

This brief reflects an update from the November 2016 brief.

## LGBTQ+ Parents and Their Children

by Charlotte J. Patterson, Ph.D., Rachel H. Farr, Ph.D., and Abbie E. Goldberg, Ph.D.

### TALKING POINTS

LGBTQ+ parent families and their children are a diverse group.

Overall, LGBTQ+ parents and their children are as well adjusted as parents and children in the general population.

Like others, LGBTQ+ parents and their children fare better when they have adequate resources and when they live in supportive environments.

Even after the advent of marriage equality in the United States, LGBTQ+ parent families are still more likely than others to live in poverty.

Supportive federal and state laws, such as a federal nondiscrimination bill, can help LGBTQ+ parents and their children to thrive.

Increased research funding is needed to explore and to enhance the experiences among a full range of diverse LGBTQ+ parents and their children.

### ABSTRACT

Research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual and gender minority (LGBTQ+) parents and their children has found that both parents and children are generally well adjusted and that they do not differ in well-being or in multiple developmental outcomes from parents and children in the general population. In general, LGBTQ+ parent families living in supportive environments, and families with more social, financial, and legal resources, show the most positive adjustment. The legal climate in the United States for LGBTQ+ people and their families has improved in recent years, but significant legal and practical difficulties remain, including greater poverty among, and pervasive stigma and discrimination toward, families headed by LGBTQ+ parents. Federal, state, and local laws are needed that reduce the likelihood of discrimination against these families, including in domains of housing, education, and parenting. In addition, support is needed for research to explore the full range of experiences among diverse LGBTQ+ parents and their children, and to develop ways to help LGBTQ+ parents and their children to thrive.

### LGBTQ+ Parents and Their Children

In recent years, considerable controversy has surrounded lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual and gender minority (LGBTQ+) parent families in the United States. Questions posed by courts, legislators, and others have included the following: Do LGBTQ+ people make good parents? How do their children “turn out”? Should LGBTQ+ adults be allowed to adopt and foster children? Research has revealed that LGBTQ+ parents are generally well adjusted, that their children are developing in positive ways, and that those living in supportive circumstances seem to have the best chance to thrive. Considerable diversity characterizes LGBTQ+ parent families, however, and studies of LGBTQ+ parent families have focused more on sexual minority (gay, lesbian, or bisexual) than on gender minority parents.<sup>1-4</sup> In this brief, we provide an overview of what is known about LGBTQ+ parents and their children from social science research. We also offer policy recommendations that, if implemented, can help these families to flourish. We focus mainly on the United States, but where relevant, we also describe research on LGBTQ+ parent families conducted outside of the United States.

## Diversity Among LGBTQ+ Parents

Among the more than 11 million LGBTQ+ adults in the United States,<sup>5</sup> approximately 29% report that they are currently rearing children younger than 18 years of age.<sup>6</sup> Among same-gender couples, those who are married are more likely than unmarried couples to be parenting children.<sup>7</sup> In addition, same-gender couples with children are more likely than others to include people of color in their families.<sup>8</sup> Among same-gender couples, 41% of women of color and 20% of men of color are rearing children younger than age 18 years, compared with 23% and 8% of White women and men, respectively.<sup>9</sup>

Families headed by LGBTQ+ parents are sometimes viewed as a homogeneous group, but the reality is that they are quite diverse.<sup>2-4</sup> Like other families, they vary in gender, race, ethnicity, education, geography, income, and pathway to parenthood.<sup>1</sup> LGBTQ+ parent families also differ in ways that are more specific to them. For example, some LGBTQ+ parents had children in the context of marriages or other relationships with different-gender partners, before they came out as LGBTQ+; after coming out, many rear children as divorced and/or single LGBTQ+ parents. This pathway to parenthood is less common today than in earlier years, partly because people come out at younger ages,<sup>10</sup> and partly because of increasing opportunities for family building,<sup>1</sup> but it is still a prominent mode of family formation among LGBTQ+ parents.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, others become parents after coming out as LGBTQ+ and/or in the context of relationships with same-gender partners.

