7

LGBTQIA Relationships

I’m straight, but it may just be a phase.

—Anonymous
Learning Objectives

7.1. Know the meaning of the letters LGBTQIA
7.2. Discuss the problems with identifying and classifying sexual orientation
7.3. Explain the origins of sexual orientation
7.4. Define homonegativity, homophobia, biphobia, binegativity, and transphobia
7.5. Review LGBTQ relationships and mixed-orientation relationships
7.6. Describe the struggles LGBTQ individuals face during the coming out process
7.7. Understand the pros and cons of same-sex marriage
7.8. Know the various LGBTQ parenting issues
7.9. Discuss the future for LGBTQ relationships in the United States

Increasingly, U.S. culture reflects more acceptance of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning) individuals and their relationships. The Supreme Court has legalized same-sex marriage, voters have elected openly gay individuals like Colorado’s Jared Polis as governor, mainstream television programs have continued to feature openly gay characters (Gonzalez, 2018), and the Boy Scouts of America has lifted its ban on admitting gay people into their ranks.

BASIC TERMS
In this chapter, we discuss concerns experienced by LGBTQIA individuals. LGBTQIA is an initialism that has emerged to refer collectively to lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender individuals, those questioning their sexual orientation or sexual identity or queer individuals, intersex individuals, and asexual people or allies who do not identify as LGBTQIA but support the rights of those who do.

Sexual Orientation
Many of the terms included in the LGBTQIA initialism relate to sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is an enduring emotional, cognitive, and sexual attraction or non-attraction, also known as asexuality to other people. It is generally understood to be a classification of individuals as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or queer. The person’s self-identity is also important. One’s attraction, sexual identity, and sexual behavior may be different. Hence, a person may be attracted to those of the same sex, but self-identify as heterosexual and not engage in sexual activity. Sexual orientation can change or be fluid for some people. Galupo et al. (2017) noted that individuals use a diversity of terms to describe their sexual identities including “fluid,” “pansexual,” and “queer.”

Unpacking each of the concepts above, heterosexuality refers to the predominance of cognitive, emotional, and sexual attraction to individuals of the other sex. Homosexuality refers to the predominance of cognitive, emotional, and sexual attraction to individuals of the same sex. Since the word homosexual has been used in a prejudicial context in recent years, some people may consider the word offensive. The word “homosexual” should be avoided when referring to a person with same sex preferences, as the terms “gay” or “lesbian” are preferred. Bisexuality is cognitive, emotional, and sexual attraction to members of both sexes, and pansexuality is sexual attraction to other people regardless of their biological sex.
sex, gender, or gender identity. The term lesbian refers to women who prefer same-sex partners; gay can refer to either women or men who prefer same-sex partners but more often refers to a gay man.

There are about 10 million LGBTQ adults in the United States or about 4% of the 250 million in the U.S. adult population with millennials most willing to self-identify (7.3%; Gates, 2017). Here is the percentage breakdown by sexual orientation per category: 1% of females self-identify as lesbian, 2% of males self-identify as gay, and 1.5% of adults self-identify as bisexual (Mock & Eibach, 2012). It’s important to give visibility to these groups, as the data on LGBTQ individuals can influence laws and policies that affect LGBTQ people and their families. “The more we are counted, the more we count” is the slogan that points out the value of LGBTQ individuals being visible. However, LGBTQ individuals will no longer be included in the 2020 census, making visibility more important than ever.

Just as important as the major classifications of sexual orientation is that of asexuality. The term asexual refers to the absence of sexual attraction to others (ACE is slang for asexual person). However, asexual people may form emotional attachments, masturbate, and experience sexual pleasure and orgasm—what is unique is that they don’t want to be sexual with someone.

Mitchell and Hunnicutt (2019) noted that asexuality (absence of sexual attraction) is virtually invisible for two reasons. One, most people are not aware that asexuality exists and two, it is easy to fake interest in sex. The Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) facilitates awareness of asexuality as an explicit identify category.

Gupta (2017) interviewed 30 asexual individuals and identified five ways they saw themselves as affected by compulsory sexuality or the idea that individuals in a relationship are usually expected to have sex with their partners. They experienced (1) pathologization, or being treated like something was “wrong” with them; (2) isolation and being treated like they weren’t wanted; (3) unwanted sex; (4) relationship conflict, which often stemmed from being pressured to have sex; and (5) the denial of epistemic authority, such as being told that they would get over being asexual and were just a late bloomer.

**Gender Identity**

The other terms that comprise the LGBTQIA initialism relate to gender identity. Gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation, and is one’s concept of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither. Simply put, sexual orientation is whom you go to bed with, and gender identity is whom you go to bed as. Many people identify as a different gender than what they were assigned at birth. Genderqueer refers to people who do not want to be defined by the gender binary term, such as female or male, and embrace fluid ideas of gender. As defined in Chapter 3, transgender is a term for a person whose gender identity does not match the biological sex they were assigned at birth.

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**Lesbian**: a woman who prefers same-sex partners.

**Gay**: term which refers to women or men who prefer same-sex individuals as emotional and sexual partners.

**Genderqueer**: individuals can consider themselves as non-binary—not feminine or masculine—but a blend of both.

**Transgender**: abbreviated as “trans” describes a person whose gender identity does not match the biological sex they were assigned at birth.
Less than 0.6% of adults or about 1.4 million individuals in the United States self-identify as transgender (Flores et al., 2016). Under the Trump administration consideration was given to defining gender as a biological, immutable condition determined by genitalia at birth (Green et al., 2018). Kuper et al. (2012) found that 292 transgender individuals self-identified as genderqueer—their gender identity was neither male nor female—and pansexual or queer—they were attracted to men, women, or bisexuals—as their sexual orientation. Some individuals who identify as transgender undergo gender reaffirming surgery, which is discussed in “Technology and the Family.”

Transsexual is an older term for transgender people. “Transsexual” differs from “transgender” in that it is not an umbrella term; many transgender people do not identify as transsexual. Some who have changed, or seek to change, their bodies through medical interventions prefer “transsexual.” In the Kuper et al. (2012) sample of 292 transgender individuals, most did not desire to or were unsure of their desire to take hormones or undergo sexual reassignment surgery. Individuals need not take hormones or have surgery to be regarded as transsexuals. The distinguishing variable of a transsexual is living full time in the role of the other biological sex. A man or woman who presents full time as the other gender is a transsexual by definition.

Intersex, also known as innersex, individuals are those who are born with a variety of chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals. Some individuals who are born intersex do identify as intersex in terms of their gender identity, but otherwise may identify as male, female, or gender non-conforming, just as non-intersex people do. They often have ambiguous genitals at birth so that assigning them as a female or male is problematic. Hence, our society provides limited variation from the binary female or male.

Johnson et al. (2014) noted the complexity of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation issues as experienced by transgender, queer, and questioning individuals. One of the participants in their study who identified themselves as TQQ, explained:

I would consider myself to be bi-gendered or gender fluid. Which is probably like the most complicated thing or decision that I have ever made... because there aren’t very many people that understand it. Being bi-gendered makes a lot more sense for me just because like my sexuality in general is just really fluid and it’s really hard to identify myself in one particular box for very long at all ’cause it’s always changing.

This participant’s experiences are similar to those who identify as queer. The term queer is an umbrella term, which refers to people who reject binary categories of gender and sexual orientation. Traditionally, the term queer was used to denote a gay person, and the connotation was negative. More recently, individuals have begun using the term queer with pride, much the same way African Americans called themselves Black during the 1960s Civil Rights era as part of building ethnic pride and identity. Hence, LGBTQ people took the term queer, which was used to demean them, and started to use it with pride.

