



## Three critical questions for future research on lesbian relationships

Lisa M. Diamond

**To cite this article:** Lisa M. Diamond (2016): Three critical questions for future research on lesbian relationships, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/10894160.2016.1143756](https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2016.1143756)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2016.1143756>



Published online: 21 Oct 2016.



Submit your article to this journal



View related articles



CrossMark

View Crossmark data

## Three critical questions for future research on lesbian relationships

Lisa M. Diamond

Department of Psychology, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

### ABSTRACT

In this article I discuss three questions that should be priorities for future research on lesbian love and relationships. The first question concerns the very definition of "lesbian relationship," given how many women may be engaged in same-sex relationships without identifying as lesbian. The second question concerns the potential influence of childhood neglect and abuse on adult women's same-sex relationships, a topic that has important implications for both psychological well-being and relationship functioning. The third question concerns the potential downsides of legal marriage for women's same-sex relationships, a topic that is particularly important in light of the newfound legal recognition of same-sex marriage in all 50 states. Although there are many understudied questions in the domain of women's same-sex relationships, research on these three questions has particularly strong potential to advance our understanding of lesbian love and relationships in important ways.

### KEYWORDS

Lesbian; bisexual; marriage; abuse; relationship

The past several decades have witnessed dramatic increases in the scientific investigation of same-sex relationships, but certain topics have remained woefully under-investigated or, in some cases, outright taboo. We are now at a point at which our investigation of same-sex relationships will be hampered by continued inattention to such issues. The goal of this article is to outline three key unanswered questions in the study of same-sex love and relationships that should be research priorities going forward: First, what do we mean by "lesbian relationship," given that not all women in same-sex relationships consider themselves lesbians, and not all lesbians pursue exclusively same-sex relationships? We need greater investigation of these understudied groups in order to understand the complex interdependence between sexual identification and sexual relationships. Second, how do histories of childhood neglect and abuse shape women's adult same-sex relationships? Sexual minorities have substantially higher rates of childhood neglect, non-sexual abuse, and sexual abuse than do heterosexuals, and although there is an extensive body of

research investigating how these experiences shape individual well-being, there has been no substantive attention to the long-term implications of these experiences for same-sex relationship phenomena. Third, what are the potential downsides of legal marriage for women's same-sex relationships? The steady advance of legal recognition of same-sex relationships is undoubtedly a social and political victory, yet for many years feminists have extensively documented the ways in which traditional marriage has oppressed women and limited their independence and agency. These critiques have been revisited by many scholars in the context of same-sex marriage, and yet these critiques typically focus on the "downsides" of legal marriage for individual well-being and/or political progress. An unexplored question is whether legal marriage has potentially negative *relationship* implications, contrary to the widespread social-psychological view that legalization would uniformly enhance the strength and functioning of same-sex relationships.

These are certainly not the only questions that can yield important advances in the study of women's same-sex love and relationships. Why, then, have I emphasized these three in particular? My selection of these questions is largely motivated by the fact that they each pose particularly uncomfortable challenges to the current "conventional wisdom" regarding lesbian love and relationships. Each of them, in one way or another, tackles ideas or constructs that are unpopular, taboo, or simply difficult to handle theoretically and methodologically. Without a "push," it might be tempting for scholars studying lesbian relationships to leave these tricky topics aside, and yet we would do a disservice to the field if we did so. Toward this end, my goal is to show exactly why these questions are so important to the study of lesbian love and relationships and to suggest particularly intriguing lines of future research.

### **Question #1: What do we mean by "lesbian relationship"?**

Nearly 20 years ago, when the first issue of the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* was published, it was common for any sexual relationship between two women to be described as a "lesbian relationship." Yet there are two fundamental problems with equating the terms "lesbian relationship" and "same-sex relationship." First, not all women in same-sex relationships consider themselves lesbians. Second, not all lesbians pursue exclusively same-sex relationships. Both of these problems have distinct and important implications for research.

The phenomenon of same-sex relationships among non-lesbian women (whether those women identify as bisexual, heterosexual, or whether they decline to label their sexuality at all) raises important questions about the linkage between sexual/romantic relationship experience and sexual identification. It has been widely documented that the majority of individuals with same-sex attractions and behavior (a group I will refer to as *sexual minorities*) do not, in fact, consider themselves lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Igartua, Thombs, Burgos, & Montoro, 2009; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994), and yet the vast majority of

research on same-sex relationships has been conducted among individuals who identify as lesbian or gay (reviewed in Diamond & Butterworth, 2009). This is not surprising, given that most researchers recruit research participants by seeking them in areas and contexts that overrepresent individuals who openly identify as lesbian or gay (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender [LGBT] community centers and publications). Recruiting samples of same-sex couples in which one or both members of the couple does *not* identify as lesbian requires altogether different recruitment strategies and also requires changes in the description of the research aims and procedures (e.g., studies should be described as focusing on “women’s same-sex relationships” rather than “lesbian relationships”). These changes are not difficult to make, and the internet (particularly social networks such as Facebook) make it easier than ever before to recruit sexual-minority research participants who do not openly identify as lesbian or gay.