LGBTQ+ people take many pathways to parenthood.<sup>2-3</sup> Some pursue parenthood using assisted reproductive technologies such as donor insemination<sup>11</sup> or surrogacy.<sup>12-13</sup> Donors and surrogates may be friends or relatives, or they may provide services through a clinic and remain unknown to the family. Other LGBTQ+ individuals become parents through adoption or serve as foster parents.<sup>14-15</sup> Still others may conceive via sexual intercourse with a different-sex partner.<sup>16</sup>

## Research With LGBTQ+ Parents and Their Children

Considerable research with LGBTQ+ parents and their children has been conducted over the past 30 years.<sup>2-3,17</sup> Studies have addressed aspects of LGBTQ+ parenting, as well as development among children of LGBTQ+ parents. In this section, we review research on cisgender sexual minority parents and their children,<sup>3,17</sup> and then we turn to research on transgender and other gender minority parents and their children.

Studies of sexual minority parents, most of which focus on lesbian mothers and gay fathers, have shown them to be generally healthy and well adjusted.<sup>3,17</sup> Many studies have found that lesbian and gay parents are indistinguishable from heterosexual parents in terms of overall mental health and adjustment.<sup>12,18-19</sup> The research findings also show that many sexual minority parents experience satisfying relationships with their partners and engage in positive parenting practices with their children.<sup>18-19</sup>

Not only has research found sexual minority parents to be succeeding in parental roles; it also has revealed that their children are developing in positive ways.<sup>1-2,17</sup> In study after study, children with sexual minority parents have shown outcomes that are similar to those of their peers who have heterosexual parents. Considered as a whole, the research is characterized by rigorous methods and large samples, and it has been conducted by multiple investigators in many countries.<sup>18,20</sup> Studies have examined a diversity of pathways to parenthood, such as adoption,<sup>19,21</sup> donor insemination,<sup>11,20</sup> and surrogacy,<sup>13,18</sup> and all have reported positive adjustment among the children. The findings are also consistent across varying ages and domains of child development (e.g., both social and cognitive development).<sup>12,18-19</sup>

Research with transgender and gender minority parents and their children is currently less extensive than studies of lesbian and gay parents and their children, but several studies with these families have been reported. The findings about transgender and gender-diverse parent families run parallel in many ways to those about sexual minority parent families.<sup>22</sup> For instance, many transgender adults want to become parents and plan to do so.<sup>16,23</sup> Population-based data reveal that transgender parents are comparable to cisgender parents in terms of mental health and other health assessments.<sup>24</sup> Children of transgender parents have also been found to be well adjusted, and family processes have been found to be more important to individual and family outcomes than parents' gender identity or expression.<sup>25</sup> Qualitative work has also revealed important strengths among members of transgender parent families, such as adaptive strategies for navigating parental disclosure of gender identities.<sup>26-27</sup>

## Contexts of LGBTQ+ Parenting

Although LGBTQ+ parents and their children show good adjustment overall, there are marked variations among the social and political environments in which they live.<sup>5</sup> Legal

and policy climates vary across national and state boundaries, social conditions vary from one neighborhood to another, and attitudes vary from one family to another. How do such variations affect the lives of LGBTQ+ parents and their children? Research has consistently shown that minority stressors, such as stigma and discrimination, have negative effects on LGBTQ+ family members and that those who live in supportive environments are more likely to thrive.<sup>5</sup>

Studies of LGBTQ+ parents in the United States have indicated the importance of supportive laws and policies. For instance, legal marriage recognition has been shown to be associated with positive LGB identity and greater social support among same-gender couples.<sup>28</sup> In a study of more than 700 gay fathers by Perrin and colleagues, parents and their children were often found to face stigma and discrimination from religious institutions as well as from their families, friends, and neighbors.<sup>29</sup> In this same study, fathers reported more obstacles to becoming parents when they lived in states with fewer legal protections.<sup>29</sup> Thus, it appears that sexual minority parents who live in less favorable social contexts are disadvantaged, whereas those in more supportive contexts derive many benefits.

