



# LGBTQ Parents and the Workplace

Ann Hergatt Huffman, Nicholas A. Smith,  
and Satoris S. Howes

Few would dispute that parenting is hard, and perhaps harder today than in the past (Mikolajczak, Brianda, Avalosse, & Roskam, 2018). Moreover, being a working parent brings additional complexities, with working parents experiencing greater levels of physical and emotional fatigue than non-working parents (Ilies, Huth, Ryan, & Dimotakis, 2015). Indeed, work-family conflict, which occurs when work and family demands clash (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), is positively related to the number of children one has and negatively related to the age of one's youngest child living at home (Byron, 2005). Add to this an LGBTQ status and the intricacies of being a working parent become more complex, and far less researched.

In this chapter, we explore the workplace experiences of LGBTQ parents. We start by presenting policies that have the potential to uniquely impact LGBTQ working parents. Following this, we provide an overview of contemporary theoretical perspectives that have been used to help understand workplace experiences of LGBTQ parents as well as critical theories that we believe pose the greatest possibility for advancement as they incorporate a more nuanced understanding of LGBTQ working parents. We then summarize the literature that has incorporated the various theoretical approaches to empirically explore the workplace experiences of LGBTQ parents. Finally, we provide implications for practice and recommendations for future research. In the spirit of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) larger systems perspective, we provide suggestions at the individual, organizational, and national levels.

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A. H. Huffman (✉)  
Psychological Sciences and WA Franke College  
of Business, Northern Arizona University,  
Flagstaff, AZ, USA  
e-mail: [ann.huffman@nau.edu](mailto:ann.huffman@nau.edu)

N. A. Smith  
Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences,  
Oregon Health & Science University,  
Portland, OR, USA  
e-mail: [smitnich@ohsu.edu](mailto:smitnich@ohsu.edu)

S. S. Howes  
College of Business, Oregon State University,  
Bend, OR, USA  
e-mail: [satoris.howes@osucascades.edu](mailto:satoris.howes@osucascades.edu)

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## Workplace Policies Impacting LGBTQ Parents

National and state laws and policies likely play a large role in the work and family experiences of employees (Den Dulk & Peper, 2016). For example, important issues such as healthcare for oneself and one's family are less relevant in countries that provide free or universal healthcare compared to countries in which similar

healthcare program are nonexistent. Although many laws and policies may impact LGBTQ individuals generally, and LGBTQ employees more specifically (e.g., discrimination), we limit our focus on laws/policies that are most germane to LGBTQ employees' experiences as *parents*, including family/parental leave and family medical coverage.

### Family/Parental Leave

Depending on the country, the amount of time allowed for family leave varies substantially. For example, whereas employees in the United States of America (USA) are not guaranteed any maternal leave, employees in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Singapore get 100% wage replacement for an established period of time (for those countries, 14 to 146 weeks; Earle, Mokomane, & Heymann, 2011). The pattern is similar for paternal leave.

LGBTQ employees who are citizens of countries with paid leave will experience fewer issues related to getting time off for adoption or caring for sick child(ren) than LGBTQ employees who are citizens of countries without paid leave. Since the law in such countries surrounding paid leave allows all parents time for parental responsibilities, sexual or gender orientation status is less relevant to paid parental leave. However, in countries without mandatory paid leave, decisions about whether or not to grant parental leave is at the organization's discretion. Interestingly, Goldberg (2010) reports that biological lesbian mothers may have more access to parental leave compared to nonbiological mothers. Worthy of mention is the point that LGBQ couples adopt at higher rates than different-sex couples (i.e., different-sex couples have nonbiological children—step or adopted—at a rate of 4% compared to same-sex couples' rate of 21%; Lofquist, 2011). This is notable because adoption benefits are not as common as traditional parental birth leave (Hara & Hegewisch, 2013). In turn, many LGBTQ parents who adopt their children may face limited or no formal parental leave.

### Family Medical Coverage

Healthcare, which also varies considerably by country, is another important benefit for employed parents. The majority of all developed countries have either free (78%) or universal (59%) healthcare (STC, 2018). Unlike most other countries, most health benefits in the USA are not government sponsored and often are the responsibility of employers (see Ridic, Gleason, & Ridic, 2012). As of 2018, organizations in the USA with more than 50 employees are required to provide health coverage or must pay a penalty. A limitation in this system is that health coverage is quite variable such that not all conditions or treatments are covered by all insurers.

