2 LGBTQ FAMILIES

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My grandpa majored in biology in college, but he wasn't allowed to teach at a high school because he was black. Not long ago, I spoke on a panel at a high school with my mom. This guy in the audience told my mom that he wouldn't want her to teach his kids because she is a lesbian. It reminded me so much of what happened to my grandpa. I think homophobia is like any other "ism." . . . Like racism, you learn it from the people you grow up with, from your parents, from television, and from society.

—Rayna White, eleventh grader, daughter of a lesbian mother
(PrideSource 2013, para. 9)

My family is just a family. I don't have anything obscure to say about it.

—Amara, 19-year-old college student with four moms
(personal communication to author, December 2017)

What we collectively define and accept as family has far-reaching implications. The boundaries that we—and others—make between family and nonfamily play both subtle and not-so-subtle roles in our daily lives.

—Powell et al. 2010:1–2

Because of cultural, political, and religious debates over the past several decades about how families must be structured and function to perform a productive role in society, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) families have captured the interest of politicians, academics, and the general public. Despite great strides toward equal rights for LGBTQ people and their families over the past several decades, fierce debates persist concerning who should be able to form families through marriage, adoption, and the use of reproductive technologies. Policies and laws concerning families, in general, are developing out of those debates, thus reacting to a changing family landscape, and in turn shaping a new family landscape. Amid the debates and changing laws, members of LGBTQ communities are negotiating the rocky political, cultural, and social terrains that regulate their material and ideological access to the title of "family." Therefore, if we want to understand how families are changing today, and how those families fit into, are shaped by, and shape larger society, then we must understand one of the most important growing segments of current families: LGBTQ families.

Over 10.7 million adults (approximately 4% of the US population) in the United States identify as LGBT. More specifically, 4.5 million adults (1.7% of the US population) identify as lesbian or gay, 4.8 million adults (1.8% of the US population) identify

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as bisexual, and 1.6 million adults (0.6% of the US population) identify as transgender (Flores, Gates, and Brown 2016; Romero 2017). Among those LGBT adults, approximately 19% identify as lesbian, 36% identify as gay men, 40% identify as bisexual, and 5% as transgender (Brown 2017). Further research is needed to determine the number of people who identify as queer or questioning. Regarding youth, despite difficulties in measuring LGBTQ identities, an estimated 2% – 4% of youth in the United States and Canada identify as GBL (Homma et al. 2012), and approximately one in 500 children identify as transgender (Skougard 2011).

In addition to individual counts, there are an estimated 605,472 same-sex couple households in the United States (Vespa, Lewis, and Kreider 2016). Of these, 52% (321,177) are female-female, and 47% (284,295) are male-male partnered households. Among these households, the number of married same-sex couples has been increasing since 2013, prompted by two US Supreme Court cases. In the June 2013 *United States v. Windsor* case, the Court ruled that the federal government must recognize marriage between same-sex couples. In the June 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* case, the Court ruled that "the Constitution guarantees same-sex couples the right to marry and to have their marriages recognized by the states" (Romero 2017:1).

In 2013, at the time of the *Windsor* ruling, "an estimated 230,000 same-sex couples were married, 21% of all same-sex couples" (Gates and Brown 2015:1). By the time *Obergefell* was decided in 2015, "390,000 same-sex couples were married, 38% of all same-sex couples." By October 2015, less than six months after *Obergefell*, "486,000 same-sex couples were married, or 45% of all same-sex couples" (Gates and Brown 2015:1). And by June 2017, nearly 547,000 same-sex couples were married nationwide (Romero 2017). What these data suggest is that two years after the Supreme Court ruled that states could not prohibit same-sex marriages, 10.2% of LGBT adults in the United States were wed to a same-sex spouse, "up from 7.9% in the months prior to the Supreme Court decision in 2015, but only marginally higher than the 9.6% measured in the first year after the ruling" (Jones 2017).

Many same-sex couple households, both married and unmarried, include children. According to the Williams Institute (Gates 2013), "an estimated 37% of LGBT-identified adults have had a child at some time in their lives" (p. 1). This means that approximately "3 million LGBT Americans have had a child and as many as 6 million American children and adults have an LGBT parent" (p. 1). In addition, 48% of LGBT women and 20% of LGBT men under the age of 50 either living alone or with a spouse/partner "are raising a child under age 18" (p. 1). Therefore, over "125,000 same-sex couple households (19%) include nearly 220,000 children under age 18," most of whom (an estimated 170,000) are biological, step, or adopted children (p. 1). Although estimates vary, "as many as 2–3.7 million US children under age 18 may have a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender parent" (Gates 2015:67). And while these families are often concentrated into particular geographic regions, LGBT families exist in over 99% of all counties in the United States (Gates and Ost 2004).

