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LGBTQ+ families are more visible and accepted than ever before—but greater visibility has not erased the barriers they face. Drawing on the latest research, this essential volume offers a nuanced portrait of LGBTQ+ families, illuminating their remarkable resilience as they navigate changing social and cultural landscapes. Timely, insightful, and deeply relevant, it provides a fresh perspective on what it means to build, sustain, and thrive as a family today.

–NANETTE GARTRELL, MD, VISITING DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR, WILLIAMS INSTITUTE, UCLA SCHOOL OF LAW, LOS ANGELES, CA

At a time when LGBTQ+ families are being attacked with political arguments dressed up as empirical claims, Goldberg responds with the best social science evidence. With rigor and honesty, she shows how LGBTQ+ people become parents, identifies the challenges they face, and documents how well their children fare, ultimately painting a complex and heartening picture of LGBTQ+ families.

–DOUGLAS NEJAIME, JD, ANNE UROWSKY PROFESSOR OF LAW, YALE LAW SCHOOL, NEW HAVEN, CT

Dr. Goldberg has synthesized decades of peer-reviewed research on LGBTQ+ parenting that will serve to rigorously refute right-wing legal attacks against our families. This book is grounded in an intersectional approach identifying the unique dynamics that influence each specific population represented within the LGBTQ+ acronym. Dr. Goldberg has crafted a rock-solid compendium built on robust science that proves what we already knew: Our families are good places to live.

–ARLENE LEV LCSW-R, CASAC, CSTS, UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WELFARE, ALBANY, NY, LGBTQ FAMILY THERAPIST, AND INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

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In this book, Dr. Goldberg has brought psychological science to bear on essential questions for LGBTQ+ families, with a focus on the current and very real threats to their very existence. In the interest of making the science more available, she has very adeptly woven into a coherent fabric the important elements of what science has to say about how these families function, the current political landscape, and the reality of the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ families. Dr. Goldberg has clearly demonstrated her skill at addressing over-arching issues alongside the day-to-day reality of life on the margins. In so doing, she has written a book that is relevant to researchers, lawmakers, families, and those who support them. It takes a special skill to present our science in a way that is both understandable and relevant to those outside our science. Dr. Goldberg clearly has that skill!

–MICHAEL L. HENDRICKS, PhD, ABPP, PRIVATE PRACTICE, WASHINGTON, DC

Abbie Goldberg is the leading voice for psychological science and LGBTQ+ families. The subtitle of her new book—"fact over fiction, science over politics"—says it all. Goldberg speaks the facts—and aspirations—of science to support LGBQ+ families. She shares the science in ways that are accessible and usable to all of us—psychologists, policymakers, and parents and families themselves.

–STEPHEN T. RUSSELL, PhD, FOUNDATION PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR OF THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DYNAMICS, ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY, TEMPE

Abbie Goldberg has spent years researching and championing queer families, and this book shows she understands exactly what's at stake right now. *LGBTQ+ Families* is a triumph of evidence over misinformation, arriving at a moment when queer families like mine face the threat of being surveilled, separated, and punished simply for who we are.

–VALENA E. BEETY, JD, ROBERT H. MCKINNEY PROFESSOR OF LAW, INDIANA UNIVERSITY MAURER SCHOOL OF LAW, BLOOMINGTON

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1 INTRODUCTION

Science Matters, and It Matters Now

For decades the legitimacy of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other (LGBTQ+) families has been questioned in public discourse, policy debates, and courtrooms. Yet alongside these challenges, a substantial and expanding body of scientific research has consistently demonstrated that gender and sexual orientation are not relevant to parenting effectiveness and child development. This body of evidence was brought to the forefront in landmark cases such as *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), in which leading professional organizations, including the American Psychological Association (APA, 2015) and the American Sociological Association (ASA, 2015), submitted amicus briefs synthesizing decades of research on LGBTQ+ families. In addition to concluding that children are not harmed by having LGBTQ+ parents, experts determined that extending marriage rights to same-sex couples benefits children, given that the institution of marriage offers social and legal supports to families. Thus, although the political landscape sing of these families has remained notably consistent.

