LGBT Parents and Their Children: Non-Western Research and Perspectives

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Current knowledge about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) families has developed mainly in a Euro-American (Westernized) cultural context, which, although characterized by diversity, represents a fairly monocultural perspective on LGBT families. When examining research from a non-Western perspective, factors such as globalization, geographical location, social and cultural frameworks regarding race, language, and religion, and localized understandings of gender, sex, and sexuality need to be recognized.

Accordingly, against a backdrop of major global change and conflict, postmodern worlds and traditional patriarchal societies come into conflict, highlighting inequalities in class, gender, race, culture, ethnic group, and religion that create patterns of exclusion and marginalization. Therefore, in exploring non-Western perspectives, can the Westernized terms of homosexuality, gay, lesbian, queer, and so forth be applied when trying to comprehend and understand what is taking place in local cultures? Can the existence of forms of same-sex practices in non-Western cultures be seen as evidence of or similar to same-sex practices viewed from a Western perspective?

Consequently, a cross-cultural theoretical framework might assist in interpreting the available research, allowing for the appreciation of widely diverse and previously unfamiliar cultures' indigenous knowledge. In this respect, cross-cultural approaches study the variations in human behavior, taking into account the cultural environment in which the behavior occurs. Gilbert Herdt (1997) observes that the "cultural study in non-Western societies stresses the importance of examining not only the environment in which same-gendered relations occur, but also the symbolic systems of beliefs, rules, norms and social exchanges surrounding sexuality" (p. 19). Similarly, Kiluva-Ndunda (2005) emphasizes the complexity of sexual and gender identities in the sense that different societies or contexts produce different sexualities based on cultural ideas about how these should be expressed.

This chapter briefly explores the historical background of same-sex-oriented people within non-Westernized cultures, to account for the possible presence and existence of LGBT-parent families, as well as to provide a background against which the diversity and complexities of same-sex practices in various cultures influence the way LGBT families should be considered. After this overview, research from five regions is explored along significant signposts of gender, heteronormativity, the legal and political framework, and religious influences.

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A Brief History of Same-Sex-Oriented People in Non-Western Cultures

How do the possible presence and practices of same-sex relationships in non-Westernized cultures relate to global movements and a Westernized understanding of same-sex practices? Every country exists within a particular historical and social context; therefore Westernized defined terms should be used cautiously and critically (Khamasi & Maina-Chinkuya, 2005). Nel (2007) argues that it is even potentially offensive to use Westernized gender and sexuality categories in different countries; that even in the Westernized world the categories are not self-evident, and there is an even greater need for localized questions as to what it means to the people in a specific country. Similarly, in terms of the concept of sexuality, Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy, and Moletsane (2010) argue that "there are no widely accepted, positive, non-colonial terms for a celebrated and chosen, non-conventional sexual identity" (p. 12). It would seem that Western theories and/or terminologies of sexualities cannot capture what is meant by, or is taking place in, local cultures (Herdt, 1997; Khamasi & Maina-Chinkuya, 2005; Nel, 2007), and the need arises to discuss broader considerations before addressing non-Western families, such as sex, gender, sexual identity, sexual practices, and sexual orientation.

The same-sex practices reported in the literature provide a contextual background against which lesbian- and gay-parent families can be understood in specific cultural and localized contexts. The examples given below indicate the presence and existence of same-sex practices, but also illustrate the complexity of taking into account cultural distinctions. For example, in Thailand, *Tom and Dee* same-sex relationships between females have been documented. Throughout Mexico, Central America, and South America, *travestis* may dress and to some extent live as women, adapting their clothing, hair, and bodies in line with their intent. Some have prominent roles in their local community as entertainers, hairdressers, beauticians, and even politicians (Aggleton, 2009). Similarly, in West Africa, feminized men have an important role to play in traditional dance troupes. For example, in Burkina Faso, such men play an important role in baptisms and marriages. In Senegal, researchers have described the existence of *ibbi* (the receptive partner) and *yoo* (the penetrative partner) relationships between men (Aggleton, 2009). Similarly, Nel (2007) mentions the male *Azande* warriors in northern Congo who routinely married male youths who functioned as temporary wives.

Furthermore, Graham (2003) mentions her fieldwork in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, where she never met or heard of *women* involved in romantic relationships with women, but encountered *females* involved in romantic relationships with women. This example illustrates the cultural factors involved in understanding sexuality and gender in a specific country. In this case, the feminine partner continues to identify herself as a woman, while the masculine partner identifies as a *calalai*, a female-bodied individual who is attracted to women, and whose behavior and attitude are more masculine-like. The feminine partner is also referred to as *linas*. In South Saluwesi, these couples occupy a place in their society where they are accepted, and even adopt children from close relatives, for example. However, there is no public acknowledgement of their status, and one partner is expected to be masculine and actively develop a masculine identity. The women Graham encountered in her fieldwork stated that the pressure to become mothers via marriage is strong. However, they were very creative in negotiating this, either by adopting or marrying, until they become pregnant and then they choose to find a *linas*.