The data are clear that the family landscape in the United States is shifting. A major sociological explanation for this shift is that families are socially, not biologically, constructed. This means that the ways in which families are formed—the roles and functions families perform, their structure in terms of who occupies them, and the experiences of their members—are born out of the social, economic, cultural, political, and historical

context in which those families exist. There is nothing natural, normal, biologically inherent, or biologically mandated by any family type.

We can see how families are socially constructed by studying how families change throughout history (as indicated by the data above) and how they are structured and function in different geographic locations. And as the quotes at the beginning of the reading by Rayna and Amara suggest, our thinking about families by race and gender have shifted. Rayna compares current views about LGBT families to historical views about racial-ethnic families. And Amara, a 19-year-old who grew up with four mothers due to her original two moms divorcing and both remarrying, sees her family as unremarkable or unusual; that is, she sees her family structure within the norm of 21st century families.

As a sociologist who understands families to be socially constructed, I wonder about three questions: (1) How and why do different family forms develop within specific social and historical contexts, (2) why are new family forms so threatening to certain groups of people in society, and (3) how are new family forms beneficial to the society in which they exist? Based on the current trends in LGBTQ families and on my three questions, the purpose of this reading is to provide an understanding of what LGBTQ families are, why they have developed at this historical moment, how they are socially constructed, and why conservative thinkers perceive LGBTQ families to be a threat to society, while progressive thinkers argue that LGBTQ families are an important and positive addition to the US family landscape. Due to lack of space, I do not answer the third question in this reading, but address that question fully in my book, *LGBT Families* (Mezey 2015).

To answer the first two questions, this reading draws on scholarship concerning LGBTQ families, focusing specifically on social constructionist and intersectional (i.e., race-class-gender-sexuality) perspectives. The reading starts with a discussion of what LGBTQ families are and how they have formed historically by first deconstructing and defining key terms. Then, to illustrate how LGBTQ families have been socially constructed out of the culmination of several historical factors, the reading provides a brief history of the development of LGBTQ families. The reading finishes with a discussion of the rocky terrain on which LGBTQ families exist and persist, thus looking at why certain groups of people feel threatened by these historically new family forms.

DECONSTRUCTING AND DEFINING TERMS

The connection between an active and effective LGBTQ rights movement, an equally active and effective conservative movement against LGBTQ families, and policies and laws concerning issues such as marriage, adoption, and immigration has led to a public discourse on what constitutes family and where LGBTQ families fit into the current US family landscape. As the quote by Powell and his colleagues at the beginning of this reading states, how we define family and who we accept as having legitimate claims to being recognized as a family has both serious implications for the United States and beyond, as well as for the individuals within those families.

Although the term *LGBTQ families* seems simple enough, the deconstruction of this term illustrates the complexities within LGBTQ families themselves. While teaching family sociology courses over more than twenty years, and through the reading of a variety of sources, I have developed and use the following definition of family: Family is a social institution found in all societies comprising two or more people related by

birth, law, or intimate affectionate relationships, who may or may not reside together. I use the above definition because it includes as many configurations of families about which I have read or heard. The more we learn about the diversity of families, the more we can test and stretch our definitions of "family." For example, in my classes, some students have argued that the definition should include animal companions (aka "pets"). In fact, in their study of who Americans count as family, Powell, Bolzendahl, Geist, and Steelman (2010) found that 51% of those surveyed believe that pets count as family. While that fact is interesting, what is more interesting is that only 30% of Americans count gay and lesbian couples without children to be family. So, as these authors pointedly remark, in 2010, more Americans believed that pets count as family than do gay and lesbian couples (p. 45).

To be clear, my definition of family is not one accepted by a court of law or upon which politicians base family policy. Legal definitions of family generally include people who are connected by bloodlines or legal ties (e.g., marriage, adoption, legal guardianship, and foster care), although some judges are beginning to use social definitions of family particularly in determining court cases involving LGBTQ families (Richman 2009). I use an inclusive definition because while "family" is a legal term, it is also an ideological and socially constructed term that means many different things to many different people. Family is an *idea* about how human relationships *should* be organized. The definition of family I offer above works well because LGBTQ families fit into that definition and because the definition allows us to compare other definitions used throughout legal and political systems.

Thinking about the definition of family in general also leads to a question that Judith Stacey asked in her 1996 book, *In the Name of the Family*: What is a gay or lesbian family (a question I broaden to include BTQ people)? In trying to answer this question, Stacey asked additional questions:

> Should we count only families in which every single member is gay? Clearly there are not very many, if even any, of these. Or does the presence of just one gay member color a family gay? Just as clearly, there are many of these, including those of Ronald Reagan, Colin Powell, Phyllis Schafly and Newt Gingrich (1996 :107).

