

FAMILY PRIDE

*What LGBT Families Should
Know about Navigating Home,
School, and Safety in Their
Neighborhoods*

Michael Shelton

Foreword by Elizabeth Castellana,
COLAGE, Former National Program Director



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Family Pride

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QUEER ACTION/QUEER IDEAS
A Series Edited by Michael Bronski

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For Donald.
How could I complete a book without you?

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A Note from the Series Editor

The rapid emergence, over the past decade, of the LGBT family from the shadows of fear into the bright light of the everyday world has been startling. Openly LGBT families are now attending PTA meetings, applying for social services, and rolling Easter eggs on the White House lawn. This journey—a continuous, unfolding adventure for many families—has been historically a slow, and often dangerous, one. In the 1950s and '60s one of the main concerns of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first political and social group founded by and for lesbians, was to help women who were raising children alone or with a partner. Dealing with issues of housing, school, being out, and dealing with hostile relatives and neighbors were a staple in their publication, the *Ladder*. The advances of feminism, gay liberation, and the relatively new field of LGBT family law has made life for these families—and really, all families—immeasurably better, safer, and healthier.

This move into the bright daylight of security and safety is immeasurably helped by Michael Shelton's *Family Pride: What LGBT Families Should Know about Navigating Home, School, and Safety in Their Neighborhoods*. Raising a happy, healthy family is difficult for all Americans who choose to do so. For nontraditional families, and especially LGBT families, what should be a joyous experience can often be fraught with social, legal, political, and even medical problems. Are our children going to be safe at school if their classmates find out that they have two mothers? Can I trust the doctors and nurses at the local health clinic to tell them that Bobby's father has HIV/AIDS? How open can I be with our neighbors about the fact that my partner and I just broke up? These are just a few of the problems that LGBT families face every day. Michael Shelton is not just providing reasonable, helpful—maybe even life-saving—advice here for LGBT families. He is mapping out new territory in helping reshape and rethink how all families might live safer, stronger, and happier lives.

—MICHAEL BRONSKI

Series Editor, Queer Action/Queer Ideas

Foreword

The current legislative battles over adoption and marriage have fostered shrill and poignant rhetoric around families with LGBTQ parents. As the daughter of a gay father from a mixed-race family, I am personally familiar with many of the dominant themes in LGBTQ family issues. In this storm of dialogue, COLAGE is the only national organization focused solely on the needs of the children, youth, and adults with LGBTQ parents. I have the incredible privilege of not only having a gay parent, but also of making my living working for COLAGE and with people who have LGBTQ parents (COLAGERS) all over the country. As my involvement with COLAGE has grown, I have met thousands of youth and adults with LGBTQ parents and I have been honored to represent us within the LGBTQ equality movement in many ways.

COLAGERS often have the ambiguous privilege of being able to hide our identity. We can choose to be bold and out about our families or to be closeted about them, and most of us have had to stare that choice in the eye. Sometimes we make choices that are about short-term safety and security; sometimes we wage love on our fiercest adversaries; sometimes we play our cards close to the chest, fly in under the radar, and confront hate and bigotry in powerful ways. Sometimes we preempt prejudice by being out, happy, and proud of our family in ways that challenge the notion that we have any reason to feel insecure.

On the whole, we are proud of our families. In many ways, having LGBTQ parents is far less unusual than our straight-parented peers may think, but to say that our families are “just like” straight-parented families falls short of reflecting our truth. Much of the rhetoric around our families focuses on the argument that we should have the same rights and protections as straight-parented families because we are just like them: we eat family meals, we celebrate holidays, we go to church. Well, sure, for some of us that is the case, but it’s not the whole picture, not by a long shot.