As I am finishing this book, Donald J. Trump is finishing the second year of his second nonconsecutive term as president of the United States. Many of the LGBTQ+ people I know and love began this year fearful and

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uncertain, having lived through one Trump presidency, and are aware of his plans to further eradicate LGBTQ+ rights and protections in his second term. After all, during election season, Trump promised that, if elected, he would rescind federal policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2024). Trump also promised to use federal law to override critical state-level protections for trans students (ACLU, 2024). Two years into his second term, Trump has directly and indirectly attacked LGBTQ+ people and families. For example, of the 669 grants that the National Institutes of Health had canceled as of May 2025, nearly half were related to LGBTQ+ health (Mueller, 2025). This scaling-back of LGBTQ+-related health research has implications far beyond the research sphere. Such cuts contribute to a reduction in LGBTQ+-focused training, programs, and clinics, and exacerbate stigma against LGBTQ+ people (Cahill, 2025; Francois, 2025; Gliadkovskaya & Donndelinger, 2026; Stepp & Griffith, 2025).

Further, many of Trump's policies related to non-LGBTQ+ issues, such as immigration, affect some LGBTQ+ families. It is estimated that about 25,700 foreign-born adults who are members of same-sex couples are raising children under the age of 18 (S. K. Goldberg & Conron, 2021), rendering Trump's threats of mass deportation and the end of birthright citizenship extremely frightening to already vulnerable communities (Acevedo & Lavietes, 2024). Trump's economic policies—including his tariffs on many basic products—threaten the well-being of low-income families in particular, who do not have the disposable income to absorb higher prices (Pettypiece, 2025). Such policies hit members of the LGBTQ+ community particularly hard, given their greater likelihood of having an income below the poverty line compared to heterosexual cisgender adults (Wilson et al., 2023).

Trump's efforts to punish people who identify as LGBTQ+ represent the contemporary iteration of a fraught political strategy. People who identify as LGBTQ+ have long served as a convenient scapegoat for politicians who require an "other" around which the public can situate themselves as an exclusive, and better, "us." One can, in turn, expect that bad-faith leaders will continue to strategically and superficially deploy this othering strategy to debate whether people who identify as LGBTQ+ deserve full participation and protection in American society.

One can also expect that among the far-reaching and troubling consequences of such efforts will be (a) increased stressors among LGBTQ+ families; and (b) diminished capacity to address the psychological and practical needs of LGBTQ+ people and families—by both eroding compassionate understanding of LGBTQ+ people and intensifying service barriers through diminished access to LGBTQ+ inclusive health care (Cahill, 2025; National

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Coalition for LGBTQ+ Health, 2025; Stepp & Griffith, 2025). This book serves as an essential counterpoint to such efforts. By consolidating and highlighting the critical research on LGBTQ+ families, I supply clinicians with the comprehensive, data-driven guidance they need to care for and support all of their clients now and in the future, regardless of changing political and social headwinds.

Understanding the science of LGBTQ+ parenting and families, particularly against a backdrop of anti-LGBTQ+ policies and harmful rhetoric, is a form of both knowledge and power. This book serves as an essential grounding tool that can inform clinicians' understanding of and work with LGBTQ+ parents and prospective parents, children of LGBTQ+ parents, and other family members. This book can also be helpful to educators, policymakers, attorneys, and others who seek to push back harmful and inaccurate claims about LGBTQ+ families—whether by a school lesson plan, a policy brief, or a statement at a school board meeting.

For me, writing this book—an up-to-date, contextually informed, and readable resource for clinicians and others who seek to support LGBTQ+ clients and families—has never felt more important or timely. My research career began in the late 1990s, when I was in graduate school, exploring the transition to parenthood in diverse and understudied family contexts such as working-class heterosexual couples. I was shocked at the fact that the transition-to-parenthood literature almost exclusively reflected the experiences of heterosexual, biological parent families. This research literature, and the research on families more generally, did not reflect my own family nor the families of so many people I knew and cared about. In turn, in the early 2000s, building on Nanette Gartrell's groundbreaking work (Gartrell et al., 1996, 1999), I conducted one of the earliest studies of the transition to parenthood among lesbian couples, which included 35 couples (70 women) who used donor insemination to become parents (e.g., A. E. Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007). This study provided the groundwork for much of my research to come—including research on the transition to adoptive parenthood, bisexual parenthood, and young adults with LGBTQ+ parents.

