

# Care Considerations for Children of LGBTQIA+ Families

**Dominic Schnabel, MPH**



NATIONAL LGBTQIA+ HEALTH  
EDUCATION CENTER

A PROGRAM OF THE FENWAY INSTITUTE

# Our Roots

## Fenway Health

- Independent 501(c)(3) FQHC
- Founded 1971
- Mission: To enhance the wellbeing of the LGBTQIA+ community as well as people in our neighborhoods and beyond through access to the highest quality health care, education, research, and advocacy
- Integrated primary care model, including HIV and transgender health services



A PROGRAM OF THE FENWAY INSTITUTE

## The Fenway Institute

- Research, Education, Policy



# The National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center

- Training and Technical Assistance
- Grand Rounds
- Online Learning
  - CE and HEI Credit
- Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) Programs
- Publications and Resources



Learning Module



Publication



Toolkit



Video



Webinar



NATIONAL LGBTQIA+ HEALTH  
EDUCATION CENTER

A PROGRAM OF THE FENWAY INSTITUTE

[www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org](http://www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org)

# Technical Questions?

- Please call Zoom Technical Support:  
1.888.799.9666 ext 2
- You can contact the webinar host using the chat function in Zoom. Click the “Chat” icon and type your question.
- Alternatively, e-mail us at [education@fenwayhealth.org](mailto:education@fenwayhealth.org) for less urgent questions.

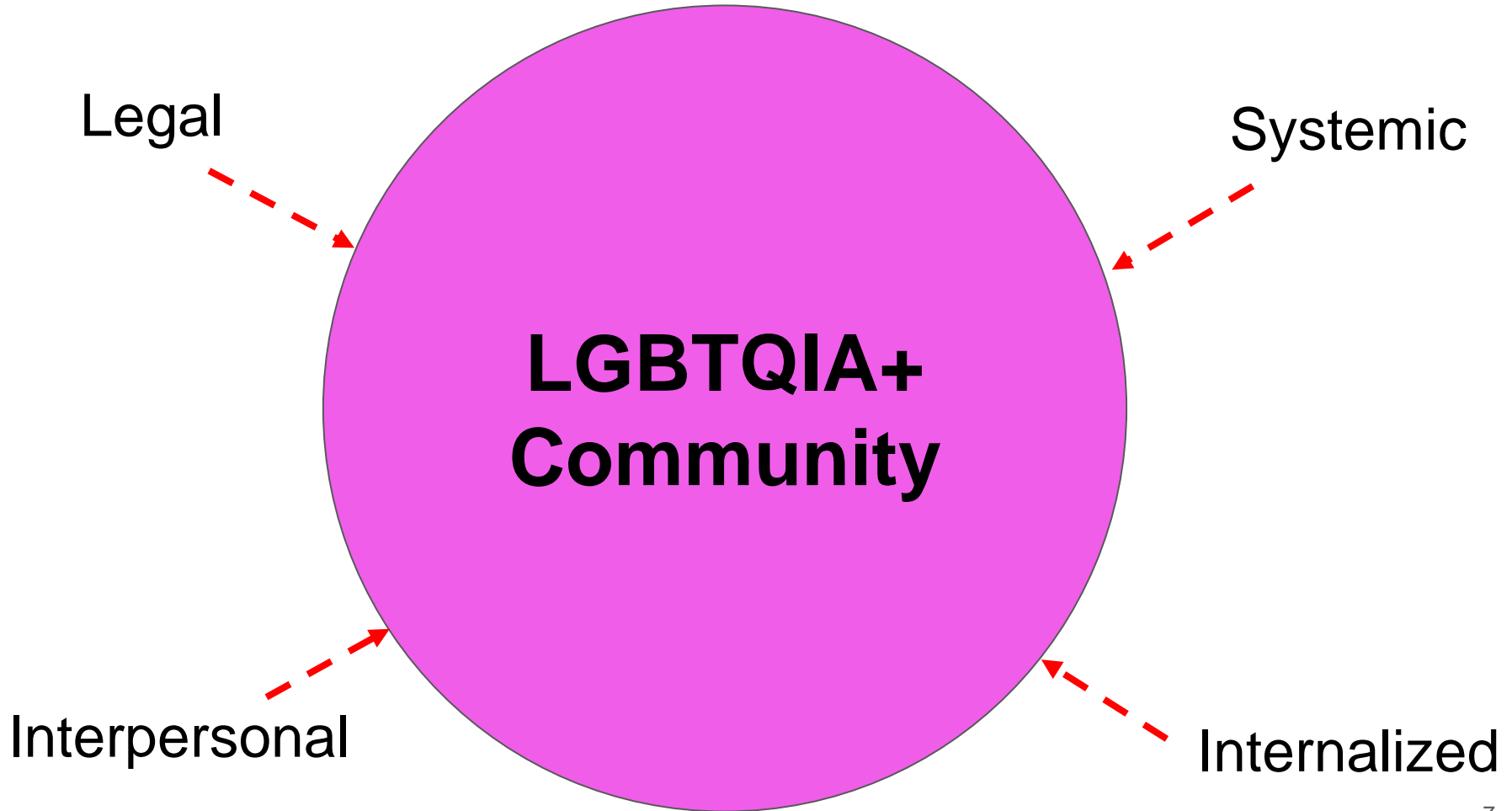
# Sound Issues?

