

# Translating Research Into Practice

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It's not that long ago since the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* published its first-ever research contribution on lesbian parenting (Perlesz & McNair, 2004). And now, just six years later, the *ANZJFT* has embarked on a bold new venture: not just a whole issue on gay and lesbian parented families, but a volume of research papers with commentaries by experienced family therapists that translate research into practice wisdoms.

It *is* a bold venture in mainstream publishing, because for the first time ever, contemporary research on a marginalised group of families becomes a focal point for consideration by mainstream therapists who have an opportunity to think about issues of discrimination, 'homonegativity' (see Tasker et al. in this issue), and what learnings from non-traditional family life can contribute to everyday therapeutic practice. The other exciting thing about this special issue of the *ANZJFT* is that all five original research contributions (from the United Kingdom, Netherlands, United States, and Australia) offer cross-cultural findings via a unique variety of rigorous methodologies, highlighting the practical relevance of the family studies literature for family therapists and counsellors.

Jason Tuazon-McCheyne's article on Australian two-father families conceived via surrogacy heads up this collection. Perhaps there is an intended double entendre in the use of the word 'conceived' here. It takes much thought, planning and expense to bring a child via surrogacy and a two-dad family to fruition. Such radical and transformative family creation leads Naomi Rottem in her commentary to ask us, the reader, significant reflective questions such as: 'What assumptions do we hold about the effect on children of being raised by gay parents? What are our beliefs about the roles of men and women in raising children, and about how the absence of a female parent might affect children?' And 'What beliefs do we hold about the use of surrogacy?' This research is also of interest because it's an engaging account of a cooperative inquiry, action research method.

In Fiona Tasker, Helen Barrett and Federica De Simone's UK research we hear from young adults who were conceived within a heterosexual partnership, but whose fathers later came out as gay. A young person's acceptance, or otherwise, of their father's gay identity raises questions about disclosure both within and beyond families. Not all gay fathers are as 'out' as are those in Tuazon-McCheyne's Australian research, and this UK contribution untangles some of these complex decisions in a rigorous interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Damian McCann, in his response to this article, invites therapists to 'offer a flexible model of working in helping family members navigate a way through the challenges posed'. It's not just the heterosexist or homophobic beliefs that may be

operating within and between family members, but therapists too need to be self-reflective on where and how they sit with sexual minority issues.

Hannah Richardson and Abbie Goldberg's research tackles the intersections, not just between mainstream and marginalised sexuality, but between race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and adoptive status for lesbian parents who adopt racial/ethnic minority children in the United States. The participants in this mixed-method study reported multiple layers of stigma and a lack of understanding from others. However, the discrimination they had experienced as lesbians contributed to their strength in coping with stigma experienced by themselves as parents and their children. Fiona Mc Ilwaine, Kerry Proctor, Jacqui Sundbery and Banu Moloney respond to this research from the vantage point of their membership of the Indigenous Program at The Bouverie Centre in Melbourne. Their commentary highlights that connections and relationships are key to resilience and the capacity building to overcome discrimination, whether it be based on skin colour, sexual orientation or other sources of potential stigma and marginalisation: a realisation supported by the fact that many of our clients live with 'multiple minority identities'.

Henny Bos's gay fathers represent a different segment of the gay population to those of both Tuazon-McCheyne and Tasker and her colleagues. These gay fathers in the Netherlands, after donating sperm, are co-parenting in kinship arrangements with lesbian mothers. In a methodologically rigorous quantitative comparison with heterosexual fathers, these gay men felt significantly less competent in their child-rearing role. This is not to say that they *were* less competent in their parenting, but experiences of coping with perceived rejection and having to defend their non-traditional parenting role in a heterosexist culture no doubt contributes to parental stress and uncertainty. We hope that Bos will pass on to her research participants Mark Furlong's observation that research consistently reveals positive outcomes for children raised in gay- and lesbian-parented households, and non-heterosexual parents should thus be proud of, rather than doubting, their parenting achievements.

And then to our own article, where, along with six of our research colleagues (Rhonda Brown, Ruth McNair, Margot Schofield, Marian Pitts, Anna Barrett and Andrew Bickerdike), we have presented findings from the mixed-method Work, Love, Play study: to date the largest sample of same-sex attracted parents across Australia and New Zealand. A comparison of our respondents with opposite-sex parents showed that same-sex couples divided household labour significantly more equally than heterosexual parents, and lesbian couples also shared parenting tasks more equally. Tom Paterson in his commentary is 'interested to know why more heterosexual couples and parents have not "seen the light"' when, as Perlesz et al. point out, it has long been part of the mainstream literature that dissatisfaction with domestic division of labour is a major contributor to unhappiness in relationships'. Paterson evokes Helm Stierlin's concept of co-evolution, arguing that if men and women in opposite-sex relationships were to each develop strengths in earning a living, sharing in domestic tasks and parenting then each could 'cover' for, and share with the other, providing opportunities to not only explore new areas as individuals but to also co-evolve together in a strengthened relationship.

Finally, but by no means less significant in their interest for family therapists, are the two book reviews we have selected for this issue. The first, by Anna McDowall,

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reviews an important book for family therapists written by Patricia Crittenden about 'parents whose risky behaviour as caregivers jeopardises the welfare and lives of their children'. This is a book, not just for those who work in child protection, but for all of us who have lapsed at times into inadvertent parent-blaming. The second review by Pru Crombie, of Carole Gammer's book, takes us into the oft-neglected area of including children in therapy, something that some family therapists are perhaps fearful of, but here are some clear guidelines to light the path of child inclusiveness!

We'd like to thank the editor and Board members of the *ANZJFT* for inviting and entrusting us to get together this special issue of the *ANZJFT*. We are thankful that the authors kept to deadlines, and we are particularly grateful to our Australian and US academic colleagues who peer reviewed all papers, gave perceptive and thoughtful feedback that improved each contribution, but who were also generous in their praise of the quality of the papers. It's been both inspiring and a lot of fun editing this issue (aside from the proof-reading!), and we hope you enjoy reading it as much as we have enjoyed getting it together.

### Reference

Perlesz, A., & McNair, R. (2004). Lesbian parenting: Insiders' voices. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 25(3), 129–140. 