Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity

LGBTQ Parents' Accounts of Their Children's Experiences With Heterosexism in Schools

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Children in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (trans), and queer (LGBTQ) parent families are vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization in the school setting, including both institutionalized and interpersonal stigma. Prior studies of LGBTQ parents have documented reports of heterosexism and homophobia in schools, but these studies have generally used small samples and focused on cisgender parent families. This mixed-methods study examines 419 LGBTQ parents' (65% cisgender women, 22% cisgender men, 13% trans/nonbinary parents) narrative accounts of their children's experiences with stigma in schools. Forty-two percent had at least one child <6, 36% had at least one child 6–10, 36% had at least one child 11–15, and 11% had at least one child aged 16–18. Two-thirds of the sample reported that their children had encountered structural and/or interpersonal stigma at school. Logistic regression indicated that parents of older children had greater odds of reporting stigma than other parents, and trans parent families had greater odds of reporting stigma than cisgender gay male parent families. Parents described how they had sought to prevent or mitigate, as well as prepare their children for, stigma (proactive advocacy), and how they responded to institutional and interpersonal stigma (reactive advocacy). Findings underscore how parent factors (e.g., gender) and child factors (e.g., age) may intersect to shape the school experiences of children in LGBTQ parent families, and have implications for therapists and family advocates, school professionals, and researchers.

Public Significance Statement
Children with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (trans), and queer (LGBTQ) parents—particularly those who are older, and those with trans parents—are vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization in the school setting, including institutionalized and interpersonal stigma. However, many LGBTQ parents engage in proactive and reactive advocacy on behalf of their children, thereby promoting family resilience. Educators and family professionals can benefit from understanding the forms of stigma to which children with LGBTQ parents are exposed, and how to create structurally and interpersonally safer and supportive school and community environments.

Keywords: gay, transgender, parents, school-aged children, stigma

Experiences of bullying teasing, and more subtle forms of stigma can have a devastating impact on children's developing sense of themselves and overall well-being (Horn & Russell, 2016). Children with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (trans), and queer (LGBTQ) parents may encounter sexuality- and gender-related stigma based on their parents', and/or their own, identities (Horn & Russell, 2016). Significantly, LGBTQ parents' concern about their children potentially experiencing sexuality- and gender-based stigma often precedes even the decision to become parents (Gartrell et al., 2019; A. E. Goldberg, 2022). In turn, when children

enter school, LGBTQ parents often voice worries about the potential for implicit and explicit stigma and marginalization (A. E. Goldberg & Byard, 2020).

Children with LGBTQ parents often attend schools that, as institutions that reflect and perpetuate the dominant norms of the broader culture, reify the primacy of heterosexual, two-parent families with biologically related families—that is, the standard North American family (SNAF; Smith, 1993). According to queer theory (Oswald et al., 2005), insomuch as LGBTQ parent families deviate from and challenge SNAF, they are vulnerable to marginalization in the school setting, including both institutionalized (e.g., curricular) and interpersonal (e.g., negative encounters with peers and teachers) forms of heterosexism. The specific nature and impact of marginalization necessarily changes with children's developmental status, as well as shifts in schools' requirements and resources (Horn & Russell, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Children, and their LGBTQ parents, may experience minority stress as a result of such marginalization (Meyer, 2003), yet parents in particular (e.g., because of their greater relative power) may embody

forms of resistance, such as teaching their children to be proud of their families, and advocating on behalf of their children at school (A. E. Goldberg, Black, Manley, et al., 2017; A. E. Goldberg, Black, Sweeney, et al., 2017). Of interest in the current study were LGBTQ parents' ($N = 419$) perspectives of their children's encounters with homophobic and transphobic stigmatization in the school setting, and how they sought to minimize, and/or respond to, such encounters. Specifically, the following research questions framed this study:

Research Question 1: Are certain characteristics of LGBTQ parents (gender), their children (gender, age), and their proximal social context (private vs. public school, rural vs. more metropolitan neighborhood) associated with parents' reports of their children's encounters with stigmatization at school? (Quantitative)

Research Question 2: What types of stigmatization (structural, interpersonal; direct, indirect) do parents describe their children as encountering at school? (Qualitative)

Research Question 3: How do parents seek to prevent, offset, and respond to stigmatization? (Qualitative)

Structural Stigmatization: Exclusion and Marginalization

Schools are fundamentally cisnormative and heteronormative institutions that often mirror the norms and beliefs of society at large (e.g., there are only "two" genders, male and female; there is only one "natural" sexuality, heterosexuality; families should have two biological parents consisting of one parent of each of gender; Oswald et al., 2005; Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009). In turn, schools often serve as extensions of, and perpetuate the societal silencing and stigmatization surrounding, queer and trans identities and nondominant family building contexts (A. E. Goldberg & Byard, 2020). Such silencing and stigmatization may show up in the form of institutional (structural) marginalization, as well as interpersonal marginalization.

Children with LGBTQ parents often experience the erasure of their families in school curricula, policies, imagery, and documents (A. E. Goldberg & Byard, 2020). LGBTQ parent families, for example, are routinely invisible in classrooms (which contain books and images featuring heterosexual parent families), school events (e.g., Mother's/Father's Day), and paperwork (e.g., which ask for "mother" and "father"; A. E. Goldberg & Byard, 2020). Such exclusion, which has been described by LGBTQ parents of children as young as preschool-age (A. E. Goldberg, 2014), sends the message that LGBTQ parent families are less valid than heterosexual cisgender parent families.

Just as structural exclusion can have negative effects on LGBTQ parent families, its flipside, structural inclusion, can have positive effects. The presence of LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, antibullying policies that are inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), and gender-sexuality alliances in schools send powerful messages to all youth, benefiting children with LGBTQ parents as well as LGBTQ youth (Snapp, McGuire, et al., 2015; Snapp, Watson, et al., 2015). Such structural supports may not only directly impact children with LGBTQ parents, but may buffer the negative impact of interpersonal stigma on well-being. Bos et al. (2008) studied 78 lesbian-mother families with school-age children ($M_{age} =$

10 years) and found that although homophobic teasing (i.e., interpersonal stigmatization) was negatively related to children's well-being, attending schools with LGBTQ curricula (i.e., structural support) served as a buffer against the negative impact of homophobia. And, in a study of 50 adolescents (age 10–18; $M_{age} = 15$ years) with lesbian mothers in Canada, Vyncke et al. (2014) found that higher levels of school structural support for LGBTQ people (e.g., the presence of LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, paperwork, and clubs) moderated the association between adolescents' experiences of heterosexism and internalizing problems.

Interpersonal Stigmatization: Exclusion, Marginalization, and Bullying

Youth with LGBTQ parents are also vulnerable to interpersonal stigmatization and even bullying in their schools. Carone et al. (2022) studied an Italian sample of 70 school-age children of lesbian and gay (LG) parents ($M_{age} = 8$ years) and found that about two-thirds of youth reported at least one peer microaggression, which the authors define as a form of implicit stigmatization comprising "brief, commonplace and daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities" (p. 1210). A longitudinal study of 78 lesbian-mother families found that 18% of mothers reported that their 5-year-olds had experienced overt homophobia from peers or teachers (Gartrell et al., 2000); by age 10, almost half of youth reported experiencing homophobia (e.g., teasing) from peers (Gartrell et al., 2005), with similar numbers reporting homophobic stigmatization as teens (van Gelderen et al., 2012). By contrast, in a more recent study of forty-nine 6- to 11-year-olds with LG parents, Farr et al. (2016) found that while over half of children reported experiencing at least one microaggression (heterosexism, questioning the legitimacy of family, discrimination, public outing, pressure to be a spokesperson, and teasing/bullying), only 8% of them reported having been directly bullied "for having same-sex parents" (p. 94)—yet notably, these children were the most likely to have parent- and teacher-reported adjustment problems.

Indeed, marginalization and victimization in school have been consistently linked to poorer outcomes among youth with LG parents. Multiple studies show that perceptions of stigmatization (Bos & van Balen, 2008; Vyncke et al., 2014) and experiences of victimization (A. E. Goldberg & Garcia, 2020) are related to poorer psychological adjustment in children of LG parents. Peer stigmatization may have negative consequences for educational outcomes as well, with findings from a 2008 survey by the organization GLSEN showing that students (age 13–20; $M_{age} = 15$ years) with LGBTQ parents who reported high levels of harassment at school were more likely to report that they missed classes or entire days of school because of feeling unsafe (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).