Some authors point to certain words in different cultures and languages that refer to the concept of homosexuality. Epprecht (2008) mentions *skesana, matanyola, istabane,* and so forth. Likewise, GALZ (Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe) (2008) refers to *hungochani* in Shona and *ubunkotshani* in Ndebele among others. Mkhize et al. (2010) mention the derogatory terms such as *Nongayindoda* in isiZulu that stigmatize women who live beyond accepted heterosexual norms of dress, behavior, or desire, and the terms in Afrikaans *moffie* and in isiZulu *isitabane* that refer to effeminate young men. The authors highlight the fact that these words

suggest a strong stigma or social disapproval. However, the mere fact that such words exist and some can be traced back over hundreds of years might indicate to a Westernized reader that forms of same-sex sexuality do exist.

Taking into account that in 82 countries same-sex sexuality is considered a crime and even the death penalty awaits (Ottosson, 2010), accessing information on LGBT families becomes a complicated affair. In countries such as Bangladesh, the Maldives, Singapore, and Uganda, people involved in same-sex practices can be imprisoned for years or even for life. In countries such as Iran, Yemen, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates, people involved in such practices can be sentenced to death for their sexual orientation (Vaggione, 2010). In much of sub-Saharan Africa for example, homosexuality is firstly interpreted as "foreign," and is portrayed as "un-African" and a "White import" (Nel, 2007, p. 101). According to some traditional African beliefs, people of a same-sex sexual orientation are considered cursed or bewitched by the forefathers. In Malawi, a country hostile to LGBT people, individuals with same-sex sexual orientations are currently imprisoned, blackmailed, or experience hostile reactions within their communities, and most live in secret (Watson, 2008). Thoreson and Cook (2011) also describe personal narratives of people with same-sex sexual orientations subjected to blackmailing and extortion practices in countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi, Nigeria, Ghana, and Cameroon. The illegality and stigmatization of LGBT people foster victimization in extreme forms. The practice of same-sex sexuality therefore becomes either so rare or hidden in many of these countries that it becomes almost unnoticeable.

LGBT-Parent Families in a Non-Western Context

Sociocultural change and the blending of different influences such as the fusion of different cultures since the advent of colonialism, globalization, and urbanization have all influenced the way families are shaped (Khamasi & Maina-Chinkuya, 2005). Like many sociologists and feminists, Karraker (2011) argues for an inclusive definition of what constitutes a family, defining the family as a "collection of people related by blood, marriage, adoption, or other intimate bond, who often but not always share a common residence over a significant span of time" (p. 304), and allowing for the incorporation of the complexities of blended families, single parents, and the unions of LGBT persons. The concept of LGBT families is complex and variations exist within the LGBT community. In this chapter, the focus is on lesbian- and gay-parent families; thus, I address research findings that address either a single parent or two gay or lesbian individuals together who are acting as parents to children. A significant exclusion is any discussion on families with the presence of a bisexual or transgendered parent, which at this stage represents a huge silence in the current available research.

To identify studies on this topic, I conducted a literature search using English keywords such as "homosexuality," "lesbian," "gay," "parents," "adoption," "queer," "homosexual/transgender/bisexual parents," "families," "non-Western," "Africa," and so forth in PsycInfo, Social Work Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, ERIC (Proquest), Social Sciences Citation Index, Sabinet, and EbscoHost. A wealth of information in the field of sexuality and especially HIV/AIDS research was uncovered, but with most emphasis on individuals, and fewer references to couples, with LGBT-parent families or LGBT parenting being almost nonexistent. As mentioned, the research presented is largely limited to research published in recognized scholarly journals in the English language. I acknowledge that more research certainly exists, but with the exceptions of a few articles that colleagues could translate from Portuguese and Spanish, only works in English were consulted.

Non-Western Research on Lesbian- and Gay-Parent Families

Working within a cross-cultural perspective, the following section is organized according to geographic region, to capture the contextual specifics

of each country. However, certain similarities emerge, which will be addressed within each region. The first similarity that emerges from each region is the way gender and the roles of women and men are framed within traditional and normative discourses on the family, illuminating the intersection among gender, parenting, and sexuality. Second, heteronormativity and the cultural nuances involved in interpreting homosexuality within a specific country reveal deeper complexities, indicative of the presence of prejudice, discrimination, and stigma. Third, the legal and political policies and framework of each country also play an important role, with regard to LGBT rights but also in informing specific parental practices such as adoption or the right to reproductive health. Fourth, the role of religion is also paramount in a cross-cultural perspective. Although these four commonalities are used as guideposts for presenting key information, it should be noted that definite and complex intersections and interconnections exist across the four contexts.

South America and Latin America

The Influence of Religion

In this region, the heteronormative assumptions that result in stigmatization and discrimination are informed by a religious discourse. Vaggione (2010) observes that resistance to nonheterosexual parenthood is greatly influenced by the Catholic Church. The immense historical and sociopolitical influence of the church can be seen in the fact that the state bases its legislation on Catholic doctrine, and any attempt to resist Catholic principles is considered by various sectors as an attack against the state. The patriarchy and heteronormativity of the church is seen as natural and legitimate. Furthermore, many characteristics of motherhood are embedded in the Virgin Mary's Catholic model of motherhood; for example, that a mother sacrifices on behalf of her children and shows sensitivity and care for her children (Sardá-Chandiramani, 2010; Vaggione, 2010).