**Choices in Language**

Because gender identity and sexual orientation are a sensitive, complex topic, it is important to be aware of language. In recent years, there has been a push toward using gender inclusive pronouns, such as the singular “they.” By not paying attention to language, you may misgender someone, by using a pronoun that does not reflect the gender identity with which that person identifies. If you are unsure what gender pronouns you should use for your friends, just ask politely. For example, ask “How would you like to be addressed?” or “Please remind me what pronouns you prefer again?” Some people include gender pronoun preferences in their e-mail signatures. For example, below your e-mail signature line, add your preferred pronouns such as “pronouns: she/her/hers.” You can also include your gender pronouns when introducing yourself. For example, “Hi, my name is Terry and I am from Springfield. My pronouns are they/them/their.” Similarly, you may also ask what terminology people prefer:

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**Transsexual:** older term for the person who has had had hormonal or surgical intervention to change his or her body to align with his or her gender identity.

**Intersex:** having many of the characteristics (hormonal, physical) of both sexes.

**Queer:** inclusive term used by individuals desiring to avoid labels. People who label themselves as “queer” could be gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, trans, intersex, non-conforming heterosexual.
Gender Affirming Surgery

Gender affirming surgery (GAS), formerly known as gender reassignment surgery or sex reassignment surgery, is a procedure used to alter one’s biological sex characteristics. The goal of GAS is to change one’s sex-specific physical characteristics such as genitals, chest, face and voice (Van de Grift et al., 2018). GAS is one of the treatment choices for individuals who suffer from gender identity disorder or gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is “a conflict between a person’s physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he, she, or they identify” (American Psychiatric Association, 2018). By transforming one’s appearance and body, GAS provides people who experience the incongruence between their biological sex and preferred gender.

GAS is a complicated and prolonged process and usually includes three types of surgeries: breast surgery—for example, augmentation, implants, or mastectomy, and reduction; genital surgery, such as alternating, removing, or creating genitalia; and other aesthetic surgical interventions like shaving of the Adam’s apple. In male to female (MtF) GAS, a neovagina is usually created from the individual’s own genitalia or other parts of the body and additional surgery is frequently required to improve its function and appearance. Nearly 60% of total GAS surgeries are male to female transition (Global Market Insight, 2018). Compared to the MtF process, the FtM procedure is more complex. A neophallus is usually fashioned from one’s own skin grafts, either from the forearm or other parts of the body. The lengthening of the female urethra to male dimensions in FtM surgery allows for FtMs to urinate standing.

Gender affirming surgery has a profound impact on the individual person and its impacts are irreversible. In making their choice, individuals considering GAS need to be aware of the physical, psychological, and social implications. According to the Standards of Care (SOC) which were outlined by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), the process begins with the person seeking to transition to be interviewed by mental health professionals with expertise in gender related issues to obtain a diagnosis of gender identify disorder or gender dysphoria. Next, hormonal therapy is required to stimulate the desired body growth such as breasts in a female for an MtF. Some also opt to have hormone therapy prior to puberty to stop the secondary sex growth—for example, a deep voice. In addition, a period of living in the social role of the desired gender for 12 continuous months is required. Finally, various surgeries to remove organs, alter genitalia, and construct body parts are performed. Post-GAS care and support are also important. Although the Standards of Care document has been used to review eligibility and assess readiness, it was critiqued as lacking rigorous and empirical evidence. In addition, the SOC can also be a barrier for GAS (Worth, 2018).

Post-GAS evaluation is mostly satisfactory. The advancement of medical technologies has made GAS safer (Canner et al., 2018). One study reported a 94-100% satisfaction rate during a four-to-six-year period post GAS (Van de Grift et al., 2018). GAS regret rate has been stable at about 2.3% across recent studies (Worth, 2018). Although the cost of gender affirming surgery was high and the medical interventions were complex and long, the surgery reduces one’s constant struggle and improves one’s quality of life (Özata Yildizhan et al., 2018).

The international prevalence and legalization of GAS reflects the growing acceptance of sexual diversity. Sweden, which legalized GAS in 1972, is known for its progressive views on gender issues. With the increasing acceptance of transgender issues and expanding insurance coverage, GAS has grown during the last decade and is forecasted to continue to rise.!
heterosexual women who fall between heterosexual and bisexual women in terms of sexual attraction, fantasies, and sexual behaviors. About 10% of women represent this category.

A third difficulty in labeling a person’s sexual orientation is that an individual’s sexual attractions, behavior, and identity may change across time. One’s sexual orientation is, indeed, fluid. For example, in a longitudinal study of 156 lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth, 57% consistently identified as gay or lesbian and 15% consistently identified as bisexual over a one-year period, but 18% transitioned from bisexual to lesbian or gay (Rosario et al., 2006).

Ross et al. (2013) studied a sample of 652 men and 1,250 women and suggested that sexual orientation be conceptualized as heterosexual, gay, bisexual, and fluid. Six percent of men in the Ross et al. sample reported fluidity in terms of having sex with both women and men; 15% of the women reported having sex with both women and men. In regard to sexual fantasies, the fluidity percentages were much higher—15% of the men and 49% of the women.

The Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale that Kinsey et al. (1953) developed allows individuals to identify their sexual orientation on a continuum. Individuals with ratings of 0 or 1 are entirely or largely heterosexual; 2, 3, or 4 are more bisexual; and 5 or 6 are largely or entirely homosexual (see Figure 7.1). Very few individuals are exclusively a 0 or a 6, prompting Kinsey to believe that most individuals are bisexual. It is also important to note that the Kinsey data were collected at a time when being gay was not accepted, prompting some individuals to avoid identifying themselves as a 0 or 1.

Finally, sexual-orientation classification is also complicated by the fact that sexual behavior, attraction, love, desire, and sexual-orientation identity do not always match. For example, “research conducted across different cultures and historical periods, including present-day Western culture, has found that many individuals develop passionate infatuations with same-gender partners in the absence of same-gender sexual desires . . . whereas others experience same-gender sexual desires that never manifest themselves in romantic passion or attachment” (Diamond, 2003, p.173).

ORIGINS OF SEXUAL-ORIENTATION DIVERSITY

Same-sex behavior has existed throughout human history. Much of the biomedical and psychological research on sexual orientation attempts to identify one or more “causes” of sexual-orientation diversity. The driving question behind this research is this: “Is sexual orientation inborn or is it learned or acquired from environmental influences?” Although a number of factors have been correlated with sexual orientation, including genetics (Ganna et al., 2019), prenatal hormones, gender role behavior in childhood, fraternal birth order, and child sex abuse, no single theory can explain diversity in sexual orientation.

Prior to 1973, the American Psychiatric Association listed homosexuality as a mental disorder with treatments including chemical castration, electric shock therapy, mental institutionalization, and lobotomies. The catalyst for the change was a presentation in 1972 by psychiatrist and member of the APA organization, John E. Fryer. He appeared as Dr. H. Anonymous at the annual convention in Dallas in 1972 wearing a mask, a big curly wig, and used a voice-altering microphone.

“I am a homosexual. I am a psychiatrist,” he said and noted that he had to remain anonymous for fear of losing his job as an untenured professor at a major university. Earlier he had been terminated from his psychiatry residency program at the University of
Pennsylvania’s School of Medicine when it was discovered he was gay.

A year after Dr. Fryer’s presentation, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as a mental disorder.

Is it biology or nurture? I don’t know why we can’t let that debate go. We are always, at every point in time, the product of both.

Stephanie Sanders, senior scientist at Indiana University’s Kinsey Institute.

Beliefs About What “Causes” Sexual Orientation

Aside from what “causes” same sex sexual attraction, social scientists are interested in what people believe about the “causes” of same sex attraction. For example, are gay individuals “biologically wired” to be attracted to each other or can they “choose” their sexual orientation? Overby (2014) analyzed Internet data of over 20,000 respondents, primarily heterosexual, and found that roughly half, about 52%, believed same sex attraction was based primarily on “biological make-up” compared to 32% who believed sexual orientation as more of a lifestyle choice. Of course, regarding whether sexual orientation is a biological imperative or a choice, one may ask of heterosexuals if they are “wired that way” or choose partners of the other sex.