Children of LGBTQ parents may be particularly likely to experience interpersonal stigma at certain developmental stages. As noted, children in preschool/daycare rarely experience teasing due to their parents' LGBTQ status (Gartrell et al., 2000). In middle childhood (i.e., age 6–12), children begin to develop more prejudicial views, and, alongside their increasingly sophisticated cognitive and language skills, are more likely to enact—and understand—stigmatization (Bigler & Liben, 2006; Eccles, 1999; Hoglund et al., 2008). Both the increasing significance of peers and peer approval across middle childhood and beyond, and greater awareness of one's social groups (e.g., related to family structure and

other intersecting identities) may contribute to increasing stigmatization (Gruenenfelder-Steiger et al., 2016; Spears Brown, 2017). Indeed, in addition to Gartrell et al.'s (2000, 2005) work documenting an increase in peer stigmatization between kindergarten and school age, qualitative research reveals that teens with LGBQ parents often describe middle school (approximately age 11–14) as the most difficult time in their lives in terms of teasing, in part because of the heteronormative attitudes they encounter in their peer group (Cody et al., 2017; Gianino et al., 2009; Welsh, 2011). Studies of adults raised by LG parents also found that most recalled their social experiences as becoming more positive across the life course, and reported less stigma related to their family structure in young adulthood than in earlier developmental periods (e.g., middle school and junior high school; Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Leddy et al., 2012; Lick et al., 2013).

Even more pervasive, but less researched, are the presence and effects of indirect sexual stigma (e.g., antigay slurs not directly aimed at the individual with LGBTQ parents). Existing work suggests that children with LGBQ parents commonly encounter this at school (Kuvalanka et al., 2014; Lindsay et al., 2006). In the GLSEN study, 64% of teenagers in LGBTQ parent families endorsed that they "frequently" heard homophobic comments from peers at school (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). School personnel may indirectly contribute to a negative school climate by failing to address antigay sentiment. In the GLSEN survey, only 28% of the 154 teens with LGBTQ parents reported that staff intervened frequently when overhearing antigay remarks; and, 39% said that teachers/staff were the perpetrators of such remarks (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).

Parents as Engaged Advocates, Defenders, and Protectors

LGBTQ parents are often aware of the reality of both structural and interpersonal stigmatization. Interpersonal stigmatization in particular, in the form of teasing or bullying, is a major concern for LGBQ parents (Gartrell et al., 2019; A. E. Goldberg, 2022), who often share worries that their children will be discriminated against because of parents' sexual orientation (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2018; Lindsay et al., 2006). Such worries, when realized, create painful feelings: in one study of 131 lesbian parents, the most challenging parenting experience reported was distress over children's experiences of homophobic stigmatization or exclusion (Gartrell et al., 2019).

Aware of the potential for marginalization of their children and families, as well as the potential for certain schools to be more inclusive and accepting than others, LGBTQ parents may engage a variety of preventive strategies to minimize the likelihood of interpersonal and structural stigma. First, they may seek out certain geographic regions and educational settings (e.g., progressive day cares, private schools) in an effort to protect their children from harm (A. E. Goldberg, 2014; A. E. Goldberg & Smith, 2014). One study found that two-thirds of LG parents considered the gay-friendliness of the daycare/school in their preschool selection process (A. E. Goldberg & Smith, 2014). Such decision-making is facilitated by economic resources, such that more affluent LGBTQ families can more seriously consider the LGBTQ inclusiveness of a given school, assuming their availability in a given region (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2018). Wealthier parents may also be more able to afford private schools, which may be valued because they are seen as providing a buffer to exposure to victimization (A. E. Goldberg, 2023; A. E. Goldberg et al., 2018). Risk of marginalization may be higher among LGBTQ families with less latitude in decision-making—such as those who cannot afford private school, or live in more rural regions: indeed, several studies have found that rural LGBQ parents are more likely to report that their children were bullied than those in urban areas (A. E. Goldberg & Garcia, 2020; Power et al., 2014).

In addition to choosing certain communities or schools to protect their children from stigma, LGBTQ parents may rely on other strategies. Proactively, they may speak to teachers about their family structure in an effort to enhance knowledge and support and decrease ignorance and the likelihood of exclusion (A. E. Goldberg, Black, Sweeney, et al., 2017; Lindsay et al., 2006). Parents may also try to promote a more positive school experience by making suggestions to teachers about ways to incorporate diverse families into the curricula (A. E. Goldberg, Black, Sweeney, et al., 2017; Lindsay et al., 2006). By offering input regarding school content, and donating resources (e.g., books), LGBTQ parents assert themselves as active, concerned school citizens, potentially helping to create more inclusive environments for their children (A. E. Goldberg, 2014; A. E. Goldberg, Black, Manley, et al., 2017).

Of course, teachers and staff may not be open to LGBTQ parents' input and may ignore their feedback (A. E. Goldberg, Black, Sweeney, et al., 2017; Lindsay et al., 2006), particularly in the current political climate, in which certain parents' rights (i.e., cisgender, heterosexual parents) are often centered over others (Kline et al., 2022) and debates around whether to affirm LGBTQ identities in classrooms and curricula are ongoing (A. E. Goldberg, 2023; Kline et al., 2022). In turn, in addition to enlisting proactive strategies to minimize marginalization, LGBTQ parents may deploy reactive strategies as well. Little work has examined how LGBTQ parents respond to their children's exposure to stigma at school. However, one study found that LG parents were more likely than heterosexual parents to talk to staff if their children were being victimized (A. E. Goldberg & Garcia, 2020). Other research, too, has found that LG parents are very involved in schools—which may be both a protective measure (e.g., to minimize the likelihood of biased treatment) and a reactive one (e.g., a means of enacting influence upon observing bias; A. E. Goldberg & Byard, 2020).

Parental Socialization: Scaffolding and Support

In addition to seeking to prevent, or interrupt, negative treatment of their children in schools, LGBTQ parents may also engage in certain socialization strategies aimed at enhancing their resilience and ability to maintain a positive sense of self amidst interpersonal and structural stigma. Recognizing the potential for their children to experience and possibly internalize societal messages that their families are "less than," parents may seek to instill pride in children related to their family structure. They may do this by reading children books about diverse families, attending Pride celebrations, and promoting positive socialization messages about their families (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2016; Oakley et al., 2017). They may also seek out social settings where their children are not the only ones with LGBTQ parents (e.g., LGBTQ parenting groups) to normalize, and create a sense of community around, their family identity (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2016, 2018; Oakley et al., 2017). Such efforts constitute important socialization processes aimed to foster resilience among minoritized youth (Marks et al., 2020).

Major Limitations of Past Research: Trans Invisibility and Children's Identities

Research on LGBTQ families' experiences in schools is limited in a number of ways, such as its reliance on small samples, primary focus on cisgender lesbian-mother families, lack of attention to multiple forms of stigma, and limited focus on the attendant issue of how parents seek to prevent, respond to, or offset such encounters with stigma. One notable limitation is the lack of inclusion of trans parents in the studies discussed above, aside from the GLSEN survey, and the existence of only a small number of qualitative studies that specifically examine trans parents' experiences in schools. Trans parents appear to face more discrimination in general as compared to cisgender LGBQ parents (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2023), yet their experiences in schools have rarely been studied explicitly. Some qualitative work on trans parents has briefly addressed their school experiences, usually in the context of larger discussions of parenting or discrimination (Bower-Brown & Zadeh, 2021; Haines et al., 2014). These studies, which use small samples and do not consider the role of child factors such as age or gender in shaping school experiences, suggest that children of trans parents may face elevated levels of stigma at school, which some families seek to circumvent through limited or selective disclosure of their identities to school staff, as one study of 50 trans parents documented (Haines et al., 2014). Indeed, trans parents balance the potential benefits of visibility and openness (e.g., personal integrity) with concerns about the potential costs (e.g., hostility toward their children; Bower-Brown & Zadeh, 2021; Haines et al., 2014). In a study of 11 trans parents in the United Kingdom, participants spoke to the challenge of balancing advocacy on behalf of their children with pragmatic acceptance of the challenges of parenting in a cisnormative and heteronormative society (Bower-Brown & Zadeh, 2021).

In addition to a lack of inclusion of trans parents, prior work has also failed to consider how the sexual/gender identities of the children of LGBTQ parents may affect their experiences at school. Trans children in particular seem to face more discrimination than their cis peers (Horton, 2023), demanding parental advocacy (Davy & Cordoba, 2020). Research on lesbian mothers of trans children indicates that such parents may encounter an added layer of stigma related to perceived attribution by teachers that, by virtue of their queer identities, they "made" their children trans (Kuvalanka et al., 2018).

Thus, given the close and complex relationship between SOGI in our culture, as well as the related (in)visibility and stigma affecting nondominant sexuality/gender presentations, it is important to consider gender–sexuality intersections in our analysis of children's experiences of LGBTQ-related stigma in schools.

The Current Study

In line with Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological theory regarding the impact of broader contexts of social interactions on development, exposure to structural and interpersonal stigma surrounding their LGBTQ parent families may have negative emotional, educational, and social consequences for children with LGBTQ parents. Thus, the focus of this study is (a) parents' descriptions of stigmatization in school; and (b) how they sought to prevent, and respond to, such stigmatization. It builds on prior work using small samples of mostly cisgender lesbian parents to explore, in depth, a broader range of interrelated dimensions related to LGBTQ parent families' experiences in schools. It also includes a quantitative component, whereby certain demographic factors that may increase the likelihood of reporting encounters with homophobia/transphobia at school (i.e., presence of a trans parent; presence of a trans child; school-age children; rural community) as well as decrease the likelihood of stigma (i.e., attending private school) are examined as predictors of the presence or absence of such reports.