Legal and Political Frameworks

Sardá-Chandiramani (2010) states that same-sex sexualities in Latin America seem to be experiencing more social, institutional, and legal recognition. What is interesting is that in most Latin American countries, non-procreative/same-sex consensual relationships have never been illegal. The few countries that maintained such legislation (Chile and Ecuador) repealed it without problem in the early 1990s. The exception to this rule is Nicaragua, which passed a sodomy law in 1992 and only repealed it in 2007 (Ottosson, 2010). The only country where civil unions for same-sex couples exist at the national level is Uruguay (Sardá-Chandiramani, 2010). In addition, same-sex unions have been recognized on local and state levels in the big cities of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico (Ottosson, 2010; Sardá-Chandiramani, 2010). Legal advances, as well as the presence of individuals and relationships (including families), confirm that the silence on the existence of same-sex desires and practices, and the identities built around them, has long been broken. However, inequality still exists at many levels, including the economic, class, race, and social levels (Herrera, 2009; Sardá-Chandiramani, 2010). Furthermore, the legal advances should still be viewed against the backdrop of cultural forces that shape Latin-American societies, as Uziel (2001) notes that even though the union of same-sex couples is tolerated, the family is perceived as the basis of society and receives special protection from the State. The essential concept of family still refers to the traditional family; same-sex partners who wish to adopt are seen as a threat to the family, and even single parenthood is still perceived unfavorably. It can therefore be deduced that a specific moral order of types of family exists.

The Intersection Between Religion and Legal/Political Frameworks: The Case of Adoption

The intersection between the above-mentioned legal advances and the role of religion can especially be seen when it comes to adoption rights.

The Catholic Church on both a national and an international level argues that adoption by homosexuals is immoral and in violation of the rights of the child, and can even be seen as an "act of violence against minors as their normal development would be obstructed" (Vaggione, 2010, p. 218) without the presence of both sexes. Sardá-Chandiramani (2010) mentions that apart from the Catholic Church, some Christian evangelical churches and right-wing conservative parties also offer strong resistance to marriage and adoption rights especially for same-sex couples. Feminist activism and the movement for sexual diversity have brought the debate on regulating the family into the public arena, an inevitable issue in establishing legitimacy and legality for LGBTQ rights.

Uziel (2001) provides an overview of the judiciary process of adoption in Brazil and, against the background of a case study, discusses various reasons for how the law is applied, first in terms of how masculinity is constructed in Brazil and second the relationship between homosexuality and the way the justice system perceives what constitutes a family. Her data consisted of court records from 1995 to 2000 in Rio de Janeiro, and interviews with two judges, five psychologists, and four social workers involved in evaluations for adoptions. Uziel's work shows the gendered belief in Brazil that the female identity is tied to motherhood, as women are seen as caretakers of children. Consequently, men are seen as being unable to perform such a function, whether for biological, social, cultural, or judicial reasons. Therefore, the idea of wanting to be a single father, and even more so if that man is homosexual, becomes almost unimaginable. This example highlights the intersection among gender, sexuality, parenthood, and societal beliefs embedded in a legal framework.

Herrera (2009) describes with regards to Chile that legislative frameworks and public policies do not protect lesbian partnerships, nor are adoption and reproductive technologies available to lesbians. Chilean society is strongly heteronormative, and same-sex partners face discrimination on a daily basis. As recently as 2004, the Supreme Court ruled that custody be given to the biological father, because Karen Atala, who happened to be a judge, lived with a female partner. The Court ruled that Atala was not able "to provide them [the children] with a proper social environment" (Herrera, 2009, p. 36). Most of the lesbian mothers in Herrera's ethnographic study (in which she interviewed 29 lesbians, 10 of whom were mothers) had children from a previous marriage. She found that the lesbian mothers hid their sexual identity to protect their relationship with their children, out of fear for custody battles and being labeled as incompetent mothers. This dilemma is similar to current Westernized societies where legal protection does not yet exist, or resembles earlier findings where legal protection does not yet favor lesbian or gay couples and their families.

Traditionalist Discourses on Motherhood and the Family

Traditionalist discourses on motherhood and gender are intertwined with heteronormative ideals on what constitutes a family constitutes and the roles that mothers and fathers ought to play. Álvarez and Álvares-Gayou Jurgenson (2003) reiterate the strong relationship between motherhood and families in Mexico, and refer to the heteronormative assumption that motherhood is only associated with heterosexual women: "Lesbian women who are interested, desire, aspire or actually exercise maternity are not only not understood, but persecuted, criticized or stigmatized" (p. 66). They studied 10 heterosexual and 10 lesbian women who were equivalent in age, educational level, number of children, years living with a partner, and socioeconomic status. Their findings revealed that heterosexual and lesbian mothers perceived maternity and being a mother in similar ways.

Herrera (2009) discusses the gendered identity of families in Chile, namely the heteronormative assumptions that place great emphasis on motherhood. Much of what it means to be a Chilean woman (identity) centers on one's children, and a woman achieves a sense of purpose in her life by becoming a mother. Furthermore, society expects a mother to be feminine, sensitive, caring, and always giving of herself.