Although the terms sexual preference and sexual orientation are often used interchangeably, those who believe that sexual orientation is inborn more often use the term sexual orientation, and those who think that individuals choose their sexual orientation use sexual preference more often. The term sexual preference can be seen as offensive to the gay community.

Can One’s Sexual Orientation Change?

Individuals who believe that gay or queer people choose their sexual orientation tend to think that people can change their sexual orientation and may be proponents of conversion therapy. Various forms of conversion therapy, also called reparative therapy, are focused on changing one’s sexual orientation. Some religious organizations sponsor “ex-gay ministries,” which claim to “cure” and transform them into heterosexuals by encouraging them to ask for “forgiveness for their sinful lifestyle” through prayer and other forms of “therapy.”

Data confirm that conversion therapy is ineffective and misguided. Gay people are not the problem; social disapproval is the problem. In fact, these treatments may cause psychological, physical, and emotional harm. The National Association for the Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) has been influential in moving public opinion from “gays are sick” to “society is judgmental.” The American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Counseling Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, the National Association of Social Workers, and the American Medical Association agree that homosexuality is not a mental disorder and needs no cure.

The American Psychological Association (APA), American Academy of Pediatrics, and The American Counseling Association have recommended legislation to ban conversion therapy. Eleven states have such a ban and 24 other states have similar legislation in progress (Miller, 2018). In July 2017, the Church of England called on the government to ban conversion therapy and has condemned the practice as unethical and potentially harmful.

HETEROSEXISM, HOMONEGATIVITY, HOMOPHOBIA, BIPHOBIA, BINEGATIVITY, AND TRANSPHOBIA

The United States, along with many other countries throughout the world, is predominantly heterosexual. Heterosexism refers to “the institutional and societal reinforcement of heterosexuality as the privileged and powerful norm.” Heterosexism is based on the belief that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality. Of 12,788 undergraduates, 25% agreed, with more men concurring than women, with the statement “It is better to be heterosexual than gay” (Hall & Knox, 2019). Heterosexism results in prejudice and discrimination against gay and bisexual people. The word prejudice refers to negative attitudes. Prejudice begins early and judgment is given by one’s peers. Farr et al. (2019) reported on 131 elementary school students (M age = 7.79 years; 61 girls) who viewed images of same-sex—female and male—and

Conversion therapy: also called reparative therapy, designed on using techniques to change one’s sexual orientation. Recognized as ineffective and harmful.

Heterosexism: the institutional and societal reinforcement of heterosexuality as the privileged and powerful norm. Assumes that homosexuality is “bad.”
other-sex couples with a child and then were asked about their perceptions of these families, particularly the children. Results indicated participants' preferences toward children with other-sex versus same-sex parents.

Discrimination refers to behavior that denies equality of treatment for individuals or groups. Woodford et al. (2015) used the term microaggression to refer to subtle and covert discrimination against sexual minorities. Examples of microaggressions include hearing someone say “That’s so gay” to describe something negative about a member of the LGBTQ community. Other examples of microaggressive statements include “you’re not really gay,” “being gay is just a phase,” and “you know how gay people are” (Swann et al., 2016).

Even though the Supreme Court has legalized same-sex marriage in June 2015 (Obergefell v. Hodges, 576 U.S. __ 2015), 28 states have no laws prohibiting discrimination against same-sex individuals. Indeed, prejudice and discrimination against sexual minorities continues (Hoyt et al., 2019). In 2018, Kansas and Oklahoma passed legislation to allow state licensed child welfare agencies to cite religious beliefs for not placing children in LGBTQ homes. Twenty-one states have religious exemption laws. Previously, in the Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission—the “gay wedding cake” case—the Supreme Court ruled that the cake makers could refuse certain services based on the free exercise of religion, and thus, were not required to bake a wedding cake for a gay couple.

The consequences of being a victim of prejudice for being a sexual minority adult in the United States involves, relative to heterosexuals, lower social health which includes loneliness, friendship strain, familial strain, and social capital (Doyle & Molix, 2016). This finding is based on a comparison of 365 self-identified heterosexuals of which 105 were women and 214 sexual minorities of which 103 were women. In addition, since social health is related to psychological and physical health, the implications for prejudice and discrimination are devastating. From bullying, hate crime, inadequate work assignments, and prohibiting usage of bathroom to sexist jokes, discrimination can manifest itself in overt or subtle forms (Nadal, 2018). Such discrimination can lead to a hostile working environment for sexual minorities and negatively affect their employment and economic well-being.

Before reading further, you may wish to complete the Self-Assessment on page 382, which assesses the degree to which you are prejudiced toward gay men and lesbians.

**Attitudes Toward Being Gay, Homonegative, and Homophobic**

We got White girls and Black girls and everything in between. Straight girls and gay girls... It’s my absolute honor to lead this team out on the field. There’s no other place that I would rather be...

Megan Rapinoe, American professional soccer player and top scorer of the 2019 Women’s World Cup

The term homophobia is commonly used to refer to negative attitudes and emotions toward people who are gay or lesbian. Homophobia is not necessarily a clinical phobia—that is, one involving a compelling desire to avoid the feared object despite recognizing that the fear is unreasonable. Other terms that refer to negative attitudes and emotions toward members of the LGBTQ community include homonegativity—attaching negative connotations to being LGBTQ— and antigay bias. The result of homonegativity is predictable: depression and anxiety in gay individuals (Puckett et al., 2017) as well as conflict and lower relationship quality in same-sex couples (Totenhagen et al., 2018). Discrimination also continues into elder and nursing home care such that some workers are not comfortable around “gays” (Leyerzapf et al., 2018). Negative social meanings associated with being gay can affect the self-concepts of LGBTQ individuals. Internalized homophobia is a sense of personal failure and self-hatred among

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**Homophobia:** negative attitudes and emotions toward people who are gay or lesbian.

**Homonegativity:** attaching negative connotations to homosexuality.

**Antigay bias:** being biased against lesbians, gays, and bisexuals.

**Internalized homophobia:** a sense of personal failure and self-hatred among

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Memorial signs and flowers outside the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City’s Greenwich Village, the day after the June 12, 2016 shooting at an LGBTQ nightclub in Orlando, Florida, the greatest mass shooting in U.S. history.

Dennis K. Johnson/Lonely Planet Images/Getty Images Plus
queer individuals resulting from social rejection, and the stigmatization of being gay has been linked to increased risk for depression, substance abuse and addiction, anxiety, and suicide thoughts (McLaren, 2016). Newcomb et al. (2014) compared national samples of gay and straight youth and found higher drug use among sexual minorities. Van Bergen et al. 2013 also found higher suicide rates. Platt et al. (2018) also found that sexual minority individuals utilize mental health care professionals at higher rates than heterosexual individuals. Hu et al. (2016) compared lesbian, gay, and bi adults with heterosexual adults and found lower self-esteem and higher loneliness in the former groups. Cao et al. (2017) reviewed 32 research reports and confirmed that same sex relationships are burdened by sexual minority stress in the form of internalized homophobia—negative feelings about being gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans. Having these feelings may result in depression, anxiety, and irritability. In addition, Pepping et al. (2019) noted that minority stressors, such as internalized homophobia and difficulties accepting one’s sexuality, are associated with lower relationship satisfaction via concealment motivation.

Being gay and growing up in a religious context that is antigay may be particularly difficult. Todd et al. (2013) conducted focus groups of LGBTQ individuals who confirmed that religion had a negative impact on them. One group member said, “Religion made me feel that something was wrong with me: it made me feel worse about myself and become depressed.” Given that religion has traditionally been antigay, it is no wonder that LGBTQ college students view campus religious and spiritual spaces as less diverse, supportive, and tolerant. This finding is based on a national study of 13,776 students at 52 institutions that took part in the Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey (Rokenbach et al., 2017). Finally, Rodriguez et al. (2019) also found an association with one’s gay identity struggle and negative mental health. And, when religion and spirituality influences, which were typically negative, were considered, the identity struggle was ongoing and active rather than a passive cognitive conflict.