Method

Sample

The current sample consisted of 419 LGBTQ parents; see Table 1 for key demographics. Specifically, the sample consisted of 273 cis women (167 lesbian, 50 queer, 41 bisexual, seven pansexual, four gay, one two-spirit, three missing data); 92 cis men (91 gay, one queer); 12 trans men (seven queer, two gay, and one each pansexual, bisexual, and straight); four trans women (two lesbian, one pansexual, one bisexual); and 38 nonbinary/genderqueer (17 queer, 10 lesbian, five pansexual, three bisexual, and one each gay, asexual, and straight). At the couple level, there were 242 cisgender (cis) women in relationships with other cis women (57.8%), herein referred to as women in female couples for simplicity; 92 cis men in relationships

Table 1
Demographics of the Sample (N = 419)

Demographic variable	N	Percent
Gender		
Cis women	273	65.2
Cis men	92	21.9
Trans men	12	2.9
Trans women	4	0.9
Nonbinary	38	9.1
Race		
White only	345	82.3
Of Color	74	17.7
Family income level		
Under $100K	102	24.3
$100–$150K	114	27.2
$151K–$200K	70	16.7
$201K–$250K	51	12.2
$251–$300K	32	7.6
Over $300K	47	11.2
Family building route		
Gestational parent	147	35.1
Nongestational parent	122	29.1
Reciprocal in vitro fertilization	23	5.0
Surrogacy	8	1.9
Private domestic adoption	81	19.3
Public domestic adoption	37	8.8
International adoption	12	2.9
Foster parents	9	2.2
Stepparents	5	1.2
Child via intercourse	21	5.2
Child gender		
At least one cis boy	233	55.6
At least one cis girl	217	51.8
At least one trans/nonbinary child	54	12.9
Child race		
Only White children	233	55.6
At least one child of color	185	44.3
Child age		
At least one child 5 years and under	175	41.8
At least one child 6–10 years	152	36.3
At least one child 11–15 years	149	35.6
At least one child 16–18 years	45	10.7
At least one child 18+ years	35	8.4

with other cis men (22.0%), herein referred to men in male couples for simplicity, and 85 individuals who were trans/nonbinary and/or whose partners were trans/nonbinary (herein referred to as trans; 20.2%). Within this group of 85, 32 were trans with cis women partners; 31 were cis women with trans partners; 15 were trans people with trans partners; and seven were trans people with cis men partners. A total of 352 (84.0%) were married, 15 (3.6%) were divorced, and 11 (2.6%) were separated.

A total of 345 (82.3%) identified as White only, and 74 (17.7%) identified as Of Color. Within the latter group, the following racial categories were endorsed (participants could identify more than one category): Hispanic ($n = 26$, 6.2%); Latino/a/x ($n = 22$, 5.3%); Black/African American ($n = 22$, 5.3%); Asian ($n = 13$, 3.1%); American Indian or Alaskan Native ($n = 5$, 1.2%); and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ($n = 3$, 0.7%). A total of 381 (90.9%) endorsed one racial category; 29 (6.9%) endorsed two; and 9 (2.1%) endorsed three or more racial categories.

Most ($n = 389$, 92.8%) had at least a college degree. Regarding family/combined income, 102 (24.3%) reported less than \$100 K; 114 (27.2%) reported \$100–\$150 K; 70 (16.7%) reported \$151–\$200 K; 51 (12.2%) reported \$201–\$250 K; 32 (7.6%) reported \$251–\$300 K; and 47 (11.2%) reported family income of over \$300 K. Three were missing income information. Most lived in urban or suburban areas; 38 (9.1%) classified their communities as rural.

Most parents ($n = 342$, 92.4%) identified as Democrats; 30 (7.2%) were Independent or Unaffiliated, 16 (3.9%) were Democratic Socialist, nine (2.2%) were Republicans; and one each identified as Green Party and Libertarian. Fifteen (3.6%) self-identified as unaffiliated but "left leaning." One was missing data. Parents lived in a variety of regions in the United States, with the most common states being Massachusetts ($n = 71$, 17.3%), California ($n = 52$, 12.7%), Washington ($n = 36$, 8.8%), Colorado ($n = 26$, 6.3%), New York ($n = 19$, 4.6%), Maryland ($n = 14$, 3.4%), Texas ($n = 12$, 2.9%), Illinois ($n = 11$, 2.7%), Oregon ($n = 11$, 2.7%), North Carolina ($n = 11$, 2.7%), Michigan ($n = 10$, 2.4%), New Jersey ($n = 10$, 2.4%), and Pennsylvania ($n = 10$, 2.4%).

In terms of family building route, 147 (35.1%) were gestational parents to at least one child (they carried and birthed them); 122 (29.1%) were nongestational parents to at least one child (their partner carried); and 23 (5.0%) had at least one child via reciprocal in vitro fertilization (one partner carried and one provided the egg). Eight (1.9%) had at least one child via surrogacy. Eighty-one (19.3%) had at least one child via private domestic adoption; 37 (8.8%) had at least one child adopted via public domestic adoption; and 12 (2.9%) had at least one child adopted internationally. Nine (2.2%) were foster parents, five (1.2%) were stepparents, and 21 (5.2%) had at least one child conceived via sexual intercourse. A total of 74 (17.7%) had used more than one family building route (e.g., they were a gestational parent and a nongestational parent; they were an adoptive parent and a stepparent).

In terms of child gender, 233 (55.6%) were parents of at least one cis boy, 217 (51.8%) were parents of at least one cis girl, 54 (12.9%) were parents to at least one trans, nonbinary, or gender diverse (i.e., trans) child. A total of 233 (55.6%) had only White children. A total of 185 (44.2%) had at least one child Of Color. More specifically, 80 (19%) identified at least one of their children as Black; 54 (12.9%) as Latinx; 29 (6.9%) as Asian; 11 (2.6%) as American Indian child; and 7 (1.7%) as Hawaiian; and 16 (3.8%) indicated another race for at least one child. Over one third of White parents ($n = 123$, 35.9%) had at least one child Of Color, whereas more than three-quarters of parents Of Color had at least one child Of Color ($n = 61$, 82.4%). Almost two-thirds of parents Of Color had at least one White child ($n = 47$, 63.5%, whereas more than three-quarters of White parents had at least one White child ($n = 297$, 86.1%).

A total of 175 (41.8%) had children 5 years old and younger: 119 had one, 51 had two, and five had between three and five children under five. A total of 152 (36.3%) had children 6–10 years old: 113 had one, 34 had two, and five had three children ages 6–10. A total of 149 (35.6%) had children 11–15: 119 had one, 25 had two, and five had 3–4 children this age. Forty-five parents (10.7%) had children aged 16–18: 39 had one, and six had two. Finally, 35 (8.4%) had children over 18: 24 had one, and 11 had 2–4. A total of 259 (61.8%) had at least one child in public school, 114 (27.2%) had at least one child in private school, 30 (7.2%) had at least one child at a charter school, 26 (6.2%) had at least one child being homeschooled, 24 (5.7%) had at least one child in daycare, and 10 (2.4%) had at least one child at a therapeutic school. Thirty-nine (8.8%) indicated "something else" (e.g., virtual or hybrid, $n = 21$).

Procedure

A total of 543 LGBTQ parents were originally surveyed. They completed a 20- to 25-min online survey on family building and parenting in Summer 2020. Recruited via social media and LGBTQ, parenting, and adoption organizations, they were invited to participate if they were an LGBTQ parent of a child 18 years or younger. They were told that the study focused on LGBTQ family building and parenting experiences. Participants were entered into a drawing for one of 25 \$25 Amazon gift cards. The study was approved by the Clark University human subjects review board. All participants signed a consent form.

For the current analysis, we included 419 parents. In addition to excluding individuals with partial or incomplete data, we excluded parents who were both bisexual and in different-gender relationships (e.g., cis women partnered with cis men; $n = 46$) because of the invisible nature of such parents' identities amidst heteronormative assumptions (Hayfield et al., 2013), which likely shields their children from the types of stigmas faced by children of parents who are more "visibly queer" (Gianino et al., 2009). Indeed, many bisexual parents in different-gender relationships do not even share their sexual orientation with their children, at least not until their teen years (Bowling et al., 2017). We also excluded currently single parents ($n = 33$), given the possibility that parents' sexual identity would be less obvious or visible to their children's schools or peers, and children may experience greater choice surrounding whether and how they disclose their parents' sexual orientation, if there is no other same-gender adult in the household who is clearly designated as another parent or caregiver (Gianino et al., 2009; Lapidus, 2004). We also excluded parents who only had infant or very young children ($n = 8$), such that they responded "not applicable" to our central question(s) regarding school heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia.