Some research has examined children's stigma-related experiences in LGBTQ+ parent families and the potential consequences of such experiences. One study, conducted in the Netherlands, found that adolescent offspring of lesbian mothers who reported more experiences of homophobic stigmatization also had more behavior problems.<sup>30</sup> In a study conducted in Italy of school-age children with gay fathers, stigmatization was also associated with greater behavior problems.<sup>18</sup> Similar findings have been reported in the United States with greater stigmatization being associated with greater emotional and mental health challenges among 4- to 17-year-old children of sexual minority parents.<sup>31</sup> Parallel patterns have been found among adolescents with LGBTQ+ parents in Canada<sup>32</sup> and Australia.<sup>33</sup> Children in families who live in less stigmatizing environments reported fewer worries and greater openness than those living in other contexts.<sup>34</sup>

The children of LGBTQ+ parents also fare better when they attend schools with supportive social climates. Many researchers have studied the experiences of children of lesbian and/or gay parents with regard to homophobic teasing or bullying from peers, and all have reported that children described this as a negative experience.<sup>35-36</sup> Research has also revealed that both lesbian and gay parents and their children are less likely to feel

alienated, and more likely to have favorable experiences overall, when school curricula and policies are explicitly inclusive of them.<sup>36</sup> In one Canadian study, adolescents with lesbian mothers were asked about their views of the communities in which they lived; results showed that youth who saw their neighborhoods and school environments as supportive to sexual minority people also reported greater feelings of overall well-being.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in the United States, Lick and colleagues found that population characteristics, such as higher density of same-sex couple households, were associated with greater well-being among adult children of lesbian and gay parents.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly, family, school, and community contexts affect both LGBTQ+ parents and their children.<sup>15,33</sup> Research suggests that children of sexual minority parents fare best when they experience less stigma and greater support.<sup>1-3</sup> As in other families, when children and their parents have social supports and view their schools and neighborhoods as supportive, they are more likely to thrive.<sup>2-3,17</sup>

## Conclusion

In the United States, changes in federal law over the past several years have improved the climate for sexual minority people, including for those who are parents, and for their children. In 2015, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the right to marry is guaranteed to same-gender couples as it is to different-gender couples under the Constitution, thus legalizing and providing access to same-sex marriage throughout the country. In this way, married same-gender couples gained access to many rights and benefits, such as increased access to health insurance for their spouses and children, as well as joint adoption rights. In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Bostock v. Clayton County* that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is not permitted by Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, thereby offering LGBTQ+ employees protection from such discrimination at work.<sup>38</sup>

While the legal terrain for LGBTQ+ people in the United States has changed in significant ways in recent years, many concerns remain. In many parts of the country, discrimination against LGBTQ+ people is still legal in the areas of housing, insurance, education, and public accommodations.<sup>5</sup> Only 21 states and the District of Columbia have nondiscrimination laws that include both sexual orientation and gender identity; even in the limited number of states with nondiscrimination laws, religious exemptions still allow discrimination in some cases.<sup>39</sup> For instance, adoption law and policy are regulated at the state

level, and thus, individual states may enact barriers or supports for LGBTQ+ adults who seek to foster or adopt children. Among LGBTQ+ people, transgender and gender-diverse adults who seek to adopt or foster children may face particular barriers.<sup>40</sup> Federal legislation such as the John Lewis Every Child Deserves a Family Act<sup>41</sup> would be an important step toward ensuring equal treatment for all in child welfare settings.