When you grow up in a world that challenges your family’s legitimacy, everything you do as a family takes on a deeper meaning. Sadly, many of the challenges to our families’ legitimacy come from within the LGBTQ movement. In an effort to win equality, we are pushing the image of the goodness and “normalcy” of our families, we proudly show off high-functioning two-parent home-owning white suburban families who are ready for prime time. In *Family Pride*, Michael Shelton carefully peels off the veneer to counter innumerable myths and misconceptions about our families with simple data. Our families reflect complexity of structure and composition, as do all other families; in a sense, we *are* “just like” other families—in that we

just are as difficult to fit into a mold. We are also different from all other families in that we face specific, direct, and targeted discrimination daily. What Shelton captures in this skillful analysis is that our families face the work of raising children in the same challenging world as all parents do, but they do so with an added layer of discrimination, fear, and ignorance.

As children moving through the world with LGBTQ parents, our sensitivity to hostility, judgment, and hate is heightened. We have to search ourselves daily in making choices about whom to put on our family tree at school, whether or not to invite a friend for a sleepover. This is not because we are ashamed our families, it's because of a desire to protect ourselves and our families from the negative (and baseless) feelings others may or may not have about them.

For fear of fueling anti-equality arguments, many of us, parents and children alike, avoid speaking out about the true hardships of living in LGBTQ-parented families. The myths and stereotypes around LGBTQ culture are both damaging to and protective of our families, and their removal is delicate work.

To be raised by LGBTQ parents means countless things. Our parents were often intentional, brave, and thoughtful about how to create a family, partaking in strong communities of other LGBTQ people, all of whom are deeply invested in our safety, health, and happiness. But LGBTQ families must still face hard choices about truth-telling and safety, standing up for ourselves and our families in the face of potential ostracism or worse. We need language to talk about sexuality and identity at ages when our peers may be sheltered from such concepts, and we often have to educate adults like teachers and counselors about us and our families. Some of our families live in four-bedroom houses on cul-de-sacs in the suburbs and have two parents and two children, a dog and a minivan, but most of us don't (most straight-parented families don't, either). Our families become part of the LGBTQ-parented community through adoption, kinship care, foster care, insemination, surrogacy, or simply when a parent comes out.

Hostile environments for LGBTQ-parented families also don't fit into a neat box. As Shelton adeptly explains, the small town in which a parent grew up can be the most familiar and embracing place for LGBTQ parents to raise children, but while acceptance may not be a problem, perhaps isolation becomes one. Never seeing another family like our own is a common challenge for us, but this can happen in a progressive urban environment too, owing to silence and closeted families. The best thing we can do for ourselves and our families is to do the work Shelton is doing through this book—by telling the true stories of who we are.

While our movement likes to engage a certain kind of LGBTQ-parented family in the public eye, there is no depiction of our families so narrow that could possibly be representative or accurate. Shelton's work here reveals this beautifully. Like all parents, sometimes LGBTQ parents need help, guidance,

and advice; unlike straight parents, seeking that help can be terrifying. LGBTQ parents carry a fear that their challenges will be ascribed to the unfitness of LGBTQ people as parents as a whole, that their every action reflects on our entire scrutinized and oppressed community. For their children, it is no different; we defend and stand up for our families because we love them and are proud of them, but dare the child of two moms proclaim “I hate my parents!” like any other adolescent would? Not in mixed company, so to speak.

We are far from where we need to be, and the climb is getting steeper. As the questions of marriage equality, employment equality, and family equality for LGBTQ people move from the margins to the heart of public discourse, our families face more, not less, scrutiny, pushback, and discrimination. This is truly at the core of what is detrimental to children being raised in our families. We have told the world loud and clear for decades: our parents are not the problem, ignorance, hate, and discrimination against them is.

A dominant problem in the work toward LGBTQ family equality is the inherent prevalence of the voices of parents over the voices of children. Though we are studied, scrutinized, interviewed, and asked to testify, we are rarely heard. In my work in the LGBTQ community, I am reminded daily that people with LGBTQ parents are not yet located within the LGBTQ movement. In safe schools work, we are fiercely and rightly focused on preadolescents and adolescents at risk because of bullying—but for children with LGBTQ parents, these issues start when they are much younger. Our parents may have come out in their teens or twenties, or even fifties or sixties, but many of us had to learn to talk about and come out about our families before kindergarten. Our parents may have the social agility to avoid hostile and hateful people, but in a small elementary school, we may not. Our parents may elect to put us in progressive schools where our families are more visible and affirmed, but if we are transracially adopted (as is more common in LGBTQ adoption), is our ethnic background visible and affirmed? Our experiences are different, and the work done in this book highlights that.