As mentioned earlier in the section on religion, these characteristics of motherhood are strongly influenced by religious frameworks. Some of the women Herrera interviewed associated motherhood with heterosexuality and had difficulty associating motherhood with homosexuality, while others commented on homophobia as being the biggest obstacle, thinking of the potential influence it could have on their children.

Therefore, Herrera (2009) argues that traditional and transgressive elements coexist in the experiences and perceptions of motherhood in the narratives of the Chilean lesbians that she interviewed. This argument is congruent with Ellen Lewin's (1993) observation, based on her sample of mostly White lesbian mothers in the USA, that motherhood legitimates a lesbian's experiences. However, Herrera contends that, for Chilean lesbian couples, the traditional notions of motherhood are important, as they hope to gain legitimacy and social acceptance for their families. She argues that traditional discourses continue to have power over how people comprehend and create families. By embracing tradition and following a path of assimilation rather than differentiation, the families want to be included in the milieu of what is accepted. Chilean lesbians therefore do not differentiate themselves from the heterosexual model of parenthood, but adjust the existing model to normalize their families. They embrace tradition as much as they can, and follow the traditional expectations of family life. Herrera concludes that Chile has not yet consolidated alternative models of family and motherhood. However, she asserts that, with or without realizing it, the lesbian couples in her study are challenging the traditional family model by "(a) eliminating the father as parent, (b) the equality of gender roles within the couple, and (c) the centrality of care and affection in kinship" (Herrera, 2009, p. 50).

However, the various factors in negotiating parenthood are considered against the specific cultural background of Chile, where lineage and a secure bloodline are of importance. For example, as in a Western context, artificial insemination is the preferred option, as the children have some resemblance to the birth mother. In Chile, however, lesbian women cannot opt for assistance in hospitals and clinics and must use their own networks for obtaining donors, whether known or unknown. Since self-insemination is the only option, the partner also plays a significant role. The involvement of both women as a couple correlates with the emphasis that Chilean society places on the significance of parenthood as a couple. The "other mother," her role as well as her place in the structure of the family, becomes important. However, the other mother is neither legally nor, in many instances, socially recognized, placing her in a vulnerable and fragile position (Herrera, 2009).

Another important issue that Sardá-Chandiramani (2010) raises is that the commonality in terms of the Spanish language in Latin American countries has led to strong research and advocacy being generated in this region, but has also "made the region somewhat insular" (p. 201). An informal search on Google, Google translate, and Google Scholar confirms the presence of scientific articles written in Spanish and Portuguese. Forging cross-cultural ties between Latin America and other world regions might advance our understanding of local culture. However, a perusal of the bibliographies of the articles reviewed confirmed that a great deal of research from the USA, UK, and Western Europe has been used, especially, to inform the theoretical underpinnings of gender, sexuality, identity, and parenting. Still, closer ties with the Latin American region might reveal ways in which different cultures and perspectives have been blended to advance our current knowledge on what family life holds for LGBT parents and their children.

In conclusion, heteronormative assumptions of traditional family life are strongly embedded within a religious discourse in South America and Latin America, where the legal and political frameworks are also strongly influenced by religion. These intersecting influences certainly present challenges for lesbian- and gay-parent families to establish legitimate and fully recognized families.

Israel

From the literature it would seem that two main forces are present in Israel, modernization and Westernization (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Shechner,

Slone, Meir, & Kalish, 2010). Simultaneously, the centrality of the traditional nuclear family dominates as a distinctive feature (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Shechner et al., 2010).

In examining research findings from Israel, the legal/political framework creates certain features that allow the emergence of lesbian- and gay-parent families. However, strong traditionalism where the stability of the family is highly valued provides an interesting backdrop against which the legal changes can be viewed.

Legal/Political Framework

Israel is a country where same-sex couples have been offered some rights of marriage since 1995, and joint adoption of children has been legal since 2008 (Ottosson, 2010). Lavee and Katz (2003) describe Israel as a child-oriented society, where children are highly valued by their parents and by society as a whole. Women receive a birth allowance, and families continue to receive allowances and tax deductions based on the number of children they have. Free medical care is provided for all mothers and children up to the age of three.

Ben-Ari and Livni (2006), however, caution that the liberal perspective of the courts does not necessarily reflect the public's attitude. What is interesting is that at the time when early articles on lesbian and gay parenting were written, Israeli law viewed the biological mother as a single mother, and the partner did not have any parental rights. The couples, however, perceived themselves as equal in status. Of note is that Shechner et al. (2010), who examined fatherless families in Israel by interviewing 30 women from two-mother lesbian families, 30 single heterosexual mothers by choice, and 30 mothers from two-parent heterosexual families, confirmed this in the fact found that lesbian mothers did not differ from heterosexual mothers in their psychological and parental adjustment.