Religious exemptions that permit child welfare or adoption agencies to deny services to LGBTQ+ prospective foster or adoptive parents on religious grounds exist in some parts of the United States.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in 2021, the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, a case that involved a Catholic-affiliated adoption agency in Philadelphia that refused on religious grounds to receive adoption applications from prospective LGBTQ+ parents. Although a religious exemption to nondiscrimination law was upheld in this case, the decision itself did not appear likely to create difficulties for LGBTQ+ individuals who seek to become foster parents across the country, given its very narrow scope. Whether additional religious exemptions might do so, however, remains unknown.

In the United States, LGBTQ+ parent families are also more likely than others to lack adequate financial resources. LGBTQ+ adults are more likely than others to be unemployed and to have low incomes. Specifically, 22% of all LGBT adults are living in poverty; parents, women, people of color, and bisexual and transgender adults are all disproportionately affected.<sup>5</sup> More children with same-gender parents live in poverty (20%–24%) than do those with different-gender parents (12%).<sup>5</sup> Poverty among LGBTQ+ parent families may be linked with employment discrimination and other structural inequalities.<sup>5</sup>

Many challenges for LGBTQ+ parents and their children have been created by the global COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>42</sup> Even though data are scarce, it seems likely that the pandemic has disproportionately affected LGBTQ+ people in the United States, including LGBTQ+ parents and their children, in terms of greater health risks, economic disparities, and other challenges. Because transgender adults are more likely than others to be uninsured, unemployed, living below the poverty line, and/or homeless, as well as to have underlying health conditions, they may be especially vulnerable to harm from COVID-19.<sup>42</sup>

Overall, the findings from many years of research in this area have yielded important conclusions:<sup>1–4</sup>

- LGBTQ+ people generally do well in parenting roles.
- Children reared by LGBTQ+ parents are generally well adjusted and develop in positive ways.
- When they live in supportive environments, LGBTQ+ parents and their children are more likely to thrive.

The single most important policy change that could improve the climate for LGBTQ+ parents and their children in the United States would be passage of a federal law to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression in housing, education, parenting, and other areas.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the addition of supportive state laws and the elimination of religious exemptions that allow for continued discrimination against sexual and gender minorities would be valuable steps toward full equality. By taking such steps, the United States could create more inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ parents and their children, and in this way, could improve their overall health and well-being.

## References

1. Goldberg, A. E., & Allen, K. R. (Eds.) (2020). *LGBTQ-parent families: Innovations in research and implications for practice* (2nd ed.). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-35610-1>
2. Patterson, C. J. (2000). Family relationships of lesbians and gay men. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1052–1069. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1566724>
3. Patterson, C. J. (2017). Parents' sexual orientation and children's development. *Child Development Perspectives*, 11(1), 45–49. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12207>
4. Reczek, C. (2020). Sexual- and gender-minority families: A 2010 to 2020 decade in review. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, 82(1), 300–325. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12607>
5. National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. (2020). *Understanding the well-being of LGBTQI+ populations*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25877>
6. Williams Institute. (2019). *LGBT Demographic Data Interactive*. UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=LGBT#about-the-data>
7. Goldberg, S. K., & Conron, K. J. (2018). *How many same-sex couples in the U.S. are raising children?* UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/same-sex-parents-us/>
8. Gates, G. J. (2012). *Same-sex couples in Census 2010: Race and ethnicity*. UCLA School of Law, The Williams Institute. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/66521994>
9. Gates, G. J. (2013). *LGBT parenting in the United States*. UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9xs6g8xx>
10. Bishop, M. D., Fish, J. N., Hammack, P. L., & Russell, S. T. (2020). Sexual identity milestones in three generations of sexual minority people: A national probability sample. *Developmental Psychology*, 56(11), 2177–2193. <http://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001105>
11. Gartrell, N., Bos, H., & Koh, A. (2018). National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study—Mental health of adult offspring. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 379, 297–299. <https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmc1804810>

