality and gender (Oswald et al. 2005), permitting consideration of a broad range of sexualities and gender identifications.

Navigating Societal Scrutiny and Heterosexism: Pressures and Fears

While some participants felt that discovering their sexual/gender identities was made easier by having queer parents, 10 participants reported perceiving or experiencing

pressure and/or feelings of fear related to their identity formation and disclosure.

Pressure to be Heterosexual/Gender-Conforming

Eight of these 10 participants experienced real or perceived pressure *not* to be queer, or to delay their coming out. For example, Kim said: “I think I felt extra pressure around that; since my mom was gay I had to be very straight.” Amy, who identified as queer, described her feelings as a pressure to be perfect, which in our heterosexist society also included identifying as heterosexual:

I received a lot of, “Oh, so that’s why you’re queer,” or “That’s why you’re gay.” ...Feeling this need to justify her all the time and feeling kind of bad sometimes that I’m not like the perfect kid was hard. I wanted to be like, ‘See? Lesbian parents do good!’

Four of these eight participants explained this pressure in terms of not wanting to fit a stereotype and, thus, prove the critics of queer parenting right: i.e., that queer parents do indeed raise queer children. David, who identified as bisexual, shared how his knowledge of this stereotype affected his queer identity formation: “I do feel to some extent I didn’t want to be gay because that just proves the stereotype true that gay parents will raise a gay child and shouldn’t be allowed to have children.” Terry, who identified as genderqueer and a tranny-dyke, explained further:

For me, one of the most difficult things was that, when I was born there was an article in the paper about it. The (name of newspaper) did a big photo essay journalistic piece, and people wrote angry letters to the editor talking about how they were going to turn me gay, and I’d be confused about my gender. And I think the most difficult thing for me coming out was dealing with the fact that I was somehow proving them right.

Thus, some participants internalized the heterosexism that existed in their social environments—which in Terry’s case, manifested itself in the form of letters to the editor—and thereby contributed to feelings of shame on the part of participants.

Four of these eight participants also expressed explicit annoyance and/or feelings of disempowerment in relation to the commonplace assumption that their sexual/gender identities were necessarily related to their parents’ sexual orientations (i.e., that they were queer because their parents were queer). For example, Amy shared her feelings by stating that

That’s something that’s really been pushed on me—like, “You’re like this because of your mom,” which

feels, like, really disempowering in a lot of ways. And I think that is probably the thing that has hurt the most...just this feeling of like, my claim to my identity is being taken away.

Thus, Amy seems to reject the shame that others’ assumptions might impose upon her, yet she still feels disempowered as she tries to claim her identity. Marni was also affected by this assumption and, in turn, avoided telling others that her mother was gay in order to keep them from “jumping to conclusions”:

I don’t really like to tell partners about my family context. I am always wary that people will leap to the conclusion that I am only gay because my mom is gay, and that bothers me since I feel that the two are completely unconnected.

Thus, some participants’ awareness of societal scrutiny regarding their family context led them to experience intrapersonal conflict regarding whether (and when) to come out about themselves and/or their families (Goldberg 2007), thereby adding unique complexity to the already-challenging process of coming out.

Fears Due to Heterosexism

Somewhat different from experiencing feelings of real or perceived pressure to be straight related to societal scrutiny, two of these 10 participants described specific fears related to identity formation and disclosure that stemmed from perceived and/or anticipated heterosexism. Eve, who identified as bisexual, had witnessed discrimination against queer people and did not want that for herself:

[My own sexual identity formation] was really challenging—part of the assumption was, it’s easy to figure out your sexuality if your mom is a lesbian! I realized my attraction to women and was like, “I am NOT taking this on as an adult!” I was also attracted to men, and I was like, “Thank God.” I had internalized that stuff. I didn’t want it to be true. I didn’t want to take on that homophobia.... I didn’t have any problem with it, but I had no desire to take on a life of homophobia.

Thus, despite others’ assumptions that having a lesbian mother would make it “easy” for Eve to understand and articulate her own sexuality, Eve’s awareness of heterosexism, as well as her own internalized heterosexism, seemed to complicate the formation of her sexual identity.