In 2010, I published my first book, *Lesbian and Gay Parents and Their Children: Research on the Family Life Cycle*, with the APA (A. E. Goldberg, 2010a). I wrote this book at the invitation of Greg Herek, an internationally known expert on stigma, prejudice, and violence against LGBQ+ people, who was the then-editor of the APA Division 44 book series. At the time, interest in LGBTQ+ parenting was burgeoning, and there was a decent base of research upon which to develop the book, albeit one that was quite limited in the coverage of certain topics, as well as who exactly was being studied: mostly

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White middle-class lesbian mothers. Now, more than 15 years later, as we coast past the quarter-century mark, the field has expanded considerably alongside shifting sociopolitical norms and tensions surrounding LGBTQ+ parent families and LGBTQ+ people more broadly.

The past decade and a half was characterized by major triumphs in LGBTQ+-related policies, laws, and visibility, such as the 2015 Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which made marriage equality a reality across all U.S. states. (Significantly, with Trump's second presidency, some LGBTQ+ people have voiced concern that the current Supreme Court could revisit—and invalidate—federal marriage equality [A. E. Goldberg & Smith, 2026b]; however, experts have suggested that this would be extremely difficult to do [S. Minter, 2024], and in November 2025, the Court declined to take up a challenge to *Obergefell* [Kapasi, 2025].) There have also been major challenges to LGBTQ+ rights. Anti-LGBTQ+ laws have been proposed and passed across the United States at an accelerating rate (Movement Advancement Project [MAP], 2025d); and, as noted, Donald Trump was elected to a second nonconsecutive term after running on a platform that targeted the rights of trans people in particular (B. Barrow, 2024).

Alongside the political precarity and whiplash of the past 15 years, changes in attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people are evident. Despite the negative attacks on LGBTQ+ people during Trump's recent presidential campaign, attitudes toward same-gender relationships, marriage equality, and the like have largely become more favorable over time (Brenan, 2024b). In 2024, more than two in three Americans favored legal same-sex marriage, although attitudes were strongly divided by political affiliation, with 83% of Democrats, 74% of Independents, and 46% of Republicans favoring it (with the latter group down from 55% in 2021 and 2022; Brenan, 2024b). In 2024, more than six in 10 Americans opposed laws limiting gender-affirming care for minors (Brenan, 2024a). Time will tell whether federal attacks on LGBTQ+ rights and especially trans rights will contribute to shifts in attitudes, at least among certain groups of Americans.

Alongside the shifting legal and social landscape, continuing empirical research has revealed how LGBTQ+ people and families are impacted by changing legal and policy developments and has also captured changes in patterns of LGBTQ+ identification. The number of adults who identify as LGBTQ+ is higher than ever, at 7.6% (J. M. Jones, 2024). Further, there is growing awareness among scholars and the public that sexual and gender identities may be complex, nonbinary, and fluid over time. Reflecting this awareness, more research has focused on bisexual parents, who have been historically understudied amid their invisibility in different- and same-gender

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partnerships such that they are presumed to be—or categorized by "default" as—heterosexual or gay/lesbian (Manley & Ross, 2020). Researchers have also increasingly studied transgender (trans) parents, shifting over time to retire the term *transsexual* and beginning to include nonbinary and gender-queer parents as well (Pfeffer & Jones, 2020).

By means of illustration, I searched Google Scholar by decade (1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000–2009, 2010–2019, 2020–current) to ascertain shifts in the number of studies devoted to bisexual parents and transgender parents (Table 1.1). This exercise revealed stark growth in the number of studies conducted over time, but also shifts in the language used to describe these populations. In 2010–2019, there were 76 citations for "transsexual parent" and 335 for "transgender parent," compared to 40 and 59, respectively, during the previous decade. This reveals that the term *transsexual parent* is now out of fashion—but also that the number of studies on transgender parents has rapidly increased compared to prior decades.

This example illustrates just one way that research on LGBTQ+ parenting has shifted and expanded over the past few decades. There have been many changes in who is studied, how they are studied, and what is studied. Indeed, research has expanded to address many elements of diversity within LGBTQ+ parenting, including experiences of discrimination in family building, racial

TABLE 1.1. Citations for Bisexual and Trans Parents, by Decade

	Bisexual parent	Bisexual mother	Bisexual father
1970s	8	1	0
1980s	18	16	19
1990s	49	18	28
2000–2009	63	27	22
2010–2019	135	88	45
	Transsexual parent	**Transgender parent**	**Transgender mother OR transgender father**
1970s	4	0	0
1980s	6	0	0
1990s	12	0	1
2000–2009	40	59	14
2010–2019	76	355	123
2020–2025	22	501	148

Note. These data were last updated in December 2025. Citations for "trans parent" by decade are not included due to a lack of consistency and clarity in the use of this term, and counting the number of citations using this term posed challenges: For example, some studies used the term *trans parent*, others used *transparent*, and still others were included in the citation count that had nothing to do with trans parenting, such as those referring to the term *transparent* as an adjective.