In countries that have free or universal healthcare, there should be few issues for LGBTQ employed parents since the national medical care would presumably cover the employee, partner, and children, regardless of one's sexual or gender orientation. LGBTQ employed parents without free or universal healthcare, however, will likely experience additional stress. Countries without a national healthcare system, such as the USA and Mexico (the only two OECD countries without universal health coverage; OECD, 2014), depend on private health insurers, often through one's employer. The USA is a notable example of this type of system whereby health insurance is secured through one's employer, through purchasing one's own insurance, or for certain groups (aged/disabled, economically disadvantaged) through the government (Ridic et al., 2012). This becomes relevant for LGBTQ individuals who may not have access to a company's health insurance, who may have to take additional steps to prove eligibility for insurance compared to married heterosexual parents, who may experience additional tax burdens when obtaining coverage for domestic partners, or when only legally married partners are eligible for healthcare coverage and the couple's union is not legally recognized (see Potter & Allen, 2016). As parents, this could be further complicated if only one parent is afforded legal guardianship

over a child, and that parent becomes unemployed and therefore the child's health insurance coverage is at risk (or is at risk of becoming prohibitively costly).

In summary, some stark differences in work-life experiences, especially medical and leave issues, exist at the national or country level. Yet we would be naïve to suggest that these policies by themselves affect an LGBTQ employed parent's workplace experience. There are transgender employed parents in Germany, for example, who would state their work-life interface is very stressful. Conversely, there are lesbian employed parents in the USA who would say they have very positive work-life experiences. In the following section, we provide an overview of theoretical perspectives that have been used to help understand workplace experiences of LGBTQ parents as well as theories that pose the greatest possibility for advancement in this area.

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## Theoretical Foundation

We next provide a brief review of contemporary theoretical perspectives that researchers have used to help understand workplace experiences of LGBTQ parents, including role theory, stigma theory, and minority stress theory. Worthy of note is that we provide only a short summary of these perspectives; readers interested in a more comprehensive discussion of these theoretical orientations along with implications for LGBTQ workers are encouraged to see King, Huffman, and Peddie (2013). Following this overview, we provide a glimpse into critical theories going forward for understanding LGBTQ parents in the workforce. While the contemporary theories still have utility for future scholars, particularly given the paucity of research that remains regarding LGBTQ employed parents, we present additional critical theories that pose perhaps the greatest possibility for the advancement of research on the workplace experiences of LGBTQ parents, as they incorporate a more nuanced understanding of the target sample. Specifically, we discuss transformative perspectives, feminism, and queer theory.

## Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives: A Nod to the Past

**Role theory** The first theoretical perspective that can help better understand work-family experiences for LGBTQ individuals is role theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This theory posits that individuals hold multiple roles at any given time, and each of these roles are associated with particular expectations that may create conflict when they contradict or interfere with one another. While most individuals simultaneously engage in multiple roles that may create stress (e.g., employee, spouse, parent), LGBTQ parents may have more complicated role fulfillment and potential for problems than other employees in that they may occupy multiple roles perceived by others as conflicting (e.g., gender roles). As such, LGBTQ parents may experience additional stressors compared to non-LGBTQ parents. A sub-theory within role theory is gender role theory. Gender roles refer to an individual's attitudinal identification with a particular gendered role (such as the need for a woman to fulfill domestic duties and for a man to serve as the main breadwinner), or the degree to which one complies with expectations that exist for one particular gender role versus another (Larsen & Long, 1988). Although gender roles in the past were rigid and associated with negative consequences when individuals violated them, role expectations have become more fluid with society becoming more accepting of crossover in traditional gender role stereotypes (de Visser, 2009).

Nevertheless, gender roles impact how LGBTQ parents are perceived at work, and correspondingly how they behave at work. For example, Hennekam and Ladge (2017) argued that sexuality is a key component of one's gender role and pregnancy adds an interesting component to how individuals perceive others in the workplace. When a lesbian woman is pregnant, it might elicit two different reactions from coworkers. The state of pregnancy might lead coworkers to see her as more feminine, and therefore closer to their expected gender role, which may increase their comfort with this worker. Conversely, the idea of

a pregnant lesbian might lead some coworkers to have conflicting thoughts about the person's gender role (i.e., they are fulfilling a role that is not the norm), therefore leading the coworkers to feel less comfortable with their lesbian coworker.