Homophobia also results in gay individuals hiding their sexual orientation for fear of negative reactions or consequences. Such hiding may also have implications for gay interpersonal relationships. Easterling et al. (2012) found that gay individuals were significantly more likely to keep a secret from their romantic partner than straight individuals. The researchers hypothesized that gay people learn early to keep secrets and that this skill slides over into their romantic relationships.

In particular, the African American community faces enormous pressure to hide homosexual behavior, resulting in some African American males being on the “down low.” Black men on the down low are non-gay-identifying men—for example, they do not view themselves as gay—who have sex with men and women. They meet their gay partners out of town, not in a predictable context or on the Internet.

With Black men, you have to almost hide it. I think that’s why the DL [down low] community was such a big deal or became so large because it’s a . . . there are certain codes or things that you have to do in order to be perceived as straight. If you don’t do those things, then you’re considered gay. As a Black man, you can’t express . . . you can’t cry, you can’t be the emotional. I feel that this is the reason for the growth of the DL community. . . there are certain expectations that Black men have to do in order not to be stigmatized in society (Trahan & Goodrich 2015, p. 152).

However, in spite of the double stigma of race and sexual identity, Edwards (2016) identified 42 Black gay males, 79% of whom reported that they had been in their present relationship at least four years or longer.

Does race impact persons who identify as LGBTQ? According to the Williams Institute (2019), statistics show that 58%, more than half of the LGBT population, is White, and that figure is followed by Latino with 21%, Black with 12%, more than one race with 5%, Asians with 2%, American Indians and Alaska Natives with 1%, and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific islanders with 1%. In general, being a racial and sexual minority individual is associated with minority stress, such as discrimination and microagression. A study of 396 self-identified gay, lesbian, and bisexual participants in New York City revealed that Black and Latino sexual minorities reported experiencing greater stigma than their Caucasian counterparts (Shangani et al., 2019). To counter the report of negative experiences of LGBTQ individuals, Flanders et al. (2017) revealed 278 positive experiences of 91 individuals about their sexual identity via daily diaries. An example recorded by one respondent follows:

I talked more with my coworker who came out to me and he ended up saying he was poly[amorous] and pan[sexual], and I admitted I was bi rather than totally gay and he was like “rock on man, I hear you.” We talked a bit about the semantics of bi vs pansexual because he’s dating a transman, but all together it was a great and affirming experience. I did not expect to make a friend at work who got this stuff.

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Biphobia and Binegativity

**Biphobia**, also referred to as binegativity, refers to a parallel set of negative attitudes toward bisexuality and those identified as bisexual. Just as bisexuals are often rejected by heterosexuals—though men are more rejecting than women—they are also rejected by many gay and lesbian individuals. There are harmful stereotypes that bisexual people are confused about their sexual orientation or are immoral or hypersexual. Thus, bisexuals experience “double discrimination” and reveal worse mental health than their heterosexual and gay or lesbian counterparts. Minority stress and lifetime adversity contribute to this outcome (Persson & Pfau, 2015). A related finding is by Gorman and Oyarvide (2018) who compared bisexual elders with heterosexual, gay, and lesbian elders. Bisexual elders had the lowest rates of completed schooling, lived in lower-income households, and had poorer health predictive.

**Transphobia**

Transgender people are targets of transphobia, a set of negative attitudes toward transgenderism or those who self identify as transgender. Blosnich et al. (2016) found that transgender individuals who lived in states with employment nondiscrimination protection—about half—had a 26% lower incidence of mood disorders like depression. In regard to the school experience of transgender youth, Day et al. (2018) surveyed 31,896 youth representatives of the middle and high school population in California, one percent of which identified as transgender. Compared to cisgender youth, transgender youth were more likely to be truant from school, to experience victimization, and bias-based bullying, which did not translate into lower grades.

Effects of Homophobia, Trans Bias, and Discrimination on Heterosexuals

The antigay and heterosexist social climate of our society is often viewed in terms of how it victimizes the gay population. Moran et al. (2018) surveyed 347 LGBTQ students and found that depressive symptomology was associated with victimization of bullying such as verbal, relational, cyber, and physical abuse. Support from peers provided a buffer to lower levels of depression.

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**Biphobia**: parallel set of negative attitudes toward bisexuality and those identified as bisexual.

**Transphobia**: a set of negative attitudes toward transgenderism or those who self identify as transgender.

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Heterosexuals are also victimized by heterosexism and antigay prejudice and discrimination. Some of these effects follow:

1. **Casualties of hate crimes.** Extreme homophobia and transphobia contributes to instances of violence against LGBTQ individuals, known as **hate crimes**. In June of 2016, the “Orlando Shooting” was a hate crime directed toward the LGBTQ community leaving 49 dead and 53 wounded. Some of these victims identified as straight. Thus, even though LGBTQ individuals may be the primary target of a hate crime, heterosexual individuals may still be affected.

2. **Concern, fear, and grief over well-being of LGBTQ family members and friends.** Many family members and friends experience concern, fear, and grief over the mistreatment of their gay or lesbian friends or family members or all of them. Heterosexual parents who have a gay or lesbian teenager often worry about how the harassment, ridicule, rejection, and violence experienced at school might affect their gay or lesbian child. Will their child be traumatized or drop out of school to escape the harassment, violence, and alienation they endure there? Will the gay or lesbian child respond to the antigay victimization by turning to drugs or alcohol?

3. **Restriction of intimacy and self-expression.** Because of the antigay social climate, heterosexual individuals, especially males, are hindered in their own self-expression and intimacy in same-sex relationships. Many men feel that they must be careful in how they interact platonicly with other men, for fear that they may be perceived as gay. Homophobic scripts also frighten youth who do not conform to gender role expectations, leading some youth to avoid activities—such as arts for boys, athletics for girls—and professions such as elementary education for males.

4. **Stigmatizing one’s sexual behavior.** Heterosexism may prevent individuals from fully exploring their sexual identity. Adolescents, in particular, may be affected. They may resist their own sexual desires because they’ve been taught that heterosexuality is the norm. Adolescent male virgins are often teased by their male
peers, who say things like “You mean you don’t do it with girls yet? What are you, a fag or something?” Such language can further stigmatize adolescents who do not identify as heterosexual.

5. School shootings. Antigay harassment has also been a factor in many of the school shootings in recent years. For example, 15-year-old Charles Andrew Williams fired more than 30 rounds in a San Diego, California, suburban high school, killing two and injuring 13 others. A woman who knew Williams reported that the students had teased him and called him gay.

Recent research has focused on how to promote more inclusive attitudes among heterosexual individuals. An ally development model has been suggested as a means of providing a new learning context for homophobic heterosexual students (Zammitt et al., 2015). Such a model is multilayered and involves school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists providing programs to expose children K-12 to the nature of prejudice and discrimination toward LGBTQ individuals. In addition, LGBTQ individuals should be provided with a framework to react or perceive prejudice and discrimination. In some schools the whole culture is LGBTQ aware and supportive.

College is another context where acceptance toward LGBTQ individuals can increase. Research has demonstrated that interaction with gays and lesbians and taking courses related to these issues is associated with more accepting attitudes regarding same-sex relationships, voting for a gay presidential candidate, being friends with a feminine man or masculine woman, and comfort with a gay or lesbian roommate (Sevecke et al., 2015).

**LGBTQ RELATIONSHIPS**

Interviews with 36 LGBTQ couples in regard to their relationship histories revealed that LGBTQ individuals and couples noted more stress in reference to coming out—if and when—as individuals and as a couple, greater hesitancy to commit, and less family and institutional support for their relationship, and hence, more vulnerable to breaking up (Macapagal et al., 2015). Otherwise, gay and heterosexual couples are amazingly similar in regard to having equal power and control, being emotionally expressive, perceiving many attractions, and few alternatives to the relationship, placing a high value on attachment, and sharing decision-making (Kurdek, 1994). (Refer to the Self-Assessment for same-sex couples on page 384.)