Ben-Ari and Livni (2006) explored the subjective experiences of eight Israeli lesbian mothers. The age of the children ranged from 2 months to 13 years. All the pregnancies were planned, with seven of the eight couples opting for anonymous donor insemination. Ben-Ari and Livni's research provides insight into the establishment of equality in a lesbian couple relationship prior to and following the birth of a child, influenced by the legal status of same-sex relations in Israel. They found that a significant strategy to attempt to regain equality was in the couple's pursuit to access all possible legal rights and is significant since adoption rights were only granted in 2008, 2 years after the research findings have been published. In addition to the above, the couples also used other strategies, such as having both partners become pregnant and give birth and deciding that both parents will raise the children. The quest to establish equality should also be seen against the backdrop of the strong traditionalist discourse on motherhood present in Israel.

Traditionalist Discourses on Motherhood and the Family

Lavee and Katz (2003) maintain that strong traditionalism is present especially with regard to the family in Israel, as they argue that the family is "stronger and more stable than in other industrialized nations" (p. 213). Within this strong family, a vast diversity of family patterns exist in terms of family values, attitudes toward gender roles, and lifestyle choices. Lavee and Katz reject the notion of a clear, monolithic Israeli family. The blend of predominantly Jews (about 80%) and non-Jews of mainly Arabic descent also brings the cultural orientation of individualism versus collectivism to the fore. Despite these two different orientations, Ben-Ari and Lavee (2004) maintain that the centrality of family dominates. A finding that emerged that is especially relevant to the Israeli context is the high value that is placed on motherhood and the family. Ben-Ari and Livni (2006) assert that, after becoming mothers, the lesbian women in their sample reported feeling more accepted and less marginalized by both members of the community and their families of origin. Participants mentioned that their families of origin supported their decision to become pregnant, even if they did not approve of a lesbian lifestyle. Lesbian couples

reported a change in attitude, including the partner, with the birth of a biological grandchild. This change reflects the Israeli culture where womanhood is equated to motherhood, and giving birth outside the traditional framework of a family is quite acceptable and even encouraged. The mainstream identity of motherhood overshadows the marginalized identity of being a lesbian, and therefore supports the legitimization of the lesbian couple.

Shechner et al. (2010) found that family processes such as satisfaction with the relationship and parental and couple adjustment shaped the well-being of families, regardless of sexual orientation. Another finding, which is well established in the literature, was that lesbian couples shared more equally in their parental duties. Furthermore, single heterosexual mothers were the most vulnerable group, as they received less positive social support from their families and friends, indicating that their single status marks their deviation away from the normative family and gives them minority membership. The traditional heterosexual married mothers received the highest level of positive family support, but lesbian mothers also attained high levels of positive family support, as motherhood provides an avenue to become part of the normative ideal of establishing a family.

Eastern Europe

Eastern Europe is such a diverse region, and it would be arrogant to create the impression that a comprehensive overview of this region is represented here. Research in the Czech Republic as well as Slovenia could be obtained and is discussed in terms of the legal frameworks and heteronormativity.

Legal/Political Framework

In 2006, the Registered Partnership Act of Same-Sex Persons was passed, granting gay and lesbian couples legal security. However, the law does not include provisions of any adoption arrangements; it explicitly excludes any individual with the registered status from adopting a child. The Czech Family Act enables both married couples and single individuals to adopt children, given that a proper environment for the child is provided. According to Polášková (2007), her research using interpretative phenomenological analysis is the first project on lesbian and gay families to be conducted in the Czech Republic. Polášková (2007) interviewed 10 lesbian families (20 female parents and 13 children), focusing mainly on parenting experiences. Three couples had children from previous heterosexual marriages, four couples had undergone anonymous donor insemination at foreign clinics, and one couple had used donor insemination themselves with a known donor. In addition, two couples were in co-parenting agreements with gay male couples. Polášková (2007) mentions that some single lesbian women have managed to adopt a child, but they hid their sexual orientation and therefore their sexual orientation is not reflected in official records. Furthermore, Czech legislation does not allow for women without a male partner to apply for donor insemination and, although not explicitly stated, women either use a foreign clinic or manage to navigate past the standard procedures.

Heteronormativity and Parenthood

In Polášková's (2007) research, subtle indicators of heteronormativity were expressed through the concerns raised by some parents about their children's healthy development in terms of future sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender role behaviors. Some parents also ensured that their children had sufficient exposure to gender role models via their families or social networks, while others also made an effort to break away from gender stereotypes in raising their children, exposing their children to a wide variety of toys. In common with findings from Western-based research, the mothers negotiated the choice of children's surnames, either adopting the biological mother's surname or the social mother changed hers as a demonstration of her commitment to the

family and as a way to gain public recognition. Children born from previous marriages kept their fathers' surnames so as not to stigmatize the children, or mothers obtained permission from the fathers to change the child's surname. Some families even created new surnames to establish a new identity. The issue of what to call the two mothers was also raised, whereby, for example, children referred to both women as "parents," or referred to the social mother as "aunt" or calling her by her name. With regard to the negotiation of the gender roles assigned to parenting, women valued the equal distribution of power within their relationship and explicitly moved away from traditional role expectations (Polášková, 2007).