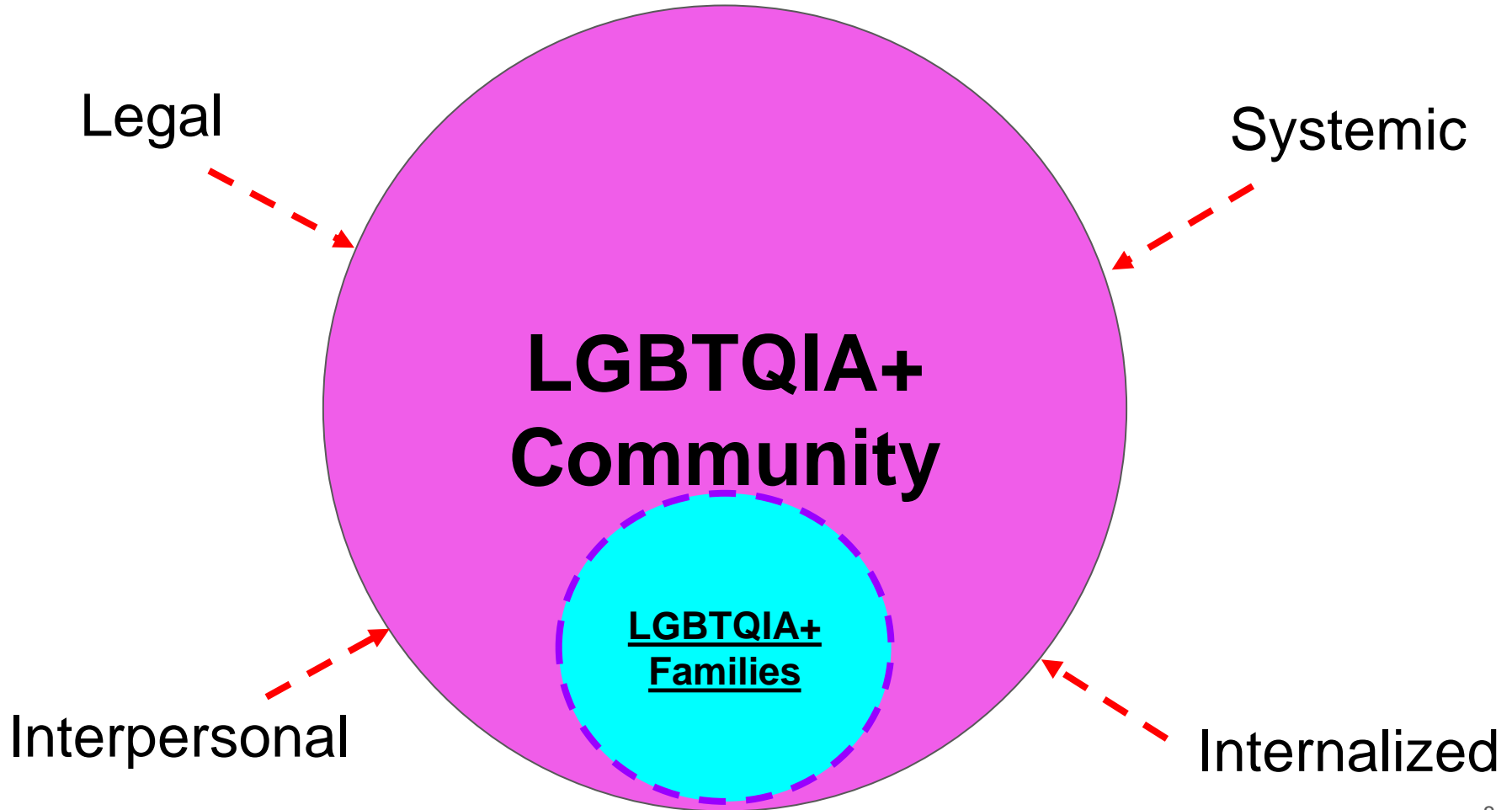
- Ensure your computer speakers are not muted
- If you cannot hear through your computer speakers, navigate to the bottom toolbar on your screen, go to the far left, and click the arrow next to the phone icon
- Choose “I will call in”
- Dial the phone number and access code

# CME/CEU Information

This activity has been reviewed and is acceptable for up to 1.0 Prescribed credits by the American Academy of Family Physicians. Participants should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in this activity.

<b>Physicians</b>	AAFP Prescribed credit is accepted by the American Medical Association as equivalent to AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™ toward the AMA Physician's Recognition Award. When applying for the AMA PRA, Prescribed credit earned must be reported as Prescribed, not as Category 1.
<b>Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants, Nurses, Medical Assistants</b>	AAFP Prescribed credit is accepted by the following organizations. Please contact them directly about how participants should report the credit they earned. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA)</li><li>•National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA)</li><li>•American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC)</li><li>•American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP)</li><li>•American Academy of Nurse Practitioners Certification Program (AANPCP)</li><li>•American Association of Medical Assistants (AAMA)</li></ul>
<b>Other Health Professionals</b>	Confirm equivalency of credits with relevant licensing body.