Quite simply, there is no longer any reason to continue limiting samples to openly identified lesbian couples. This limitation has introduced substantial potential distortion into our existing body of research on same-sex love and relationships, given that the experiences of non-lesbian-identified individuals in same-sex relationships are likely to differ in important (but as yet poorly understood) ways from the experiences of lesbian-identified individuals in same-sex relationships. For example, a woman who is involved with a female partner, yet does not identify as lesbian, may have less access to social support for her relationship from friends and family members (Diamond, 2008). This in turn might negatively impact the quality and longevity of the relationship. Couples in which one partner openly identifies and the other does not may also face unique challenges and strains that warrant study. Failure to measure and address such phenomena could result in misspecifications of the full range of factors that shape women’s experiences in same-sex relationships.

Of course, in order to appropriately assess differences between the same-sex relationships of lesbians and non-lesbians, researchers must carefully assess the reasons that women involved in same-sex romantic and sexual relationships might decline to identify as lesbian. The most obvious may be fear of social stigma, but in order to accurately assess how such fear may influence a woman’s couple relationship, we must collect more nuanced data on the source and context of that fear. For example, the psychological and economic risks of openly identifying as lesbian may be substantially greater for women with lower socioeconomic status, those living in socially conservative or geographically isolated communities, those living with children or other family members, or those who are members of conservative religious traditions. Culture and ethnicity also play an important role: Some ethnic communities view “the LGBT community” as a predominantly White and middle class phenomenon, and may suggest to community members that they must choose between their ethnic identity and their sexual identity. For some ethnic-minority women, then, involvement in a same-sex relationship may only be possible if they stay “under the radar” and do not openly claim a lesbian identity. By

restricting research to “lesbian relationships” we risk excluding these voices and underrepresenting the diversity of the sexual-minority experience.

Other women in same-sex relationships may decline to identify as lesbian because they view their true identity as bisexual or heterosexual. Historically, both of these groups of women have been treated with skepticism and systematically excluded from research on same-sex relationships (reviewed in Diamond, 2008). As Rust has ably and comprehensively documented (1993), the lesbian community has long harbored fear, resentment, and suspicion regarding bisexual women, and this has been manifested in research practices that systematically exclude bisexual women from research samples. Heterosexually identified women involved in same-sex relationships have received similar treatment and more open disdain, given that they are often viewed as either closeted, curious, or confused (Diamond, 2008). The underrepresentation of these groups of women from research on same-sex relationships has historically been justified by the argument that they are small in number and exceptional in nature, and therefore have little to tell us about the experiences of “most” sexual minorities. Yet we now have substantial new evidence that women with bisexual patterns of attraction and behavior—including those who identify as bisexual and those who identify as “mostly heterosexual”—far exceeds the number of women with exclusive same-sex attractions and behavior (Chandra, Mosher, Copen, & Sionean, 2011; Gates, 2011), and the single largest group of women with same-sex attractions is the “mostly heterosexual” group, which researchers have come to view as a distinct and important sexual orientation group in its own right, appreciably distinct from both bisexuals and exclusive heterosexuals (Savin-Williams & Vrangalova, 2013). Notably, some research suggests that younger generations of sexual-minorities are less likely to choose identity labels altogether, and do not necessarily consider their pattern of sexual attractions and relationships to represent a fundamental component of their self concept (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Quite simply, whereas previous research on same-sex relationships has treated lesbians as the most normative and common “type” of sexual-minority woman, this is wrong. Instead, non-lesbian women with bisexual patterns of attraction and behavior constitute the norm. Yet we know almost nothing about their unique experiences and concerns in same-sex relationships, and how their experiences may differ from those of lesbians. By focusing previous research exclusively on self-identified lesbians, we have been building models of same-sex relationship functioning that are based on the smallest and arguably least “representative” subset of the female sexual-minority population. In order for the study of women’s same-sex relationships to move forward scientifically and to produce knowledge that can be meaningfully applied to clinical and social work practice, we need to ably represent the *entire* population of women with same-sex relationships, including those who identify as bisexual, heterosexual, or nothing at all (all of which may prove increasingly prevalent over time, given the historical changes noted by Savin-Williams, 2005).