Stacey's question of what we mean by LGBTQ families is important. In 1991, Kath Weston published a book called *Families We Choose* in which she argued that gays and lesbians have been "exiles from kinship" (Weston 1991). She wrote that "for years, and in an amazing variety of contexts, claiming a lesbian or gay identity has been portrayed as a rejection of 'the family' and a departure from kinship" (p. 22). In other words, until very recently, media and other public portrayals of LGBTQ people assumed that "LGBTQ" and "family" could not possibly go together. This portrayal was based on two assumptions: (1) that gays and lesbians cannot or do not have children; and (2) anyone who is LGBTQ must have been rejected by, and therefore alienated from, their families of origin (e.g., their parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.).

Current data and research provide compelling evidence that these two assumptions are no longer (if they ever were) true. So what is an LGBTQ family? In addition to Stacey and Weston, other social scientists have also grappled with this question. As Baca Zinn, Eitzen, and Wells (2011) stated, defining LGBTQ families is difficult "because individuals—not families—have sexual orientation" (p. 429). These authors point out that typically members of families often have sexual identities that differ from one another. Furthermore, sexual identities can change over a life course such that a family member may embrace

a particular sexual or gender identity at one point but then later in life embrace another sexual or gender identity. Therefore, defining an LGBTQ family can be difficult.

Some scholars define LGBTQ families by the presence of one or more LGBTQ adults in the family (Allen and Demo 1995). Others have included "couples, parents, children, and youth, as well as intentional communities" within the definition of LGBTQ families (Doherty 2006:xxii). Therefore, to define LGBTQ families, I draw on previous definitions, as well as my own general definition of family, to define LGBTQ families as two or more people related by birth, law, or intimate affectionate relationships, who may or may not reside together, and where the LGBTQ identity of at least one family member impacts other family members in some meaningful way. This definition is intentionally broad to be as inclusive as possible.

Built into the definition of LGBTQ families are a variety of sexual and gender identities. Trying to define sexual and gender categories can be complicated, particularly if we understand such categories to be socially constructed; that is, gaining their purpose and meaning from the social, cultural, political, economic, and historical context in which they are created. In fact, queer theory challenges traditional sexual categories and shows how these categories are "products of particular constellations of power and knowledge" (Epstein 1994:192). Although sociologists acknowledge the problems of sexual and gender categories, they use such categories to understand how underlying and unifying factors create similar experiences for different groups of people based on social structural factors, such as sexuality, as well as race, social class, and gender (Epstein 1994). That is, sociologists want to examine how the categorization of people is "materially experienced across the world" by specific groups of people (Stein and Plummer 1994:184).

In defining sexual categories, we tend to use terms that identify the gender toward whom our emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions are directed (Stryker 2008); for example, "'heterosexual' (toward a member of another gender), 'homosexual' (toward a member of the same gender), 'bisexual' (toward a member of any gender)" (Stryker 2008:16). In addition, historian Susan Stryker (2008) states that the sexual terms mentioned above "depend on our understanding of our own gender"; that is, the terms homo- and hetero- "make sense only in relation to a gender they are the 'same as' or 'different from'" (p. 16). If people do not have a fixed or clear gender identity (as discussed below) then definitions of sexual categories begin to lose meaning.

Perhaps to avoid confusion about how sexuality and gender relate to one another, the American Psychological Association (APA 2013) defined sexual categories by referring to attractions based on someone's "sex" rather than "gender." The distinction between the two is that we think of "sex" as being the biological makeup that determines if someone is physically male or female, which is often easier to identify than gender (i.e., "the socially learned behaviors and expectations associated with being men and women" (Andersen and Witham 2011:418). Yet in her work on people who are intersexual (i.e., who have ambiguous genitalia), biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling (1993, 2000) suggested that there are at least five different varieties of "sex" found in the biological world. Thus, even our desire to construct and maintain the myth of only two biological sexes (female and male) is in fact socially constructed. All this is to say that the definitions of heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual (referring to the possibility of only desiring two—"bi"—sexes, rather than two *or more* sexes) are based on limited, if not false understandings of the biological, psychological, and sociological world.