Measures

Participants were asked, "To what extent has your child(ren) encountered homophobia or transphobia at school?" and asked to

choose from one of the following options: 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, and 5 = *very often*. Through an open-ended query, parents were encouraged to "please elaborate and give examples" of such experiences, if relevant. And, they were queried about "specific ways that schools and daycares were or were not LGBTQ+ inclusive." They were also invited to share how they had advocated for their children in school. Parents were also asked to provide basic demographic information.

Data Analysis

This study used mixed-methods, in that our analysis of survey data involved exploration of both quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) components to address our study aims and make meaningful interpretations and conclusions (Johnson et al., 2007).

Quantitative Analysis

To answer the question of what parent, child, school, and community characteristics predicted any reported child encounter with homophobia/transphobia, we created a dichotomous variable for our outcome, whereby participants' responses to the question, "To what extent has your child encountered homophobia or transphobia at school?" were recoded, such that 0 = *never*, and 1 = *rarely*, sometimes, often, and very often, to represent the presence versus absence of such encounters. A logistic regression was fit, in which characteristics specific to the parent/family (family type: female couple, male couple, couple in which one or both parents are trans), child (age: any children aged 6–17; gender identity: any trans children), school (school type: any children attending private school), and community (rural vs. urban/suburban) were entered as predictors. Female couple and male couple were entered as predictors; thus, couples with at least one trans partner were the default. Although not of substantive interest, we included the presence of multiple children as well, as the likelihood of reporting any stigmatization would seem likely to increase with the number of children in the household. We conducted follow-up analyses to explore whether the number of children (rather than just the presence of more than one child) increased the likelihood of reporting stigma. We also conducted follow-up analyses to determine whether further breaking down child age to younger school-age children (aged 6–10) and older school-age (aged 11–18) made a difference in terms of stigmatization experiences.

Qualitative Analysis

Responses to the open-ended queries were typically three to five sentences of text. The first author, Abbie E. Goldberg, coded the qualitative data using a qualitative content analysis method, which is a standard method for examining responses to open-ended questions and represents a process of identifying and categorizing the primary patterns or themes in the data (Patton, 2015). Qualitative content analysis represents an organized, systematic, and replicable practice of condensing words of text into a smaller number of content categories (Krippendorff, 2004), with the goal of creating a coding system to organize the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The first author's analysis focused on parents' descriptions of their children's experiences of heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia at school, their efforts to prepare their children for such experiences, and their efforts vis a vis the school to enhance inclusivity and acceptance. In approaching the analysis, she aimed to remain mindful of how her life experiences, identities and social locations, and research background informed her initial orientation to the data (A. E. Goldberg & Allen, 2015). In turn, she continually returned to the data to ensure that all key themes, and relevant social locations and contexts that might nuance those themes, were sufficiently explored and documented.

The first author first read all open-ended responses to gain familiarity with the data, including overarching themes in responses. Then, responses were annotated, that is, via line-by-line coding, she labeled phrases relevant to the primary domains of interest (e.g., peers, teachers). These codes were abstracted under larger categories and subcategories, which were positioned in relation to each other, such that connective links were established in an effort to meaningfully capture participants' responses. For example, parents of young children described more ignorance and less hostility by peers. A tentative coding scheme was produced and reapplied to the data, such that all data were then recoded according to the revised coding scheme.

Then, two student research assistants served as auditors and analyzed half of the open-ended portions of the survey, as a basic "check" on primary themes and respondent counts, to strengthen the credibility of the analysis. Author and auditor counts for codes and subcodes were highly similar; interrater agreement was typically over 92%. Minor discrepancies were discussed and reconciled. For example, one coder counted parents talking to teachers and school staff under one code, and another differentiated between parents talking to teachers versus staff. This led the author to clarify the definition of the coding category and make minor modification—such that, for example, these two types of encounters were collapsed under one larger category. Once the main coder and auditors reached consensus, the second author, JuliAnna Z. Smith—whose social locations, life experiences, and research expertise differ from and complement that of the first author—provided feedback about the finalized coding structure, resulting in rearranging several sections for cohesion and flow. See Table 2 for a comprehensive description of all themes, with counts and examples for each.

Findings

Quantitative Findings

Participants were asked, "To what extent has your child encountered homophobia or transphobia at school?" A total of 147 (35.1%) said that their children had never encountered homophobia or transphobia at school; 164 (39.1%) said rarely; 93 (22.2%) said sometimes; 13 (3.1%) said often; and 2 (.5%) said very often.

Logistic Regression

To create the outcome for our logistic regression, exposure to homophobia/transphobia (i.e., exposure to stigma) was dichotomized such that 0 = *never* (n = 147, 35%) and 1 = *at least rarely* (n = 272, 65%). Predictors included parent type (i.e., female couple, n = 242, 57.8%; male couple, n = 92, 22.0%; couple in which at least one parent is trans, n = 85, 20.2%); child gender (any trans children; n = 35, 8.3%); child age (any children 6 and up; n = 280, 66.8%); number of children (multiple children; n = 238, 54.1%); school type (any children attending private school; n = 114, 27.2%); and community (live in a rural area; n = 38, 9.1%). The

Table 2
Key Themes (N = 355)

Theme	Description	N (%)	Examples
	Encounters with stigma in the school setting		
Encountering structural stigma: indirect marginalization through erasure and invisibility	Being excluded at the school level, such as via assignments and curricula, which are grounded in heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions	79 (22.3)	"Not so much bullying. More like exclusion. Like when they do stories, it's always a mommy it's mommy and daddy … Or when they do games or play at school, it's always a mom and dad … It would be nice for him to be included more." "Preschool teacher told him that boys had to marry girls, we corrected it."
Reacting to and addressing structural stigma	Responding to a lack of institutional inclusion by speaking to teachers and recommending specific changes and/or resources	50 (14.1)	"We advocated for more inclusive family curriculum activities in early grades and for more inclusive sex education."
Encountering interpersonal stigma: direct marginalization through bullying	Confronting explicit heterosexism, directed at one's family structure; facing LGBTQ family centered stigma and discrimination	39 (11.0)	"Children assuming they are gay because of [their] gay parents." "Most of the comments [are] from peers snickering or asking rude questions about why our kids have two dads." "Otr … kids have had to insist, repeatedly, that they do have two moms and that it is indeed possible to not have a dad. It wears on them and has been very stressful."
Reacting to and addressing interpersonal stigma	Intervention through the school system, such as talking to teachers about teasing and bullying	15 (4.2)	"We have talked with school officials about instances of bullying."
	Other forms of interpersonal stigma		
Indirect marginalization via lack of understanding, unintelligibility	Confronting a lack of understanding, ignorance by peers about LGBTQ families (e.g., questions; disbelief); curiosity about one's family structure	43 (12.1)	"Other students told my daughter she had to have a dad because everyone has a dad." "Usually it's young children who don't know better; they innocently ask why they don't have a dad, for example."
Indirect marginalization via exposure to homophobic climate	Witnessing people, i.e., peers, making homophobic remarks at school; not directed at family or child	27 (7.6)	"Middle school has presented some homophobia and inappropriate language, but not necessarily directed at my kid. They just have observed it." "Children … use the word gay in a derogatory way." "Beginning around 7th grade more issues began to arise for our oldest and continue through high school. Kids using homophobic and racist language, not directed at her specifically but in general it seems the climate in the schools have become a lot more difficult. I also think this has worsened since the 2016 election."
Beyond family structure: encounters with stigmatization focused on child identities	Confronting explicit stigma and discrimination aimed at child's gender-nonconforming behavior, appearance, identity, or sexuality	25 (7.0)	"In the after school program, our nonbinary child has experienced repeated transphobia from other children. In preschool one of our children experienced homophobic comments from another child repeatedly." "Both of our children have been bullied for having worn nail polish to school and/or for liking pink." "My kids are constantly told by peers that their interests aren't for boys."
Explaining a lack of exposure to stigma at school	Lack of confrontation with heterosexism; parent attributes it to geographic context or child developmental stage	45 (12.7)	"Not that we know of yet, but [my child is] just in preschool."
	Proactive protection strategies aimed to reduce exposure to stigmatization		
Choose LGBTQ-inclusive settings	Chose LGBTQ-inclusive schools, communities to enhance the likelihood of inclusivity, acceptance	26 (7.3)	"We put our kids in independent schools with a reputation for LGBTQI inclusiveness." "We also chose to send her to a small, private Montessori school that's a very welcoming environment."
Inform and educate teachers and school staff	Talked to schools, teachers about their family, to educate them and provide opportunities for questions and discussion	99 (27.9)	"We are open about our family structure and Ava has always talked about her open adoption." "We tell each teacher before school starts that they have two dads so that they aren't made to feel left out when asked to draw pictures of their mom and dad, etc."