Although the child raised by LGBTQ parents is undoubtedly a lucky one in countless ways, it is also very difficult to generalize about us. Michael Shelton’s book does a tremendous job of illuminating the intricacies and nuances of LGBTQ families while highlighting the simple fact that these *are* families, bound by love and commitment like families of all other shapes and sizes. I am grateful to be a part of a movement that is redefining family not only in the name of full civil equality for all families and citizens, but also with the aim of elevating the visibility and acceptance of all families, no matter their structure. We have come a long way, but the majority of institutions still presume that children live with their mothers and fathers, and whether children have LGBTQ parents or not, that presumption is no longer the reality. The evolution of families reflects a beautiful trend toward creating the strongest possible social foundations for children no matter how unorthodox the family may be, and all families share in that goal.

—ELIZABETH CASTELLANA

Former National Program Director
COLAGE: People with a Lesbian,
Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer Parent

Introduction

Advocates proudly proclaim that more LGBT progress has occurred between 2009 and 2012 than at any other point in the nation's history. This progress was obvious when, in 2011, the United States and eighty-four other countries presented an international declaration to the United Nations Human Rights Council urging an end to discrimination against LGBTs. "The US government is firmly committed to supporting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals to lead productive and dignified lives, free from fear and violence," declared Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe, US ambassador to the council.¹

But why then, with all of this progress, did Jon Davidson, the legal director of Lambda Legal, the nation's oldest and largest legal organization working for the civil rights of LGBTs, begin a late 2011 editorial with the following: "I consider myself an optimist. I usually focus on the remarkable progress LGBT people have made through the years... But, there are times when the venom and violence that still [get] directed at members of our community [break] through and I find myself shocked at how strongly people still hate us and how far we have yet to go."²

Many LGBT activists and leaders have voiced similar sentiments of frustration and disbelief; the more progress made for LGBTs, the more intense the backlash against them. And, unfortunately, families with LGBT parents have become a focal point of this ire.

Signs of Progress

Progress for LGBTs has ranged from the seemingly prosaic (as when the federal government, for the first time, redesigned forms recognizing the possibility of two parents of the same gender³) to the phenomenal, including

- The Obama administration's 2011 refusal to back the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which had granted individual states the right to define marriage as they saw best and the concomitant ability to deny the legality of a marriage occurring in another state (thus, for example, a lesbian couple legally married in New Hampshire found that this union was still invalid in their home state of Pennsylvania).
- The belated dissolution of the military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy.
- The introduction by the federal government of the Every Child Deserves a Family Act, a federal bill that opens up more homes for foster youth by

restricting federal funding for states employing discriminatory practices in adoption and foster care placements based on sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, or the sexual orientation or gender identity of the foster youth involved. (The bill began the process of debating the issue in response to the patchwork of state rules and regulations regarding LGBT adoption.)

- The Obama administration's directive that hospitals receiving federal funding be required to provide equal visitation rights to LGBT families.
- The increasing number of states passing same-sex marriage or civil union legislation. At the writing of this book, same-sex marriage is legal in Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Maryland, and Washington, DC.
- The unprecedented media coverage of gay bullying and efforts at the local, state, and national levels to combat it.
- The release of *The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People*, a report by the National Institute of Medicine acknowledging the deficit of health research on these populations and advocating for more.⁴
- The adoption by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development of new regulations alleviating discrimination against LGBTs in rental-assistance and home-ownership programs.