Sociologists argue that although we must understand that categories based on sexual and gender identities are problematic and that the lines between and among these categories are in reality blurry and unclear, we must also understand that many of our laws, policies, practices, and beliefs are based on distinct categories. Furthermore, to understand how people in sexual and gender categories create and experience family life, we need to have some understanding of how each society defines sexual and gender categories. We need to also understand how people and systems use those categories to distribute rewards and resources in unequal ways such that we have developed discrimination based on seemingly real, yet socially constructed, gender and sexual categories. Such discrimination includes homophobia (the fear of gays and lesbians), biphobia (the fear of bisexual people), transphobia (the fear of transgender people), heterosexism (the assumption that being heterosexual is best, and the systematic privileging of heterosexuals over people who are not heterosexual), as well as more commonly understood sexism, racism, classism, ageism, and so on.

So how do we define sexual and gender categories? Elsewhere I provide a comprehensive discussion of "LGBT" (Mezey 2015), while here I provide an abridged version. In defining the sexual categories (LGB), "Lesbian" refers almost exclusively to women who have emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions to other women. "Gay" generally refers to men who have emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions to other men, although some women also refer to themselves as gay (APA 2008). Bisexual refers to people who have emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions to multiple genders (Burleson 2005; Seidman 2009).

In defining the gender category, transgender indicates "anyone who does not feel comfortable in the gender role they were attributed with at birth, or who has a gender identity at odds with the labels 'man' or 'woman' credited to them by formal authorities" (Whittle 2006:xi). Many identities fall within the category of transgender, including transsexual people, trans men, female-to-male (FTM), transgender men, transsexual men, trans women, male-to-female (MTF), transgender women, transsexual women, people who cross-dress, drag queens, drag kings, genderqueers, and people who are gender non-conforming (GNC). I encourage readers to explore the history and changing definitions of "transgender" outside of this reading.

A more recent addition to the acronym of sexual and gender identities is "Q" for queer or questioning. Historically, "queer" was a derogatory term used by those in dominant society to insult LGBT people. Through queer theory, queer studies, and the queer movement, LGBT people have reclaimed the term "queer" as positive symbol of power and inclusiveness (Stryker 2008). Today, queer often serves "as an umbrella term for people who contest normative conceptions of gender and sexuality" including LGBT people, "as well as others who don't quite fit into those categories or who experience fluidity in their genders or sexuality" (University Library 2018). The term queer can also include a broader group of people who might "engage in non-normative sex (such as kink or polyamory)" but who otherwise identify as heterosexual (University Library 2018). In addition to "Q" referring to queer, Q also refers to questioning, an identity that occurs when someone is experiencing an unsure change in their sexual or gender identity. Although questioning is often associated with youth, a person of any age might start questioning their gender or sexual identity at any point over the life course (University Library 2018).

Understanding categories of people based on gender and sexual identities is significant to understanding LGBTQ families because we need to understand who is creating and occupying those families.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF LGBTQ FAMILIES

The definitions discussed above have developed out of a historical context. Indeed, prior to the 1980s, the term *LGBTQ families* was an oxymoron. This section discusses the history of the development of LGBTQ families to provide evidence of how LGBTQ families have developed out of a coalescing of specific social, economic, political, and cultural factors over time. Providing this history contributes to our understanding of how LGBTQ families are socially constructed.

Elsewhere, I have documented a longer history of the development of lesbian and gay families (Mezey 2008). Here, I offer a shortened version that incorporates bisexual and transgender history to help explain the historical context out of which LGBTQ families have developed. LGBTQ families have emerged out of four key factors: (1) the gay liberation movement, (2) the women's rights movement, (3) the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and (4) the development of reproductive and conceptive technologies. These were not the only factors, but they were perhaps the most influential in helping LGBTQ people develop their families today.

The gay liberation movement was instrumental in helping people outside of dominant gender and sexual categories develop a positive self-image and group identity. Starting as the homophile movement during the first half of the 20th century, White, middle-class homosexuals began to meet through organizations such as the Mattachine Society (for homosexual men) and the Daughters of Bilitis (for homosexual women). These groups served to connect homosexuals and fight against sexual discrimination (D'Emilio 1998). Outside of these largely White groups, groups of homosexual racial-ethnic minorities also started to socialize in separate groups, particularly in bars (Kennedy and Davis 1993).

Concurrently, bisexual and transgender people began to organize as well. The concept of "bisexual" was not identified until the early 20th century. Previously, people held the "common belief that bisexuality didn't exist or was either self-deception or a transition phase" (Dworkin 2000:118). Because of these perceptions, both heterosexuals and homosexuals ostracized bisexual people. However, coming out of a desire for sexual freedom as well as heterosexual "swinger" communities (Highleyman 2001), bisexual people began to understand their own sexual desires as real. Alfred Kinsey's 1948 and 1953 publications of the "Kinsey Scale" in which he identified a continuum of sexual desires ranging from "exclusively heterosexual" to "exclusively homosexual" also helped bisexual people make sense of their own sexual desires (Dworkin 2000; Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Kinsey et al., 1953). Through a burgeoning awareness, bisexual people began to gain self-identity through groups such as the Sexual Freedom League, a group that experimented sexually with both heterosexual and same-sex partners, and the National Sex Forum, a group that educated pastors and therapists about homosexuality, lesbianism, and bisexuality (Dworkin 2000).