Another underinvestigated topic is the *other-sex* relationships (i.e., relationships with men) of self-identified lesbians. Rust (1992) was among the first to document the high prevalence of periodic other-sex sexual experiences among self-identified lesbians. Rust's questionnaire research found that the greater number of years that a lesbian had been "out," the greater the chances that she ended up becoming involved in an other-sex sexual relationship (while maintaining her lesbian label), and Rust provocatively suggested that other-sex sexual involvements might be an inevitability for many lesbians over the life course. Of course, her study was conducted in the early 1990s, when it was arguably more common (compared to the present time) for women with bisexual patterns of attraction to identify as lesbian, given the lower visibility of bisexuality within the lesbian–gay community and the prevalence of biphobia. Yet contemporary studies continue to document that many lesbians continue to experience periodic other-sex attractions and pursue periodic other-sex behavior (reviewed in Diamond, 2008). No systematic research has been conducted on the diverse motives, experiences, and consequences of lesbians' other-sex relationships, and how they influence a lesbian's future *same-sex* relationships. The lack of attention to these questions likely reflects the taboo that surrounds other-sex relationships among lesbians, yet this simply underscores the importance of investigating this phenomenon. Research documenting the prevalence and charting the diverse experiences of lesbians in other-sex relationships can provide critically important information to clinicians working with lesbian clients involved in such relationships, and can play a particularly important role in reassuring them that they are "normal" and that their experiences are worthy of respect.

### **Question #2: How do histories of childhood neglect and abuse shape women's same-sex relationships?**

An increasing body of research, much of it from large-scale, population-based, representative and longitudinal studies, clearly shows that sexual-minority women and men have substantially higher rates of childhood neglect, non-sexual abuse, and sexual abuse than do heterosexuals (Andersen & Blosnich, 2013; Austin, Jun, et al., 2008; Friedman et al., 2011; McLaughlin, Hatzenbuehler, Xuan, & Conron, 2012; Sweet & Welles, 2012). Historically, researchers have been reluctant to openly address the abuse histories of sexual minorities for fear of appearing to confirm the homophobic notion that same-sex orientations are "caused" by child abuse (a notion that has no empirical support, as discussed by Rind, 2013). Yet over the past decade, scholars have increasingly turned a rigorous eye to the robust correlation between adult same-sex sexuality and childhood abuse/neglect, drawing on large and reliable datasets to test hypotheses about the reasons for this association and its implications for the psychological and physical well-being of sexual minorities (Alvy, Hughes, Kristjanson, & Wilsnack, 2013; Austin, Jun, et al., 2008; Austin, Roberts, Corliss, & Molnar, 2008; Balsam,

Lehavot, Beadnell, & Circo, 2010; Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchaine, 2005; Hughes, McCabe, Wilsnack, West, & Boyd, 2010; Hughes et al., 2010; Rind, 2013; Roberts, Austin, Corliss, Vandermorris, & Koenen, 2010; Roberts, Glymour, & Koenen, 2014; Roberts, Rosario, Corliss, Koenen, & Austin, 2012; Wilsnack, Kristjanson, Hughes, & Benson, 2012).

Yet these investigations typically focus on the *individual* experiences and well-being of sexual minorities, and the specific implications of childhood neglect and abuse for adult *relationship functioning* is not typically studied. Researchers studying women's same-sex love relationships can no longer afford to ignore the controversial and uncomfortable topic of childhood abuse and neglect among sexual-minority women. The fact that so many sexual-minority women and men have such histories means that the psychological sequelae of such experiences are likely to influence a woman's same-sex relationships at some point: Even if a woman was not abused herself, she may become involved with a woman who has had experienced abuse, or a woman whose *previous* lover has experienced abuse. Hence, childhood abuse may have a number of complex, indirect, and slow-developing effects on a woman's lifetime relationship experiences over her lifespan, which may serve to compound any deleterious effects that they may have on her individual well-being and psychological functioning. There are also likely to be complex bidirectional associations between deficits in individual functioning and relationship functioning, such that the women who face the greatest obstacles regarding individual adjustment may have the hardest time preventing these obstacles from spilling over into their intimate ties, and women with conflictual relationships may have trouble drawing psychological security from their partners.