Similarly, Tom, who identified as gay, had grown up hearing his heterosexual father and stepmother make homophobic comments about his lesbian mother, which in

turn made Tom wary of coming out to them. Tom shared a conversation he had with his father and stepmother:

I said, “These are the things that hurt me, and these were the reasons why I never felt comfortable talking to you about anything. You know, I had preconceived notions about what you would think about me from hearing about what you thought or said about my mom and [her partner].”

Thus, queer youth with queer parents are inevitably confronted with the heterosexism their parents face. In turn, some, if not most, understand they may face similar struggles, which may cause ambivalence or fear about coming out to their families, friends, and society.

Identity Formation and Disclosure: The Role of Parental Social Support

Parents as Sources of Support

Out of the 18 total participants, six emphasized the ways in which their queer parents had served as sources of social support, either directly or indirectly, thereby helping participants to embrace their own sexual/gender identities and to “be themselves” around their parents. Two of these participants felt having queer parents helped them to accept their own sexual/gender identities more easily. Kara, who identified as gender-ambiguous and bisexual, explained:

I don’t know if I’d be out [if I had heterosexual parents], and I don’t know if I’d be okay with it (bisexuality). In fact, I doubt that I’d be out or okay with it. I mean, even having gay parents, it took me a little while to come to terms with it.

Thus, Kara acknowledges that regardless of who one’s parents are, it is difficult to escape the societal stigma associated with non-heterosexuality, and, thus, to “come to terms with” one’s sexuality. However, her self-acceptance was indeed facilitated by the fact that her parents themselves were queer; thus, her parents’ identification (and perhaps their support and acceptance) served to neutralize the powerful homonegative messages that Kara inevitably received from society (Oswald et al. 2005). Laura further elaborated this point by sharing how her mother’s partner (Laura’s “other mother”) was able to identify with and relate to Laura’s feelings of same-sex attraction, thereby “normalizing” those feelings:

I remember talking to my mom’s girlfriend about having a crush on this girl on the lacrosse team.... I don’t think that she was like, “Really? Girls?” I think she was just like, “Yeah, I remember that—in high school having a crush on a girl.” ...Basically relating

with me and being like, “Yeah, I understand, and it’s okay.”

Prior to coming out to their parents, two of these six participants were comforted by their belief that their queer parents would not reject them upon learning about the participants’ sexual/gender identity. Charlie, a gay man with a lesbian mother, expressed how this knowledge benefited him: “I didn’t have that added fear of rejection from my mother, because no matter what, it was always like, there’s no way she can reject me.” Kara explained why she also did not fear coming out to her parents about her sexuality: “Having gay parents means that the kid is willing to experiment and will know that their parents will accept them no matter what. No gay parent would ever be angry at you for choosing one sexuality.” Thus, at least some queer youth with queer parents feel that, given their unique familial context in which non-heterosexual identities are de-stigmatized and accepted, they have to worry less about parental rejection upon coming out than queer youth with heterosexual parents.

Similarly, two of the six participants who described how their parents provided them with social support expressed happiness and relief that they could “be themselves” around their parents, who accepted, understood, and embraced their sexual/gender identities. Shelley, who identified as bisexual and whose mother was also bisexual, stated: “I’m glad to have a parent who can relate around this issue...it’s nice having a parent that you don’t have to explain queer stuff to.” Tara also felt this way and compared her situation to that of queer youth with heterosexual parents:

Being queer myself, having gay parents is such a blessing...it made so much of a difference. I can bring people home. I can bring friends home. They are so welcoming and loving.... I feel more confident that my partners will be accepted by my parents...than many LGBT folk do.

Thus, Tara recognizes that the support and acceptance that she receives from her family is unique, and not necessarily typical of queer youth. In this way, she expresses gratitude that she has been “bless[ed]” with queer parents, as someone who happens to be queer herself.

Finally, two of these six participants also felt their parents helped them learn how to deal with discrimination and societal heterosexism by acting as positive role models and offering emotional understanding and support. For example, when asked how she has been able to resist internalizing the heterosexist messages she perceived from society, Kara replied, referring to her lesbian moms, “I’ve had really good role models that have always told me just to not listen to them.” Kara went on to say: “It makes for a

much more open family, a family that understands your struggle more...because they've gone through so much discrimination being gay, they understand a lot more."

Why Might Parents Not be Utilized/Viewed as Sources of Support?