Transgender people also started organizing in the wake of Kinsey's work, as well as through the work of psychiatrists like Karl Bowman who were researching diverse gendered behaviors. Through the work of early transgender activists, such as Louise Lawrence and Virginia Prince in the 1940s and 1950s, social networking and organizing of transgender people around the country began to increase, and organizations such as the Foundation for Personality Expression (FPE) and the Labyrinth were started (Stryker 2008). Similar to homosexuals, race divisions existed among transgender people as well. As Stryker (2008) wrote, "While white suburban transgender people were sneaking out to

clandestine meetings, many transgender people of color were highly visible parts of urban culture" through drag balls held in major urban areas (p. 56).

During the time that LGBTQ people began to form their own groups, the civil rights movement was developing in ways that provided examples of how to organize politically. Drawing on the strategies of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., as well as more radical groups, such as the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam, and the Congress of Racial Equality, LGBTQ people began to organize their own protests and find new ways of community organizing (D'Emilio 2007; Stryker 2008). The new sense of pride that LGBTQ people developed out of the early homophile movement developed into the gay liberation movement after a group of LGBTQ bar-goers revolted against police riots at the Stonewall Bar in New York City on June 28, 1969 (Faderman 1991; Stryker 2008).

While the gay liberation movement was picking up momentum, early second-wave feminists were also working toward securing women's rights. Despite homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia among early activists (Rust 1995; Stryker 2008), feminism and the women's rights movement were nevertheless instrumental in the development of LGBTQ families. Through the women's rights movement and the development of a feminist consciousness, women began to interact more specifically with other women, creating spaces in which they could explore lesbian relationships. Because feminists encouraged women to take control of their own bodies and to more freely experiment in sexual ways, bisexual women and men began to explore their sexualities in ways that cultural norms had previously prohibited (Dworkin 2000).

At this time, White radical feminists began to critique the nuclear family, arguing that housework, motherhood, and catering to husbands, oppressed women and limited women's access to higher education and paid labor (D'Emilio 2007). As feminist theories developed, women of color began examining the relationship between race and gender oppression, drawing on connections they made between the civil rights and the women's liberation movements (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1984). As women, in general, developed a new feminist way of conceiving gender relations and as men and women increasingly began to have sexual relations with the purpose of pleasure rather than procreation, the differences between heterosexual relationships and same-sex relationships began to diminish (Faderman 1991).

During this time, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, bisexual and transgender people found both the gay liberation and women's liberation movements to be hostile spaces. Feminists such as those in the Daughters of Bilitis did not consider trans women to be "real" women and therefore prevented trans women from entering women-only spaces and events, a division line that still exists in some feminist circles (Stryker 2008). Similarly, some gay and lesbian organizations, such as those that organized San Francisco's gay pride events, "opposed drag and expressly forbid transgender people from participating" (Stryker 2008:102). In addition, gay and lesbian groups often prevented bisexual people from joining. As a result, bisexuals started their own organizations, such as the San Francisco Sexual Information (SFSI), the Bi Center, BiPOL (a bisexual political action group) in San Francisco (Dworkin 2000), and the National Bisexual Liberation Group in New York, as well as later groups developing in major cities throughout the United States (Highleyman 2001). The effect of being excluded from both the women's and gay liberation movements was that bisexual and transgender people began to form their own communities and senses of identity (Dworkin 2000; Stryker 2008).

As LGBTQ people began to develop a stronger identity—albeit often separated by race, social class, sexual, and gender divisions—in the 1980s, gay men, bisexual men, and transgender people, in particular, were faced with a new challenge in the form of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Styker 2008). Regarding the development of LGBTQ families, the HIV/AIDS epidemic had two important effects. First, the epidemic brought separate sexual and gender communities together. Because people initially associated the AIDS epidemic with gay male sex and because heterosexual people feared that bisexual men would infect heterosexual women, homophobia and biphobia were heightened during this time (Dworkin 2000; Highleyman 2001). Therefore, as Stryker (2008) wrote, "To adequately respond to the AIDS epidemic demanded a new kind of alliance politics, in which specific communities came together across the dividing lines of race and gender, social class and nationality, citizenship and sexual orientation" (p. 134).