**Stigma theory** Also relevant to LGBTQ employed parents is stigma theory (Goffman, 1963), which suggests that social meanings are constructed around attributes of an individual, some of which are deeply discrediting. These discredited attributes are related to negative stereotypes (Jones et al., 1984) and may result in negative treatment for those who possess—or are thought to possess—the stigmatized attribute (Major & O'Brien, 2005). As both sexual and gender minority statuses are stigmatized, LGBTQ parents may choose to conceal their sexual identity, gender identity, or parental status, which has important implications with regard to their physical and psychosocial well-being (Ragins, 2008) and access to available resources.

Pregnancy in the workplace, regardless of sexual orientation or identity, can be considered a stigmatized state (Jones, 2017). Thus, pregnant lesbian women potentially have multiple stigmas in the workplace: being a woman, being pregnant, and being a lesbian. Additionally, Hennekam and Ladge (2017) utilized stigma theory to understand the management of multiple stigmatized identities for pregnant lesbian employees, finding that an organization's diversity climate strongly influenced pregnancy disclosure decisions and the ease with which one's maternal identity was claimed among both biological and nonbiological mothers. Similarly, Sawyer, Thoroughgood, and Ladge (2017) used stigma theory to illustrate a unique stressor that LGBTQ employees experience in the workplace. They suggest that LGBTQ employees with a family have a unique family stigma that leads to stigma-based work-family conflict. To cope with this stigma, the LGBTQ employee uses different family-related identity behaviors (e.g., suppression of family information),

which leads to additional strain above and beyond the typical outcomes related to work-family conflict. These strains (e.g., depersonalization, denial of family dignity, and hypervigilance) in turn increase the likelihood of deleterious work-family outcomes such as physical distress and negative work outcomes.

**Minority stress theory** Related to stigma theory is minority stress theory (Meyer, 1995), which suggests that members of a stigmatized group experience additional stressors beyond those that nonminority group members experience, which may lead to negative health outcomes. These additional stressors are categorized as either distal (e.g., discrimination) or proximal (e.g., engaging in identity management) stressors. As LGBTQ parents are a minority within the LGBTQ community, they may experience additional stressors both compared to their non-LGBTQ peers, and also compared to LGBTQ individuals who are not parents.

Researchers have used minority stress theory in several studies to examine sexual minority parents, although not specifically *working* parents. For example, Goldberg and Smith (2014) examined same-sex parents in schools and investigated whether openness in an educational setting would affect their engagement in school events and other school-related outcomes. They found that indeed, perceptions of stigma were related to key outcomes such as satisfaction with the school. In a later exploratory study that examined health outcomes of same-sex couple parents, Goldberg, Smith, McCormick, and Overstreet (2019) used minority stress theory as a framework to help understand how unique minority stressors operate for sexual minority parents. Their study revealed that sexual minority status was related to health outcomes, although the nature of effects differed for lesbian mothers and gay fathers. Although neither of these studies examined working parents, their findings do provide evidence that minority stress is a unique stressor for LGBTQ parents.

## Critical Theoretical Perspectives: A Glimpse to the Future

**Transformative perspectives** Transformative frameworks (Mertens, 2010) are based on the assumptions that knowledge (and science) is value laden and that research should be conducted with an agenda to enact positive political change against social oppression. Methodologically, research drawing upon transformative frameworks may be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, depending upon the underlying philosophical assumptions. Oftentimes the research is conducted “with” rather than “on” participants, such as in participatory action research (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). We believe that participatory action research is particularly advantageous when considering inquiry regarding work-family issues for LGBTQ parents as LGBTQ individuals have been historically taken advantage of by the scientific community and this technique empowers oppressed individuals to bring about practical change in a collaborative fashion as it actively involves participants in the research process.

**Feminism** Feminism—a lens with which to examine particular questions (Fox-Keller, 1985)—brings gender to the foreground and seeks to end gender disparities (see Lather, 1991). Williams (2010) has directly considered work-family issues from a feminist perspective, arguing that the workplace is structured around traditional gender roles and gendered assumptions:

As long as good jobs are designed around men’s bodies and men’s traditional life patterns, mothers will remain marginalized. As long as mothers remain marginalized, women will not approach equality—and a society that marginalizes its mothers impoverishes its children... In the past thirty years, it has become abundantly clear that reshaping the work-family debate will require changes both in the ways we think about gender and in the ways we think about class. (p. 281)

Similar critiques exist in reference to organizational theory and structures in reference to sexism and sexual harassment (Hassard & Parker,

1993). Importantly, scholars in this space realize that gender does not occur in a vacuum, and thus often draw on an intersectional feminist perspective—considering the ways that other characteristics such as race, class, and sexuality intersect with gender (e.g., Few-Demo, 2014; Mahler, Chaudhuri, & Patil, 2015). By putting gender front and center and considering the gendered nature of the workplace along with the division of the public and the private (e.g., paid work vs. domestic work; Williams, 2010), we argue that it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of LGBTQ parent’s work-family experiences.