**Sexuality and Commitment**

Kurdek (2008) studied both partners from 95 lesbian couples, 92 gay male couples, 226 heterosexual couples living without children, and 312 heterosexual couples living with children. In studying them over a 10-year period, researchers found that lesbian couples showed the highest level of relationship quality. Like many heterosexual women, most gay or queer women value stable, monogamous relationships that are emotionally as well as sexually satisfying. Gay and heterosexual women in U.S. society are taught that sexual expression should occur in the context of emotional or romantic involvement. When lesbians and heterosexual females are compared on the value of fidelity, lesbians report being more loyal (Okutan et al., 2017).

Long term quality male-male relationships are less frequent. A common stereotype of gay men is that they prefer casual sexual relationships with multiple partners versus monogamous, long-term relationships. Gotta et al. (2011) found that gay men reported greater interest in casual sex than did heterosexual men. The degree to which gay males engage in casual sexual relationships is better explained by the fact that they are male than by the fact that they are gay. In this regard, gay and straight men have a lot in common: They both tend to have fewer barriers—no stigma—to engaging in casual sex than do women who are heterosexual or lesbian.

Contributing to this phenomenon is the use of technology. McKie et al. (2017) conducted focus groups with 43 young adult gay men in regard to Internet use and outcome. Most used the Internet, which was described as having negative outcomes—gay male porn provided unrealistic sex-focused models for gay relationships, dating sites promoted meeting for sex not for relationships, and cheating on one’s partner was easy. An absence of positive models for long-term relationships was noted by one interviewee:

> There is nothing like eharmony.com for gay men, where if you are actually interested in a long-term relationship to go to . . . rather you end up on a website that by and large tends to be about sex . . .

Rosenberger et al. (2014) analyzed data from 24,787 gay and bisexual men who were members of online websites facilitating social or sexual interactions with other men. Over half of those who completed the questionnaire—61.4%—reported that they did not love their sexual partner during their most recent sexual encounter, while 28.3% reported being in love with their most recent sexual partner. Hence, most of these

**Ally development model:** emphasizes those who are supportive of the LGBTQIA movement.
men did not require love as a context to having sex. Although they are given little cultural visibility, many gay men are in long-term monogamous relationships or are interested in monogamy. Van Eeden-Moorefield et al. (2015) studied a small sample of 43 gay men and found that 72% reported a preference for traditional monogamy. Interviews with 36 gay men committed to monogamy in their relationships revealed the benefits of emotional and sexual satisfaction, trust, security, and so forth (Duncan et al., 2015).

What about the sexual satisfaction of sexual minorities? Ritter et al. (2018) compared data on 193 heterosexual and 87 sexual minority undergraduate respondents and found lower sexual satisfaction

### Trans Partner Relationships: A Qualitative Exploration

"Trans," as used here, is a comprehensive term which encompasses individuals within the gender nonconforming population. Existing research reveals that trans individuals are among the most discriminated, marginalized, and stigmatized with high levels of mental and financial difficulties. While this study is about trans relationships, not all of the respondents were in a relationship at the time of the interview.

#### Methodology and Findings

Data for this study came from interviews with 38 trans individuals who self-identified as either (a) having transitioned or (b) having gender expression fluidity from male to female (MTF) or female to male (FTM). As for sexual orientation, participants identified as lesbian, bisexual, demisexual, pansexual, straight, queer, and no label. Most were White, Euro-American and the remainder African American, Hispanic, or biracial. The respondents were recruited through widely placed advertisements on trans-oriented public pages on Facebook.

The participants completed a one-hour interview via Skype during which they responded to 13 prompt questions about their lives and relationships, such as “Overall, what would you say are the pros and cons of being trans in regard to romantic relationships?”. Five themes were identified in the answers from the respondents.

1. **The oppressive gender binary system**

   Thirty-three of the 38 participants, about 87%, noted the relentless stress of living within the oppressive and narrowly defined male or female gender role system. Examples of issues trans individuals had to confront included the complexity of determining their own gender identity and how to present themselves; that is, did they want to present as a male, female, or genderqueer person? And what type partner did the other person want?

2. **Coming out and disclosure decisions**

   Dealing with the complexity of disclosure of one’s trans identity to one’s current or future partners was another major issue. Dierckx et al. (2019) interviewed 17 partners of trans people who reported the various roles they had to manage were the co-parenting role, the ally role, and the romantic partner role; the latter being the most difficult.

3. **Emotional and physical sexuality concerns**

   Participants talked about the challenges of sexual relations. Some comments included:

   > It’s hard for a partner to react to a body that they’re not familiar with. (Cris, age 25)

4. **Healthy relationships are work**

   Trans individuals must navigate all the issues that other couples do—where to live and questions like whether the city is trans gender friendly, work priority and schedule issues, and in-laws and extended family.

   > We see them [extended family] in the summers and at Christmas time . . . So, a year ago they met me as one person and now here I am and I’m not the same person. I mean, I’m the same person, but I don’t look the same, I don’t have the same name, I don’t even sound the same, so . . . they were quite confused. (Jake, age 37)

5. **Living an authentic life**

   In spite of the difficulty trans individuals face, there is joy in moving out of the shadows and being true to one’s self:

   > So, the pros are that you’re being completely authentic and I think that in a loving relationship . . . that is absolutely critical. (Aubrey, age 59)

The researchers summarized their research by noting the important issues trans individuals face in their relationships—their fears and rejections—but also their joy of authenticity.

among the latter. Previous researchers have suggested that sexual minority relationships exist in a context of heterosexism, suppression, stigmatization, prejudice, discrimination, and violence which results in lower relationship quality. Such an impact on minority couples’ satisfaction may spill over into lower sexual satisfaction.

Paine et al. (2019) interviewed 16 married midlife lesbians who reported a decrease in sexual interest over time, citing weight gain, the exhaustion of rearing children, caring for aging parents, and menopause as culprits. They also noted the positive value of a mutual understanding of menopause, and some were intent on not letting sex slide into nonexistence in their relationship. Some reported “penciling in” time for sex to make sure it happened.

**Mate Preferences of Transgender Individuals**

Aristegui et al. (2018) surveyed the mate preferences of 134 male to female (MtF) individuals who emphasized attractiveness and socioeconomic status in a partner; the same survey showed that 94 female-to-male (FtM) individuals were more focused on dependable character. The researchers noted that “although biological sex differences were present in both groups, providing support to the evolutionary theory, MtF individuals valued the same characteristics as both biological male and female individuals do” (p. 330).

Fein et al. (2018) noted that transgender individuals have a variety of sexual partners, predominantly cisgender, and may change sexual preference when they transition. However, transitioning can be associated with having no primary sexual partner, despite past sexual partnerships. Recognizing the unique challenge for many gender-nonconforming individuals, dating sites and apps have enabled members to select transgender or other gender-nonconforming identities in profile. Despite these changes, transgender individuals may face more challenges in finding a partner than heterosexual or queer individuals.

Blaire (2019) found that across a sample of heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and trans individuals, 87.5% indicated that they would not consider dating a trans person.

**Division of Labor**

Compared to heterosexual couples, previous studies have found gay and lesbian couples share household labor and childcare more equally. Kelly and Hauck (2015) interviewed 30 queer participants who were cohabitating with a partner to examine how they negotiated the household division of labor in their relationship. Results revealed that their roles in reference to housework and childcare were shaped by time availability and personal preferences as well as labor force participation and citizenship. The authors suggested that queer couples are “redoing gender” by challenging normative gender roles.