Notably, in addition to the numerous studies documenting robust correlations between childhood sexual abuse and adult psychological problems such as anxiety and depression, studies have also found that childhood sexual abuse predicts a range of specifically *interpersonal* difficulties including distrust of others, ambivalence about interpersonal closeness, sexual dysfunction, feelings of isolation, and poor personal boundaries (Beitchman et al., 1992; Briere & Elliott, 1994; Busby, Glenn, Steggell, & Adamson, 1993; Cole & Putnam, 1992; Finkelhor, 1990; Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis, & Smith, 1989; Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1994). As argued by Larson and Lamont (2005), these problems may impede women's ability to form and sustain satisfying romantic partnerships, not only because they may find it difficult to meaningfully communicate with and confide in romantic partners (as found by Mullen et al., 1994) but because their own fears, doubts, and pessimism regarding emotionally intimate relationships may become self-fulfilling prophecies, through maladaptive relationship behaviors that slowly undermine relationship quality (Larson & Lamont, 2005). This may be the reason that women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse report a greater number of marital problems, more maladaptive behavior such as contempt and defensiveness, lower marital sexual satisfaction, and have a greater likelihood of divorce (Colman & Widom, 2004; Finkelhor et al., 1989). All of the cited studies have been

conducted with samples of heterosexual women, and nothing is currently known about how sexual abuse influences women's relationship experiences in same-sex relationships. Given that the vast majority of abusers are men, and that female survivors of abuse often report some degree of distrust of men (Sheldon & Bannister, 1998), it is possible that same-sex relationships may be perceived by female survivors as safer and more trustworthy than other-sex relationships, facilitating more positive relationship experiences and outcomes. Yet it is also possible that the interpersonal difficulties reported by many abuse survivors are so fundamentally rooted in a woman's own psychology that they do not vary as a function of the characteristics of her partner (not only the partner's gender, but also the partner's age, sensitivity, psychological stability, responsiveness, etc.). Hence, there are reasons to expect both similarities and differences in the relationship experiences and outcomes of abuse survivors in same-sex versus other-sex couples, and these issues deserve close scrutiny. Not only would such investigation advance our basic understanding of core psychological processes in same-sex female couples, but they are critical for the development of sound, evidence-based guidelines for therapists working with same-sex couples in which one partner has experienced childhood abuse.

### **Question #3: What are the potential downsides of legal marriage for women's same-sex relationships?**

The 2015 Supreme Court ruling recognizing same-sex marriage across the entire United States is undoubtedly a social and political victory, yet the implications of legal marriage for the actual daily practice of living in—and sustaining—a healthy same-sex relationship need more systematic study. In particular, the potential drawbacks and dangers of legal same-sex marriage for women's same-sex ties warrant close scrutiny. Obviously, critique of the heteropatriarchal institution of marriage and the legal regulation of intimate relationships has been a fundamental project of feminism for over 200 years (Auchmuthy, 2004; Bernard, 1973; Mill, 1869; Rich, 1980; Wander, 1974; Wollstonecraft, 1792/1929). Feminist criticism has demonstrated that the institution of heterosexual marriage has historically oppressed women by keeping them economically dependent on men, defining their worth with respect to their roles as mothers and caretakers, preventing women from gaining economic and political independence, and trapping them in relationships that are unsatisfying at worst and abusive at best. Yet in the progressive push for the legalization of same-sex marriage over the past decade, many of these critiques of marriage have been set aside. Hence, whereas feminists have historically argued for the dismantling of the entire institution of marriage (e.g., Robson, 1998), advocates for same-sex marriage have often eagerly pronounced that it will actually *strengthen* the institution of marriage by enfolding an ever-larger number of citizens within its framework (Young & Boyd, 2006).

Accordingly, numerous feminists have raised concerns about the contemporary emphasis on legal marriage within the LGBT community (Auchmuthy, 2004;

Barker, 2012; Butler, 2002). Perhaps most critically, advocacy for legalized same-sex marriage has inevitably contributed to the historical privileging of monogamous couplehood as the ideal context for individual self-fulfillment (DePaulo & Morris, 2005) and legal marriage as the ideal form of couplehood (reviewed in Boyd, 2013). Hence, whereas feminist activists have argued (successfully) for years that marriage is a lifestyle choice, and not a fundamental necessity for human happiness, advocates for same-sex marriage have tended to argue the opposite, noting that it is the status of marriage as a fundamental context for human happiness that makes its inaccessibility to same-sex couples so harmful.

This ideological stance marginalizes women with alternative forms of romantic and sexual relationships, such as women with more than one romantic partner, women who choose to pursue only casual sexual relationships, women who pursue their most emotionally significant ties with platonic friends, and women who simply choose to remain uncoupled and/or celibate. The activism around same-sex marriage implicitly creates a social hierarchy suggesting that the only same-sex relationships and families that are deserving of social acknowledgement and legal protection are those that are similar to traditional heterosexuality (Auchmuty, 2004; Harding & Peel, 2006; Lannutti & Lloyd, 2005; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2005). This hierarchy, of course, inevitably extends to individuals as well as their relationships: “Good” sexual minorities are those with “good,” heterosexual-like marriages, whereas “bad” sexual minorities are those who insist on breaking the rules by pursuing nonmonogamous relationships, uncommitted relationships, choosing to remain unpartnered, or choosing to raise children outside the context of a committed monogamous partnership (Platero, 2007). Ideally, the fight to extend social and economic protections for sexual minorities and their families should extend to *all* sexual minorities, regardless of the specific form and structure of their intimate lives. Yet the fight to legalize same-sex marriage has implicitly supported mainstream culture’s privileging of one and only one type of family as ideal and healthy.