- <sup>12</sup> Golombok, S., Blake, L., Slutsky, J., Raffanella, E., Roman, G. D., & Ehrhardt, A. (2018). Parenting and the adjustment of children born to gay fathers through surrogacy. *Child Development, 89*(4), 1223–1233. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12728>
- <sup>13</sup> Green, R. J., Rubio, R. J., Rothblum, E. D., Bergman, K., & Kutzny, K. E. (2019). Gay fathers by surrogacy: Prejudice, parenting, and well-being of female and male children. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 6*(3), 269–283.
- <sup>14</sup> Farr, R. H., & Goldberg, A. E. (2018). Sexual orientation, gender identity, and adoption law. *Family Court Review, 56*(3), 374–333. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12354>
- <sup>15</sup> Farr, R. H., & Vázquez, C. P. (2020). Stigma experiences, mental health, perceived parenting competence, and parent-child relationships among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents in the United States. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*(445), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00445>
- <sup>16</sup> Tornello, S. L., Riskind, R. G., & Babic, A. (2019). Transgender and gender non-binary parents' pathways to parenthood. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation & Gender Diversity, 6*(2), 232–241. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000323>
- <sup>17</sup> Golombok, S. (2015). *Modern families: Parents and children in new family forms*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107295377>
- <sup>18</sup> Carone, N., Lingardi, V., Chirumbolo, A., & Baiocco, R. (2018). Italian gay father families formed by surrogacy: Parenting, stigmatization, and children's psychological adjustment. *Developmental Psychology, 54*, 1904–1916. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dev0000571>
- <sup>19</sup> Farr, R. H. (2017). Does parental sexual orientation matter? A longitudinal follow-up of adoptive families with school-age children. *Developmental Psychology, 53*(2), 252–264. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000228>
- <sup>20</sup> Bos, H. M. W., Kuyper, L., & Gartrell, N. K. (2018). A population-based comparison of female and male same-sex parent and different-sex parent households. *Family Process, 57*(1), 148–164. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12278>
- <sup>21</sup> Brodzinsky, D. M., & Goldberg, A. E. (2016). Contact with birth family in adoptive families headed by lesbian, gay male, and heterosexual parents. *Children and Youth Services Review, 62*, 9–17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.01.014>
- <sup>22</sup> Hafford-Letchfield, T., Cocker, C., Rutter, D., Tinarwo, M., McCormack, K., & Manning, R. (2019). What do we know about transgender parenting? Findings from a systematic review. *Health & Social Care in the Community, 27*(5), 1111–1125. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.12759>
- <sup>23</sup> Tornello, S. L., & Bos, H. (2017). Parenting intentions among transgender individuals. *LGBT Health, 4*(2), 115–120. <https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2016.0153>
- <sup>24</sup> Carone, N., Rothblum, E., Bos, H. M. W., Gartrell, N. K., & Herman, J. L. (2020). Demographics and health outcomes in a U.S. probability sample of transgender parents. *Journal of Family Psychology*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000776>
- <sup>25</sup> Petit, M.-P., Julien, D., & Chamberland, L. (2018). Interlinkages between parental and trans trajectories: A life course perspective. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 5*(3), 371–386. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000280>
- <sup>26</sup> Veldorale-Griffin, A., & Darling, C. A. (2016). Adaptation to parental gender transition: Stress and resilience among transgender parents. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 45*(3), 607–617. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-015-0657-3>
- <sup>27</sup> Zadeh, S., Imrie, S., & Golombok, S. (2019). Stories of sameness and difference: The views and experiences of children and adults with a trans\* parent. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2019.1683785>