## My Background



## Setting the Stage

Created by Stefan Beer  
from Nicos Project



## The Challenges

Created by Stefan Beer  
from Nicos Project



## The Considerations

Created by Designing-HUB  
from Nicos Project



# My Background

Born in Southern California



My Biological Parents



Placed in Foster Care



Created by Amethyst Studio  
from Noun Project

Created by NoNsEnSe THInGs  
from Noun Project



# My Background

Uncle "Frank"



Enter "David"

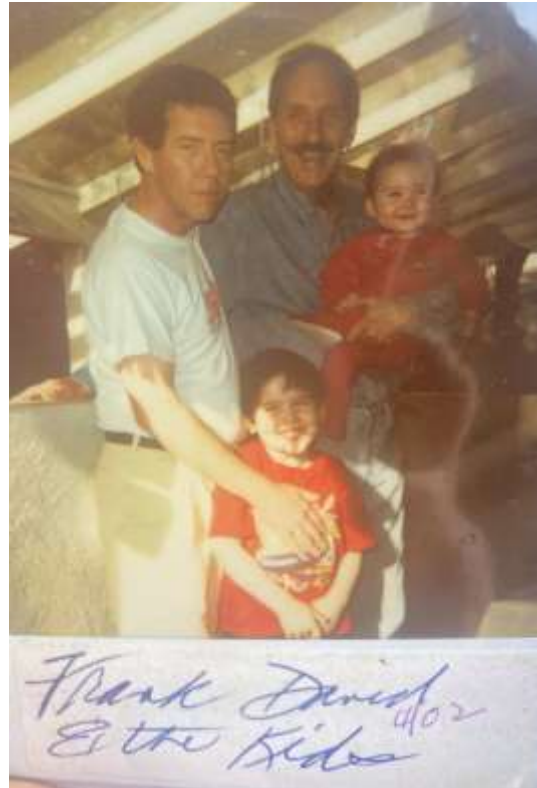


Legally a Family





# My Background





# My Background



## The Many Questions

- “Where’s your mom?”
- “Is that your grandpa?”
- “Who’s your real dad?”
- “Why don’t you look like your ‘dad’?”
- “Why is your mom named X?”
- “Isn’t it hard to live with parents that don’t love you?”



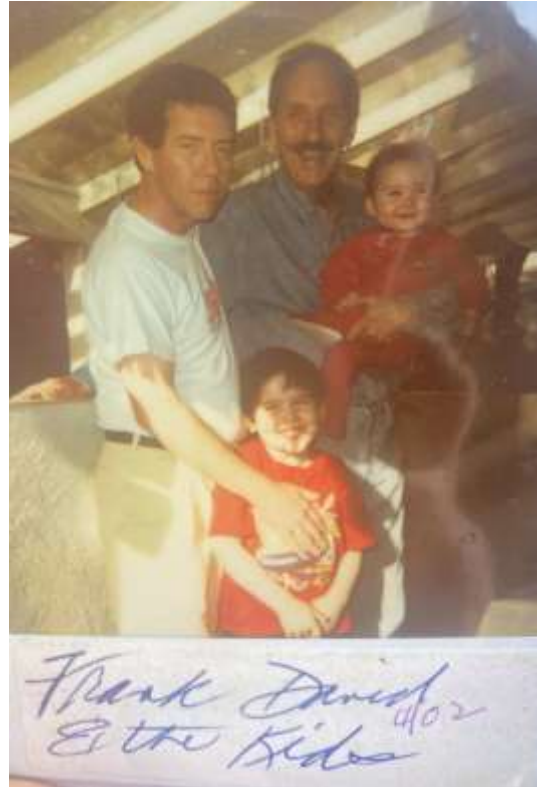


# My Background

## Media



The Many Questions



## Institutional Influences

### School

- Forms specifying “Mother/Father”
- Family Tree Assignments
- Mother’s Day Gifts
- Uncertain allies