To be sure, some feminists have argued that the legalization of same-sex marriage has the potential to transform the institution of marriage in productive ways, severing its ties to oppressive heteropatriarchal gender norms and creating new and progressive possibilities for family and kinship that do not revolve around reproduction (Hunter, 1995). Yet this view may be overly optimistic, and scholars have argued that the risks of assimilation, accommodation, and increased social regulation of intimate life appear to be greater than the likelihood of transformation (Barker, 2012). Given that same-sex couples have historically adopted a more creative and egalitarian approach to the structure of their relationships and families, often as a direct result of their exclusion from conventional norms and standards, it is certainly possible that the legalization of same-sex marriage will have a beneficial impact on the structure of marriage for *all* individuals. Yet such achievements may still come at the expense of women whose family lives most diverge

from conventional heterosexual norms of monogamous couplehood, and whose legal and social status has historically been the most tenuous.

In particular, the question of economic dependence within families, and how it is affected by legal marriage, deserves scrutiny. As Boyd and Young (2003) and Harding (2011) have argued, women with low socioeconomic status may find that legal same-sex marriage (because it has the effect of pooling assets across spouses) reduces their eligibility for social services, such as subsidies for child care or health insurance. Some scholars have argued that such phenomena represent a larger and understudied threat of the institutionalization of marriage as a strategy for shifting the burden of social caretaking from the state to the family (Boyd, 2013). Hence, in evaluating the benefits of same-sex marriage, we must remain mindful of the differential effect of marriage for women in different economic circumstances, and who have different needs for state social services which use income as a criterion for eligibility.

Clearly, there has been a healthy range of ideological debate regarding the degree to which the legalization of same-sex marriage advances progressive feminist ideals; what has gone relatively underinvestigated, however, is the degree to which these thorny issues specifically play out in the day to day functioning of same-sex couples. We need more research, on a larger scale, like that conducted by Rolfe and Peel (2011). They conducted interviews with 12 individuals (5 couples and 2 individuals) exploring attitudes and ambivalence regarding same-sex marriage. Their findings show that concerns about assimilation into mainstream patriarchal norms are more than ideological arguments, they are lived realities. As one of their participants eloquently stated, “I think there’s a real danger that if you impose the, the marriage model, and the social model of model of what that is onto a gay relationship, you create actually a dysfunctional relationship that may not sustain itself, rather than supporting a co-creation of something much richer and deeper” (p. 324).

These are precisely the sorts of tensions that relationship researchers must attend to if we seek a comprehensive and thoroughgoing understanding of the unique dynamics of same-sex couples. For example, how might the possibility of legal marriage create new tensions in women’s same-sex relationships, especially given that two women in a couple might have highly divergent previous experiences with the institution of heterosexual marriage and its potential for oppression and repression? How might the possibility of legal marriage change women’s attitudes and decisions about childbearing in the context of a same-sex couple? Disagreements between partners regarding the necessity and value of marriage are likely to become increasingly common, and the very meaning of marriage may be something that couples struggle to define and to make sense of. Relationship researchers must not shy away from investigating the degree to which legalized same-sex marriage may in fact create new stressors, problems, and forms of oppression for some women in same-sex relationships. We must pursue answers to these questions without being afraid of blocking

the important social and political advances that have been made in the arena of same-sex marriage.

## Conclusion and future directions

The past several decades have seen tremendous advancements in the psychological investigation of sexual-minority women and their intimate lives. The sheer volume of rigorous, interdisciplinary, socially impactful research on these topics demonstrates the important strides that social science has made in treating the lives of sexual-minority women as worthy of respect, dignity, and scientific scrutiny. Given the quality, depth, and breadth of existing research on women's same-sex love and relationships, we are well poised to step back and adopt a critical perspective on the questions that have yet to be addressed. In order to continue making meaningful social and scientific contributions, we must have the courage to tackle the most difficult, understudied, and taboo topics in the field.