Similarly, Švab (2007) reiterates the heteronormativity present in Slovenian society, in which LGBT parenthood becomes almost unthinkable for the gay men and lesbians whom she interviewed. She established that 42% of her respondents wanted to have a child, while 20% were undecided. Even though they wanted children, they mentioned that they did not think it was possible and expressed anxiety over the potentially negative consequences of homophobia for the children.

Švab and Kuhar (2005) report that Slovenia is marked by homophobia, and violence against gay men and lesbians is common. In Slovenia, gay and lesbian couples cannot adopt children, and reproductive technology, such as artificial insemination, is not an option for women without male partners. In this context, same-sex parenthood is both legally impossible and socially unacceptable. Moreover, the social and political climate of the country creates a barrier where thoughts of parenting are silenced. Participants suppressed their desire to have children and rationalized it as unwanted, mentioning that children need two gendered role models, while others made use of more positive forms of coping, such as taking over social roles for nieces and nephews, or becoming part of the social networks of other gay men and lesbians who had children (Švab, 2007; Švab & Kuhar, 2005). By engaging in these repressive thoughts, gay men and lesbians subtly reinforce the heteronormative ideals and reproduce discriminatory beliefs.

South Africa

A multitude of family formations have evolved in South Africa, as a consequence of the cultural, political, and economic conditions as well as personal choice. Simultaneously, what needs to be understood about South Africa is its diversity, the tension between a developed and developing economy, and the life worlds of its people.

Even the deployment of the terms "Black" and "White" in South Africa is not simple. As collective terms, they reflect the diversity present in issues such as class, ancestry, language, educational experience, the stories of their families under apartheid, and so forth. Nevertheless, they can be useful as, generally speaking, Black women represent the most vulnerable group in South Africa in terms of poverty, class stratification, and gender inequality (Mkhize et al., 2010).

Furthermore, lesbians, most notably Black lesbians, are subjected to violence in townships and other urban settings. Between 2006 and 2009, 10 cases of rape and murder of lesbian women were reported in South Africa (Gunkel, 2010; Mkhize et al., 2010). Such incidents are informed by culturally sanctioned homophobia and hate speech, based on perceptions that homosexuality is un-African, that gay men and lesbian cannot be afforded the same constitutional protections and rights, and that homosexuality should be criminalized and condemned from a religious point of view. In addition, the cultural intolerance emanating from varied notions of what is correct and proper gender behavior and what is not also affects different perceptions of people (Mkhize et al., 2010). Such intolerance occurs in spite of the current legal climate in which the Constitution guarantees the protection of all citizens, irrespective of sexual orientation.

In the almost 20 years since the new Constitution was written in 1994, there has been little research on LGBT families in general, and lesbian- or gay-parent families in particular. Potgieter's (1997) doctoral study was the first in-depth study addressing issues related to Black lesbians; although families are not the main focus of her research, she did explore discourses on motherhood from the perspective of Black South African lesbians (Potgieter, 2003).

Localized Discourses on Motherhood

Potgieter's (2003) groundbreaking work in South Africa illustrates the complexity of working in a non-Western environment, as well as the richness that can be obtained when research is undertaken to understand experiences and discourses from a local context in particular. Potgieter conducted six individual interviews and 10 focus groups (63 women in total). She observed that Black women in South Africa, as in other non-Western contexts, do not necessarily use labels familiar to Westernized societies to define themselves as lesbian. Since she conducted her interviews in the informal settlement of Khayelitsha near Cape Town, the languages of English and Xhosa (an official yet indigenous language) were used, and many women labeled themselves "*nongayindoda*, the Xhosa word for gay" (Potgieter, 2003, p. 138). However, many chose to speak in English, as one participant said, "We do not talk about this 'secret' in Xhosa" (Potgieter, 2003, p. 142). This comment alludes to the speculation that some forms of gayness do exist in African culture, although the difference between practices and identities should be treated with care.

The findings emphasized the essentialist notion that it is important and a natural instinct to have children; indeed, many of the women shared that they had heterosexual sex to have a baby. In my opinion, this way of conceiving a child might either be because other forms, such as artificial insemination, have not been explored or that access to this service is limited, or it might even be too expensive. Alternatively this practice resonates with reports that in African and other non-Western societies women who have same-sex relationships are assisted by men who fulfill certain functions, such as helping women reproduce (Chacha, 2003; GALZ, 2008; Potgieter, 2003).

Motherhood also assisted the participants in achieving "adult status" in the eyes of the community (Potgieter, 2003, p. 144). Potgieter (2003) explored the contradiction and tension between the normalizing discourse of being similar to heterosexual women, while also positioning themselves as lesbians and challenging certain traditional roles. However, doing routine household tasks and having a baby gave them "a comfortable space to 'be' lesbian" (Potgieter, 2003, p. 148).

Research Findings from Lesbian- and Gay-Parent Families Similar to Westernized Societies

Pockets of research are starting to appear in South Africa, mainly from postgraduate studies that include lesbian and gay parents who are willing to participate; most often, these participants come from more affluent sectors in society. Six research-based studies could be found focusing specifically on LGBT families via official search engines and informal networking across South Africa. A synopsis of the main findings of the above six studies can be summarized in two themes, namely children's experiences and parenting experiences against the backdrop of heteronormativity.