While it may seem intuitive that queer parents would serve as sources of positive support for their queer children, 11 participants did not necessarily look to their queer parents for guidance regarding their sexual/gender identity formation. For example, five of these 11 participants mentioned books (e.g., *Stone Butch Blues*) and/or the Internet as primary sources for queer information (e.g., information about gay identity formation, same-sex dating, same-sex sexuality, etc.), rather than their parents. The fact that participants were typically in the middle of their adolescence when forming their LGBTQ identities perhaps may help to explain why these youth did not necessarily go to their parents for support: It is considered typical for adolescents to develop independence and autonomy from their parents during this time (Hurrelmann 1996). Other potential reasons for participants' lack of reliance on parents as a source of support emerged from the data, including (a) factors related to gender and general familial communication patterns, (b) a "queer generation gap," and (c) parental reactions to participants' identity disclosure.

Gender Differences and Family Communication

Gender differences between lesbian mothers and their sons appeared to play a role in why three of these queer youth (two gay men and one bisexual man) did not seek out their parents as primary sources of support during their sexual identity development. Tom recalled his mother's negative response to finding out that he had been exploring same-sex pornography on the Internet:

When I came out to my mom and [my mom's partner] at the very end of middle school, both of them, who were completely computer illiterate, managed to get onto my (on-line Internet) account, and boy, did that just unravel all sorts of things. And I was trying to tell my mom that I think a *lot* of middle school boys are looking at pornography, and it's probably not that unusual, but she wouldn't have known that.

Thus, Tom experienced frustration with his mothers' lack of awareness that looking at pornography was just something that, from his perspective, a lot of boys did. Indeed, even though gay male pornography is often viewed as a learning tool for young men who are realizing their homosexual/bisexual orientations (Kendall 2004), it has also raised controversy within LGBTQ communities in that

it is often regarded as inconsistent with feminist/lesbian politics (Jensen 2004). In this way, Tom may have realistically anticipated a negative reaction from his lesbian mothers regarding the ways in which he was exploring his (male) homosexuality. Thus, although Tom and the other male participants had their non-heterosexual identities in common with their mothers, this may not have been enough to bridge gender differences that existed between them.

However, it seems that for Tom and two other participants, perhaps an even more influential factor than gender differences was the lack of open communication about their mothers' sexuality and/or other such topics within their households. In the absence of frank discussion about one's parent's sexuality, participants found it difficult to talk openly about their own sexuality, or the stigma that they endured related to their sexuality. For example, although Tom knew his mother and her partner were lesbians from a young age, the topic was rarely discussed. Alluding to this, Tom spoke about why he did not seek out help for the harassment he was experiencing from peers who suspected he was gay:

I never told my mother or [my mother's partner]...about any of those things. And when I think about it, I think a lot of the reason I didn't address those things is because I was afraid to bring up the issue of [my mom's partner] and my mother, because I never really talked about that either.

Thus, gender differences between queer parents and queer children (and, therefore, the complex politics and intersections that accompany *male* homosexuality/bisexuality and *female* homosexuality/bisexuality) may influence the degree to which parents are experienced as sources of support and information during the critical period of sexual identity formation and coming out. However, other factors, such as general familial communication and, perhaps, parents' internalized homophobia, may also be operative.

A "Queer Generation Gap"

Three participants did not perceive their parents as playing an actively supportive role in their identity development due to what they described as a "queer generation gap" which existed between themselves and their parents. This generational gap referred to the changes in cultural context that had taken place since participants' parents were growing up as queer youth. Shelley described why she believed that her mother was not always supportive of her choice to be very "out" and "proud":

[A] queer generation gap made it hard for Mom when I wanted to be out—she had a 1950s notion of how

openly queer people were treated, and she was scared when I marched at Pride or joined the LGBTA at school.

For Shelley, then, this “queer generation gap” was manifest in her mother’s fears for Shelley’s safety; in turn, Shelley and her mother differed in their beliefs about the importance of—and consequences of—being out. For another participant, this queer generational gap was related to the timing of the parent’s coming out: Jesse’s mother came out as a lesbian in adulthood—much later than Jesse, who identified as queer from a young age. This gap in the timing of their coming out was significant for Jesse:

It didn’t occur to me to ever connect my coming out with my mom’s, because my mom, like, she didn’t come out to herself as queer until she was 25. So it was like, it didn’t occur to me to ask her what is was like or, like, ask for her for support, because I just thought like 25 is a grown up, and that’s just a whole different world—you can just come out, and nobody can give you shit, ‘cause you’re a grown up.