- <sup>28</sup> Riggle, E. D. B., Wickham, R. E., Rostosky, S. S., Rothblum, E. D., & Balsam, K. F. (2017). Impact of civil marriage recognition for long-term same-sex couples. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy, 14*(2), 223–232. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-016-0243-z>
- <sup>29</sup> Perrin, E. C., Hurley, S. M., Mattern, K., Flavin, L., & Pinderhughes, E. E. (2019). Barriers and stigma experienced by gay fathers and their children. *Pediatrics, 143*, Article e20180683. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-0683>
- <sup>30</sup> van Rijn-van Gelderen, L., Bos, H. M., & Gartrell, N. K. (2015). Dutch adolescents from lesbian-parent families: How do they compare to peers with heterosexual parents and what is the impact of homophobic stigmatization? *Journal of Adolescence, 40*, 65–73. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.01.005>
- <sup>31</sup> Calzo, J. P., Mays, V. M., Björkenstam, C., Björkenstam, E., Kosidou, K., & Cochran, S. (2019). Parental sexual orientation and children's psychological well-being: 2013–2015 National Health Interview Survey. *Child Development, 90*(4), 1097–1108. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12989>
- <sup>32</sup> Crouch, S. R., Waters, E., McNair, R., Power, J., & Davis, E. (2014). Parent reported measures of child health and wellbeing in same-sex parent families: A cross-sectional survey. *BMC Public Health, 14*(1), 635–646. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-635>
- <sup>33</sup> Vyncke, J. D., Julien, D., Jouvin, E., & Jodoin, E. (2014). Systemic heterosexism and adjustment among adolescents raised by lesbian mothers. *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science, 46*(3), 375–386. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034663>
- <sup>34</sup> Sumontha, J., Farr, R. H., & Patterson, C. J. (2016). Social support and coparenting among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parents. *Journal of Family Psychology, 30*(8), 987–996. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000253>
- <sup>35</sup> Cody, P. A., Farr, R. H., McRoy, R. G., Ayers-Lopez, S. J., & Ledesma, K. J. (2017). Youth perspectives on being adopted from foster care by lesbian and gay parents: Implications for families and adoption professionals. *Adoption Quarterly, 20*(1), 98–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926755.2016.1200702>
- <sup>36</sup> Farr, R. H., Oakley, M. K., & Ollen, E. W. (2016). School experiences of young children and their lesbian and gay adoptive parents. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 3*(4), 442–447. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000187>
- <sup>37</sup> Lick, D. J., Tornello, S. L., Riskind, R. G., Schmidt, K. M., & Patterson, C. J. (2012). Social climate for sexual minorities predicts well-being among heterosexual offspring of lesbian and gay parents. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy, 9*, 99–112. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-012-0081-6>
- <sup>38</sup> Liptak, A. (2020). Civil rights law protects gay and transgender workers, Supreme Court rules. *New York Times*. [www.nytimes.com/2020/06/15/us/gay-transgender-workers-supreme-court.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/15/us/gay-transgender-workers-supreme-court.html)
- <sup>39</sup> Movement Advancement Project. (2020, October). *What's at stake in the Fulton case*. [www.lgbtmap.org/2020-fulton-issue-briefs](http://www.lgbtmap.org/2020-fulton-issue-briefs)
- <sup>40</sup> Goldberg, A. E., Tornello, S. T., Farr, R. H., Smith, J. Z., & Miranda, L. (2020). Barriers to adoption and foster care and openness to child characteristics among trans adults. *Child and Youth Services Review, 109*. Article 104699. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104699>
- <sup>41</sup> Every Child Deserves a Family Act. (n.d.). *About the John Lewis Every Child Deserves a Family Act*. <https://everychilddeservesafamily.com/about-ecdf-act>
- <sup>42</sup> Herman, J. L., & O'Neill, K. (2020, April). *Vulnerabilities to COVID-19 among transgender adults in the US*. UCLA School of Law, Williams Institute. <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/transgender-covid-19-risk/>