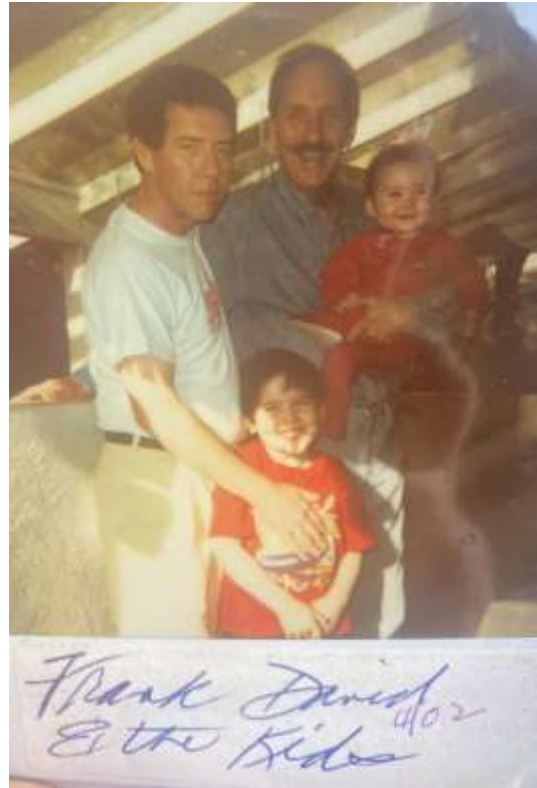
### Medical

- Forms specifying “Mother/Father”
- Family History
- Denial of visitation
- Representation



# My Background

Legislative Stigma



Institutional Influences

School

Medical

Media

The Many Questions





# My Background

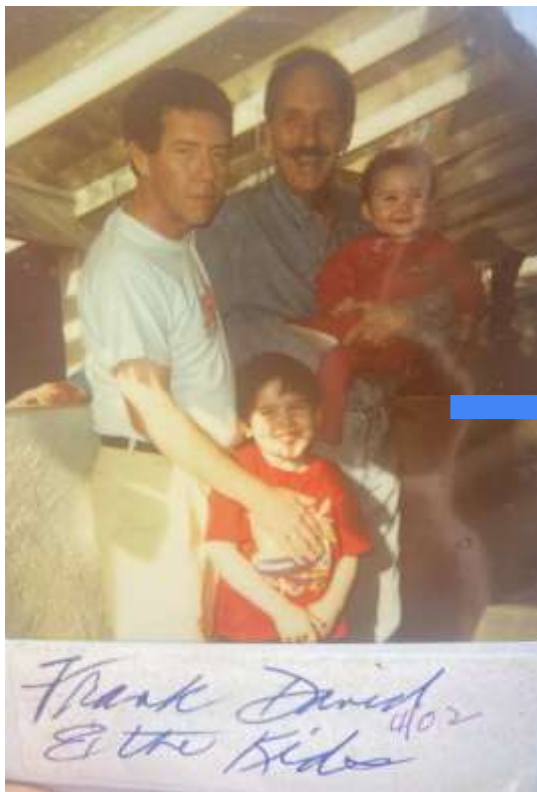
## Institutional Influences

School   Medical   Media →

## Legislative Stigma



## The Many Questions



For me...