For both Shelley and Jesse, then, these generational or cohort differences in queer experiences at times seemed to “trump” the fact that they shared non-heterosexual identities in common with their parents.

Parental Reactions to Participants’ Disclosure

Seven of the 11 participants who did not view their queer parents as key sources of support were somewhat disappointed with their queer parents’ reactions upon the disclosure of the participants’ sexual/gender identities. Indeed, these participants viewed their parents’ reactions as less than fully supportive. Specifically, four participants described parental reactions of worry and fear (i.e., parents expressed concern that their children would have to struggle with heterosexism and homophobia in their lives). Amy shared her mother’s response to her disclosure:

Well, I came out to my mom when I was like 12, and she was not happy with me at all about that. She told me basically: “It’s hard, people are going to make fun of you, people are going to dislike you.” ...Yeah, I was really disappointed.... The first thing she said was, “Don’t tell anyone.” What do you mean don’t tell anyone? ...Like any mother, she wishes that my life could be easier than hers. I think that she really wishes that I wouldn’t [be queer], and she very much sees it as bringing trouble on myself and into my life.

Charlie had a similar experience when he came out to his mother. Like Amy, over time Charlie was able to understand the reason for his mother’s reaction:

My mother said to me, “I wish, if there’s anything in the world I wish, I wish you weren’t gay.” ...That wasn’t what I was expecting, but now I can go back and make meaning and...really try and understand, as a mother, where she was coming from.

Thus, both Amy and Charlie ultimately came to understand that their parents’ fears reflected a desire to protect their children; however, when these participants initially disclosed to their parents, they had hoped for a more supportive and positive reaction than they received.

Three of the seven participants who perceived their parents’ reactions to coming out as unsupportive identified as genderqueer or gender-ambiguous and felt that their parents did not fully understand these gender identities. Jason explained: “I don’t really think [my mother] understands it. She’s never really been exposed to anything other than the gender binary system.” Indeed, two of these participants described their parents as accepting of the participants’ non-heterosexual orientations but less celebratory of their gender identities. Kara illustrated this point when responding to a question about what it was like to come out to her parents as bisexual:

They were happy. At that time I had a boyfriend, and they were afraid I was going to close myself off to one gender. And they wanted me to live my life and make sure I experienced as many things as possible. So they were very happy when I came out with that. The gender ambiguity, I’m not sure they’re so happy about, but they don’t talk about it.... They’re both feminist. And I think that they don’t want me to think that I’m a man and a woman. I think they want me to be a woman and just realize that there are many forms of a woman, which I agree with, but I don’t think I necessarily fit into any of them. Or that I should have to fit into any of them.... I think they honestly think they’re accepting, and they don’t realize that they’re not helping by saying that I’ll find my definition of a woman, because I don’t necessarily want to find my definition as a woman. And they’re trying to make me feel better when I feel fine the way I am.

Thus, while LGB parents may be open and accepting of their children’s non-heterosexual identities, some of these parents may not necessarily understand or embrace their children’s transgender or gender-queer/ambiguous identities. This finding is consistent with research evidence indicating that transgender people often encounter misunderstanding, resistance, and exclusion within the broader gay/lesbian community (Morris 2005).

Lastly, two of the seven participants who expressed disappointment with their parents’ reactions to their coming out believed that their parents’ negative responses

stemmed from fears that others might place blame on them for their children's queer identification. One of Terry's mothers seemed to have a particularly hard time being supportive of Terry's gender identity: "I think that was one of the most difficult things for [my mother] to deal with—that, like, somehow my being trans indicated her failure as a parent, and that was something that was always very scrutinized for her." Tara expressed how her mother's worry and fear played a role in Tara's mother's unsupportive reaction:

It was hard when I was first coming out because my mom felt guilty and ashamed of both of our sexual orientations. She didn't want me to come out to people in my family because she was afraid of being blamed.

Some queer parents, then, may also succumb to heteronormative messages that "queer parents raise queer kids" and that "queer is bad." Internalization of these messages, in turn, served to interfere with their ability to be supportive of their queer children.

