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INTRODUCTION

The path to becoming a parent is complicated for LGBTQ¹ people. Some LGBTQ people are inhibited from seriously considering parenthood because of societal stereotypes and obstacles that make parenthood seem inaccessible or even impossible. Some are interested in parenthood but unsure about the first steps to take, uncertain what path is the best fit for them, or lack certain resources they feel are important to acquire (e.g., financial stability, a partner) before actively pursuing parenthood. Some LGBTQ people feel they would be good parents (e.g., they have a lot to offer, they have always wanted to be parents) but are discouraged by the attitudes of their family, community, or religion that have treated their gender identity or sexual orientation as liabilities, and they are made to feel that becoming a parent would be “unfair” to a child.

¹The abbreviation “LGBTQ” refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (trans), and queer people. *Transgender*, or *trans*, refers to people who have a gender identity that differs from the sex that they were assigned at birth. *Nonbinary* people, who may consider themselves to be trans or part of the trans community, are people whose gender identities fall outside of or beyond the gender binary of male/female.

Yet research points to the many strengths that LGBTQ people bring to parenthood, including freedom to define their own roles as parents, a tendency to share parenting responsibilities more equally than cisgender² (cis³) heterosexual folks, a deep appreciation for (i.e., not “taking for granted”) the possibility of parenthood, and personal experiences with stigma and discrimination that may foster resilience and empathy (e.g., toward their children; Brown et al., 2009; Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014; Titlestad & Robinson, 2019). Furthermore, research is consistent in finding that children with LGBTQ parents are not “disadvantaged” by their parents’ sexual orientation and gender identity; in fact, the children may benefit in unique ways (e.g., they may be more open to and tolerant of various aspects of difference or diversity; Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014; Goldberg & Smith, 2013; Perrin et al., 2013). Rather, the key challenges and barriers that LGBTQ parent families face are societal—in the form of laws, policies, and attitudes that stigmatize LGBTQ people and their families. But LGBTQ people who wish to pursue parenthood do need to consider a variety of unique factors and be prepared for a potentially complex set of decisions and steps. Furthermore, the process of becoming a parent may differ in important ways from that of most heterosexual, cisgender (cis) folks—and there may be more challenges and stumbling blocks along the way.

²The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes *cisgender* as an adjective and defines it as “designating a person whose sense of personal identity corresponds to the sex and gender assigned to him or her at birth” (Green, 2015, para. 3). For an interesting history and commentary on the word’s inclusion in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, see Brydum’s (2015) article “The True Meaning of the Word ‘Cisgender’” in *The Advocate*.

³*Cis* describes a person whose gender identity aligns with what they were assigned at birth. *Heterosexual*, or “straight,” generally refers to attraction to people of a different gender.

Most books on family building, becoming a parent, and early parenthood are aimed at heterosexual couples in which both partners identify as cis. These books also typically assume biological parenthood. Certainly, books like *What to Expect When You're Expecting* (Murkoff et al., 2018) are useful and play an important role in preparing for various aspects of parenthood, such as swaddling, diapering, and feeding. But they typically do not address the unique family-building decisions, pathways, and experiences of LGBTQ people. Furthermore, they make assumptions and use language that may be invalidating to LGBTQ people. They also rarely address considerations like choosing a sperm donor; deciding who should become pregnant (when both people in a couple are capable of becoming pregnant); evaluating adoption options; establishing and maintaining contact with birth families in open adoptions; choosing LGBTQ-friendly health care providers, adoption agencies, and day care providers; and addressing many other topics that are relevant to the LGBTQ family-building experience.

In this book, you will learn about the various steps and decision points in becoming a parent. You will also be offered a variety of self-assessment tools—for example, questions to ask yourself to help aid introspection related to family-building desires, motivations, and options. Becoming a parent is a major life decision, and this book is designed to help you engage with that decision: the “if,” the “how,” the “when,” and all that comes after. Likewise, you will find a variety of questions and checklists to help you evaluate the LGBTQ friendliness and overall “fit” of adoption agencies, health care providers, day cares, and other institutions.

In this book, you will also learn about the research findings on LGBTQ family building. This research can be an important tool when trying to battle stereotypes or myths about LGBTQ parenting—either those you hear, or have internalized, from society, your community, your religion, or your parents. For example, maybe you have

the idea that you shouldn't be a parent or don't deserve to be a parent. As one parent in my LGBTQ Family Building Project (which you will learn about in a moment), shared,

I came from a very conservative, Evangelical Christian background, and was told that I was a danger to children when I came out. When deciding to become a parent, fostering and adopting domestically [seemed right] for me. I [rationalized] it as, "I can't really be a big danger to children who have had intense abuse and neglect as their other parenting option." I think I felt that my mother and sibling would react better to that than private adoption—an "undamaged" child—or to insemination strategies—clearly against the "natural" order of things.

This book offers parents and prospective parents evidence-based knowledge that directly challenges the kinds of beliefs that this participant refers to—beliefs that have frequently been weaponized against LGBTQ people, often discouraging or preventing them from becoming parents.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Each chapter in this book begins with a vignette of LGBTQ prospective parents or parents at different stages of their family-building and parenting journey and ends with a list of further resources.⁴

Chapter 1 addresses the process of deciding to become a parent, motivations for parenthood, potential barriers to parenthood, and resources for parenthood.

⁴The case studies are composites of research participants, interviewees, and therapy clients, and all names and relevant identifying information have been disguised to protect confidentiality.

Chapter 2 addresses choosing adoption, as well as choosing among public domestic, private domestic, and international adoption. It also examines race, gender, and other preferences in adoption, and it provides a brief overview of legal issues.