Children's Experiences Embedded in Heteronormativity

Lubbe (2005) focused on the experiences of children growing up in lesbian-parent families. Nine children in total from five households were interviewed, ages ranging from 9 to 18 years. In four of the five families the children were born in a previous heterosexual marriage, while the other family's children were adopted. In this study, the main findings suggest that the children experienced different levels of "okayness" in having lesbians parents, they were aware of others' open-mindedness or not, and they expressed the need for openness in their relationships with others. The findings are consistent with Annandale's (2008) research, which explored the experiences of adolescents with gay parents. In-depth case studies were carried out with three adolescents, each of whom had a gay father. Annandale found that the participants were affected by the discovery of their father's homosexuality; however, they chose to eventually accept their father's sexual orientation and expressed the wish to establish open and trustworthy relationships with their fathers.

Similarly, Lubbe and Kruger (2012) explored the disclosure practices of a South African-born adolescent raised in a lesbian-parent family in the

USA. Dominant discourses that influenced disclosure were identified, namely religion, school, friends, acquaintances, and society at large, as well as individual emotional well-being. Protective factors against heterosexism were support from parents, friends, and significant others (Annandale, 2008; Lubbe & Kruger, 2012; Lubbe, 2008), as well as schools with an accepting and open-minded atmosphere (Judge, Manion, & De Waal, 2008; Lubbe & Kruger, 2012; Lubbe, 2007; Pon, 2008). Judge et al. (2008) shared an anecdote of a lesbian couple of color (a particular race category in South Africa) who adopted two daughters to give both parents equal status. They shared their experiences of adoption before the Civil Union Act (prior to 2006), as one partner had to adopt the child as a single mother, while with the second adoption the legal changes created by the Act made it much easier. They also shared that the school was very supportive when they told members of the school system about their changed marital status.

Parenting Experiences and Heteronormativity

Two qualitative studies have explored the parenting experiences of lesbian couples who chose to have children through assisted reproductive technology, namely artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization (Suckling, 2009; Swain, 2009). Furthermore, Pon (2008) conducted the first study of adoptive gay parents and their experiences with the preschool system. Key themes on parenting centered on the experiences of general heterosexism through social interactions, as well as significant institutional challenges, most notably from the medical, legal, and religious domains. Religion emerged as the most homophobic and exclusionary discourse toward parents in Pon's study. This subtheme of religion is also present in the studies of Lubbe (2005) and Lubbe and Kruger (2012). Lack of social support from friends and family resulting in feelings of isolation were evident in Suckling's (2009) research. Other themes included concerns about providing male role models or a "father" figure, as well as equipping their children to come to terms with their family unit and their conception. The participants in Pon's study also prepared their children with social and emotional skills to handle possible prejudice and discrimination from their peers and teachers, indicative of the heteronormativity of society. Being proactive in the schools facilitated the process of acceptance and acted as a discourse of empowerment (Pon, 2008). All three studies are indicative of the highly reflective skills of negotiating what it means to become and be a parent.

What can be deduced from research being done in South Africa? Members of the middle to upper classes are adopting and having children with the help of assisted reproductive technologies, and previously married LGBT individuals are keeping custody of their children in the current more liberating legal environment. There are a variety of experiences within and between families, as is the case in other Westernized countries. Also, true of any family irrespective of the parent's sexual orientation, there is a continuum of experiences from highly functioning families that encounter the occasional homophobic incident here and there, with children being well adjusted, "okay," open and proud; to couples struggling with intense rejection, nonacceptance, and internalized homophobia. Most findings cohere with what is known in Westernized societies, mainly because research is done in partnership with White, middle-class participants. What remains silenced and invisible in research is that when race, ethnicity, and lower socioeconomic factors are explored, research becomes almost nonexistent, as is perhaps also the case in most other Westernized societies. Furthermore, even though South Africa has a very advanced constitution and legal arena, living as a family in a heteronormative patriarchal society, where differences, distrust, fear, and hatred are on the rise, can be a totally different story.

Imagining Lesbian- and Gay-Parent Families in Traditionalist Cultures

Other small vignettes found in scholarly work on same-sex practices reveal the presence of LGBT families, although their focus is not on parenting

or LGBT families per se. The occurrence of woman–woman marriage in Southern African countries is not ordinarily seen as lesbian, even if occasional sexual exchange may occur, but has always taken place in African societies with varying degrees and for different reasons (Matebeni, 2008). Instances of these marriages are found among the Venda, Balobedu (Lovedu), Pedi, Zulu, and Narene peoples. Such marriages are performed for two main reasons: (a) because the woman marrying is in a powerful position as a result of owning land and property, and (b) because she is childless. The female husband remains the most important "father figure" for children born to women marriages, and sons continue her lineage (Chacha, 2003; Matebeni, 2008; Morgan & Wieringa, 2005; Nel, 2007). Chacha (2003) argues that woman–woman marriages are predominantly a precapitalist tradition on the African continent and flourished in the nineteenth century. This highlights the intersection among sexuality, gender, marriage, and cultural traditions, such as the economics of production, resource control, and social security.