**Mixed-Oriented Relationships**

Mixed-orientation couples are those in which one partner is heterosexual and the other partner is lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Adler and Ben-Ari (2017) studied 46 individuals in mixed orientation marriages and found varying patterns of secrecy from complete secrecy to complete openness. Their research challenged the idea that secrecy is detrimental and openness is beneficial in the context of mixed-orientation marriages. In another study, eight heterosexual women in a relationship with a gay or bisexual partner emphasized that they were able to reframe their involvement with their partner to move toward a successful relationship (Adler & Ben-Ari, 2018). The Straight Spouse Network (www.straightspouse.org) provides support to heterosexual spouses or partners, current or former, of LGBTQ mates.

**COMING OUT TO SIBLINGS, PARENTS, AND PEERS**

Coming out is a major decision with which LGBTQ individuals struggle. Coming out can mean a series of decisions and an ongoing process for many. A person must first “come out” to oneself, then decide on who, when, where, and what to disclose. Peterson et al. (2017) found siblings were the first individuals to whom sample of LGBTQ individuals came out and with 100% positive response. The reaction of friends is particularly important. Puckett et al. (2017) reported that LGBTQ youth who lost friends when they came out were 29 times more likely to report suicide attempts. Coming out to parents involves the parents adjusting their previous expectations—the parents must give up the idea that their offspring will either not have a biological child or will want to adopt (Jhang, 2018). Coming out to grandparents is a cautious decision based on the perception of their having conservative values (Scherrer, 2016). Coming out as a transgender individual can be particularly difficult. Brumbaugh-Johnson and Hull (2019) interviewed 20 transgender people about their coming out process. The result indicated that coming out is a strategic decision and requires thoughtful consideration for social contexts for transgender individuals.

Parents also struggle with coming out to their wives and children. A gay father—his daughter was in
Risks and Benefits of “Coming Out”

In a society where heterosexuality is expected and considered the norm, heterosexuals do not have to choose whether or not to tell others that they are heterosexual. However, decisions about “coming out,” or being open and honest about one’s sexual orientation and identity, particularly to one’s parents, are agonizing for LGBTQ individuals. Whether LGBTQ individuals come out is influenced by the degree to which they are frustrated with hiding their sexual orientation, the degree to which they are pressured to come out by their partners, the degree to which they feel more “honest” about being open, their assessment of the risks of coming out, and their prediction of how others will respond.

Risks of Coming Out

1. Parental and family members’ reactions. Rothman et al. (2012) studied 177 LBG individuals who reported that two-thirds of the parents to whom they first came out responded with social and emotional support. Their research is in contrast to that of Mena and Vaccaro (2013), who interviewed 24 gay and lesbian youth about their coming out experience to their parents. All reported a less than 100% affirmative “we love you” and “being gay is irrelevant” reaction which resulted in varying degrees of sadness or depression. Parents’ reactions have a major effect on the development of the child, and parental rejection is related to suicide ideation and suicide attempts (Van Bergen et al., 2013).

2. Harassment and discrimination at school. LGBTQ students are more vulnerable to being bullied, harassed, and discriminated against. The negative effects are predictable: “a wide range of health and mental health concerns, including sexual health risk, substance abuse, and suicide, compared with their heterosexual peers” (Russell et al., 2011). Some communities offer charter schools which are “LGBT friendly” and promote tolerance; LGBTQ students as well as faculty often seek these contexts of greater acceptance.

3. Discrimination and harassment at the workplace. The workplace continues to be a place where 8 million LGBTQ individuals experience discrimination and harassment. Specifically, gay men are paid less than heterosexual men. LGBTQ individuals feel their potential for promotion is less than the heterosexual majority, and many remain closeted for fear of retribution. There is no federal law that explicitly prohibits sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination against LGBTQs.

4. Hate crime victimization. Another risk of coming out is being victimized by antigay hate crimes against individuals or their property. Such crimes include verbal threats and intimidation, vandalism, sexual assault and rape, physical assault, and murder.

Benefits of Coming Out

Coming out to parents is associated with decided benefits. D’Amico and Julien (2012) compared 111 gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth who disclosed their sexual orientation to their parents with 53 who had not done so. Results showed that the former reported higher levels of acceptance from their parents, lower levels of alcohol and drug consumption, and fewer identity and adjustment problems.

After five years of marriage, we separated and it felt like I could maybe stop hiding who I was. My family was pressuring me to “get back out there” and after holding them off I met a woman who I believed would be my saving grace. I learned that she had been with other women during college and felt like she could be my cover up. However, after we married, it was apparent that would not be the case. I began drinking because I was ashamed of who I was and what my life had become because of it. I made the decision to end my second marriage and come out to my family. My parents and grandparents had passed away at this point so I...
didn’t feel like I had to worry about rejection from them. Coming out to the older members of our family led to a few interesting conversations, but they all assured me that they still loved me and their opinion of me as a person and as a father to my children had not changed. Once I was honest with everyone, I felt like a huge weight had been lifted off my shoulders.

Social media is sometimes used to come out and celebrate one’s sexual identity—“out and proud.” Ten percent of 42 gay men who were interviewed reported using Facebook to come out. Facebook may also be a forum to be “out and discreet” whereby 57% came out to friends—for example, by controlling privacy settings—but hid this information from others. “Facebook and closeted” was another option used by a third of the interviewees who carefully manage their online profile to ensure their sexual identity is not exposed (Owens, 2017). Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube are also used in coming out. Shawn Dawson did so for seven million viewers (Couric, 2015).

LGBTQ individuals may also “go back into the closet” when they enter a new context. Svab and Kuhar (2014) identified the concept of the “transparent closet” to describe a situation in which parents are informed about a child’s homosexuality but do not talk about it... a form of rejection. The “family closet” refers to the wider kinship system having knowledge of a child’s being gay but is “keeping it quiet,” a kind of denial. Because Black individuals are more likely than White individuals to view homosexual relations as “always wrong,” African Americans who are gay or lesbian are more likely to face disapproval from their families than are White lesbians and gays (Glass, 2014). “We just don’t talk about it,” said one African-American parent.

Coming out as a bisexual is different from coming out as gay or lesbian. In a qualitative study of the coming out experiences of 45 bisexuals, Scherrer et al. (2015) noted that bisexuals may come out to remove the confusion for parents. For example, explaining why one spends a lot of time with and is moving in with a same-sex person. Others feel that use of the term “gay” is easier for parents and family than “bisexual.” One respondent said that her parents knew what gay was but thought bisexuals were “weird” so gay was used. Regardless of the strategy or use of term, the predominant reaction by parents to coming out as a bisexual was to label the new identity as a phase, as in “You are just trying this out, but you will come to your senses.”

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

In June 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that same sex marriage was legal in all 50 states. The decision was 5-4. Justice Anthony Kennedy, the pivotal swing vote, wrote the majority opinion. “They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law,” Kennedy wrote of same-sex couples in the case. “The Constitution grants them that right.” Hart-Brinson (2018) observed that the legalization of same-sex marriage was the culmination of social and political forces including...
a significant positive shift in the perception of gays and lesbians. Masci et al. (2017) identified five key facts about same-sex marriage:

1. Greater societal support. Every year since 2007 there has been an increase in public support for same-sex marriage. In 2017, 62% supported same sex marriage; 32% opposed.

2. Demographic differences in support. There is a demographic divide in support of same-sex marriage with religiously unaffiliated more supportive than the religiously affiliated. Younger individuals are also more supportive: 74% of millennials, now ages 18 to 36, back same-sex marriage; 65% of Generation Xers, ages 37 to 52, agree; 56% of baby boomers, ages 53 to 71, concur; and 41% of those in the Silent Generation, ages 72 to 89, also support same-sex marriages.

3. More same sex marriages. Before legalization, 38% of cohabiting same-sex couples were married. After the Supreme Court ruling, 61% of cohabiting same-sex couples are married.