Chapter 3 explores the choice of donor insemination over adoption, choosing who will be pregnant or be genetically related to the child, choosing a sperm donor, and finding LGBTQ-competent providers. It provides an overview of specific considerations for non-binary and trans masculine folks who pursue pregnancy.

Chapter 4 addresses the choice of surrogacy and the process of pursuing it. It also covers how to manage genetic asymmetry between parents and other parenthood routes not addressed elsewhere, namely, coparenting arrangements, cis/heteronormative sex,⁵ and stepparenting.

Chapter 5 discusses choosing adoption agencies, fertility centers, ob-gyns, and midwives. In particular, the discussion attends to LGBTQ inclusiveness but also addresses other considerations (e.g., agency/clinic effectiveness, professional ethics).

Chapter 6 explores the transition to parenthood. It considers shifts in mental health, relationship quality, division of labor, and social support, including friends and family.

Chapter 7 addresses choosing day cares and schools, preparing for and preparing children for heterosexist bias, and navigating gender normativity pressures in society. It also discusses how to deal with other parenting challenges in early parenthood.⁶

⁵*Cis/heteronormative sex* refers to sexual (penile–vaginal) intercourse.

⁶Because this book is primarily aimed at addressing issues related to family building as opposed to parenting older children and adolescents, Chapter 7 ends with resources on parenting children at later stages of the family life cycle.

THE LGBTQ FAMILY BUILDING PROJECT

Throughout the book, you will be presented with data—numbers and quotes—from LGBTQ parents themselves. These data are from the LGBTQ Family Building Project (Goldberg, 2021), a survey that I undertook specifically *for* this book. I wanted to be able to supplement the research and guidance and tools that I discuss with contemporary data gathered from LGBTQ parents who took diverse routes to parenthood.

Importantly, the data were gathered July 2020 through February 2021 during a period of notable transition and upheaval in the United States—the COVID-19 pandemic and also before, during, and after, the 2020 election of President Joseph R. Biden Jr., and the subsequent departure of President Donald J. Trump from the White House. This is important context, given that the COVID-19 pandemic has had widespread impacts on the well-being of families in general but LGBTQ parent families in particular, who may be even more vulnerable to the economic and mental health consequences of the pandemic amid preexisting income inequities, discrimination burden, and parenting stress (Goldberg et al., 2021; Medina & Mahowald, 2021). Furthermore, LGBTQ parent families have been deeply affected by living through 4 years of a Trump administration—an administration that was characterized by near constant attacks on LGBTQ people’s rights and liberties (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.-c).

Details about the LGBTQ Family Building Project and the 543 participants who completed the survey appear in Appendix A. A little more than two thirds of participants were cisgender women, 17.5% were cisgender men, and 14.5% were trans or nonbinary. A total of 82% were White, and 18% were of color, including biracial and multiracial. Among the 88% of participants with partners, 72% of their partners were White and 28% were of color. A total

of 42% of participants identified as lesbians; 20%, as queer; 19%, as gay; 14%, as bisexual; 3%, as pansexual;⁷ 1%, as asexual;⁸ and the remainder, as something else. More than three quarters of participants worked full-time, and 90% had at least a college education. They lived in 44 U.S. states, with a small number (fewer than 5%) living outside the United States, predominantly in Canada and Europe. Participants had between one and six children: 47.5% had one child, 40.5% had two, 7% had three, and the remainder had from four to six children. Regarding child age, 42.5% had at least one child aged 5 years or younger, 36% had at least one child aged 6 to 10 years old, 35% had at least one child aged 11 to 15 years, 10.5% had at least one child aged 16 to 18 years, and 9% had at least one child older than 18. Of the participants, 60% used donor insemination or surrogacy to become parents, 32% used adoption or foster care, 6% used cis/heteronormative sex, and 5% were stepparents.

OTHER KEY FEATURES OF THE BOOK

This book contains not only data from the LGBTQ Family Building Project, but it is grounded in the empirical research on LGBTQ family building more broadly. It offers a variety of assessment tools, questions to ask yourself or your partner(s), fast facts about the different aspects of LGBTQ family building and parenting, and numerous resources to further your knowledge and understanding of the many aspects of LGBTQ parenting. The book also emphasizes specific considerations for trans and nonbinary prospective parents and parents.

⁷*Pansexual* refers to attraction (physical, emotional, or romantic) to people of all genders. It can be contrasted with *bisexual*, which means being attracted to more than one gender; being pansexual means being attracted to all gender identities or attracted to people independent or regardless of gender.

⁸Asexuality exists on a spectrum, but, in general, people who identify as *asexual* experience little or no sexual attraction to other people.

In recognition of the important history of LGBTQ parenting—including legal milestones and key figures in the battle for LGBTQ parenting rights—Appendix B contains a time line of key events in the history of LGBTQ parenting. This time line was compiled by Dana Rudolph, the creator and founder of Mombian (see <https://mombian.com>), one of the longest running LGBTQ parenting blogs that also serves as a clearinghouse for a wide range of resources and articles related to LGBTQ parenting. (For folks interested in a more in-depth account of LGBTQ parenting dating back to the 1950s, see Daniel Winunwe Rivers's 2013 book *Radical Relations: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, & Their Children in the United States Since World War II*. The book does not address bisexual or trans parents in depth, but it does provide a detailed account of the early struggles and triumphs as well as a largely hidden history of lesbian and gay parents.)

ONWARD . . .

As you explore the following pages, remember that this book is the beginning—and not the end—of your parenting journey. There are many choices and decisions to make, as well as much to consider. But, thanks to the pioneering LGBTQ parents who have made this journey over the past 5 decades in particular, you are well positioned to learn from their experiences and forge the road ahead with confidence. As Chapter 1 details, more and more LGBTQ young people are considering parenthood for themselves. Indeed, the possibilities for parenthood are expanding, and it's time to get started.