Under the reclaimed umbrella of "queer," organizations such as the AIDSCoalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) and Queer Nation worked to unify forces and create a "new kind of unabashedly progay, nonseparatist, antiassimilationist alliance politics to combat AIDS" (Stryker 2008:134). By the mid-1990s, many organizations that had formally focused only on gay-lesbian issues, or gay-lesbian-bisexual issues, now included transgender in their causes and efforts (Stryker 2008).

The second important effect the HIV/AIDS epidemic had on the development of LGBTQ families is that the epidemic openly displayed the deep disregard society had for LGBTQ relationships. The illness and death that struck gay and bisexual men forced the dying men, their partners, and their friends to acknowledge how poorly recognized their families were by physicians and courts. Issues relating to "next of kin," such as "hospital visitation rights; decision making about medical care; choices about funeral arrangements and burials; and the access of survivors to homes, possessions, and inheritance" all brought the lack of recognition of their intimate partner relationships into clear focus for LGBTQ people (D'Emilio 2007:49).

In addition, evidence suggests that one reason lesbians and gay men began to have and adopt children in the 1980s was to counteract the deaths that the LGBTQ community was experiencing related to HIV/AIDS (Mallon 2011; Weston 1991), as well as to care for children who lived with HIV/AIDS (Mallon 2011). The loss of community members was particularly salient as men of color constituted over 41% of the total HIV/AIDS cases at the time (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] 1988, as cited in Morales 1990). Not surprisingly, therefore, Latino and African American LGBTQ community groups led many of the local battles against the epidemic (D'Emilio 2007). The irony is that while lesbians began having more children during this time perhaps partially to counterbalance the epidemic, they were also less willing to use the sperm from gay and bisexual men because they feared contracting the disease themselves or passing it on to their offspring (Stacey 1996; Weston 1991). The result was that more lesbians began using tested sperm from sperm banks, thus, reducing the number of gay and bisexual men as parents (Weston 1991).

During the 1980s and 1990s, lesbians were able to access tested sperm because of the increased use and access to reproductive and conceptive technologies (Stacey 1998), the fourth main historical factor in the development of LGBTQ families today. Reproductive technologies, also known as assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), refer to "the use of non-coital technologies to conceive a child and initiate pregnancy. Most widely used is artificial insemination, but in vitro fertilization (IVF), egg donation, surrogacy, and

genetic screening techniques are also available" (Robertson 2005:324). ARTs have revolutionized most types of families, not just LGBTQ families, because they allow people who historically could not have children (e.g., infertile men, older women) to have children through a variety of means that potentially separate genetic, gestational, and social parenting from one another (Gimenez 1991). Although the use of ARTs is often expensive and not always covered by insurance, ARTs allow LGBTQ people who can afford the services to have children without getting involved in heterosexual sexual relations.

The culmination of the gay liberation movement, the women's rights movement, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the development of reproductive and conceptive technologies combined forces to create the current existence of LGBTQ families. Culminating in the 2013 and 2015 US Supreme Court cases discussed earlier, these four factors supported the positive formation of LGBTQ identities, communities, and ultimately families. However, as the following section illustrates, LGBTQ families continue to persist within often unfriendly, and at minimum rocky, terrain.

LGBTQ FAMILIES NEGOTIATING ROCKY TERRAIN

Despite the historical landscape in which LGBTQ people are now forming families, including the legalizing of marriage for same-sex couples, there remain barriers preventing LGBTQ family formation as well. As suggested through the opening comment of the reading spoken by Rayna, the eleventh grader whose mother is a lesbian, these barriers come out of an ideological battle between those who believe that LGBTQ people are immoral and hurting the fabric of American culture, and those who believe that LGBTQ people should have the same rights as heterosexual Americans. The debate surrounding LGBTQ families, and all families in general, involves asking one main question: Is there one best type of family that creates the best quality of life for those within the family and for larger society? Related to this one main question are two subquestions: (1) Who should be able to get married? and (2) Who should be able to raise children? These questions are asked by politicians, academics, and the public in response to the single fact that almost everyone can agree upon: Families in the United States are changing.

In trying to make sense of why families are changing and the consequences of those changes, people have participated in a long-standing discussion about cause and effect called the family values debate. The two main sides of the debate include "conservatives"—or "the decline of the family" lamenters (Powell et al. 2010:8), and "progressives"—or "diversity defenders" (Cherlin 2003, as cited in Powell et al. 2010:10). People who identify with conservatives through the family values debate largely consist of certain religious leaders, politicians, and social scientists who argue that families are changing because Americans no longer value the "traditional" nuclear family (i.e., dad at work, mom at home, with direct offspring living in their own home with a white picket fence, suggesting economic security and independence). Such conservatives argue that the move away from the traditional nuclear family is causing a decline in material and economic conditions nationwide (Blankenhorn 1991; Dill, Baca Zinn, and Patton 1998; Stacey 1996).