Confusion

Concealment

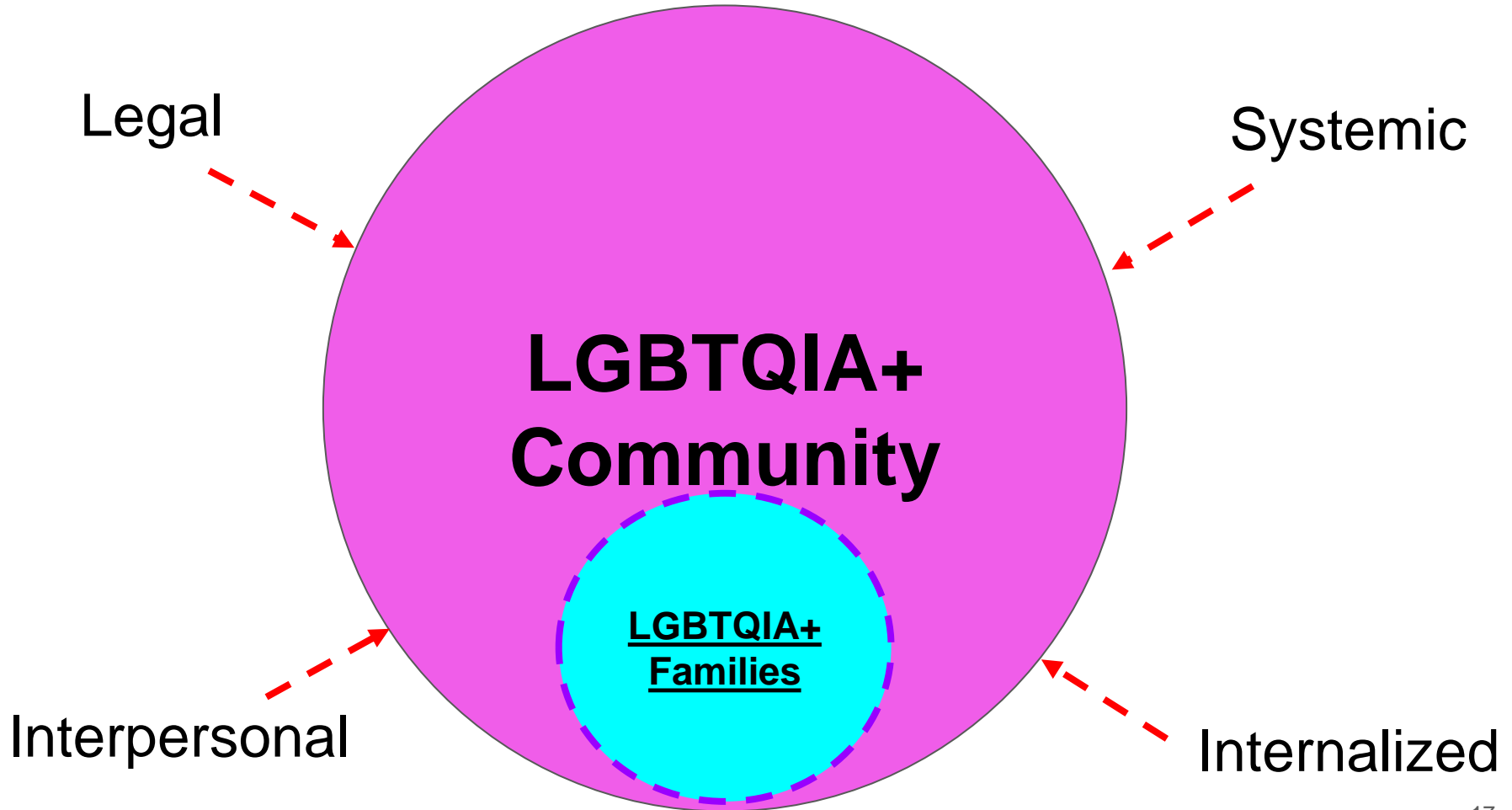
Distancing

Collapsing Identities

Helplessness









# My Background

## Institutional Influences

School   Medical   Media →

## Legislative Stigma



## The Many Questions



For me...

Confusion, Concealment,  
Distancing, Collapsing  
Identities, Helplessness...

## Supports



Image: <https://www.courthousenews.com/california-moves-to-dump-proposition-8-from-constitution/>  
<https://www.popluckclub.org/news>  
<https://www.ptownfamilyweek.com/event-details/2021/7/26/colage-making-gay-history-podcast>  
<https://campuspress.yale.edu/qpocresources/the-office-of-lgbtq-resources/>



# Learning Objectives

## External Pressures

Understand the external societal pressures faced by LGBTQIA+ families and their children, including legal, social, and cultural challenges, to better support and advocate for their rights and well-being.

## Internalized Coping

Explore the internal coping mechanisms utilized by LGBTQIA+ children in response to societal stigma and discrimination

## Protective Supports

Identify strategies within health care to mitigate distress and promote the holistic health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ children and their families, fostering inclusive and affirming environments



## My Background



## Setting the Stage

Created by Stefan Beer  
from Nicos Project



## The Challenges

Created by Stefan Beer  
from Nicos Project



## The Considerations

Created by Designing-HUB  
from Nicos Project



# LGBTQIA+ Family Prevalence

**6 million Americans** with LGBT parents <sup>1</sup>

**170,000 children** raised in same-sex household <sup>2</sup>

**25-49% of transgender people** are parents <sup>3</sup>

More data needed: multi-parents, polyamorous, other gender minorities

Sources: 1- Gates GJ. LGBT Parenting in the United States. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law: Los Angeles, CA; 2013; Available from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9xs6g8xx> [Last accessed: September 20, 2023]

Dierckx M, Motmans J, Mortelmans D, et al. Families in transition: A literature review. Int Rev Psychiatry 2016;28(1):36-43; doi: 10.3109/09540261.2015.1102716

3- Meerwijk EL, Sevelius JM. Transgender Population Size in the United States: a Meta-Regression of Population-Based Probability Samples. Am J Public Health. 2017;107(2):e1-8; doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2016.303578



# Past Research Shows No Difference in Outcomes

- Consistent findings over the years: **No significant difference in psychological adjustment** for children in straight households vs. same-sex households<sup>3-4</sup>
- Recent shift in focus: From proving normality to celebrating uniqueness
- Qualitative research enables nuanced discussions and deeper understanding of individuals' lived experiences within LGBTQIA+ family units<sup>1-2</sup>

1. Welsh MG. Growing up in a same-sex parented family: The adolescent voice of experience. J GLBT Fam Stud 2011;7(1-2):49-71; doi: 10.1080/1550428X.2010.537241

2. Goldberg AE. (How) does it make a difference? Perspectives of adults with lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents. Am J Orthopsychiatry 2007;77(4):550-562; doi: 10.1037/0002-9432.77.4.550

3. Rivers I, Poteat VP, Noret N. Victimization, social support, and psychosocial functioning among children of same-sex and opposite-sex couples in the United Kingdom. Dev Psychol 2008;44(1):127-134; doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.44.1.127