## Glossary

**Bisexual**—a sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender and also to people of other genders.

**Cisgender**—the gender identity of a person whose current gender identity is aligned with the sex that person was assigned at birth; a person who is not transgender.

**Gay**—a sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender. This term can be used regardless of gender identity but is usually used to describe men.

**Gender identity**—a person's deeply held inner sense of being male or female, another gender (e.g., gender fluid, or no gender). Gender identity may or may not correspond to sex assigned at birth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

1. Passage of federal and state legislation (e.g., John Lewis Every Child Deserves a Family Act) to outlaw discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in housing, education, parenting, and other areas.
2. Elimination of religious exemptions in the law that allow for discrimination against members of sexual and gender minorities.
3. Increase research funding to explore the full range of experiences among diverse LGBTQ+ parents and their children.
4. Provide support for the development, evaluation, and dissemination of effective programs to help LGBTQ+ parents and their children to thrive.

**Gender minority**—a description for individuals who are transgender, nonbinary, or who identify in other ways that are outside of heteronormative notions.

**Heteronormative**—relating to an attitude or world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal and/or preferred sexual orientation.

**Heterosexual**—a sexual orientation that describes women who are emotionally and sexually attracted to men, and men who are emotionally and sexually attracted to women. The colloquial term used for this is *straight*.

**Lesbian**—a sexual orientation that describes a woman who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other women.

**LGBTQ+**—an acronym that refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or who identify in some other way as being outside of heteronormative notions. The plus sign after LGBTQ is intended to represent additional sexual and gender minority identities as well as new and emerging identities (e.g., nonbinary identities).

**Nonbinary**—an identity descriptor for individuals who feel that they do not fit within the traditional binaries of gender identity; for example, a nonbinary person may see themselves as both male and female, or as part male and part female.

**Queer**—an umbrella term used by some to describe people whose sexual orientation and/or gender identity is/are outside of heteronormative ideas about sexual or gender identities. Originally used in derogatory ways, the term “queer” has been reclaimed by some LGBT+ people as an empowering self-designation. Some people use this term to describe themselves because they see it as more fluid and inclusive than *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual*, or *transgender*. Because of its history as a derogatory term, however, not all members of the LGBTQ+ community are comfortable with the term “queer.”

**Sexual minority**—a description for individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or queer and/or who identify in other ways that are outside of heteronormative notions.

**Transgender**—the gender identity of a person whose current gender identity is not aligned with the sex that person was assigned at birth. Sometimes the colloquial term is *trans*.

## Author Bios

**Charlotte J. Patterson, Ph.D.**, is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia. Best known for her work on child development in lesbian- and gay-parented families, her research has been published in the field's top journals, and she has written or edited several books.

**Rachel H. Farr, Ph.D.**, is an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Kentucky. Her research focuses on diverse families, particularly how parental sexual orientation relates to child, parent, and family outcomes among diverse adoptive families across the United States. Dr. Farr is currently studying racially, economically, and geographically diverse youth in the United States with LGBTQ+ parents.

**Abbie E. Goldberg, Ph.D.**, is a Professor of Psychology at Clark University, where her research focuses on diverse families, including LGBTQ+ and adoptive-parent families, as well as key family transitions such as the transition to parenthood, school, and divorce.

## National Council on Family Relations

661 LaSalle Street, Suite 200  
St. Paul, MN 55114  
Toll free: 888-781-9331  
Fax: 763-781-9348  
[www.ncfr.org](http://www.ncfr.org)



Copyright © 2021 National Council on Family Relations

This policy brief may be duplicated, distributed, or posted electronically with attribution to the National Council on Family Relations.

Inclusion of portions or all of this brief in printed or electronic textbooks, anthologies, or other publications requires permission from NCFR.

The views expressed within this publication may not represent the views or policies of the entire organization.

Briefs are research-based, educational, non-partisan, and include a family perspective.

To see all NCFR research briefs and policy briefs, visit [ncfr.org/resources/research-and-policy-briefs](http://ncfr.org/resources/research-and-policy-briefs)

Elaine A. Anderson, Policy Brief Editor