Examples of future studies and future research questions include the following: How do the same-sex relationships of exclusive lesbians differ (with regard to duration, quality, satisfaction, conflict, power dynamics) from those of lesbian-identified women who pursue *both* same-sex and other-sex relationships? How might it affect a woman's same-sex relationship if one partner strongly claims a lesbian label, but the other views all sexual identity labels as regressive and oppressive? To what degree do the same-sex relationship experiences of bisexual women or "mostly heterosexual" women feed forward to shape their behaviors and expectations in future relationships with men?

With regard to histories of abuse and neglect, potential research questions might include the following: Which specific same-sex relationship dynamics appear to be most strongly associated with histories of abuse and neglect in one or both partners (e.g., conflict, accommodation, expectations, infidelity, sexual difficulties, attachment dynamics), and how might these associations differ from those found in heterosexual couples? How does it affect a same-sex relationship when *both* partners have experienced abuse, versus one? What are some of the unique issues that face the female partners of female abuse survivors, compared to male partners? Among bisexual women, do histories of abuse and neglect have different types of repercussions for their same-sex relationships than their other-sex relationships? To what degree are couple-based clinical interventions more or less effective than individual-level interventions for same-sex couples struggling with a partner's abuse history?

With respect to same-sex marriage, some of the most interesting and provocative questions are those that can only be answered with prospective research: How might the availability of legal marriage alter the relationship expectations and dynamics of future generations of female same-sex couples? To what degree might married same-sex female couples inadvertently adopt more conventional roles, or feel the pressure to do so? How might the economic dependencies created by legal

marriage alter the power dynamics of female same-sex couples? How might couples resolve situations when one partner strongly desires the formal legal status of marriage, whereas the other completely rejects marriage for ideological reasons? To what degree might the availability of legal same-sex marriage influence some women to give up “alternative” relationship practices (polyamory, casual sex) in order to conform to the rising tide of social acceptance facing legally married same-sex couples? Will some of these women view such choices with regret in later years?

These are only a sampling of possible questions—the task for all of us is to generate *more* of such questions, and to expand the range of topics, problems, possibilities, and dynamics that we can tackle in the coming years. As the complexity and diversity of the sexual-minority population becomes increasingly apparent, we must adopt an expansive, broad-minded, and incisive perspective on the multiple factors that shape their intimate relationships. We owe nothing less to the thousands of women who have so generously allowed us to study their most intimate experiences.

### **Notes on contributor**

**Lisa M. Diamond** is Professor of Psychology and Gender Studies at the University of Utah. She studies the longitudinal course of sexual identity development and the psychobiological mechanisms through which intimate relationships influence physical and mental health over the life course. Her 2008 book, *Sexual Fluidity*, published by Harvard University Press, describes the changes and transformations that she has observed in the sexual attractions, behaviors, and identities of a sample of lesbian, bisexual, and “unlabeled” women that she has been following since 1995. *Sexual Fluidity* has been awarded the Distinguished Book award from the American Psychological Association’s Society for the Study of Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered Issues. Dr. Diamond has been awarded grants in support of her research from the National Institute for Mental Health, The W.T. Grant Foundation, the American Psychological Foundation, the American Institute for Bisexuality, and the Gay and Lesbian Medical Association.

### **References**

- Alvy, L. M., Hughes, T. L., Kristjanson, A. F., & Wilsnack, S. C. (2013). Sexual identity group differences in child abuse and neglect. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 28, 2088–2111.
- Andersen, J. P., & Blosnich, J. (2013). Disparities in adverse childhood experiences among sexual minority and heterosexual adults: Results from a multi-state probability-based sample. *PLoS ONE*, 8(1): e54691. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0054691
- Auchmuthy, R. (2004). Same-sex marriage revived: Feminist critique and legal strategy. *Feminism & Psychology*, 14, 101–126. doi: 10.1177/0959-353504040307
- Austin, S. B., Jun, H.-J., Jackson, B., Spiegelman, D., Rich-Edwards, J., Corliss, H. L., & Wright, R. J. (2008). Disparities in child abuse victimization in lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual women in the Nurses’ Health Study II. *Journal of Women’s Health*, 17, 597–606.
- Austin, S. B., Roberts, A. L., Corliss, H. L., & Molnar, B. E. (2008). Sexual violence victimization history and sexual risk indicators in a community-based urban cohort of ‘mostly heterosexual’ and heterosexual young women. *American Journal of Public Health*, 98, 1015–1020.