4. Reasons for marriage. While both LGBTQ individuals and the general public cite love as the primary reason for marriage—84% and 88%, respectively—46% of LGBTQ individuals are more likely to cite rights and benefits as a reason for marriage compared with 23% of the general public. The abilities to become political and empowered were also motivations, identified by Lannutti (2018), for same-sex marriages.

5. The United States is one of 20 countries legalizing same-sex marriage. The first nation to legalize same-sex marriage was the Netherlands in 2000. Since then Canada, Spain, France, the Scandinavian countries, Ireland, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, New Zealand, South Africa, Uruguay, and India have legally supported same-sex marriage. However, homosexuality is still illegal in 74 countries and punishable by death in countries such as Sudan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

By a 5–4 decision, the Supreme Court declared DOMA (The Defense of Marriage Act) unconstitutional on equal protection grounds, thus giving same-sex married couples federal recognition and benefits. Previously Edith Windsor had sued the federal government (U.S. vs Windsor) on grounds that she did not owe $363,053 in estate taxes since she was legally married. Her deceased long-term partner, Thea Spyer, had left her entire estate to her. Windsor won. Below is a list of benefits resulting from the legalization of same-sex marriage:

- The right to inherit from a spouse who dies without a will;
- The benefit of not paying inheritance taxes upon the death of a spouse;
- The right to make crucial medical decisions for a spouse and to take care of a seriously ill spouse or a parent of a spouse under current provisions in the federal Family and Medical Leave Act;
- The right to collect Social Security survivor benefits; and
- The right to receive health insurance coverage under a spouse’s insurance plan.

Other rights bestowed on married or once-married partners include assumption of a spouse’s pension, bereavement leave, burial determination, domestic violence protection, reduced-rate memberships, divorce protections such as equitable division of assets and visitation of partner’s children, automatic housing lease transfer, and immunity from testifying against a spouse. All of these advantages are now available to same-sex married couples because of the Supreme Court decision. Additional effects of the legalization of same-sex marriage are lower levels of LGBTQ identity concealment, a less difficult process accepting one’s LGBTQ identity, and less vigilance and isolation (Riggle et al., 2017).

A major benefit of the legalization of same-sex marriage is that it will promote relationship stability among gay and lesbian couples. In a study of the long-term dating intentions and monogamy beliefs of gay and lesbian online daters across 53 regions in eight European countries (N = 24,598), the presence of pro same-sex relationship legislation was found to be also associated with higher long-term dating intentions and stronger monogamy beliefs (Potarca et al., 2015). This higher rate is attributed to the presence of institutional support. Supreme Court recognition of same-sex marriage will result in an increase of more stable unions.

Positive outcomes for being married as a gay couple have been documented. Perales and Baxter (2018) analyzed data on 25,348 individuals in the United Kingdom, comparing same-sex couples with
heterosexuals, and found similar levels of relationship quality. However, LeBlanc et al. (2018) provided data to confirm that although same-sex marriage is now legal in every state, unequal recognition continues which is associated with negative mental health, such as psychological distress, depression, and problematic drinking.

One negative aspect of the legalization of same-sex marriage has been to put enormous pressure on same-sex couples to “present an idyllic image of family.” Indeed same-sex spouses facing parental separation are concerned that their divorce “would disrupt efforts to achieve social and political acceptance” (Gahan, 2018).

**LGBTQ PARENTING ISSUES**

Undergraduate females, friends of gays, individuals supportive of same-sex marriage and former students of a marriage and family class where same-sex issues were discussed are more likely to report favorable attitudes toward same-sex parenting (Schephoerster & Aamlid, 2016). In regard to lesbians and gay men themselves deciding to have children, Gato et al. (2017) identified the various issues that impact their decision: sociodemographic such as gender, age and cohort, and race and ethnicity; personal, the internalization of antigay prejudice and openness about one’s nonheterosexual orientation; relational, one’s partner’s parental motivation and social support; and contextual such as work conditions, access to LGBTQ support networks, information and resources, and social, legal, and medical barriers.

**Lesbian Mothers and Gay Fathers**

Fatherhood takes on a special meaning for gay males. Traditionally deprived of the role, Shenkman and Shmotkin (2016) found that gay males in contrast to heterosexual males were more likely to tie the meaning of life to the role of fatherhood. Tornello and Patterson (2018) found that when gay fathers told their children that they were gay, the children felt closer to their fathers and had a higher sense of well-being. Golombok et al. (2018) compared 40 gay father families created through surrogacy and a group of 55 lesbian mother families created through donor insemination. Results revealed that children in both family types showed high levels of adjustment with lower levels of children’s internalizing problems reported by gay fathers.

Data on gay fathers also reveal that they are more likely to co-parent equally and compatibly than fathers in heterosexual relationships. Erez and Shenkman (2016) also found gay dads happier in reported subjective well-being than heterosexual dads. The act of becoming a father has a very positive outcome on gay men’s sense of self-worth. Part of this effect may be due to the fact that some gay men think that gay fatherhood was an unattainable role.

Bos et al. (2018) found no significant differences on children’s well-being or problems in the parent-child relationship between mothers and fathers in same-sex and different-sex parent households. Indeed, it is the relationship that children have with their parents, not their sexual orientation that determines adult outcomes for children.

A mutual concern of lesbian mothers and gay fathers is the school their adolescent children attend. Goldberg et al. (2018) emphasized that parents of lesbian and gay youth struggle to find a school system that will minimize the exposure of their children to stigma. Seeking schools emphasizing racial diversity and gay friendliness were specific criteria.

**Bisexual Parents**

Power et al. (2013) surveyed 48 bisexuals who were parenting inside a variety of family structures—heterosexual relationships, same-sex relationships, co-parenting with ex-partners or nonpartners, or sole parenting—and revealed issues relevant to all parents: discipline, combining work and parenting, and so forth. The dimension of bisexuality rarely surfaced. When it did, it was in the form of being closeted to help prevent their child from being subjected to prejudice and dealing with prejudiced ex partners, in-laws, and grandparents.

There is some question about how bisexual parents socialize their children in regard to gender. Flanders et al. (2019) interviewed 25 nonmonosexual-minority women in different gender relationships about their parenting practices. Results revealed that the participants expressed an openness to deviating from gender norms in the socialization of their children by providing both same- and cross-gender opportunities, as well as in being open to the potential their children would identify as trans. One respondent mother reported the following:

So I think I try really hard to let the kids be who they are, whether it’s about gender or any other part of their identity, and I guess that’s what’s important to me and how it relates to my identity, is that I want the freedom and the latitude to be who I am, to be authentic to myself and so I want that for my kids too.
Development and Well-Being of Children With Gay or Lesbian Parents

While critics suggest that children reared by same-sex parents are disadvantaged (Kirby & Michaelson, 2015), there are no data to support this fear. Cenegy et al. (2018) examined national data on the well-being of children reared in same-sex families and found poorer health that was “largely the product of demographic and socioeconomic differences rather than exposure to nontraditional family forms.”

In regard to how LGBTQ parents differ from heterosexual parents, Averett (2016) found that while heterosexual parents believe that children are or should be heterosexual and encourage traditional gender socialization—for example, a ribbon in the hair for female babies—LGBTQ parents provide their children with a variety of gendered options for clothing, toys, and activities like “the gender buffet.” Below is an example of “the gender buffet” revealed in comments by Latisha and Maria about the interest of their three-year-old daughter Alivia in both “boy” and “girl” things (p. 200).

Latisha:

Once Maria bought her an imitation tool set, because that’s what she was interested in at the time. But she also has microphones, and she also has dolls. But, even like, with her puzzles—she is interested in castles and dragons and things like that. And so that’s the puzzle that we’re going to get, and we don’t think about [whether it is for boys or girls].

Maria:

But then there’s people’s view on it, like when we bought that tool set. The cashier—it was man—was like, “Oh, you buying this for your son?” And I was like “Actually, no, my daughter.” And he was like, “Wha! Oh, okay, that’s cool!” But it, like, takes people a minute.