The Growing Backlash against the LGBT Community

In spite of the substantial gains, there are dark clouds on the horizon. Barack Obama's election had been predicted to usher in an era of more progressive politics, and the protracted global financial meltdown had led politicians to commit to working on urgent fiscal needs, leaving contentious social issues for future debate. However, in February 2011, Speaker of the US House of Representatives John Boehner addressed a gathering of the National Religious Broadcasters and told them, "I met with a lot of religious leaders earlier today to talk about the strategy, and I think it's important that we understand that what we want to do here is win the war, not just win a battle. And there will be an opportunity some time in order to win the big war, and we're looking for that opportunity." Just what was the "war" to which Boehner was referring? According to Americans United, his veiled comment referred to "several 'culture war' issues [that] are at stake, including abortion, denying civil rights to gay Americans, injecting religion into public education, and obtaining governmental support for religious schools and other ministries."⁵ Indeed, the Republican and Tea Party candidates elected into office in 2010—many running on widespread dissatisfaction with the slow financial recovery of the country—were soon engaged in battles that had nothing to do with the economy, particularly issues surrounding sexual minorities. Within days of Obama's edict that federal courts stop defending DOMA, political leaders launched a fusillade of protest against this move and challenged the

president's decision.

The religious right is behind many of the social, legal, and political battles facing sexual minorities, but certainly not all. The neighbor resentful of the gay-parented family moving in next door may have no religious affiliation or spiritual convictions but still believe that homosexuality is wrong, degenerate, and a danger to children. This is, to some degree, understandable. Until 1973 homosexuality was considered a mental illness, and even today, some secular organizations argue that same-sex orientation is an aberration and a mental illness. Regardless of the motivation, a sizable minority of the US population is either actively antigay or neutral regarding acceptance.⁶ Thus it is not surprising that the sweeping electoral changes arising from the 2010 elections shifted control of state legislative chambers to antigay members, many of whom went to work immediately attempting to dismantle existing laws protecting the LGBT community or write new antigay legislation into existence.

Syndicated author and columnist Dan Savage, creator of the It Gets Better project aimed at gay teenagers, observes that in spite of the progress made in gay rights over the past two decades, clear evidence of this is seen only in large urban areas.⁷ And according to activist, author, and radio personality Michelangelo Signorile, the backlash against gay rights by the religious right has made life worse for many gay individuals over the past twenty years.⁸

The current climate for LGBTs was summed up by Joe Solmonese, president of the Human Rights Campaign: "The biggest mistake we could make would be letting our recent successes make us complacent. Stung by our victories, our enemies are lashing out, unleashing their huge war chests to stop our progress and roll back our hard-won advances."⁹ Finally, Lambda Legal National Marriage Project director Jennifer Pizer ominously described the cresting backlash by stating, "We may see some new, creatively uglier, and perhaps even less grounded-in-reality arguments than we've seen to date, as there are some passionate antigay activists and others dedicating themselves to the field. It sometimes looks like the desperation of the last-gaspers, but I don't expect the debate to be over imminently, despite how much some of the arguments strain credibility."¹⁰

The Backlash against LGBT Families

National antigay forces have recently made LGBT-parented families a prime target. In November 2009, the American College of Pediatricians (an antigay group that split from the American Academy of Pediatrics) stated, "There is significant risk of harm inherent in exposing a child to the homosexual lifestyle."¹¹ The report deprecated the rights of same-sex parents for the supposed dangers they pose to their children's physical, emotional, and mental development. Simultaneously, Exodus International, an

interdenominational Christian organization consisting of hundreds of thousands of followers and 230 ministries in the United States, declared that “the intentional deprivation of a mother or father through same-sex parenting and adoption, is not in the best interest of children”¹² while simultaneously fighting against the rights of same-sex parents in legal battles. A *New York Times* article on gay and lesbian adoptions reported, “Adoption has not attracted the kind of attention nationally that gay marriage has.... The more it is in the public eye, the greater the chances conservative legislatures will try to block it.”¹³ And according to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Institute for Welcoming Resources, “There has been backlash against the existence, the visibility, and the success of many LGBT families. Marriage and adoption—two of the institutions which most clearly define our familial relationships—have been the focus of aggressive campaigns which seek to change the laws and even the constitution of our states and of our country.”¹⁴

While some gay-parented families are fortunate to live in communities that welcome and even celebrate diversity, the majority live in areas in which their treatment ranges from indifference and marginalization to censure and, often, outright hostility. Opposition is frequently most evident in the nonurban communities, and every day the ACLU, the Lambda Legal Fund, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and the Human Rights Campaign (to name just a few) report on discrimination, hostility, and violence against gay families in rural and suburban areas. Same-sex parents consistently report their most pressing concern is the safety of their children, who experience a multitude of problems, including avoidance, harassment, bullying, and even violence from individuals, other families, and organizations.