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Theme	Description	N (%)	Examples
Volunteer and be visible	Volunteering in the classroom or at the school level, to exert influence, stay alert, and impact school climate	46 (13.0)	"I have heavily volunteered in his extracurriculars to exhibit normalcy for families such as ours" "I volunteer to teach DEI lessons to kids, and sit on the school's parent advisory board."
Proactive strategies aimed to promote children's resilience amidst stigmatization			
Normalize and celebrate diverse families	Emphasizing family diversity, pride in family structure, to children, often with the help of resources (e.g., books)	25 (7.0)	"We have explained that families all look different and we can appreciate that." "She was maybe 2 when she told me it was sad she didn't have a daddy, which she heard a teacher say. We talked, and continue to talk about how special our family is just as it is."
Preparation for encountering and responding to bias	Preparing children for the possibility of ignorance, mistreatment; empowering children to respond (e.g., prioritizing safety; sticking up for selves and others; maintaining a sense of autonomy regarding if/how they wish to correct others)	60 (16.9)	"We have tried to speak with them openly about the differences in our family make up to prepare them." "We've talked about the discrimination gay people face, and that 'gay' can be used as an insult. We've asked him to stick up for kids at school if bullies are picking on them for being like us." "I tell my kids to say what they feel comfortable answering but not to lie."

Note. LGBTQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (trans), and queer; DEI = diversity, equity, and inclusion.

expectation was that parents in couples with one or more trans parents, parents of trans children, parents of children 6 years or older, and parents in rural areas, would be more likely to report at least rare encounters with stigma; and, parents of children in private school would be less likely to report stigma.

Family type was significant, such that parents in male couples had 57% lower odds of reporting stigma than parents in families in which at least one parent was trans, $B = -0.85$, $SE = 0.39$, Wald $= -2.15$, $Exp(B) = 0.43$, $p = .03$. Having children 6 years or older was significant, such that the odds were 729% greater that parents of school-age children would report that they faced stigma at school, $B = 2.11$, $SE = 0.26$, Wald $= 7.99$, $Exp(B) = 8.29$, $p < .001$. Private school was not a significant predictor once other predictors were taken into account, despite having a bivariate chi-square association significant at the level of a trend ($\chi^2 = 3.83$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$).

Follow-Up Analyses. As some research suggests that the likelihood of heterosexism and stigma may increase as children enter middle school and beyond (e.g., Cody et al., 2017; Gartrell et al., 2005), we conducted follow-up analyses taking this into account. Parents of school-age children were broken down into those with younger (ages 6–10; $n = 98$, 23.6%) and older (ages 11–18; $n = 151$, 36.3%) school-age children (while the default category remained those with only children under 6). In addition, in order to better capture the effect of having multiple children, we entered the number of children as a continuous variable ($M = 1.72$ children, $SD = 0.88$). The odds of reporting stigma were 218% greater for parents with younger school-age children than those who only had children under 6, $B = 1.16$, $SE = 0.29$, Wald $= 3.97$, $Exp(B) = 3.18$, $p < .001$, while the odds were 619% greater for those with older school-age children, $B = 1.97$, $SE = 0.29$, Wald $= 6.71$, $Exp(B) = 7.19$, $p < .001$. In addition, number of children emerged as significant, with parents having multiple children exhibiting 39% greater odds than those without, $B = 0.33$, $SE = 0.14$, Wald $= 2.27$, $Exp(B) = 1.39$, $p = .02$. Family type fell to the level of a trend, such that parent in male couples had 52% lower odds of reporting stigma than parents in families in which at least one parent was trans, $B = -0.73$, $SE = 0.38$, Wald $= -1.90$, $Exp(B) = 0.48$, $p = .057$.

To determine whether there was a significant difference between middle school-age children and older school-age children, we fit a second follow-up model where the default category was changed to parents who only had children 11 years and under (and at least one child aged 6–11 years). We found that parents with only children under 6 showed 86% lower odds of reporting stigma, $B = -1.95$, $SE = 0.31$, Wald $= -6.30$, $Exp(B) = 0.14$, $p < .001$, while parents with children up to age 18 (and at least one child aged 12–18) exhibited 75% greater odds of reporting stigma, but only at the level of a trend, $B = 0.56$, $SE = 0.32$, Wald $= 1.73$, $Exp(B) = 1.75$, $p = .08$. In this model, male couples had 61% lower odds of reporting stigma than couples with a trans member, $B = -0.94$, $SE = 0.40$, Wald $= -2.34$, $Exp(B) = 0.39$, $p = .02$. Number of children became nonsignificant, which was likely a result of having two highly, negatively correlated variables ($r = -.256$) that were also related to the outcome simultaneously in the model, that is, number of children and having at least one middle school child (but none 12–18).

Qualitative Findings

A total of 355 parents (84.7%) provided narrative accounts of their children's experiences. Their accounts nuance and expand on the

quantitative findings. These participants did not differ significantly from those who did not provide narrative accounts on any of demographic variables central to the analyses, namely type of couple; child age groupings; presence of a trans child; school type; and community type.

Encounters With Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Transphobia in the School Setting

Participants were invited to provide examples of and elaborate on their children's encounters with stigmatization (i.e., heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia) in schools, as well as how they tried to prepare their children to deal with stigma, and sought to advocate for their children at school. Parents' descriptions of children's encounters with stigmatization can be classified as capturing both structural (school) and interpersonal (mostly peer) stigmatization. Within each of these domains, some parents referred to direct or explicit marginalization, while others described more indirect or implicit marginalization.

Structural Stigma: Indirect Marginalization Through Erasure and Invisibility. Seventy-nine parents (22.3%) described ways that their children had been marginalized indirectly at the institutional (school) level, narrating how their children had been excluded via assignments, curricula, and language that was fundamentally heteronormative and cisnormative, thus erasing or excluding LGBTQ parent families (see Table 2). These parents noted that schools "presume[d] a gender binary and heterosexual family structure," resulting in various types of implicit exclusion. Tom, a White cis gay father, said: "There is a constant drum of 'Where's your mom?' Teachers specifically test my kids' reading comprehension using books that are mom-centered. If you call them on it, they say they didn't know." Clarissa, a White cis queer mother, noted that her family "live[d] in a liberal city with strong anti-discrimination laws," and that although they had not faced much homophobia at daycare, they had encountered "occasional microaggressions. There's also just the general heteronormativity of childcare staff using 'mommies and daddies.'" Thus, these parents highlighted ways that their families were implicitly invalidated through language and materials that assumed a heterosexual family structure.

Ten parents also highlighted how institutional exclusion manifested in the form of a focus on White, biogenetically related families, thus marginalizing their children on the basis of race and adoptive status. Rachel, a White cis lesbian mother with a biracial child, observed a lack of representation in terms of "adoption, race, and gender expression" in school materials and curricula. Ava, a White cis lesbian mother with two adopted children of color, shared, "We asked the teacher to tell stories in class that weren't always about little White boys."

Reacting to and Addressing Structural Stigma. Some parents (n = 50; 14.1%) described how they responded to a lack of institutional inclusion by speaking to teachers and recommending specific changes and/or resources. Many of them (n = 30) made requests or suggestions regarding paperwork, forms, and/or language in response to implicit marginalization, sharing, for example: "We asked his daycare to change the forms to be more inclusive of same-gender parents" and "We had multiple discussions with the schools to remind them to broaden their vocabulary to be more inclusive, such as say 'parents' rather than Mommy and Daddy."

Some (n = 15) described offering input in response to curricular exclusion. These often involved Mother's/Father's Day assignments, celebrations, or activities. "We asked for alternatives for some of the insensitive 'tell me about your family history' assignments," said Marisol, a White lesbian cis adoptive mother. Sara, a White cis lesbian mother, noted that her child's preschool teacher showed them "I Love Daddy" frames that they would be using for a Father's Day craft. Sara "pointed out to her that the project wouldn't work for our children," and then contacted the school director to say that "information about family structure should be communicated to teachers as students move to new classrooms … such an easy procedure that would make a big difference." Indeed, sometimes change was not immediate or satisfactory. Said Lila, a White cis lesbian mother:

> Our childcare center seemed very confused by my spouse's chosen parent name (we go by Mama and Baba). We had our child's crafts come home with the wrong parent name (once mama/mommy, and a few times "Bubba") in spite of explaining to the school. This issue did get corrected with feedback.

This example highlights how, when parents' parental identifiers do not neatly fit into gendered categories, this may render their families additionally indecipherable within educational settings.

Some (n = 7) said that they had also sought to address issues related to racial inclusion and awareness, such as through talking to teachers and offering resources: "We donate Asian-American and queer books and books about racism." A few (n = 4) also noted conversations with teachers about inclusion and awareness related to their children's adoption or adoptive status (e.g., pointing out the insensitivities and limitations associated with family tree assignments).

Interpersonal Stigma: Direct Marginalization Through Bullying. Thirty-nine parents (11.0%) described explicit marginalization at the interpersonal level, whereby their children confronted heterosexism directed at their families, most often by peers, but occasionally by teachers. Such encounters were most often identified as occurring during middle school but also occurred in elementary school. Children were interrogated, teased, or bothered because of their LGBTQ family (or absence of a mother/father), facing comments such as "Having two moms is gross" and "Are you gay because your parents are gay?" Tessa, a White cis lesbian woman said: "A boy told my son his moms should go to jail for being married." Shay, a White cis lesbian mother shared, "Religious students have told our children that their parents will go to hell." In a rare example of a parent who described their child's exposure to anti-LGBTQ stigma as high-frequency and chronic, Max, a White nonbinary queer parent said:

> My son has been called the f word slur [faggot] at school (first time was second grade), he was told that I have HIV/AIDS by a classmate (he was in 5th grade and I took the opportunity to talk to him and his friends about how HIV is transmitted and that stigmatizing people based on their HIV status is wrong), he was told by camp counselors that he wasn't allowed to use the word gay and I called to tell them that he is allowed to describe the people in his family as gay.