**Queer theory** Queer theory (Foucault, 1978) seeks to examine categories (such as sexuality and gender) and how power is distributed among these categories (Watson, 2005). Queer theory is deconstructionist in nature (e.g., challenges the idea that identity is “singular, fixed or normal” [Watson, 2005, p. 38], rejects gender and sexuality binaries, assumes gender and sexual fluidity) and emphasizes performativity (i.e., gender and sexuality are performed by gestures, movements, and clothing; Butler, 2004). Power and the concept of “normal” is produced both situationally and discursively, and all can potentially position—or be positioned—as powerful or normal (Watson, 2005). For example, the “private” can be made “public” through performativity, and heteronormativity need not be considered “normal” (see Berlant & Warner, 1998). From this perspective, it is possible to challenge dominant narratives and understandings of sexuality and gender, which, Nestle, Howell, and Wilkins (2002) argued, could have a profound impact on gaining equality for all people.

In the family field, authors have leveraged queer theory to discuss methodological and theoretical advancements and review prior work (e.g., Acosta, 2018; Fish & Russell, 2018). For example, Acosta (2018) discussed how heteronormative assumptions of family structures and configurations can be challenged as a queer perspective allows for an “infinity [of] possibilities... including (but not limited to) those consisting of same-sex, transgender, or polyamorous

families” (p. 409). Importantly, a queer perspective on family examines the manner in which people actively are engaged in “doing family,” rather than being a passive recipient of the institution of family (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005); for example, LGBTQ individuals may construct families of choice (Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001). Considering family as a verb is particularly useful as doing so expands the idea of family from a socially constructed institution and allows for increased fluidity and ambiguity (Stiles, 2002; Weeks et al., 2001). Queer intersectional scholarship, discussed next, expands on this notion by further considering how the intersection of sexuality, race, gender, class, etc., forms reality (see Acosta, 2013, 2018). As such, this perspective could illuminate work-family research by considering the ways in which LGBTQ parents construct the role of “parent” and the idea of “family.”

**Intersectionality** Although much can be gained by considering LGBTQ work-family issues from the theoretical perspectives described above, adopting an intersectionality perspective continues to be of extreme importance. Intersectionality is a lens that draws upon feminist and critical race theories (Crenshaw, 1991) and explores the experience of individuals while considering their multiple social identities. An intersectionality perspective rejects that group memberships can be added together to predict particular types of treatment, and rather asserts the multiple lived identities are intertwined and form unique experiences (Simien, 2007). Indeed, for example, experiences of transgender employees report unique experiences compared not only to hetero “normal” colleagues, but also to their lesbian, gay, and bisexual colleagues (Sawyer, Thoroughgood, & Webster, 2016). Of note, scholars have recognized the importance of taking an intersectional perspective and considering the unique lived experiences of LGBTQ parents of differing identity categories such as age, class, ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, etc. (e.g., Acosta, 2013, 2018; Allen & Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015; Few-Demo, 2014; King et al., 2013; Mahler et al., 2015; Moore, 2011). For example, Acosta’s (2013) work explores the

experiences of LGBTQ Latinx parents, and Moore (2011) considers race, family formation, and motherhood among Black gay women. We believe that this perspective is important for work-family scholarship and practice as the lived experiences of individuals with multiple stigmatized identities may be unique and it is possible that the theoretical and empirical work to this point may not fully encompass the experiences of such individuals.

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## Workplace Experiences of LGBTQ Parents

Although in recent years there has been interest in the positive interaction between work and family, much of the work-family research has focused on work-family conflict. Work-family conflict is defined by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) as “a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect” (p. 77). Meta-analytical reviews have revealed some common themes related to employees’ experiences with the work and family domains. First, whereas parental status is a key demographic predictor of work-family conflict, sex and marital status are less influential (Byron, 2005). In terms of situational predictors, role stress and role involvement have both been tied to work-family conflict. Second, there is evidence that work-family conflict leads to decreased job satisfaction, life satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and both physical and psychological health (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000). Finally, research that has examined strategies to attenuate work-family conflict have included dependent care, flexibility, supervisor support, and informal organizational support (Allen, 2013), with the latter two having the strongest effects.