Family values conservatives also claim "that the traditional nuclear family is the basis of social organization and cohesion in the United States" (Dill et al. 1998:6). According to these conservatives, the breakdown of the nuclear-family structure causes societal ills

such as poverty, teen pregnancy, divorce, drug use, crime, and poor education (Dill et al. 1998). Conservatives in the family values debate further argue that biological differences between men and women justify the nuclear-family form because women are biologically disposed caregivers and men are biologically disposed breadwinners (Andersen and Witham 2011). In addition, for a family to function "properly," husbands or fathers must be present (Blankenhorn 1991).

For such conservatives, the traditional heterosexual family is not only the glue that keeps society together, but also marriage (between one man and one woman) is the glue that keeps the traditional family together. According to family values conservatives, marriage is necessary for families to maintain social cohesion and strong child welfare. Marriage is so prominent a point that it has taken on the form of the "marriage movement" to promote the benefits of heterosexual marriage to couples and society (Heath 2012). Conservatives draw on research suggesting that marital arrangements promote longer lives, greater household financial stability, greater physical and mental health for women and men, and more sexual satisfaction than nonmarital arrangements (see, for example, research conducted by Waite and Gallagher 2001). Following this logic, a reduction in marriage and an increase in divorce are the main causes of family decline and a majority of social problems (Cahill and Tobias 2007; National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference [NHCLC] 2013).

Although supporters of the marriage movement agree that marriage benefits individuals and society, there has been disagreement as to whether marriage should be extended to lesbians and gays (Waite and Gallagher 2001:200–01). Most conservatives within the family values debate feel strongly that both marriage and family remain heterosexual institutions (Stacey 1996). To ensure the heterosexual nature of marriage and family, Republicans introduced a bill in 1996 called the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which Democratic President Bill Clinton signed into law. DOMA stated that marriage is "a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife" (Dunlap, as cited in Stacey 1996:120). As Representative Bob Barr (R-GA), the architect of DOMA, stated, "The flames of hedonism, the flames of narcissism, the flames of self-centered morality are licking at the very foundations of our society: the family unit" (DOMA Debate, as cited in Cahill and Tobias 2007:3). Therefore, to protect the traditional family and the social, economic, cultural, political, and moral fabric of the nation, DOMA specifically and intentionally left LGBTQ people out of the legal definition of marriage and family. That is, family values conservatives believe that LGBTQ families stand in direct opposition to the "traditional" family and therefore will cause major social problems to occur if allowed to develop. This sentiment is exemplified through a statement posted on the website of the conservative National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC 2013), in partnership with the Alliance For Marriage, that called

to define marriage in order to strengthen families and reinforce the threads that enable families to thrive and prosper. This is not about being anti-gay or discriminating against anyone. This is about strengthening the family to make sure that the successful historical model which embodies the fundamental fiber of society continues to be strengthened and not undermined by activist judges. The primary deterrent in the Latino community to drug abuse, gang violence, teenage pregnancy, and other social ills is faith in God and a family with both a mother and a father (NHCLC 2013, para. 1).

This view expressed by the NHCLC is not isolated to Hispanics or religious groups (see, for example, the Family Research Council and the Heritage Foundation) but rather is a popular sentiment among family values conservatives nationwide and has had far-reaching policy implications.

The opinions of conservative lawmakers and judges have long shaped the outcomes of trials concerning LGBTQ families and the family laws that policymakers implement in a variety of states. Sociologist and legal studies professor Kimberly Richman (2009) wrote that judges made explicit references to morality and religion in their judicial decisions in 34% of custody and adoption cases between 1952 and 2004 involving an LGBTQ parent. Similarly, as late as March 2014, just slightly over one year prior to the *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision, 29 states had constitutional amendments and 4 states had instituted a state-level DOMA that bans same-sex marriage (Human Rights Campaign [HRC] 2014). Many of these laws were instituted around the time or in direct effect of the 2004 presidential election of George W. Bush, who pushed a conservative agenda and used the promise of banning marriage for same-sex couples as part of his campaign platform (Olson, Cadge, and Harrison 2006). Thus, the family values debate "and the public debates surrounding morality it has spurred, have been part and parcel of evolving judicial and public attitudes toward LGBTQ parents and families" (Richman 2009:26).