Peer mistreatment sometimes extended into children's friendship groups. Five parents described how their children were excluded or "dumped" by friends in ways that implicated their friends' parents' anti-LGBTQ views: "My oldest children have had friends text in group chats that being gay is a sin. They are often not invited to

sleepovers or birthday parties if their parents know we are gay," said Dave, a White cis gay father.

Five parents described how children had faced not just heterosexism and homophobia, but cissexism and transphobia. About her trans partner, Fran, a White cis bisexual mother, said, "Kids used to ask who she was, why was her voice deep."

Four parents highlighted how their family's multiracial status had intersected with their two-mother or two-father family structure to nuance the mistreatment their children faced, and to amplify the messages of family invalidation that they received. Pam, a White cis bisexual mother shared: "We've had conversations with our kids when other children … have made comments about them having two moms and also two White moms. Sometimes kids will question that our children are related since they are different races/ethnicities too." Ciara, a biracial (Black/White) cis lesbian mother, shared:

> My White son has received pushback when I would pick him up (he is blonde haired, blue eyed/I am Black/White so brown skin, hair, eyes) [with] kids telling him that I'm not his mom. We just tell the kids politely that I am and then later discuss with our kids that families are created in a number of ways and that ours may not have come about in a "typical" way, it is still a family nonetheless.

Reacting to and Addressing Interpersonal Stigma. Fifteen parents (4.2%) described how they sought to redress instances of homophobia or heterosexism directed toward their children via intervention through the school system, i.e., talking to teachers and school administrators. Said Brie, a White cis lesbian mother, "There have been a few issues where I contacted guidance counselors and teachers regarding homophobic language directed at my daughter." Some recounted positive outcomes associated with these conversations. Shay, whose child had faced peers telling her that her parents were "sinners" said, "We addressed that with the school and in the last few years have noticed teachers teaching more diversity." Rey, a White nonbinary bisexual parent, shared:

> Our older child experienced some bullying related to her other parent's appearance. She is easily identified as trans, and another student kept referring to her "dad" and asking why "he" was wearing a dress. When I found out I told the teacher what was going on, and she was supportive and promised to pay closer attention, and asked me if I had any books or resources she could share with the class about gender diversity, to try to meet it head on.

Five parents described how they had supported their children in talking to their teachers, thus helping their children to advocate for themselves and confront problematic behaviors. Meredith, a White cis bisexual mother shared, "When she was in elementary school, each year I would educate the teacher on different types of families and my expectations when it came to my daughter. Starting in middle school my daughter was the advocate. I supported her."

Five parents described how efforts to address heterosexism with teachers did not result in any changes, leading them to take more substantial action. Specifically, they filed complaints with the school, requested a switch in teachers, or switched their children to new schools ("We ultimately left that school [because of] a lack of diversity and support").

Other Forms of Interpersonal Stigma.

Indirect Marginalization Through Lack of Understanding and Unintelligibility. Forty-three (12.1%) noted that their children had encountered a lack of understanding or confusion surrounding their LGBTQ family structure from peers, whereby children were not explicitly hostile toward them, but their questions and comments revealed ignorance regarding LGBTQ parent families. These children were typically described as younger (e.g., elementary school), and parents recognized their lack of understanding as developmentally appropriate but also rooted in a heteronormative society and school system. Their children's peers were often described as showing disbelief or confusion surrounding the idea that a child had two moms or dads. Lori, a cis Latina lesbian mother, said, "It is more in the realm of microaggressions: for example, 'Where's your dad?' From extremely young, our older [child] would answer matter-of-factly that he does not have a dad." Roger, a White cis gay father, said: "My children are still young but they do get questions, such as 'How were you born, if you don't have a mom?' 'What happened to your mom?' … We have discussed the specialness of our family."

Indirect Marginalization Through Exposure to Homophobic Climate. Some parents ($n = 27$; 7.6%) referenced school climate issues, whereby children had witnessed or were chronically exposed to homophobic language (e.g., "fag," "that's so gay") that was not directed at them but nevertheless impacted them. Sonja, a White queer cis mother, said, "They've witnessed it, heard slurs but not directed at them." Ethan, a White cis gay man, said, "His friends and classmates make reference to 'gay.' We've asked him to challenge the use of the term."

Beyond Family Structure: Encounters With Stigmatization Focused on Child Identities. Some parents described stigma that centered not on their family structure or parents' SOGI, but their children's sexuality or gender identity and expression. Specifically, 25 participants (7.0%) described negative treatment (e.g., comments or teasing, typically from peers) aimed at children's gender-nonconforming identity, appearance, or behavior. Such behaviors were generally rooted in cisgenderism and heterosexism—the assumption of a gender binary and associated expectations of stereotypical behavior and appearance. Shari, a White cis bisexual woman, said, "At our first preschool, she got teased for having short hair." Chelsea, a White cis bisexual woman, shared, "My son wore glittery boots and had shoulder-length hair in kindergarten. Other kids bullied him over it." Amy a Black cis lesbian, said, "In fifth grade, older boys bullied my son because he had his left ear pierced and they said [it] meant he was gay."

Explaining a Lack of Exposure to Stigmatization at School. Some parents provided an explanation for their assertion that their children had generally not encountered stigma at school. Namely, 45 parents (12.7%) invoked contextual factors (e.g., where they lived, school type) or their children's young age to explain their lack of exposure to stigma. Cary, a White cis lesbian, said: "We live in an extremely liberal area so the kids know many other kids with lesbian parents. It is never really an issue." Tara, a White cis lesbian, said, "Our daughter is too young and has been more isolated than normal for [a year] due to COVID."

Three parents acknowledged uncertainty associated with an assumed lack of stigma, noting that they were relying on children's reports. Said Bea, a Black cis lesbian mother, "My child has never expressed having these experiences; however, because she goes to a Catholic high school, I often wonder about her lived experience in the school."

Proactive Strategies Aimed to Reduce Exposure to Stigmatization

Some parents spoke to proactive efforts they had made to reduce or offset their children's exposure to stigma. These strategies focused

on selection of environments, talking to teachers, engaging with schools, and fostering their children's resilience. Thus, they sought to control what they could, with the knowledge that they "can't control everything in the world."

Choose LGBTQ-Inclusive Environments. Twenty-six parents (7.3%) said that they sought out LGBTQ-affirming environments as a way of accomplishing the goals of normalization, resilience, and pride. Ten specifically sought out schools that were LGBTQ-inclusive. "We have gone to lengths to put them in environments where they can feel pretty 'normal'," said Allie, a Latinx cis lesbian. "We chose a school community with LGBT representation at every level—students, staff, admin, board, etc.," said Ora, a White cis lesbian mother. Eight parents chose to live in LGBTQ friendly communities as a means of proactively creating a sense of normalcy and inclusion. Five parents sought out parenting groups with other LGBTQ families. Deb a biracial cis lesbian mother, explained, "We joined a family pride group and participated in play groups with other LGBT families … so our kids wouldn't think or feel like they were the only ones with same-sex parents."

Inform and Educate Teachers and School Staff. Some parents ($n = 99$; 27.9%) framed their efforts to minimize their children's exposure to stigma in terms of openness about their family vis a vis the school, with many noting purposeful conversations with staff at the beginning of each year, aimed to minimize curricular and classroom exclusion. Liliana, a Latinx cis pansexual mother, shared, "We were very up-front with who we are as a family, and that we expect representation of all types of families in school, and that this is coupled with teaching that all people should be treated with kindness and respect." Several noted that their approach had shifted according to children's age. Sam, a White cis lesbian mother, said, "In preschool we always talked to the teachers about our family before the year began. As the kids get older we've pulled back to an as-needed basis."

Some parents tried to head off potential confusion or negative reactions from teachers by providing additional details regarding their family structure or personal identities ("We explain to his teachers our parental names so that [they] can understand what our son is talking about"; "I always tell the teachers in advance that I am a trans gestational parent so they don't think my kids are lying when they say their father gave birth to them"). Proactive advocacy did not always result in inclusion or acceptance. Hunter, a White gay trans man, said, "My son's daycare has a note on my file that I am trans and my son calls me dad. Most of his teachers follow this. His current teacher does not and calls me mommy to him and it confuses him a lot."

Seven parents emphasized that their introduction of family diversity included not just parents' SOGI, but encompassed other elements of what made their family unique, such as an involved sperm donor dad or their family's open adoption. "We are just generally out and open about our sexuality and families, including donor fathers and open adoptions," said Kristen, a White cis lesbian mother. "We always make it clear to teachers that our daughter has two moms, and when appropriate we let them know she's adopted," said Carol, a White cis lesbian mother.