The aforementioned work-family findings have been predominantly determined by research on heterosexual two-parent families with biological children, with very little research on LGBTQ parent families. Moreover, in the first edition of this chapter (King et al., 2013), there were only

four identified studies on LGBTQ parents in the workplace, and these studies focused on LGBTQ parents (Goldberg & Sayer, 2006; Mercier, 2007; O’Ryan & McFarland, 2010; Tuten & August, 2006). We are only just beginning to see an increase in workplace research that extends the definition of family to include trans and queer parent families.

We are aware of only a single published study that has examined work-related issues of transgender working parents (Pyne, Bauer, & Bradley, 2015). In particular, the focus of this survey study was to examine stressors that transgender parents in Ontario, Canada, were experiencing. With regard to workplace stressors, 28% of transgender parents reported being turned down from a job, and 6% reported being fired from a job due to their transgender identity or gender expression. Thus, transgender working parents may have more perceived and actual job insecurity than do their colleagues. Importantly, to our knowledge, no study has explicitly considered genderqueer or nonbinary parents’ workplace experiences. Thus, our focus in the following section is on the few work-related studies that have examined LGBTQ parents.

Recent research on work-family issues of LGBTQ employed parents has revealed three emerging themes: transition to parenthood, support and resources, and role management. Worthy of note is that some sub-differences exist within the larger group of LGBTQ employed parents and some studies focused exclusively on one subgroup so findings may not generalize to others. Accordingly, we first review each theme, and then discuss potential subgroup differences.

## Transition to Parenthood

Transitioning to parenthood can be stressful for any new parent (Vismara et al., 2016) and necessitate changes for employees. While there are certainly similarities between LGBQ<sup>1</sup> employ-

ees and their non-LGBQ counterparts, there also appears to be some clear differences. Hennekam and Ladge (2017), for example, found that lesbian women in the Netherlands experienced the transition to motherhood differentially depending on the phase of their pregnancy, whether they were the biological or the nonbiological mother, and the degree to which they were out about their sexual orientation at work. Specifically, nonbiological mothers had a different experience than biological mothers, and the women’s experiences differed depending on the stage of the mothering phase. In line with gender theory, stigma theory, and minority stress theory, during the earlier stages (e.g., during pregnancy), nonbiological mothers had more advantages because they manifested fewer stigmatized roles (being a woman was the only visual stigmatized role). However, over time including after the child’s birth, nonbiological mothers were treated differently because they were not seen as “real” mothers (see Hayman, Wilkes, Jackson, & Halcomb, 2013).

Transitioning to parenthood is also significant for working gay fathers. Bergman, Rubio, Green, and Padrón’s (2010) study on gay fathers (via surrogacy) in the USA and found that most of their sample experienced occupational changes after becoming fathers, including extended leaves of absence, changing to part-time work, changing work schedules, working later at night, sleeping less, or switching to a job with less work hours or travel. Fathers who described their workplaces more positively discussed increased communication with coworkers. These fathers noted their family structure was more legitimized after having children, they had more to talk about with coworkers, and they felt like they had more in common with bosses who were also parents (see Goldberg, 2012, and Richardson, Moyer, & Goldberg, 2012, for similar findings).

## Support and Resources

Support and resources are important factors in managing work-family conflict (Byron, 2005).

<sup>1</sup>Note that we are purposeful with our acronym of LGBQ (vs. LGBTQ or LGBT) given the focus of the research studies we examined.

It has been consistently shown that employed parents are going to be the most successful, and the most satisfied with their job, if they have some type of support mechanisms to help them manage their work and family demands. Although there has been little research on support mechanisms of LGBTQ employed parents, Mercier (2007) found in a sample of American lesbian parents that most of their work-family experiences were similar to heterosexual parents' experiences. This was true for the four major themes that emerged from interviews (instrument support, interpersonal support, integration of work and family, and strategies for balancing work and family). Despite the similarities, some differences emerged, including lesbian parents reporting significantly fewer partner benefits (e.g., health insurance, flexible spending accounts) than heterosexual mothers.

### Role Management

The process of establishing rules and expectations of an individual embodies the concept of role management. With regard to work-life issues of employed partners, role management refers to the process that a couple goes through to establish what each individual will be expected to do as an employee and as a family member. In a different-sex couple, and in line with gender role theory, this role management process is usually influenced by gender norms such that women find themselves more likely to have more caregiving responsibilities and men are usually more likely to take a larger role in supporting the family financially (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006). In a relationship that does not have these traditional gender cues (e.g., that of a same-sex couple), there are fewer preconceived gender roles that determine the tasks of each individual in the couple, leaving their work and family roles open for consideration. Yet this also creates a need for some type of decision-making process to help the couple establish specific roles.