After agreeing to argue the unconstitutionality of California’s Proposition 8, which outlawed same-sex marriage in the state, lawyer and archconservative pundit Ted Olson shocked both anti- and pro-gay rights forces when he went on record saying he was “convinced that Americans will be equally proud when we no longer discriminate against gays and lesbians and welcome them into our society.”¹⁵ Similar battles await sexual minorities at the national, regional, and local levels, particularly those who are parents or who desire that role, and it seems that at this moment in history things are going to get worse before improving. Recall that it was only forty years ago that the US Supreme Court found it unconstitutional for states to deny marriages between individuals of different races. According to Evan Wolfson, president of Freedom to Marry, “As people come to understand this is about loving, committed families dealing, like everyone, with tough times, they understand how unfair it is to treat them differently.”¹⁶ Inevitably, understanding will come, even if at a glacial pace, and it is the purpose of this book to contribute to the process.

PART ONE

LGBT Families in Flux



1

The Diversity of LGBT Parents

A January 18, 2011, *New York Times* article reported that the 2010 census found about a third of lesbians are parents, as are a fifth of gay men.¹ According to Gary Gates, a demographer at the University of California, Los Angeles, who was interviewed for the article, “[A] large number of gay couples, possibly a majority, entered into their current relationship after first having children with partners in heterosexual relationships.”² In addition, gay men raising children begin to do so an average of three years earlier than heterosexual men. Other intriguing findings from the study show that while there may be a greater total number of queer individuals living in urban enclaves, particularly the West Coast and the Northeast regions, gay and lesbian individuals raising children are more likely to be living in southern states; and that African American or Latino gay couples are twice as likely as whites to be raising children and more likely than their white counterparts to be struggling economically. The article concludes with a quotation from Bob Witeck, chief executive of Witeck-Combs Communications, which helped market the US Census to LGBT people: “The gay community is very diverse. We’re not all rich white guys.”³

Witeck’s appraisal is similar to one espoused by the authors of an exhaustive review of research on gay parenting published in 2007: “Most of the research has been conducted with the assistance of lesbian and same-sex parents who are white, college-educated, employed in professional occupations and generally out about their sexuality. We clearly need more research with black, Asian, and Hispanic lesbian and same-sex parents and other ethnic groups.”⁴ The authors also called for much more research on families parented by gay fathers.

The experience of white lesbians most commonly used in research studies may bear little resemblance to that of African American lesbian parents living in the very same community, let alone two gay male parents existing on the threshold of poverty who hide their relationship from the community for their own safety. While a lack of diversity in the populations used for research studies is one reason for underestimating the true of diversity of LGBT families, it is not the sole explanation. Several others also need to be explored.

The Pink Economy

It is a common belief that most gays and lesbians are well educated and have discretionary money for all those high-priced accoutrements out of reach of the average middle-class-income wage earner (let alone low-income family). Of course being highly educated means they're also overrepresented in the professional realms, and this equates with higher income. Finally, they don't have children, so there are no diapers, toys, doctors' bills, braces, school tuition, proms, and the myriad of other expenses that inevitably accompany the raising of children. If this were true, then one of the perks of having such ample financial resources is that a family could simply up and leave when problems arose. Are you neighbors less than welcoming? There isn't enough community support in the town in which you are living? No problem, gays can relocate. Why stay in Afton, Virginia, when you can move to much more welcoming and progressive Las Vegas? But there's a problem with the pink-economy narrative: it isn't true.