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socialization processes among parents who adopt transracially, the implications of social class for parents' school choices, how state and federal laws impact LGBTQ+ family well-being, and parents' divorce and custody arrangements (see A. E. Goldberg, 2023b; A. E. Goldberg & Allen, 2020).

My goal for this book is to offer clinicians and interested others a deep, contextually informed understanding of LGBTQ+ parents and their children, with the central premise that LGBTQ+ families are now more visible in mainstream society but continue to experience degrees of marginalization and censure that vary on the basis of their relative privilege and social locations, including their race, class, gender identity, and where they live. Understanding this critical duality is central to supporting and affirming LGBTQ+ families in a diverse range of clinical settings and geographic regions. LGBTQ+ parent families currently exist in a world where they see families like theirs recognized in popular culture and media to a greater degree than ever before, but they also witness overt efforts to deny their existence in the form of state laws that restrict LGBTQ+ curricular content in schools (e.g., "Don't Say Gay" laws) and ban pride flags in schools and government buildings (A. E. Goldberg & Abreu, 2024; McKellar, 2025; National Coalition Against Censorship, 2024). Of course, some LGBTQ+ parent families are less visible in dominant depictions of LGBTQ+ families (e.g., because of their race, class, how their family was formed), and some LGBTQ+ parent families are more vulnerable to the impacts of oppressive legislation because of their identities and where they live.

This book addresses the research on LGBTQ+ families as a whole, with attention to the diversity within these families, against the contemporary backdrop of heightened visibility and legislative oppression, with the goal of guiding clinicians in providing informed and affirming care to LGBTQ+ families, particularly with respect to navigating structural barriers and challenges, addressing minority stress, and validating and enhancing family resiliencies. Amid the reality that the number of LGBTQ+-affirming providers varies across geographic and historical context, in part due to variable funding and training opportunities, it is more important than ever that all clinicians have access to empirically grounded resources to inform their practice with LGBTQ+ families (Cahill, 2025; Fitterman-Harris et al., 2023). A secondary goal of this book is to inform the work of scholars in a range of diverse disciplines, including family science, psychology, sociology, education, social work, public health, and political science. In addition, educators, attorneys, and other practitioners can apply what they learn in this book to their work. Toward this end, I include case studies to highlight the relevance of the research to diverse situations and contexts. These case studies are informed by my experiences as a researcher; as a professor and a clinical training director

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for doctoral students in clinical psychology; as an expert witness; as a consultant to educators, therapists, attorneys, mediators, and families; and by my personal and professional experiences interacting with families and support providers.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The organization of this book is as follows:

- Chapter 1 (this chapter) situates the need for the book and establishes the current sociopolitical context surrounding LGBTQ+ parenting, with a focus on the United States, although some international coverage is present.
- Chapter 2 addresses decision making related to whether to parent and the routes to parenthood, including adoption, surrogacy, donor insemination, cis/heteronormative intercourse, and stepparenting.
- Chapter 3 examines the transition to parenthood, with a focus on mental health, physical health, and relationship quality and stability.
- Chapter 4 addresses early childhood, including day care and preschool selection and experiences, socialization of children, and issues specific to family-building route (e.g., adoption, insemination).
- Chapter 5 focuses on children's experiences and outcomes, especially their academic and school experiences, mental and physical health, and gender and sexuality.
- Chapter 6 addresses parents' experiences and outcomes, with a focus on their mental and physical health and their relationships (including relationship dissolution).
- Chapter 7 addresses parents' division of labor, coparenting, and parenting processes and roles.
- Chapter 8 examines complex and difficult topics within LGBTQ+ families, including estrangement from family, divorce and relationship dissolution, and loss and grief.
- Chapter 9 addresses strategies and contexts that may enhance resilience and empowerment among LGBTQ+ parent families, including LGBTQ+-affirming therapy and support groups, LGBTQ+ community connection, and activism and advocacy.

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The book draws from social constructionist, queer, intersectional, structural stigma, minority stress, and resilience perspectives (A. E. Goldberg, 2022, 2023b). This approach blends recognition of the structural forces that oppress families, which create stress (which may be enhanced/suppressed depending on various intersecting identities), with awareness of the ways that LGBTQ+ families are forces of strength and creativity in their own lives, boldly challenging conventional parenting structures and processes. The book also balances discussion of the contemporary empirical research on LGBTQ+ families with an applied focus. Each chapter opens with a case vignette, news story, or some other application in which to ground the research and highlight connections across research, politics, and lived experience.