This becomes even more relevant when individuals in a same-sex couple become parents.

Role management is intertwined with the division of labor that is established by the couple. In a study on American heterosexual, gay, and lesbian parents who were adopting a child, Goldberg, Smith, and Perry-Jenkins (2012) found that lesbian and male gay parents were more likely to share the division of labor than heterosexual parents. Yet their findings also revealed that for all groups, differences in pay and work hours affected the division of labor for feminine tasks (e.g., laundry) but not for child care. Furthermore, Goldberg (2013) noted that same-sex couples interpret their division of labor as uniquely defined by their same-sex relational status, and not imitative of heterosexual couples. Similarly, in a sample of same-sex and heterosexual parents in New Zealand and Australia, Perlesz et al. (2010) found that same-sex partners were more likely to have a greater level of egalitarianism in their division of labor of household tasks. The authors noted that lesbian parents were more likely to negotiate a strategy so that both parents had an opportunity to both work and to care for their child(ren). Rawsthorne and Costello (2010) found similar results in a sample of Australian lesbian parents. They further found that de-stabilizing of scripts related to gender roles decreased family stress and conflict.

Another issue is how to manage these roles in a way that is comfortable to both members of the couple, despite having roles that may be unacceptable to coworkers. Sawyer et al. (2017) introduced the concept of stigma-based work-family conflict, a type of conflict in which an LGBTQ employee may feel that their family identity is stigmatized since it does not represent the traditional definition of family. In their study of American LGBTQ parents, Sawyer et al. found that LGBTQ parents were less likely to have typical roles or behaviors associated with being a parent (e.g., displaying child's art, discussing family events) due to reactions they anticipated from coworkers.



## Subgroup Differences

It should be noted that most of the studies have focused on lesbian women and gay men, with only a few on bisexual parents, and to our knowledge no studies that examined queer identified parents in the workplace.<sup>2</sup> One US study found that gay male dual-earner parents reported more anxiety than did lesbian women dual-earner parents (Goldberg & Smith, 2013). The authors proposed that these differences could be because others' perceptions of gay men as parents might be more negative due to the stereotypes that men are less nurturing as parents and that gay men are less fit as parents (see Goldberg & Smith, 2009 for similar findings).

Although bisexual parents are the largest group of sexual minority parents (approximately 64%; Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014), it is interesting that few studies have examined bisexual parents, and even fewer have examined bisexual parents and workplace issues. In a qualitative study, Bartelt, Bowling, Dodge, and Bostwick (2017) found that American parents who are bisexual are concerned about finding or keeping a job and about negative impacts of their bisexuality on their career and earnings. For these parents, the concern extends beyond their own well-being to concerns about being able to provide for their children and have a stable household. Interestingly, these parents also mentioned feeling a bond with the larger LGBTQ community but feeling that the commu-

nity did not accept them. Thus, for bisexual parents, legitimizing their identity and providing social support appear particularly important.

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## Practical Implications and Future Research Recommendations

Although few studies have examined LGBTQ working parents, they have provided an initial framework for understanding this population. Moreover, considerable work on work-life issues and LGBTQ issues provides additional insight on their work and family experiences. Based on these literatures, and the aforementioned theoretical perspectives, we provide implications and recommendations relevant for both practitioners and researchers.

### Implications and Strategies for Workplace Change

Role management emerged as an important issue for LGBTQ employed parents. O'Ryan and McFarland's (2010) research on gay and lesbian dual-career couples provides insight into how gay and lesbian couples can manage their work and family roles to be successful as parents, partners, and employees. Although their research was not focused on LGBTQ *parents*, their findings could benefit LGBTQ employed parents. Specifically, they found that three strategies help LGBTQ dual-earners be successful: planfulness, creating positive social networks, and shifting from marginalization to consolidation and integration. We argue that these same strategies would be useful for LGBTQ employed parents. Planfulness describes the need for the individual to use decision-making and strategizing "to maneuver through the social milieu of the workplace" and to use introductions "to develop a social network" (O'Ryan & McFarland, p. 74). Parenting opens one's social network, yet in the workplace the employee is dealing with unknowns related to acceptance. The LGBTQ parent might need to go through this process in a thoughtful manner to ensure that newly developed