Some of these parents ($n = 13$) proactively donated resources, materials, and/or books to schools. They did this to enhance the inclusivity of children's classroom and explicitly signpost family diversity ("We provided them with different books on adoption and LGBTQ+ families").

Volunteer and Be Visible. Some parents ($n = 46$; 13.0%) said that they had volunteered in the classroom (e.g., speaking about their family or about family diversity in general; $n = 14$) or school in general (e.g., volunteering for trips or events; serving on committees; $n = 19$). They did this to cultivate an LGBTQ-affirming environment and engender understanding and acceptance of their family. Said Becky, a Black cis lesbian mother, "We did a presentation to the first-grade class when a few kids told him he had to have a father. With the school's permission, we shared how our family was created. Other parents joined in and shared their stories as well so as to not single-out our son." By being visible and involved, they hoped to serve as models of engaged LGBTQ parenting—and to shape school staff's treatment of their children by gaining favor and credibility. Said Zoe, a White cis lesbian, "I mostly just try and be really present and involved. I figure if I chaperone and bring enough cupcakes, everyone knows me and that helps." Deb said, "Being out and being active in my kids' schools (coming in and reading to the class, bringing in baked treats, helping with parties, being part of career day) normalized for my kids' classmates and teachers that there are same-gender parents." Rex, a White cis gay father, said: "My presence in those spaces is a constant reminder to the staff that there is someone in the room. I am always mentioning my spouse as my husband and … I can at times dress a little bit flamboyantly."

Those who served on larger school committees (e.g., parent-teacher association, diversity, equity, and inclusion) often described this as a purposeful move to have visibility and influence at the school level. Rey said, "I try to stay active in the parent-teacher association so there will be at least one queer parent reminding them that these are things they need to be paying attention to." Bess, a White cis lesbian mother, said that she had "joined the school's parent teacher organization to keep a closer relationship with the principal and school community."

Proactive Strategies Aimed to Promote Children's Resilience Amidst Stigmatization

Many parents emphasized proactive strategies that they had engaged in to support their children's resilience amidst the inevitability of heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia. In this way, they spoke to how they aimed to promote their children's pride in their families, minimize exposure to stigmatization, and prepare them to face and respond to marginalization.

Normalize and Celebrate Diverse Families. Twenty-five parents (7.0%), many of whom had young children, underscored the messages they wanted their children to internalize about their families. These parents spoke to how they sought to normalize and celebrate diverse families, as well as to help their children to see their own families as special and unique. In this way, they sought to insulate their children from the negative impact of stigmatizing messaging by building up their sense of pride and resilience vis a vis their family. Alex, a White queer nonbinary parent, said, "We are a queer and mixed-race family, so we have had lots of conversations about the strengths there are in being different from each other, but learning from each other." Rich, a White cis gay father, narrated how he talked to his child: "Most people have a mommy and a daddy … You have two daddies. Some people think having two daddies is weird, but it's probably just because they haven't met a family like ours. We think it makes us cooler." Renee, a Black cis queer mother, said:

> We try to build them up about how their lives are unique. We say they have four moms to acknowledge their birth mother, important foster

parents, and us, so the story isn't just about being part of a queer family. It's about being an adoptee as well.

Preparation for Encountering and Responding to Bias. Some parents ($n = 60$; 16.9%), particularly those with elementary and middle school-age children, described how they tried to prepare their children for the reality of, and how to respond to, stigma. Their messages about how to respond centered on safety and nonviolence, confident self-advocacy, and autonomous decision-making regarding disclosure.

Specifically, 47 parents (13.3%) described how they tried to support their children to deal with stigma by educating them about and preparing them the types of assumptions and interactions they might encounter in school. Xavier, a White cis gay father, said, "We talk about the presence of homophobia in the culture and the role of religion in promoting and perpetuating gay-negative ideology." Nic, a Latinx cis gay father, said, "Once he reached middle school, I told him, 'Kids at school may say things about the ways gay men have sex, but that may or may not have anything to do with what Daddy and I do or don't.'"

Thirteen parents (3.6%) detailed how they had sought to teach their children how to respond to ignorance and teasing by peers. Their messages centered on safety and nonviolence, coupled with self-advocacy. They emphasized to children that they should aim for nonviolent solutions above all else—to "rise above the bullies" and remember, "kindness above all else." They underscored safety first, noting: "I try to teach them to make sure they're physically safe first, and then worry about anything else," and "We try to remind our child that this is led by ignorance and the best way to counter it is by taking to an adult when it happens." At the same time, many encouraged their children to balance a concern for safety with "standing up for themselves and others" and "using their voices, when possible."

Navigating Outness Versus Privacy

A cross-cutting theme was parents' observation that their children—particularly as they moved from elementary into middle school and beyond—were sometimes increasingly private (i.e., less likely to disclose) about their family structure and parents' SOGI. Rosa, a White cis lesbian mother, described how her middle school daughter had begun to distance herself from her other parent, who was nonbinary: "Being around my spouse in public makes my daughter feel weird and unlike the other children. We're working hard on this, even though we know it's age appropriate for her to want to be like all the other kids she knows with a … mom and dad."

Shay reflected:

> We've noticed when our children were younger they were more open with their peers (about having two moms) and as they get older less open. We talk about it as a family. We make space for feelings. Our oldest is choosing a high school that is known for tolerance and acceptance and wants to be more open in the future.

In some cases, parents commented on how their children simply wanted to "blend in" with other children. In turn, while they did not explicitly lie about their families, they chose to use vague language about, or avoid detailed descriptions of, their parents, to avoid questions or interrogation. Parents generally encouraged their children to make their own decisions about whether or not they wished to explain their families, particularly as they grew older. Parents tended to contextualize this guidance by noting their

children's entitlement to increasing independence, autonomy, and discretion when deciding what, if anything, they wished to share about their families. Roger, a White cis gay father, said: "They're prepared to answer but, honestly, sometimes they don't want to be different than everyone else. They don't want to answer all the questions they get … I tell my kids to say what they feel comfortable answering but not to lie." Steph, a White bisexual cis mother, said, "We tell them that they are free to answer the questions or to tell the child that they don't want to talk about it right then."

Discussion

This study makes several important contributions. It examines LGBTQ parents' reports of their children's exposure to LGBTQ-related stigma at school, in a large sample, which includes trans parent families. Furthermore, it highlights how parents both seek to prevent and respond to children's encounters with stigma—an understudied area within the small literature on LGBTQ parent families' school experiences.

The findings of our logistic regression build on prior qualitative work suggesting a tendency for LGBTQ parents of children in private school to report less overt LGBTQ-related stigma (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2018, 2020), as well as prior quantitative work indicating a tendency for LGBTQ parents of children in rural areas to report greater levels of victimization (A. E. Goldberg & Garcia, 2020; Power et al., 2014). We failed to replicate those findings in this sample, although private school attendance was related to a lower likelihood of reporting stigma in bivariate analyses, at the level of a trend. Future work should disentangle types of private schools: perhaps its effect was diluted by the fact that we did not differentiate between religious and secular private schools, for example. Future work should also pursue more fine-grained analysis of geographic factors (e.g., percent voting Democrat or Republican in a given zip code or county) and how they may relate to perceptions of stigma at school.

Our logistic regression findings do support prior, primarily qualitative, research (e.g., Leddy et al., 2012), suggesting that parents of older children are more likely to report child experiences with stigma than parents of younger children. Of note is that is somewhat inevitable as there are simply more years of opportunity for stigma to have occurred with older children; Furthermore, our follow-up analyses clarified that although younger school-age children were indeed more likely to have experienced stigma than children under six (consistent with our qualitative findings wherein parents sometimes explained a lack of stigmatization experiences by citing their children's young age), older school-age children (i.e., middle school and beyond) were the most likely to have experienced stigma. Such findings provide further support for qualitative reports that teasing and marginalization experiences may be especially salient for older children (e.g., Cody et al., 2017; Gianino et al., 2009). Our follow-up analyses also reveal, unsurprisingly, that having more children is also associated with a greater likelihood of reporting stigma. Significantly, our quantitative findings also provide support for the notion that trans parent families are more likely to experience stigma in schools (at least compared to gay male parent families), a possibility suggested by qualitative work (Haines et al., 2014), but not yet empirically demonstrated in a large sample, to the best of our knowledge. Although children's gender identity (i.e., having a trans child) was not predictive of stigma, children's gender nonconformity emerged in the qualitative data as a domain that may amplify

or nuance peer stigma, and deserves further attention in research with LGBTQ families.