Women marriage also happens among *sangomas* (traditional healers), although not all *sangomas* explicitly self-identify as lesbians (Mbali, 2009; Munro, 2009; Nel, 2007). One example is the narration of the relationship between the female husband and the ancestral wife by Nkabinde (2008), where she shares the story of Hlengiwe, who came to be married to Ntombikhona. In Hlengiwe's words, she mentions that she had been in love with Ntombikhona for more than 12 years, and the children loved her as their mother. The sexual relationship between them is secret though. Hlengiwe says that "she is 100% a lady" and they are "just two women loving each other" (Nkabinde, 2008, p. 116). This story illustrates the presence of children living with two mothers, but whether we can equate their family structure and identify it as a lesbian-parent family remains questionable.

In another example, GALZ (2008) describes the phenomenon of mine marriages in South Africa, focusing on the Basotho people (people from Lesotho), where new mine workers choose a husband who will look after him and his interests, called *Komba-E-Kehle* or *mteto ka sokisi*. A case study is presented by Epprecht (2008) about a man who had a wife in Lesotho, taking on a male husband and living in an apartment in town. The man is referred to as the second wife and is accepted by the family and the wife in Lesotho, who is quoted as saying "I'm very lucky that my husband is going out with a gay" (Epprecht, 2008, p. 169). Epprecht states "Hlohoangwane adopted the dress and manners of a respectable modern, middle-class housewife and adopted children to complete the marriage" (p. 170). This statement also alludes to the presence of children and the existence of another variety of a gay-parent family.

The various forms and variety within South Africa are found in another example from the Sesotho culture where limited and discreet female–female physical intimacy is allowed: Co-wives of one husband are allowed to express physical affection for one another that includes kissing and snuggling. In common with a Kenyan example, a widow can take a young woman in marriage if she has the resources to pay *bohali* (cattle as price or token of agreement for a marriage to take place). The wife in this type of marriage is supposed to get pregnant by a discreet arrangement with a man who would have no claims to the offspring. The female *ntate* (father, Sir, or Mister) is entitled to show affection for her wife as well. Another form that is allowed is female–female *setsoalle*, which has no material benefits or costs, but the emotional benefits are widely accepted and admired. This *setsoalle* friendship is supported by men as they claim that it makes their wives more loyal and loving (GALZ, 2008).

Africa

The complexity of finding and doing research in the rest of Africa becomes daunting. Epprecht (2008) confirms the presence in Africa of men who have sex with men, and women who have sex with women. However, he cautions that they do not necessarily identify this as lesbian or gay behavior, nor do they necessarily take on such a

specific identity. Heterosexual marriage and reproduction are highly valued in most African societies. In instances where same sex or "pseudo-homosexualities" are allowed, it occurs within the confined spaces of specific rituals or designated social roles. Furthermore, the laws criminalizing homosexuality were imposed by colonialism, and African leaders adopted the colonial laws post independence. Another challenge is the invisibility of lesbian women, bisexual women, and transgender persons, due to the fragility of human rights on the African continent (Gunkel, 2010; Nel, 2007; Ottosson, 2010).

Morgan and Wieringa (2005) give an example of a self-identified lesbian couple in Kenya who started the process of adopting two children, but foresaw that they would immigrate to the USA given the stigmatization of LGBT people in Kenya. The authors mention two other examples of lesbians considering motherhood, indicating that the presence of lesbian- and gay-parent families might become a possibility in the future.

In Tanzania and Uganda same-sex practices are so forbidden that there is no or little evidence of lesbians or gay men having children. Narratives from Namibia reveal opposition to motherhood from lesbian women, as they relate it to having sex with a man before you can have children. Some self-identified lesbians from Namibia do have children which they now raise with their partners, having had sexual relationships with men when they were younger or having been raped. Morgan and Wieringa (2005) also explore the position of *lesbian men* who are mothers to their own biological children, but also fathers to the children of their partner.

The literature emerging from Africa, such as the untold stories on blackmail, stigmatization, and imprisonment in Malawi (Watson, 2008), and blackmail and extortion of LGBT people in sub-Saharan Africa (Thoreson & Cook, 2011), reveals the confrontation of stigma, discrimination, hate crimes, and violation of basic human rights on an individual level. These violations force me to ask how, if individuals are silenced, is it possible for families to not be almost absent and invisible as well.

Concluding Remarks

Institutional, social, and cultural forces shape and regulate same-sex sexualities globally. Laws and government policies, as well as religious practices, undeniably have an impact on same-sex sexualities and, consequently, on LGBT-parent families. Before more families can be open and dare to venture into a heteronormative world, basic human rights need to be secured.

From the research that has emerged over the last few years, the claim that LGBT families *do* exist out there can be made; whether they themselves identify as LGBT though might be a totally different matter. Much more research is needed within an indigenous framework where partnerships between researchers and participants are fostered to acknowledge, value, and produce local knowledge. If questions related to same-sex identity are never asked, claims that LGBT-parent families do not exist will continue to go unchallenged. Non-Western perspectives on LGBT-parent families bring to light a world of fragile rights and vulnerable families.

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