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<sup>2</sup>We wish to emphasize that the term "queer" has multiple meanings and is used by some members of the LGBT community as an overarching inclusive term (i.e., to refer to those who are either not heterosexual or not cisgender). Queer has been used to refer to sexual orientations that reject or go beyond the gender binary and also to refer to one's own gender identity (i.e., "genderqueer," which may also refer to those who identify as gender nonbinary, agender, or gender nonconforming). For some, queer has sociopolitical meanings and is strongly tied to schools of thought such as queer theory. In such cases, queer can refer to the deconstruction or rejection of heteronormative assumptions about gender and sexuality and seeks to claim space in society. As such, we take an inclusive approach throughout the chapter.

social networks are ones that will be status affirming and provide a positive sense of duality (i.e., moving easily from work and family). O’Ryan and McFarland found that when LGBTQ couples “teamed up” to gain strength to belong in the workplace environment, they shifted from marginalization to consolidation and integration. As parents who may be struggling to adjust to new roles and potential increased stigma, such strategizing with the intent of building a support system and establishing resources can only help. Additionally, the role of coworkers acting as allies may be of key importance at the individual level. Although not work-life specific, prior research examining the experience of transgender workers demonstrated that having their gender identity affirmed by others (relational authenticity) explained why gender transition was related to positive workplace outcomes (Martinez, Sawyer, Thoroughgood, Ruggs, & Smith, 2017). Further, sexual orientation minorities have expressed the importance of allies engaging in supportive behaviors in the workplace (see Martinez, Hebl, Smith, & Sabat, 2017). As such, the powerful role that affirming allies play cannot be underestimated.

Scholars have also proposed ways in which career counselors may specifically aid LGBTQ employees. Perrone (2005), for example, noted that the extra challenges experienced by same-sex, dual-earner couples likely requires counselors who are able to help such couples prepare for potential economic difficulties (e.g., due to potential nonexistent insurance coverage for same-sex couples), identify work environments where discrimination is less likely to occur, and engage in frank discussions about types of employment discrimination and relevant laws and employment policies that may impact them and their unique situations. Perrone also noted the need to consider challenges related to social connectedness or stressors related to custodial rights with regard to LGBTQ parents and stepparents, as such stressors can greatly impact the employed parent/stepparent’s work-family interface.

Although individual-level considerations are important, change must also occur at the organiza-

tional and national level. In terms of the organization, the structure of the workplace needs to be designed so that it is inclusive and accepting to all employees, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or parental status. Organizations must ensure that LGBTQ parents receive support—and are comfortable asking for support—from different workplace entities. This is specifically important since support and resources emerged as a theme of particular importance to LGBTQ parents in the workplace. Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, and King (2008) found that supervisor, coworker, and organizational support were all important for LGBTQ employees and were related to unique outcomes. Not only do supportive workplaces affect factors such as retention, they also provide an environment in which employees are more likely to feel safe using the organization’s programs (Kim & Faerman, 2013). Perceptions of support come from both a family-friendly organizational culture and from formalized family-friendly policies (e.g., flex-time; Lu, Kao, Chang, Wu, & Cooper, 2011).

At the national level, all countries need to reexamine their policies that affect LGBTQ employees who are parents. This spans policies and laws related to family, sexual and gender minorities, and the workplace in general. To ensure that LGBTQ employed parents are treated fairly and have opportunities as both parents and employees, change needs to start at the top. Although there are some countries in which the need for change is straightforward (e.g., USA; laws to protect the rights of LGB employees), all countries must revisit their policies to ensure they are truly inclusive to sexual and gender minorities, and the policies have the intended effects. Again, although the Netherlands, for example, has quite generous leave and healthcare programs, LGBTQ employed parents in the Netherlands still experience challenges that are not experienced by their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts (Hennekam & Ladge, 2017). Thus, we applaud progressive policies, but if there continues to be differences for LGBTQ parents in the workplace, even those countries and their policies need to be re-examined.