4. Bos HM, van Balen F, van den Boom DC. Child adjustment and parenting in planned lesbian-parent families



# Dimensions of LGBTQIA+ Families

<b><i>Parent Identification</i></b>	<b>Sexual Orientation // Gender Identity // Sex Development // Race // Ethnicity</b>	<b><i>Age of Parent Identifying as LGBTQIA+</i></b>	<b>Parent(s) identified as LGBTQIA+ while raising children // Parent(s) identified as LGBTQIA+ after raising children</b>
<b><i>Method of Family Formation</i></b>	<b>Sexual Activity // Adoption // Fostering // Donor Insemination // Surrogacy</b>		<b><i>Additional Demographics</i></b>
<b><i>Family Configuration</i></b>	<b>Single-Parent Households // Co-Parent Households // Separated Parents (+/- new partners) // Multi-Parent Households</b>		
<b><i>Child Identification</i></b>	<b>Sexual Orientation // Gender Identity // Sex Development // Race// Ethnicity</b>		



# Untangling Complexity: LGBTQIA+ Family Histories

- Family background is an invisible aspect of identity, yet still incredibly impactful
- LGBTQIA+ families can have vastly different experiences based on the dimensions shown previously from timing of parental coming out to family-forming methods
- Traditional labels may not perfectly fit for complex family relationships, including those involving adoption, surrogacy or donor insemination





# Untangling Complexity: LGBTQIA+ Family Histories, continued

- There may be difficulty in obtaining a comprehensive family history due to uncertainties surrounding familial relationships
- Despite documentation, families can still face barriers to participation in medical care decisions, particularly when familial relationships are not legally recognized and/or contested



# Gathering a Family History with Sensitivity

- Overall guiding principle: DNA (Do Not Assume!)
- Avoid assumptive language (e.g. real father, biological mother, other mother) about family relationships and use more broad and inclusive terminology unless initiated by the patient
- Use open-ended questions to guide inquires (e.g. “Tell me about who raised you?” or “Who were the people important to you when growing up?”)



# Gathering a Family History with Sensitivity, continued

- Work collaboratively to address uncertainties in family history, acknowledging there may be limitations to achieving a complete picture
- Ensure healthcare practice has non-discrimination policies that offer full protections for families of all sexual orientation, gender identities, and legal statuses
  - Consider being familiar with local parentage laws as it pertains to your patients (Resource for New England: [GLAD.org](https://www.glad.org/))



# The Queerspawn Dictionary

- Consider getting familiar with the various terminology that children of LGBTQIA+ families may be familiar with
- As always, it is best to allow the child to initiate these terms but it is still worth becoming familiar
- Queerspawn Resource Project has a useful online dictionary as well as other educational materials

[\(https://queerspawnresource.org/portfolio/living-language/\)](https://queerspawnresource.org/portfolio/living-language/)



# Pressures to be the Model Family

- Heavy politicization and scrutiny towards LGBTQIA+ families can place pressure on children to hide or minimize struggles <sup>1-2</sup>
  - Qualitative studies have shown tendency for children in LGBTQIA+ families to be wary of disclosing items such as IPV and alcoholism <sup>2-3</sup>
- Children who identify as LGBTQIA+ themselves may worry that embracing their own identity puts their family at risk of being targeted by criticism that “queer families raise queer kids”

1- Welsh MG. Growing up in a same-sex parented family: The adolescent voice of experience. J GLBT Fam Stud 2011;7(1-2):49-71; doi: 10.1080/1550428X.2010.537241

2- Goldberg AE. (How) does it make a difference? Perspectives of adults with lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents. Am J Orthopsychiatry 2007;77(4):550-562; doi: 10.1037/0002-9432.77.4.550

3- Fitzgerald TJ. Queerspawn and their families: Psychotherapy with LGBTQ families. J Gay Lesbian Ment Health 2010;14(2):155-162; doi: 10.1080/19359700903433276



# Pressures inside the Family Unit

- Despite a possibly shared identity, children who identify as LGBTQIA+ may have different perspectives on their identity and may not turn to their parents for support <sup>1</sup>
- Even if the child does NOT identify as LGBTQIA+, they may still have complexity in how they approach queerness, gender diversity, and cis-heteronormativity <sup>2</sup>

1- Kunalanka K. The “Second Generation”: LGBTQ Youth with LGBTQ Parents. In: LGBTQ-Parent Families. (Goldberg AE, Allen KR. eds.) Springer New York: New York, NY; 2013; pp. 163–175.

2-Sachs AD. Family pictures: The queer relationalities of multigenerational queer family. J Homosex 2023;70(1):111-134; doi: 10.1080/00918369.2022.2121194



# Navigating Pressures for LGBTQIA+ Families

- Be attentive to potential underreporting of conflicts in the home
- Recognize that children of LGBTQIA+ families may not turn to their parents for support regarding their identities
  - This is an opportunity to provide a safe and nonjudgemental space for children to explore their identities and express concerns
- Avoid assumptions that coming out as LGBTQIA+ was “easier” for children in LGBTQIA+ families



# Cisheterosexism and Microaggressions

- Cisheterosexism is “...privileging of heterosexuality, cisgender identity, and binary sex assignment as the norm”<sup>1</sup>
- Microaggressions
  - 41% of children with lesbian parents reported homophobia at school <sup>2-3</sup>
  - 33% of children with trans parents reported conflict with peers <sup>4</sup>
  - Children with trans parents reported feeling put in position to “defend” parents identity <sup>5-6</sup>
- Downstream effects of stigmatization: increased externalizing behaviors, low self-esteem, hyperactivity <sup>7-8</sup>