Discussion

This study, informed by social constructionist and queer theoretical perspectives, explored the queer identity formation and disclosure experiences of LGBTQ adult children of lesbian/bisexual mothers. These perspectives led us to focus on the potential role of familial environments, as well as participants' perceptions of societal heterosexism/heteronormativity, in influencing the coming out processes of queer youth with queer parents. Three primary themes of interest emerged from the qualitative interview data from 18 "second generation" queer participants; each theme will be discussed in turn, followed by implications for research and practice and study limitations.

Half of the participants discussed their perceptions of how having queer parents had influenced their discovery of their own sexual/gender identity. Similar to Tasker and Golombok's (1997) findings, some participants reported that having queer parents "queered" their notions of sexuality and gender. That is, participants believed that having queer parents had given them broader conceptualizations of the potential sexual/gender identity options available to them, including those that go beyond the traditional binaries of gay/straight (e.g., "mildly bisexual") and female/male (e.g., "genderqueer"). Their acceptance of a broad range of gendered expressions, then, suggests that the nontraditional gender attitudes that have been observed in children of lesbian mothers (Sutfin et al. 2008) may in fact continue into adulthood. In addition, some participants felt

they discovered their queer identities earlier than they might have if they had been raised by heterosexual parents. These data suggest that queer youth benefit from having queer parents. Specifically, they may recognize their sexual/gender identities more quickly as a function of their unique familial context, which may in turn contribute to a less arduous and lengthy identity formation process than is often reported in the LGBTQ youth literature (Morrow 2004; Savin-Williams 1996).

Another theme that emerged from the data concerned how societal scrutiny and heterosexism resulted in some participants' experiences of pressures and/or fears regarding their identity formation and disclosure. Specifically, some participants felt pressure to not be queer, so as not to fulfill the stereotype that "gay parents raise gay kids," while some feared the potential negative reactions of others upon coming out, based upon the heterosexism they had seen targeted at their parents. Thus, societal heterosexism had a powerful impact on these queer youth with queer parents (Oswald et al. 2005), leading them to develop a heightened awareness of the scrutiny their families were under, which in turn impacted their own coming-out processes. As suggested by Goldberg (2007), who explored the familial disclosure practices of young adults with LGB parents, these data indicate that "second generation" queer youth may succumb to the heteronormative messages they receive and, subsequently, experience intrapersonal conflict regarding whether (and when) to come out about themselves and/or their families. In this way, queer youth with queer parents are similar to queer youth with heterosexual parents in that they may internalize negative societal messages about homosexuality (Morrow 2004); however, "second generation" queer youth face added complexity in that these messages pertain not only to themselves but also their parents.

The third primary theme that emerged concerned the role of queer parents in providing support for their queer children, specifically around identity development and disclosure. While it is common for queer youth with heterosexual parents to fear rejection upon coming out to their parents (Savin-Williams 1996) and to experience feelings of isolation (Williams et al. 2005), participants in the present study largely did not fear rejection from their queer parents. Supporting the suppositions of Kosciw and Diaz (2008), some participants felt "blessed" to have parents who could relate to their queer identities and who could be relied on as sources of support. Further, similar to Tasker and Golombok's (1997) findings, some participants felt their parents helped them to "be themselves" and to embrace their sexual/gender identities. Indeed, for some queer youth with queer parents, their parents' identification, support, and acceptance may neutralize society's powerful homonegative messages and serve to foster

greater self-acceptance and self-esteem (Oswald et al. 2005). Indeed, their uniquely supportive and affirmative familial environment led them to construct their own emergent identities as normal and acceptable.

Other participants, however, did not necessarily utilize or view their parents as key sources of support in relation to their queer identity development. It is very likely that age and developmental stage played a role in determining whether and the extent to which parents were viewed as sources of support, in that sexual identity development typically occurs during adolescence. Although parents are thought to play a crucial role as young people navigate their way through the developmental changes and stresses of adolescence (Call and Mortimer 2001), an increase in youths' independence and autonomy from their parents during this stage is common (Hurrelmann 1996). Youth in general often prefer to look to friends and other extrafamilial sources of support for sexuality-related communication (Lefkowitz and Espinosa-Hernandez 2007), and queer youth specifically have been found to rely more on extrafamilial sources of information and support than family members (Nesmith et al. 1999). Thus, queer youth with queer parents may be more comfortable seeking out friends and other non-family members for support, no matter how "available" their queer parents might be.