Our qualitative analyses revealed rich examples of both structural and interpersonal stigmatization, which we quantified for the purposes of demonstrating the frequencies within this particular sample as well as providing a sense of the range and types of stigma that children reportedly encountered. At the structural level, parents detailed a range of ways their children had been excluded or erased in the school system. In evaluating these findings, which highlight the potential for children of LGBTQ parents to receive less than an equal education given their families' erasure from course material (A. E. Goldberg, 2023), it is essential to highlight the need for school policies that can enhance inclusion of children with LGBTQ parents. Many teachers do not receive any training or education on the topic of sexuality or gender diversity or LGBTQ parent families (Kintner-Duffy et al., 2012); in turn, systematic inclusion of these topics in teacher training and educational programs should be a priority.

The current study documented different types of interpersonal marginalization, which appeared to be in part related to children's age, such that parents cast their children's encounters with invalidation by young (e.g., pre-elementary school) peers as less hostile and more reflective of developmental stage and their internalization of societal heteronormativity (e.g., women are married to men). Such findings point to the potential for early interventions in the classroom or school to interrupt heteronormativity before it takes more virulent, upsetting forms—indeed, parents of older children spoke less forgivingly about their children's encounters with peer mistreatment. Amidst knowledge of the harm that such interpersonal encounters can cause for youth with LGBTQ parents (A. E. Goldberg & Garcia, 2020), teacher and school efforts to prevent and if necessary address interpersonal stigmatization is of crucial importance.

Findings also point to how children's race and adoptive status may have intersected with their family structure to impact experiences of marginalization. Children of LGBTQ parents are more likely to be adopted and to be in mixed-race families than parents of non-LGBTQ-parent families (Gates, 2013; S. A. E. Goldberg & Conron, 2018), thus potentially compounding the stigma they face (e.g., related to being "given up" by their "real" parents, and not "belonging" in their adoptive families). Children of color with LGBTQ parents may face marginalization in the peer setting based on the multiple ways that they are "different" (Gianino et al., 2009). Although few parents overall commented on these intersections among race and family structure, the examples that participants provided are quite powerful—and clearly underscore the importance of recognizing LGBTQ parent families as heterogeneous and diverse with respect to family building route and family racial/ethnic make-up.

Some parents also shared that their children were exposed to a more indirect form of stigma—hearing antigay remarks at school, which likely impacted them in unique ways. Recalling that only 28% of the 154 teens with LGBTQ parents in GLSEN's survey said that school staff often intervened when overhearing antigay remarks (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008), it is essential that teachers and staff recognize the harm that their inaction may be causing. Studies of LGBTQ youth have established the negative effects of direct (e.g., being teased) and indirect (e.g., hearing words like "faggot") experiences of heterosexism on feelings of safety, belonging, and connection (Norris et al., 2018)—findings that may extend to children with LGBTQ parents.

Parents' efforts to respond to marginalization took multiple forms, including speaking directly to school staff—a strategy that is not always easy for LGBTQ parents, as it involves interpersonal risk and feelings of discomfort (A. E. Goldberg, 2014). Such efforts sometimes, but not always, seemed to result in positive change on the part of staff. Parents also sought to prevent marginalization by becoming involved in schools, echoing prior work showing high levels of school involvement by middle-class LG parents (A. E. Goldberg & Smith, 2017; A. E. Goldberg, Black, Manley, et al., 2017). Anticipating the potential for exclusion, LGBTQ parents may be especially invested in having a voice in their children's schools, although this may be harder for LGBTQ working-class parents or those with difficult school histories (Nixon, 2011). Still, parents described a range of ways that they hoped their involvement might effect change. For example, they hoped that by being visibly present as concerned, active community members, they might encourage staff to view their families more favorably—or at least not discriminate against them.

Parents also hoped to instill resilience in their children such that any negative effects of peer and school heterosexism and homophobia might be mitigated—reflecting their attunement to the importance of empowering their children to feel positively about themselves and their families (see also A. E. Goldberg et al., 2016; Oakley et al., 2017) amidst established connections between exposure to stigma and victimization and poor psychological adjustment (A. E. Goldberg & Garcia, 2020; Vyncke et al., 2014). Their efforts to build up their children's sense of pride in their families echo and compliment findings from studies with adults of LG parents, who often describe expansive notions of family, emphasizing the significance of love and security over biological relations and traditional gender roles in their own family and families in general (Clarke & Demetriou, 2016).

Some parents raised the issue of how children's experiences of stigma varied as they grew older, especially in relation to their peers. Parents of younger children described other children asking seemingly innocent questions, with more aggressive interpersonal interactions and teasing becoming more common as children grew older (i.e., middle school and beyond). Parents described reducing their involvement and oversight over time, encouraging and respecting children's growing ability to become their own advocates. Parents also discussed children wanting more to maintain more privacy about their families in middle school onward. In turn, parents narrated how they increasingly encouraged children's autonomy in determining if and how much to share about their families in school and social situations, reflecting their awareness of their children's developmental stage and the importance of allowing them greater control over disclosure of their family situation as they grew older (A. E. Goldberg & Byard, 2020).

Of note is that the inclusion of trans parents in our study helps to illuminate both the concerns they share with cis LGB parents, as well as to highlight issues that are more specific to, or play out differently for, trans parents. In particular, parents discussed how parents' gender presentation sometimes appeared to amplify the peer stigma that children encountered, engendering additional scrutiny and vitriol amidst the numerous ways that parents deviated from the heterosexual mother–father family "ideal." Research is needed that builds on the nascent literature on trans parents' encounters with schools (Bower-Brown & Zadeh, 2021; Haines et al., 2014) and further illuminates how parents' concerns and strategies vis a vis school stigma

(and advocating for their children) vary as a function of parent gender identity and presentation.

Limitations

This study is limited by its reliance on a sample of mostly White, well-educated parents, as well as data limitations. For example, among parents of multiple children, it was difficult to tell which child they were referring to in the open-ended data since we did not ask them to specify and nor did we give directions about which child to focus on, if they had more than one child. Some appeared to refer to multiple children, while others referred to just one. Our survey questions were limited, too, by the fact that we asked about homophobia and transphobia in a single question; and, we did not ask about how stigma experiences intersected with race/ethnicity of parent, child, and family—a fruitful focus for future research. Indeed, as noted earlier, several participants suggested that invisibility and stigma related to parents' sexual orientation/gender identity were tied to children's experience of invisibility and stigma related to race, pointing to the need for future work to explicitly probe for and examine these intersections.

Our study is also limited by our reliance on parents' reports: children's reports may have generated different patterns and conclusions. And, it was limited by the fact that we excluded bisexual parents in different-gender relationships, as well as single parents, for purposes of honing in on how parents who may be more visible as sexual and gender minorities perceive and experience their children's exposure to sexual and gender stigma. Future research should seek to explore the nuances of visibility and exposure to stigma within these groups. We did choose to include trans parents, whose gender minority identities are indeed highly stigmatized in society but may not necessarily be visible to outsiders; future work can explore in greater detail and depth the nature of (in)visibility and stigma for children in trans parent families.

Another area for future research is to explore the intersection of school stigma experiences and homeschooling. A small percentage (6%) of our sample was homeschooling at least one child; in turn, of interest is whether and how stigma experiences in formal educational systems in the past informed their choice to homeschool. Furthermore, we did not collect detailed data regarding the experiences of parents with children in daycare or preschool. Given the very little work in this area (e.g., A. E. Goldberg, 2014), more work is needed to explore how stigma and marginalization manifest in these environments. Also, several participants noted that they were uncertain about whether their children had experienced stigma at school, insomuch as their children had not talked to them about it. Certainly, some parents may have underreported instances of stigma given that their children may not have disclosed such experiences to them—for example, out of a desire to protect their parents' feelings and/or because they had internalized societal pressures to present as well adjusted, "problem free" children of LGBTQ parents (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2023).

Implications and Conclusions

Our findings have important implications for therapists, school professionals, and researchers. Therapists and school professionals who work with LGBTQ parent families are advised to recognize the intersectional nature of families' identities and how this impacts their experiences in the school setting, especially in regard to stigma.

Professionals should also be knowledgeable about the important ways that children's developmental status intersects with the nature of peer interactions and teasing surrounding diverse family structures and SOGI, as well as how their personal experience navigating disclosure versus secrecy may shift over time. Researchers should seek to include trans parents as a matter of course in studies of SOGI, parenting, and schools; in addition, research is needed that examines trans parent families in their own right in relation to schools.

Furthermore, we call for research that explores how LGBTQ parent families' experiences with schools are nuanced by broader community and state climate, attitudes, and policies. Such work is incredibly timely amidst growing debates surrounding parents' rights and SOGI-related topics within schools (A. E. Goldberg, 2023; Kline et al., 2022). Since the time when these data were collected, a number of new anti-LGBTQ curriculum laws and policies have been proposed and enacted throughout the United States (Yorcuba, 2023). In 2023, six states enacted restrictions on LGBTQ-related instruction in school (Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, and North Carolina) and a number of other states have laws censoring discussions of LGBTQ people or issues in schools, or requiring parental notification of LGBTQ-inclusive materials or curricula (Yorcuba, 2023). Of interest is how LGBTQ parents and their children are navigating increasingly hostile school environments, and whether and how strategies of resistance and/or coping have shifted in the current sociopolitical context.

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