## Sources

1- <https://gbtg.unc.edu/resources/exploring-identities/coming-out/>

2- Farr RH, Oakley MK, Ollen EW. School experiences of young children and their lesbian and gay adoptive parents. *Psychol Sex Orientat Gend* 2016;3(4):442-447; doi: 10.1037/sgd0000187

3- Gartrell N, Deck A, Rodas C, et al. The National Lesbian Family Study: 4. Interviews with the 10-year-old children. *Am J Orthopsychiatry* 2005;75(4):518-524; doi: 10.1037/0002-9432.75.4.518

4- Freedman D, Tasker F, Di Ceglie D. Children and adolescents with transsexual parents referred to a specialist gender identity development service: A brief report of key developmental features. *Clin Child Psychol Psychiatry* 2002;7(3):423-432; doi: 10.1177/1359104502007003009

5- Dierckx M, Mortelmans D, Motmans J, et al. Resilience in families in transition: What happens when a parent is transgender? *Fam Relat* 2017;66(3):399-411; doi: 10.1111/fare.12282

6- Zadeh S, Imrie S, Golombok S. Stories of sameness and difference: The views and experiences of children and adolescents with a trans\* parent. *J GLBT Fam Stud* 2021;17(1):1-17; doi: 10.1080/1550428X.2019.1683785

7- Golombok S, Blake L, Slutsky J, et al. Parenting and the adjustment of children born to gay fathers through surrogacy. *Child Dev* 2018;89(4):1223-1233; doi: 10.1111/cdev.12728

8- Bos HM, van Balen F. Children in planned lesbian families: Stigmatisation, psychological adjustment and protective factors. *Cult Health Sex* 2008;10(3):221-236; doi: 10.1080/13691050701601702





# Concealing to Avoid Cisheteronormativity

- To avoid conflict or avoid scrutiny, children of LGBTQIA+ families may decide to conceal information about their family
  - This can vary in degree and be situationally dependent
- Concealment leads to distress as children feel torn between their desire for openness about their family and societal pressures to conform to cisheteronormativity<sup>1-4</sup>
- Even if not LGBTQIA+ identifying, children in LGBTQIA+ families may still experience a secondary minority stress <sup>5</sup>

## Sources

- 1- Farr RH, Crain EE, Oakley MK, et al. Microaggressions, feelings of difference, and resilience among adopted children with sexual minority parents. *J Youth Adolesc* 2016;45(1):85-104; doi: 10.1007/s10964-015-0353-6
- 2- Welsh MG. Growing up in a same-sex parented family: The adolescent voice of experience. *J GLBT Fam Stud* 2011;7(1-2):49-71; doi: 10.1080/1550428X.2010.537241
- 3- Dierckx M, Mortelmans D, Motmans J, et al. Resilience in families in transition: What happens when a parent is transgender? *Fam Relat* 2017;66(3):399-411; doi: 10.1111/fare.12282
- 4- Zadeh S, Imrie S, Golombok S. Stories of sameness and difference: The views and experiences of children and adolescents with a trans\* parent. *J GLBT Fam Stud* 2021;17(1):1-17; doi: 10.1080/1550428X.2019.1683785
- 5- Bourdon T. A phenomenological study of non-LGBT students with LGBQ parents. Doctoral dissertation, Northeastern University: Boston, MA. Available from: <http://search.proquest.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/dissertations-theses/phenomenological-study-non-lgbt-students-with/docview/147638081/se-2>[Last accessed: September 20, 2023]



# Addressing Cisheteronormativity

- Prioritize looking into ways that cisheteronormativity permeates into individual interactions and broader clinical practices
  - Modify intake forms to be more inclusive with gender-neutral language such as Parent(s)/Guardians(s)
  - Avoid assumptions about family members present with child
  - Provide guidance for clinical staff interfacing with patients to ensure sensitivity in interactions with LGBTQIA+ families



# Importance of Community

- Qualitative interviews show that community connection is crucial for children of LGBTQIA+ families, offering protection against cisheterosexist discrimination and harassment <sup>1</sup>
- Organizations such as COLAGE (originally, Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere) serve as points of connection for families of diverse configurations to create community online and in-person

## Sources

- 1-. Kuvallanka KA, Teper B, Morrison OA. COLAGE: Providing community, education, leadership, and advocacy by and for children of GLBT parents. J GLBT Fam Stud 2006;2(3-4):71-92; doi: 10.1300/J461v02n03\_05
- 2-. Stotzer RL, Herman JL, Hasenbush A. Transgender Parenting: A Review of Existing Research. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law: Los Angeles, CA; 2014. Available from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3rp0v7qv> [Last accessed: September 20, 2023]



# Fostering Community

- Be knowledgeable about resources like COLAGE or local LGBTQIA+ networks to provide families with support options
- Encourage open dialogue by asking patients and their families about their support systems and needs
- Ensure your clinical space reflects inclusivity by displaying diverse representations of families in artwork, books, and materials to create a welcoming environment for LGBTQIA+ families (more work needs to be done for building trans-inclusive materials <sup>2)</sup>)