One recurrent topic that arose in my interviews was the 2010 film *The Kids Are All Right*. A commercial success, it also garnered four Academy Award nominations. Same-sex families were proud; they had a film to call their own. Unfortunately, many same-sex parents could not relate to the characters of the lesbian mothers depicted in the film, simply because of the discrepancies between their own limited financial means and the affluence of the fictional family.

Of course, some gay men and lesbians live comfortable upper-income lives, but same-sex couples are also overrepresented in the lowest income brackets. More are struggling to pay off their mortgages (or monthly rent) and utility bills than are sitting at a poolside of their gated community. According to a study by the Williams Institute, one of every five children under the age of eighteen and living with a same-sex couple is poor, compared with one in ten in different-sex married couples.⁵ Same-sex parents in the United States have fewer financial resources to support their children than married parents. The median household income of same-sex couples with children is \$46,200, 23 percent lower than that of married parents (\$59,600).⁶ Poverty rates increase when same-sex parents live in rural areas and/or are people of color.⁷

During my interviews, I did meet same-sex parents who could afford the best for their children, but the majority of families weren't affluent; many were struggling to simply stay afloat financially. Sadly, I encountered many men and women who had even accepted the myth of the pink economy themselves; they were angry and bitter that they hadn't achieved the heights of success that "most other gay men and lesbians reach."

Metrocentrism

Another stereotype is that gay men and lesbians are drawn to the venues and

support available to them in urban areas, even if they decide to reside in a suburban community on the outskirts of a metropolis. But consider the story of Charlene, a lesbian, and Keith, a gay man. They're raising a family together—two boys who are biologically their own—with hopes of returning to rural Virginia when the boys grow up. According to Charlene, “We both grew up in communities right out of *Little House on the Prairie*. I won't speak for Keith (though I know he feels the same way), but I miss that lifestyle. After we decided to marry in order to have children, we recognized that the school systems we grew up in wouldn't be the safest for our kids. We may have been able to put on the façade of the traditional nuclear family and convincingly lie to the community indefinitely, but we didn't want to expose the boys to the homophobic culture that permeated the schools and, I guess, much of the community.” Looking reflective, she continued, “So we're living here in a suburban community in which our presence is accepted no matter that we are the most nontraditional of nontraditional families. The school is welcoming of same-sex parents, we have several welcoming churches to choose from, and there is an active gay parent support system. This is what we need right now for our boys, but once they're out of the house and on their own, we both plan on relocating back to our hometown. Living close to the city definitely has its perks as same-sex parents, but I really, really miss small-town life.”

Charlene and Keith fly in the face of traditional thinking regarding sexual minorities—that gay men and lesbians can't wait to escape the parochialism of small-town and rural communities for the 'round-the-clock excitement of urban life. But I continually encountered families from the Midwest to the Deep South who were satisfied with their anything-but-urban lifestyles and had no intention of relocating. And some who had left their small-town roots, like Charlene and Keith, but longed to return in spite of the less-than-tolerant climates that awaited them in their communities. Others described their small-town communities being as welcoming as urban enclaves, and others remained in nonurban communities because they simply have no choice.

On the other side of the coin, many families who do want to move to more urban or welcoming areas have remained in nonurban communities because they simply have no choice. The myth of the pink economy mistakenly leads people—both gay and straight—to believe that same-sex families can simply pack up and relocate to more welcoming communities if and when hostility and intolerance become evident. But what happens to the majority of same-sex families who don't have the financial resources to make this happen?

In his book *The Globalization of Sexuality*, Jon Binnie, senior lecturer in human geography at Manchester Metropolitan University, uses the term *metrocentrism* to describe the tendency to universalize the gay experience based on life in large urban areas.⁸ Indeed, if I had simply interviewed same-sex families living in urban areas, it is doubtful how meaningful the results would be. In a compelling (and rare) study of nonurban gay life, researchers asked nonmetropolitan gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender people to

describe the “best” and “worst” aspects of being LGBT in that area and how to improve their lives as rural denizens.⁹ The complaints were not particularly unexpected, and some participants stated their intent to relocate to more progressive areas. Some disagreeable aspects of rural life were that the LGBT community was too small, too hidden, too fragmented, and lacking in resources for their needs. Even in communities with an active gay support system, same-sex parents reported they felt excluded. And 45 percent of the participants commented that the worst thing about their rural lives was living in a homophobic climate.