- Balsam, K. F., Le havot, K., Beadnell, B., & Circo, E. (2010). Childhood abuse and mental health indicators among ethnically diverse lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 78, 459–468. doi:10.1037/a0018661
- Balsam, K. F., Rothblum, E. D., & Beauchaine, T. P. (2005). Victimization over the life span: A comparison of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual siblings. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 73, 477–487. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.73.3.477
- Barker, N. (2012). *Not the marrying kind: A feminist critique of same-sex marriage*. Basingstoke England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Beitchman, J. H., Zucker, K. J., Hood, J. E., DaCosta, G. A., Akman, D., & Cassavia, E. (1992). A review of the long-term effects of child sexual abuse. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 16, 101–118. doi:10.1016/0145-2134(92)90011-F
- Bernard, J. (1973). *The future of marriage*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Boyd, S. B. (2013). "Marriage is more than just a piece of paper": Feminist critiques of same-sex marriage. *National Taiwan University Law Review*, 8, 263–298.
- Boyd, S. B., & Young, C. (2003). From same-sex to no sex? Trends towards recognition of (same-sex) relationships in Canada. *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, 1, 757–793.
- Briere, J. N., & Elliott, D. M. (1994). Immediate and long-term impacts of child sexual abuse. *The Future of Children*, 4, 54–69. doi:10.2307/1602523
- Busby, D. M., Glenn, E., Steggell, G. L., & Adamson, D. W. (1993). Treatment issues for survivors of physical and sexual abuse. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 19, 377–391. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.1993.tb01000.x
- Butler, J. (2002). Is kinship always already heterosexual? *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 13, 14–44.
- Chandra, A., Mosher, W. D., Copen, C., & Sioneane, C. (2011). Sexual behavior, sexual attraction, and sexual identity in the United States: Data from the 2006–2008 National Survey of Family Growth. *National Health Statistics Reports*, March 3, 1–36. doi: 10.1007/978-94-007-5512-3\_4
- Cole, P. M., & Putnam, F. W. (1992). Effect of incest on self and social functioning: A developmental psychopathology perspective. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 60, 174–184. doi: 10.1037/0022-006X.60.2.174
- Colman, R. A., & Widom, C. S. (2004). Childhood abuse and neglect and adult intimate relationships: A prospective study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 28, 1133–1151. doi: 10.1016/j.chab.2004.02.005
- DePaulo, B. M., & Morris, W. L. (2005). Singles in society and in science. *Psychological Inquiry*, 16, 57–83.
- Diamond, L. M. (2008). *Sexual fluidity: Understanding women's love and desire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Diamond, L. M., & Butterworth, M. R. (2009). The close relationships of sexual minorities: Partners, family, and friends. In M. C. Smith & N. DeFrates-Densch (Eds.), *Handbook of research on adult learning and development* (pp. 351–377). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Finkelhor, D. (1990). Early and long-term effects of child sexual abuse: An update. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 21, 325–330. doi:10.1037/0735-7028.21.5.325
- Finkelhor, D., Hotaling, G. T., Lewis, I. A., & Smith, C. (1989). Sexual abuse and its relationship to later sexual satisfaction, marital status, religion, and attitudes. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 4, 379–399. doi:10.1177/088626089004004001
- Friedman, M. S., Marshal, M. P., Guadamuz, T. E., Wei, C., Wong, C. F., Saewyc, E. M., & Stall, R. (2011). A meta-analysis of disparities in childhood sexual abuse, parental physical abuse, and peer victimization among sexual minority and sexual nonminority individuals. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101, 1481–1494. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2009190009