Rearing a Gender Variant Child

Gray et al. (2016) addressed the issues parents struggle with in parenting a gender variant (GV) child. These GV children are defined as having a “subjective sense of gender identity and/or preferences regarding clothing, activities, and/or playmates that are different from what is culturally normative for their biological sex.” Interviews with eight mothers and three fathers of GV children, ages five to 13, revealed their efforts to provide a non-stigmatized childhood for their GV by trying to reduce the child’s fear of stigma or hurt and advocating for a more tolerant society. An example of the former was to teach the child that prejudice exists and to minimize one’s exposure. One parent said of her son, “I worry for me, and for him, about society... but he’s so good at editing himself now, I think he’ll get even better at it. I think it’s kinda sad that he has to do it, but I think it just is a reality. And that I’m gonna encourage him to continue to do it.” Other parents were more supportive of their GV child being “less stealthy.”

The sentiment about changing society is revealed in a parent who said, “My view is that gender variance as we talk about it now as a ‘problem’ is not really the kid’s problem—it’s society’s problem in that we have a few narrow categories.” These parents were intent on educating teachers and administrators and persons who would be in leadership roles with their children—for example, the karate teacher. Pyne (2016) noted that parents of GV children and other gender nonconforming children seek to affirm their children. Theirs is “not a job, but a relationship with their children.”

Parents of GV children are like other parents. Their role is to love and protect their child. This involves unconditional love, support, and respect for whom their child is and clearly communicating all of these. Since the path to adulthood will be different for GV children, parents should also make contact with transgender specialists, become involved with support groups, and get ready for the challenging parenting experience ahead.

Discrimination in Child Custody, Visitation, Adoption, and Foster Care

A student in one of our classes reported that after she divorced her husband, she became involved in a lesbian relationship. She explained that she would like to be open about her relationship to her family and friends, but she was afraid that if her ex-husband...
Adoption of Children by LGBTQ Individuals and Couples?

Thousands of children in the U.S. child welfare system are waiting to be adopted. The American Psychological Association (2012) reviewed the research and noted that lesbian and gay parents are as likely as heterosexual parents to provide supportive and healthy environments for their children. In addition, the adjustment, development, and psychological well-being of children are unrelated to parental sexual orientation.

Despite the research confirming positive outcomes for children reared by gay or lesbian parents, and despite the support for gay adoption by child advocacy organizations, placing children for adoption with gay or lesbian parents remains controversial. Of 12,816 undergraduates, 18% agreed—with more men concurring than women—with the statement “Children of gay parents are disadvantaged over children of parents reared by heterosexual parents” (Hall & Knox, 2019). Prejudice against same-sex adoptions is not unique to America. In a study of Portuguese undergraduates, Gato and Fontaine (2016) found both women and men expressing more negative attitudes toward adoption by gay individuals, with increased disapproval for adoption of males into gay families. Italy remains a country in the European Union where same-sex marriages and civil unions are not legally recognized and where homosexual couples are not allowed to adopt a child (Giunti & Fioravanti, 2017).

Social policies that prohibit LGBTQ individuals and couples from adopting children result in fewer children being adopted. With the legalization of same-sex marriage, an increasing number of children will be adopted by LGBTQ individuals and couples.

Second-parent adoption is not possible when a parent in a same-sex relationship has a child from a previous heterosexual marriage or relationship unless the former spouse or partner is willing to give up parental rights.

FUTURE OF LGBTQ RELATIONSHIPS

While heterosexism, homonegativity, biphobia, and transphobia have historically been entrenched in American society, moral acceptance and social tolerance and acceptance of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people as individuals, couples, and parents will increase. Corporate America will lead the way. American Airlines is an example of a major airline to implement both sexual orientation and gender nondiscrimination in the workplace. As a result of a more accepting culture, more LGBTQIA individuals will come out, their presence will become more evident, and tolerant, acceptance, and support will increase (Gates, 2017).
SUMMARY

What are problems with identifying and classifying sexual orientation?
To avoid the stigma, prejudice, and discrimination associated with homosexuality, some individuals hide their sexual orientation. Others do not self-identify as gay or bisexual even though they are attracted to those of the same sex or have engaged in same-sex behavior. Still others may change their attitudes, attractions, behaviors, and identity across time.

What are the origins of sexual-orientation diversity?
Although a number of factors have been correlated with sexual orientation, including genetics, gender role behavior in childhood, and fraternal birth order, no single theory can explain diversity in sexual orientation.

Those who believe that gay and lesbian individuals choose their sexual orientation tend to think that members of this community can and should change their orientation. Various forms of conversion therapy are focused on changing one’s sexual orientation, but professional associations agree that being gay is not a mental disorder and needs no cure. In spite of treatment programs offering to “cure” a person who is gay, data confirm that conversion therapy is ineffective and misguided and, in some states, illegal.

What are heterosexism, homonegativity, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia?
Heterosexism refers to “the institutional and societal reinforcement of heterosexuality as the privileged and powerful norm.” Heterosexism is based on the belief that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality. The term homophobia, also known as homonegativity, refers to negative attitudes and emotions toward homosexuality and those who engage in it. Biphobia and transphobia are negative attitudes and emotions toward bisexual and trans individuals.

What are the relationships of LGBTQ individuals like?
While LGBTQ relationships tend to be more similar to rather than different from heterosexual couples, LGBTQ relationships tend to involve partners of equal power and control who are emotionally expressive and share decision making. Lesbian couples tend to have the highest levels of relationship quality. A major difference gay couples have from heterosexual relationships is whether, when, and how to disclose their relationship to others.

What is coming out to parents, peers, colleagues, etc., like?
Parental reaction to a child coming out has a major effect on the child’s development. Although every family is different, White parents are comparatively more accepting; Black parents often have more difficulty due to the presumed impact of religion on their attitudes and beliefs (Irizarry & Perry, 2018).

Rejection by peers at school can invite harassment and discrimination, bullying, and so forth. Workplace involves risk to promotion and advancement. Being the target of a hate crime permeates the decision to come out.

The result of coming out is more often positive than negative. Individuals feel relieved at no longer having to hide their orientation and are surprised by the unexpected support. Partners who have the most difficult reaction are spouses. Social media is sometimes the mechanism used in the coming out process.

What are the pros and cons of same-sex marriage?
The pros of same-sex marriage are that children benefit from being brought up in a loving, stable, nurturing relationship. The spouses also benefit from the structural, legal support. Arguments against same-sex marriage focus on the “pathology” of homosexuality, the “immorality,” and the subversion of traditional marriage. Same-sex marriage is now legal in every state.

What does research on gay and lesbian parenting conclude?
Children raised by gay and lesbian parents adjust positively and their families function well. Lesbian and gay parents are as likely as heterosexual parents to provide supportive and healthy environments for their children, and the children of lesbian and gay parents are as likely as those of heterosexual parents to flourish.

What is the future of LGBTQ relationships?
While heterosexism, homonegativity, biphobia, and transphobia are realities, they, like racism, will unfortunately continue. However, with the legalization of same-sex marriage and more LGBTQ individuals coming out, acceptance and support will increase. A policy change allowing gay individuals to join the Boy Scouts as well as numerous positive portrayals of gay individuals on television and in movies reflect this cultural shift.
### KEY TERMS

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### WEB LINKS

- Advocate (Online Newspaper for LGBT News)
  - http://www.advocate.com/
- American Institute of Bisexuality
  - www.bi.org
- Bisexual Resource Center
  - http://www.biresource.org
- People with a Lesbian, Gay, Transgender or Queer Parent (COLAGE)
  - http://www.colage.org
- Compatible Partners
  - http://www.compatiblepartners.net/
- Gay and Lesbian Support Groups for Parents
  - http://www.gayparentmag.com/
- PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
  - http://www.pflag.org

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