Since the state in which these families lived did not include sexual orientation as a protected group, many respondents reported legalized discriminatory treatment. Intolerance was also rampant. One respondent noted being “so tired of all the people here who come from so-called Christian backgrounds, so intolerant, so un-Christian.” Another wrote about a “mayor who allows city councilmen to make racial remarks publicly without reprimand while his wife boycotts Barnes & Noble for selling gay literature.” Others described police who refused to uphold the law or assist them once they were recognized as an LGBT. For example, one woman stated she received “no support when problems and threats come” from her neighbors. Generally, many found “that survival within this climate meant downplaying or completely hiding their sexual orientation. For example, one parent who lives in a small town [said] ‘I don’t want people to know for my son’s sake.’ Another identified ‘the carefulness that is needed when we are in public.’”¹⁰

These responses clearly illustrate the disenchantment of many LGBT men and women with rural living and explain their ongoing migration to urban areas. However, while 4 percent of respondents in the study felt there was *nothing* positive about living as a sexual minority in a rural community, the overwhelming majority could indeed describe positive aspects. In fact, most offered more than one characteristic when asked to describe the “best” aspect of living in their communities. These included a higher standard of living, less stress than created in urban environments, the beauty of the natural environment, very cohesive support systems, and welcoming and affirming communities. Many did not indicate a desire to relocate, and many stressed their relief that they no longer lived in cities.

Diversity

Gay minority groups have always been present, but their presence has historically been marginalized and ignored. For example, almost all studies of family dynamics of lesbian mothers have utilized samples of white women, with these findings then generalized to describe the dynamics of *all* lesbian families.

We know that same-sex couples of color are more likely than their white

counterparts to be raising children. As a startling example, a 2007 study by the Our Family Coalition found that in California more than half of all African American, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Latino/a same-gender couples between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-five were raising children of their own (43, 45, and 62 percent, respectively), while only 18 percent of white same-gender couples were raising children.¹¹ Additionally it is estimated that nearly a third (32 percent) of binational same-sex couples in the United States are raising a total of seventeen thousand children.¹²

Across racial categories, LGBT people of color tend to raise children in areas where there is a low concentration of similar families. White LGBT families tend to seek out communities in which there is a high concentration of same-sex-parented families; same-sex families of color are more likely to live in areas with a high concentration of people with similar race/ethnicities, not same-sex couples.¹³ Unfortunately, it is the former families, often because of their concentration and the relative ease of locating them, that are the subjects of the majority of studies. There is minimal research on gay-parented families of color and binational couples, and this paucity of knowledge is even more egregious when it comes to nonurban families of color. In sum, our understanding of racism and same-sex families is in its infancy.

Single and Still-Married Parents

Tina voiced her frustration early in our conversation: “You’re not going to focus all of your attention on planned lesbian families are you? I’m so tired of hearing about them. Everybody seems to have forgotten that there are single lesbian moms out here too, and I’m one of them.”

In Kentucky, one state west of Tina, Chris, a gay father, shared a similar sentiment: “I’m a gay dad, but I’m also married to a straight woman. She’s my best friend, and I couldn’t ask for a better partner to share my life’s journey. I knew I liked other males from the time I was a young teenager, but living a gay life, at least as I saw it back then, was impossible. I married and figured I would keep this a secret.”

The earliest research on lesbian and gay parents focused specifically on those who had given birth to their children in a heterosexual marriage, but there has been a perceptible shift: most current research focuses on planned families, those occurring from alternative insemination or adoption. The attention of the media followed a similar pattern. But such families, at least at present, comprise the minority of LGBT families. According to Gary Gates of the Williams Institute, “The places where we see same-sex couples at the highest rates are not oftentimes where we see same-sex couples most likely to have kids. One of the reasons is that a large portion of the childrearing happening among same-sex couples is a product of people having children early in life when they weren’t out and are now raising these kids as part of a