#### Sources

- 1-. Kavalanka KA, Teper B, Morrison OA. COLAGE: Providing community, education, leadership, and advocacy by and for children of GLBT parents. J GLBT Fam Stud 2006;2(3-4):71-92; doi: 10.1300/J461v02n03\_05
- 2-. Stotzer RL, Herman JL, Hasenbush A. Transgender Parenting: A Review of Existing Research. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law: Los Angeles, CA; 2014. Available from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3rp0v7qv> [Last accessed: September 20, 2023]



# Next Steps

- **Further research** is necessary to better assess the diverse array of family structures within the population.
  - Understanding how these communities navigate the healthcare system is crucial for identifying pain points and areas for improvement
- Ongoing legal challenges persist, necessitating **continued advocacy**. Some groups seek to silence our voices and existence, highlighting the importance of allies in advocacy
- Important to **acknowledge the challenges** faced by LGBTQIA+ families, provide space to grieve and offer support

# Thank you!!

Special thanks to Dr. Alex Keuroghlian for his support and mentorship



## Contact Info

Dominic Schnabel, MPH  
[dschnabel@hms.harvard.edu](mailto:dschnabel@hms.harvard.edu)

# Sources

Icons: NounProject

- 1- <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=SS&area=12#density>
- 2- <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/impact-dont-say-gay-parents/>
- 3- <https://www.courts.ca.gov/6465.htm>
- 4- <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/prop-8-passed-california-gay-marriage>
- 5 - Gates GJ. LGBT Parenting in the United States. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law: Los Angeles, CA; 2013; Available from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9xs6g8xx> [Last accessed: September 20, 2023]
- 6- Dierckx M, Motmans J, Mortelmans D, et al. Families in transition: A literature review. *Int Rev Psychiatry* 2016;28(1):36–43; doi: 10.3109/09540261.2015.1102716
- 7- Meerwijk EL, Sevelius JM. Transgender Population Size in the United States: a Meta-Regression of Population-Based Probability Samples. *Am J Public Health*. 2017;107(2):e1–8; doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2016.303578
- 8- Welsh MG. Growing up in a same-sex parented family: The adolescent voice of experience. *J GLBT Fam Stud* 2011;7(1–2):49–71; doi: 10.1080/1550428X.2010.537241
- 9- Goldberg AE. (How) does it make a difference? Perspectives of adults with lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents. *Am J Orthopsychiatry* 2007;77(4):550-562; doi: 10.1037/0002-9432.77.4.550
- 10- Rivers I, Poteat VP, Noret N. Victimization, social support, and psychosocial functioning among children of same-sex and opposite-sex couples in the United Kingdom. *Dev Psychol* 2008;44(1):127-134; doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.44.1.127
- 11- Bos HM, van Balen F, van den Boom DC. Child adjustment and parenting in planned lesbian-parent families
- 12- <https://lgbtq.unc.edu/resources/exploring-identities/coming-out/>
- 13- Farr RH, Oakley MK, Ollen EW. School experiences of young children and their lesbian and gay adoptive parents. *Psychol Sex Orientat Gend* 2016;3(4):442-447; doi: 10.1037/sgd0000187
- 14 - Gartrell N, Deck A, Rodas C, et al. The National Lesbian Family Study: 4. Interviews with the 10-year-old children. *Am J Orthopsychiatry* 2005;75(4):518-524; doi: 10.1037/0002-9432.75.4.518
- 15 - Freedman D, Tasker F, Di Ceglie D. Children and adolescents with transsexual parents referred to a specialist gender identity development service: A brief report of key developmental features. *Clin Child Psychol Psychiatry* 2002;7(3):423-432; doi: 10.1177/1359104502007003009
- 16 - Dierckx M, Mortelmans D, Motmans J, et al. Resilience in families in transition: What happens when a parent is transgender? *Fam Relat* 2017;66(3):399-411; doi: 10.1111/fare.12282
- 17 - Zadeh S, Imrie S, Golombok S. Stories of sameness and difference: The views and experiences of children and adolescents with a trans\* parent. *J GLBT Fam Stud* 2021;17(1):1-17; doi: 10.1080/1550428X.2019.1683785
- 18 - Golombok S, Blake L, Slutsky J, et al. Parenting and the adjustment of children born to gay fathers through surrogacy. *Child Dev* 2018;89(4):1223-1233; doi: 10.1111/cdev.12728
- 19- Bos HM, van Balen F. Children in planned lesbian families: Stigmatisation, psychological adjustment and protective factors. *Cult Health Sex* 2008;10(3):221-236; doi: 10.1080/13691050701601702
- 20- Bourdon T. A phenomenological study of non-LGBT students with LGBQ parents. Doctoral dissertation, Northeastern University: Boston, MA. Available from: <http://search.proquest.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/dissertations-theses/phenomenological-study-non-lgbt-students-with/docview/1476380811/se-2> [Last accessed: September 20, 2023]