## Recommendations for Future Research

Compared to heterosexual and cisgender parents, LGBTQ employed parents are more likely to be in dual-career relationships and share many of the challenges of dual-career employees who are not a sexual minority status (O’Ryan & McFarland, 2010). Research should examine the additional role of dual-earner status for LGBTQ parents. In addition, the dual-career literature has examined gender differences of the couples using dyadic analysis. A study by ten Brummelhuis, Haar, and van der Lippe (2010) found that the cross-over experiences between spouses differed by gender, with time and energy deficits crossing from men to women, and distress crossing from women to men. It would be interesting to see how these processes worked for same-sex couples, or if the gender norms were similar for same-sex couples such that lesbian mothers experienced more distress, and gay fathers experienced more feelings of time/energy deficit. This could be problematic if both individuals within the couple encounter the same stressor or experience couple-level minority stress (LeBlanc, Frost, & Wight, 2015). These shared experiences of stress could create a larger, harder to manage level of stress, or it could be beneficial if it provides the couple with a shared understanding of their work-life stressors. Research has shown that division of labor is less of an issue for lesbian and gay parents (Goldberg, 2013; Goldberg et al., 2012) suggesting that their status might provide some benefits related to stressors associated with being in a dual-career relationship.

Although there has been a noticeable increase in research on LGBTQ workplace and parenting issues over the past 5 years, there continues to be a dearth of research on the intersection of the two, namely LGBTQ parents in the workplace. Within this realm, it appears that the work-family literature is built upon heteronormative assumptions (such as the way in which “family” is defined; e.g., Agars & French, 2017; King et al., 2013), thus “organiz[ing] and privilege[ing] heterosexuality by infusing it into organizational cultures, systems, and struc-

tures”; Sawyer et al., 2017, p. 24). It is clear that organizations at all levels (e.g., employers, countries), as well as researchers, need to define family in a more inclusive manner. We argue that family should be described in such a way that is inclusive of key characteristics (e.g., formation: origin vs. chosen families; structure; demographic characteristics; configuration: extended, polyamorous; etc.), although we are hesitant to place restrictions on the ways in which “family” should be defined. Rather, we argue that considering family as a verb (see Stiles, 2002) is particularly useful as doing so allows for a deeper consideration of the many varied ways in which people “do family.” Although this more fluid definition of family may not be easily integrated into organizational (or federal) policies, there is much that could be learned not only about families with LGBTQ members, but also about families in general. As Benkov (1995) eloquently stated in reference to lesbian-parented families:

I came to see my subjects not as families on the margin to be compared to a central norm, but rather, as people on the cutting edge of a key social shift, from whom there was much to be learned about the meaning of family and about the nature of social change. (p. 58)

Additionally, we argue that researchers and practitioners should carefully attend to and deeply consider the language that they employ when discussing work-family issues. It has been argued that “we do not only use language, it uses us. Language is recursive: it provides the categories in which we think” (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 22). Further, though we included queer as one of the subgroups within our umbrella of sexual and gender minorities, we were not able to find much research on the experiences of employed queer parents. Moving forward, researchers should make a particular effort to bring the unique experiences of these individuals to light.

Similarly, there needs to be more research on bisexual parents in the workplace. This lack of research is disheartening since not only are they the largest of the subgroups (Gates, 2011), and the most likely to be parents (Goldberg et al., 2014), but they also report more negative

experiences (see chapter “What Do We Now Know About Bisexual Parenting? A Continuing Call for Research”). Arena and Jones (2017), for example, argue that bisexual individuals have unique experiences and more negative health and well-being outcomes compared to LG individuals. In their research, they found that bisexual employees were less likely to be open about their sexual orientation in the workplace. Researchers need to do a better job to ensure that this group’s work-family experiences are understood.

Finally, one area that remains missing in the LGBTQ work-family literature is intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Scarce research in this area has examined other minority status groups (e.g., people of color). This is important as members of multiple minority groups may experience additional forms of stigmatization and oppression (e.g., “multiple jeopardy”). Thus, in line with King et al.’s (2013) recommendations, it remains particularly important to consider the unique lived experiences of LGBTQ parents of differing identity categories (e.g., age, class, ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality).

## Conclusion

This chapter examined the workplace experiences of LGBTQ parents from micro through macro lenses. We identified three major themes concerning LGBTQ employed parents—transition to parenthood, support and resources, and role management. We discussed several theories that help explain these issues, and introduced some alternative worldviews that we believe could contribute to the understanding of work-family experiences of LGBTQ employed parents. Finally, we stress that each of these subgroups L – G – B – T – Q, although they share some commonalities, have unique characteristics and therefore must be examined both as a group and also individually. It is our hope that this chapter will benefit researchers, clinicians, and anyone interested in bettering the lives of LGBTQ employed parents and will serve as a springboard from

which to enact positive change. As Williams (2010) noted:

Cultural problems require cultural solutions—which begin with flights of the imagination. Then comes the hard work. Everything looks perfect from far away; it is much harder to come down and develop effective strategies for social, political, organizational—and personal—change. Let’s begin. (p. 282)

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