On the other hand, progressives, who consist largely of specific historians and social scientists, have pushed back against the arguments made by conservative scholars, religious leaders, and politicians (Coontz 1993; Dill et al. 1998; Stacey 1996). Progressive scholars argue that as society changes, families change. Therefore, in trying to understand why and how families have been changing throughout time, progressives look to factors external to families. These factors are both economic (e.g., shifts in work and the economy) and cultural (e.g., large social movements fueled by social inequalities). Progressives also look to data suggesting that families in the United States have always been changing (Coontz 1993).

As opposed to conservatives, progressive scholars argue that diverse family structures are not a natural given but rather result from social, cultural, economic, and political changes (Dill et al. 1998). According to progressive scholars, diverse family forms are not the cause of social ills. Rather, diverse family forms have developed historically as survival strategies in response to adverse social, economic, and cultural challenges.

Progressives refute conservative assumptions by drawing on a variety of social science and historical research. First, they argue that the nuclear family form has not been the dominant historical form; nor has the family changed over time simply because of cultural values. Rather, the traditional family is really a modern, White middle-class phenomenon that grew out of structural changes, such as the industrial revolution, the Great Depression, World War II, automated machinery, increased reliance on the computer chip, and globalization. These are the same factors that have also increased social problems in the United States, such as unemployment, a decrease in the middle class, and increased poverty (Stacey 1996). According to progressive research, families change in order to survive such structural changes, thus, diverging from the traditional model, not because they are lazy or because they have faulty cultural values but because unstable financial situations deny them access to the resources necessary to maintain (if they want) a traditional family. In other words, changes in family structures serve as survival strategies and positive adjustments to negative social forces, such as economic hardships and social discrimination.

Progressives also challenge conservative assertions that biological ties are necessary for families by pointing to research showing that both motherhood and fatherhood are socially constructed and that fathers can develop nurturing skills when they become primary caregivers to their children (Glenn 1994). Furthermore, progressives show how maintaining rigid and traditional family divisions of labor based on gender is not feasible for or beneficial to many working- and lower-class families, particularly during economic recessions or for families that have recently emigrated from another country (Coltrane 2007; Hill 2012).

Progressives also refute marriage as the only legitimate defining characteristic of a family. They point to research showing how female-headed households and children who grow up with divorced parents or in stepfamilies are no worse than children who grow up in two-biological-parent families. Progressives argue that it is not the structure of the family but rather the quality of the relationships between adults and children that determine the welfare of the children (Demo 1992). They look to research on LGBTQ families showing that children with LGBTQ parents are at least as psychologically and socially healthy as children with heterosexual parents (Stacey and Biblarz 2001).

Progressives argue that the reliance on an ahistorical approach, on cultural and biological determinism, and on marriage, leads conservatives to a reversed sense of cause-and-effect in the relationship between family and society. That is, by ignoring historical and structural factors that prevent individuals from forming "traditional" families, conservatives are able to treat "the family as the cause of social conditions, rather than as a reflection of them" (Dill et al. 1998:11). Thus, rather than discussing how family forms are changing in positive ways to counter negative economic, social, and political forces, conservatives state that economic, social, and political situations are changing because the traditional family is disintegrating.

The dueling sides of the family values debate mean that although there are conservative laws and policies being instituted that undermine LGBTQ families, there are simultaneously progressive laws and policies being instituted that support LGBTQ families. Thus, at the same time that states were banning marriage equality, they were also recognizing legal parenthood of LGBTQ adults by increasing access to ARTs and decreasing barriers to adoption for potential and existing gay and lesbian parents (Richman 2009). In other words, one result of the family values debate is that the political and social ground upon which LGBTQ families are forming is constantly shifting. In addition, where LGBTQ people live within the US may determine how difficult or easy it is for them to form and maintain their families, as laws differ from state to state.

CONCLUSION

By considering the data and research, keeping abreast of changing definitions, understanding the historical and current movements and debates, and by interacting with LGBTQ people, and seeing how they organize and run their families, people can begin to think critically about issues and base their opinions on evidence and knowledge, not on assumptions and hearsay. In drawing on data and raising questions, this reading has provided some such evidence and knowledge, so readers can begin to understand the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people, the value of LGBTQ families, and the laws, policies, and practices that both facilitate the formation of LGBTQ families and make the lives of

LGBTQ families so difficult. By changing laws, policies, and practices, we have the power to help LGBTQ people and their families live with the dignity, respect, and legal rights granted to others. Once we truly support LGBTQ families, we create a better quality of relationships within families. Rather than focusing on the structure of families, we should focus on the quality of relationships within those families. By doing so, we will find that families with quality relationships contribute to society in positive ways that help reduce social problems and strengthen the larger family landscape.