The finding that some participants did not utilize or view their parents as primary sources of social support appeared to also be related to the presence of gender differences between parent and child. Although prior research suggests that children and adolescents may be more likely to engage in communication about sexual issues with their mothers than their fathers (Byers et al. 2008), parents—especially mothers—seem more likely to talk with their daughters about sexual topics than their sons (Byers et al. 2008; Raffaelli et al. 1998). In this context, it is perhaps not entirely surprising that, despite having their non-heterosexual identities in common, queer sons of lesbian/bisexual mothers tended to look elsewhere for support regarding their queer identity development. Further, queer sons may also be hesitant to discuss their emerging sexualities with their queer mothers because of their perception that aspects of gay male culture (e.g., pornography) may clash with their mothers' (lesbian feminist) political sensibilities (Jensen 2004).

In addition to (or in conjunction with) gender differences, a lack of fully open communication within the family about sexuality may help to explain why some participants did not view their mothers as sources of support. These data suggest that some parents' internalized homophobia and shame may have inhibited open discussions in the family about parents' sexual identities, which likely contributed to some participants' lack of comfort in addressing their own queer identities with their parents.

Further, previous research suggests that many parents and children are generally uncomfortable with the notion of discussing sexual topics with one other (Lefkowitz and Espinosa-Hernandez 2007). Indeed, Jaccard et al. (2000) found that a fear of embarrassment was cited by both mothers and adolescents as a reason for their lack of communication about sexuality. Thus, given that parents and their children (at least in the U.S.) often experience discomfort when navigating sexual communication, it is perhaps unsurprising that "second generation" queer youth are not uniformly comfortable utilizing their parents as sources of support regarding sexuality.

In addition, a "queer generation gap" between parents and children also seemed to explain why some participants did not view their lesbian/bisexual mothers as key sources of social support in relation to their queer identity development. This finding was supported by Floyd and Bakeman (2006), who examined the implications of age and historical context on LGB individuals' identity development; these researchers found recent historical trends of earlier disclosure of sexual identity, as well as significant differences in identity formation patterns between individuals who discovered their queer identities in adolescence versus adulthood. These findings substantiate our participants' interpretations that: (a) their mothers were not supportive of their decisions to openly disclose their queer identities to others because their mothers grew up during a time when queer identities were more stigmatized, and (b) their own coming out in adolescence was different than their mothers' coming out in adulthood.

Finally, not all queer parents were viewed as being initially supportive upon learning about participants' sexual/gender identity. Some parents voiced their own fears about potential heterosexist discrimination their children might face and/or worried that others would "blame" them for their children's queer identity. These concerns are not unrealistic, given that queer identities continue to be stigmatized in society and queer parents in particular are often the subject of scrutiny and censure (Goldberg 2007; Oswald et al. 2005). Therefore, even though these parents *resisted* heteronormativity through their own embodiment of queer parenting, they also *upheld* heteronormativity with reactions to their children's disclosures such as: "I wish you weren't queer" (Oswald et al. 2005). Further, some lesbian/bisexual mothers' limited understanding of gender identity/transgender issues appeared to play a role in why some queer youth viewed their parents as unsupportive. Indeed, while one might assume these lesbian and bisexual women would have in-depth knowledge of (and would inevitably accept) all queer identities, this does not necessarily seem to be the case. Thus, some transgender youth may be faced with the challenge of having to more fully "queer" their queer parents' notions of gender (Oswald et al. 2005).

Implications for Research and Practice

Study findings have several implications for researchers who study children/youth with LGBTQ parents. The current literature on this topic has been critiqued for comparing children with queer parents to children with heterosexual parents in a defensive manner, rather than examining queer families in their own right, such as for the primary purpose of identifying particular strengths and challenges (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). The present study expands upon the existing literature by identifying both potential strengths and challenges of families in which queer parents are raising queer children—findings which warrant further examination. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to report extensively on “second generation” queer youth, especially those whose gender identifications lie outside the traditional labels of “male” or “female.” Although some previous literature on the gender development of children/youth with LGBTQ parents has reported that these children may tend to exhibit less traditional gendered behaviors and attitudes than children with heterosexual parents (Green et al. 1986; Sutfin et al. 2008), little variability has been found in terms of these children’s gender identifications (e.g., Gottman 1990). In turn, this limited variability has prohibited in-depth exploration of and theorizing about the experiences of individuals who have queer parents *and* who also claim nontraditional gender identities. Future studies with adolescent and adult offspring of queer parents will further enrich our understanding of the ongoing process of queer identity development and, more specifically, the evolution of gender identification for these children. For example, our research raises the following questions, which can be pursued in future studies: “(How) is gender identity and sexuality discussed and defined in families with ‘second generation’ queer youth?” “(How) are queer youth with queer parents able to resist heteronormative messages and pressures from society regarding their sexual/gender identities?” “(How) can parents better foster the sexual/gender identity development of their ‘second generation’ offspring?” “(How) do parent-child gender differences play a role in how queer parents support their queer children?”