- Gates, G. J. (2011). *How many people are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender?* Los Angeles, CA: The Williams Institute. Retrieved June 12, 2016 from <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/09h684x2>.
- Harding, R. (2011). *Regulating sexuality: Legal consciousness in lesbian and gay lives.* London, England: Routledge.
- Harding, R., & Peel, E. (2006). "We do?" International perspectives on equality, legality and same-sex relationships. *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, 7, 123–140.
- Hughes, T., McCabe, S. E., Wilsnack, S. C., West, B. T., & Boyd, C. J. (2010). Victimization and substance use disorders in a national sample of heterosexual and sexual minority women and men. *Addiction*, 105, 2130–2140.
- Hughes, T. L., Szalacha, L. A., Johnson, T. P., Kinnison, K. E., Wilsnack, S. C., & Cho, Y. (2010). Sexual victimization and hazardous drinking among heterosexual and sexual minority women. *Addictive Behaviors*, 35, 1152–1156. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2010.07.004
- Hunter, N. D. (1995). Marriage, law and gender: A feminist inquiry. In L. Duggan & N. D. Hunter (Eds.), *Sex wars: Sexual dissent and political culture* (pp. 107–122). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Igartua, K., Thombs, B. D., Burgos, G., & Montoro, R. (2009). Concordance and discrepancy in sexual identity, attraction, and behavior among adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 45, 602–608.
- Lannutti, P. J., & Lloyd, S. (2005). For better or worse: Exploring the meanings of same-sex marriage within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22, 5–18.
- Larson, J. H., & Lamont, C. (2005). The relationship of childhood sexual abuse to the marital attitudes and readiness for marriage of single young adult women. *Journal of Family Issues*, 26, 415–430. doi:10.1177/0192513x04270474
- Laumann, E. O., Gagnon, J. H., Michael, R. T., & Michaels, F. (1994). *The social organization of sexuality: Sexual practices in the United States.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- McLaughlin, K. A., Hatzenbuehler, M. L., Xuan, Z., & Conron, K. J. (2012). Disproportionate exposure to early-life adversity and sexual orientation disparities in psychiatric morbidity. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 36, 645–655. doi:10.1016/j.chabu.2012.07.004
- Mill, J. S. (1869). *The subjection of women.* London, England: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer.
- Mullen, P. E., Martin, J. L., Anderson, J. C., Romans, S. E., & Herbison, G. P. (1994). The effect of child sexual abuse on social, interpersonal and sexual function in adult life. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 165, 35–47. doi:10.1192/bjp.165.1.35
- Platero, R. (2007). Love and the state: Gay marriage in Spain. *Feminist Legal Studies*, 15, 329–340.
- Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs*, 5, 631–660.
- Rind, B. (2013). Homosexual orientation—From nature, not abuse: A critique of Roberts, Glymour, and Koenen (2013). *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 42, 1653–1664. doi:10.1007/s10508-013-0080-6
- Roberts, A. L., Austin, S. B., Corliss, H. L., Vandermorris, A. K., & Koenen, K. C. (2010). Pervasive trauma exposure among US sexual orientation minority adults and risk of posttraumatic stress disorder. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100, 2433–2441. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2009.168971
- Roberts, A. L., Glymour, M. M., & Koenen, K. C. (2014). Considering alternative explanations for the associations among childhood adversity, childhood abuse, and adult sexual orientation: Reply to Bailey and Bailey (2013) and Rind (2013). *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 43, 191–196. doi:10.1007/s10508-013-0239-1

- Roberts, A. L., Rosario, M., Corliss, H. L., Koenen, K. C., & Austin, S. B. (2012). Childhood gender nonconformity: A risk indicator for childhood abuse and posttraumatic stress in youth. *Pediatrics*, 129, 410–417. doi:10.1542/peds.2011-1804
- Robson, R. (1998). *Sappho goes to law school*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Rolfe, A., & Peel, E. (2011). “It’s a double-edged thing”: The paradox of civil partnership and why some couples are choosing not to have one. *Feminism & Psychology*, 21, 317–335.
- Rust, P. C. R. (1992). The politics of sexual identity: Sexual attraction and behavior among lesbian and bisexual women. *Social Problems*, 39, 366–386.
- Rust, P. C. R. (1993). Neutralizing the political threat of the marginal woman: Lesbians’ beliefs about bisexual women. *Journal of Sex Research*, 30, 214–228.
- Savin-Williams, R. C. (2005). *The new gay teenager*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Savin-Williams, R. C., & Vrangalova, Z. (2013). Mostly heterosexual as a distinct sexual orientation group: A systematic review of the empirical evidence. *Developmental Review*, 33, 58–88.
- Sheldon, H., & Bannister, A. (1998). Working with adult female survivors of childhood sexual abuse. In A. Bannister & A. Bannister (Eds.), *From hearing to healing: Working with the aftermath of child sexual abuse* (2nd ed.). (pp. 96–117). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Sweet, T., & Welles, S. L. (2012). Associations of sexual identity or same-sex behaviors with history of childhood sexual abuse and HIV/STI risk in the United States. *JAIDS Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes*, 59, 400–408. doi: 10.1097/QAI.0b013e3182400e75
- Wander, M. (1974). The conditions of illusion. In S. Allen, L. Sanders, & J. Wallis (Eds.), *Conditions of illusion: Papers from the women’s movements* (pp. 186–207). Leeds, England: Feminist Books.
- Wilkinson, S., & Kitzinger, C. (2005). Same-sex marriage and equality. *Psychologist*, 18, 290–293.
- Wilsnack, S. C., Kristjanson, A. F., Hughes, T. L., & Benson, P. W. (2012). Characteristics of childhood sexual abuse in lesbians and heterosexual women. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 36, 260–265. doi:10.1016/j.chab.2011.10.008
- Wollstonecraft, M. (1792/1929). *A vindication of the rights of woman*. London, England: Dent.
- Young, C., & Boyd, C. (2006). Losing the feminist voice? Debates on the legal recognition of same-sex partnerships in Canada. *Feminist Legal Studies*, 14, 229–230.