The strengths and challenges identified by the participants in the current study have implications for queer-parent families and, perhaps, for heterosexual-parent families as well. Queer young adults, who reported that their mothers provided them with broad notions of gender and sexuality as well as with acceptance and understanding, sometimes viewed their mothers as contributing to a less painful and arduous coming-out process. Perhaps a better understanding of how these parents provide acceptance, understanding, and broad conceptualizations of gender/sexuality would help all parents better support their

children. Is it merely *being* a queer parent that is beneficial to queer youth; or are there certain active, supportive behaviors that all parents of queer youth can perform? Based upon the study findings that not all participants viewed their queer parents as sources of support (and, thus, being queer was not a “prerequisite” for support), it seems that there are supportive behaviors that all parents can embody.

Practitioners should also take note of the study findings and are encouraged to be sensitive to the diversity of perspectives and experiences of queer youth with queer parents, and to be cognizant of youths’ sensitivity about interpretations regarding the “origins” of their sexual orientations and/or gender identities. While some “second generation” youth might happily talk about the influence their parents have had on their sexuality/gender development, others may resent the implication that their identities are connected to their parents’. Further, transgender youth with queer parents may face certain challenges and obstacles in that their gender identities may be stigmatized or misunderstood in the larger community/social context (Wyss 2004) and also, perhaps, within their own families.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

It is important to note the limitations of this secondary data analysis. First and foremost, our original, individual studies did not explicitly set out to analyze the perspectives and experiences of queer youth with queer parents. The interview questions were not specifically designed with this sub-group of participants in mind; thus, the scope and depth of our data are limited (i.e., saturation of themes was not reached). Future research should aim specifically to study the experiences of queer youth with queer parents in order to generate more focused and rich data on this subject. As one example, studies could explore whether “second generation” queer youth experience difficulties, such as depression and substance abuse, at rates similar to queer youth in general (Morrow 2004). Second, the vast majority of participants were White, inevitably limiting the diversity of their experiences. Racial and ethnic minority queer youth, particularly those that are adopted and/or of a different race than their parents, may have experiences that we did not capture. For example, adopted queer youth with queer parents do not have biological ties to their parents, and this knowledge likely plays a role in how these “second generation” youth construct and navigate their queer identity development inside and outside of their families. Third, our study only included the perspectives of participants with lesbian/bisexual mothers (a limitation that is common among previous studies of children with non-heterosexual parents); queer youth with gay or bisexual (or transgender or queer) fathers may have different

experiences to report. Finally, our sample was, on the whole, fairly well-educated. Thus, participants' experiences negotiating their sexual identity, and their current interpretations of this process, may be shaped by their educational achievement status. Future research that includes youth and young adults of varying educational backgrounds is warranted. Thus, caution must be used when generalizing these results to all queer youth with queer parents.

Although not all voices of "second generation" youth were captured in this preliminary study, a diverse range of experiences were nonetheless reported. Due to the exploratory nature of this secondary data analysis of two separate data sets, our ability to systematically examine various factors that may have influenced participants' perceptions of and comfort around their own sexual and gender identities was limited. For example, awareness or presence of other LGBTQ youth (including siblings) and other queer-parent families, timing of parents' disclosure about their own sexual orientation, how parents came out, geographic location, and attitudes of heterosexual/gender-conforming extended family members may have all potentially contributed to participants' particular experiences of their sexual identity formation process. Perhaps future studies on queer youth with queer parents could better attend to these factors during data collection and analysis.

Acknowledgments Both authors would like to thank their participants for sharing their personal stories. The first author would also like to thank the American Psychological Foundation for the Roy Scrivner Memorial Research Grant that supported data collection for her original study.

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