A few notes on language: I use the term *queer* interchangeably with *LGBTQ+*, where the latter refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and other diverse identities not covered by these letters, such as two-spirit, asexual, and intersex. I use the term *trans* to encompass gender-diverse identities, except when specified (e.g., if a study explicitly included nonbinary people). I generally use the term *same-gender* when referring to couples comprising two individuals with shared gender identities, such as cis men partnered with cis men and cis women partnered with cis women. I use the terms *queer* or *LGBTQ+* to describe relationships or couples when encompassing a broader range of gender identities and/or relationships. I generally use the term *same-sex* when specifically referring to two people with the same reproductive capacity and characteristics, laws that define relationships in this way (e.g., marriage equality), and studies (e.g., based on national surveys) that specifically described households, families, or couples in this way.

The Science and Politics of LGBTQ+ Parenting: Evolution of a Field

Politics and research have a long and complicated relationship with each other, especially when it comes to LGBTQ+ parenting. Research has been impacted by politics, and politics has been impacted by research. It is challenging to separate the early origins of LGBTQ+ family research from the sociopolitical context that inspired it. Custody cases involving lesbian mothers in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s gave way to activism and social science research (D. W. Rivers, 2013). In the 1970s, against the backdrop of the LGBTQ+ civil rights movement, lesbian mothers in particular were losing their children to their heterosexual ex-husbands in the context of divorce. In the 1970s, a few courts upheld custody or visitation rights for lesbian/gay parents, but these decisions typically came with the stipulation that parents did not live with same-gender partners or even engage in same-gender sexual

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activity (Rudolph, 2017). Judges often required queer parents to "sign affidavits agreeing that they would not have a same-sex partner and their children in the home at the same time" (McGowan, 2024, p. 55). Further, queer parents fighting custody battles "often felt compelled to enlist psychiatrists as expert witnesses in their custody cases, arguing that their children conformed to traditional heterosexual, cisgender stereotypes and thus were not negatively impacted by their parent's 'lifestyle'" (McGowan, 2024, p. 555).

As detailed in the documentary *Mom's Apple Pie: The Heart of the Lesbian Mothers' Custody Movement* (Laine et al., 2006), several major lesbian right organizations, including the Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund and the Lesbian Rights Project (now the National Center for LGBTQ+ Rights), organized to help fight court rulings that granted custody to fathers, grandparents, and distant relatives on the basis of the idea that lesbians were unfit parents (D. W. Rivers, 2013; Rudolph, 2017). Believing that raising children is a human right, not a heterosexual right—the slogan of the Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund—these groups and other activists fought against the legal system's unfair treatment of mothers who were lesbians. By the 1980s, several social scientists had started to examine the parenting capabilities of lesbian mothers, in part fueled by pressure to generate data that could inform these custody cases. Patricia Falk and Martha Kirkpatrick, in the 1980s, and Nanette Gartrell, Fiona Tasker, Susan Golombok, and Charlotte Patterson, in the 1990s, were some of the first scholars to respond to the urgent need for social science research that examined the parenting capabilities of lesbian mothers. Some of this groundbreaking work compared lesbian mothers' mental health, parenting stress, and parenting style to those of heterosexual mothers; whereas other important work, Gartrell's research in particular, did not include a comparison group, exploring parenting and family processes in their own right. The work of these and other pioneering scholars established that there was a lack of evidence to deny lesbian mothers the right to parent (Falk, 1989; Gartrell et al., 1996; Kirkpatrick et al., 1981; Patterson, 1992; Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

The premise that there might be something wrong with lesbian mothers—enough to award custody of their children to their heterosexual ex-husbands—is grounded in heteronormative and misogynistic ideals that marked lesbian mothers as deviant, dangerous, and harmful to their children. Brazen enough to divorce their husbands and become single mothers, they also dared to espouse a sexuality that by definition rejected male partners as ideal or desirable. Judges were complicit in upholding and reinforcing the notion that children were ultimately at risk if left with a lesbian mother. Consider, for example, the famous case of a heterosexual father who, despite being

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a convicted murderer, was awarded custody of his children over his nonmurderous, but lesbian, ex-wife. This case happened just 30 years ago, in 1995 (*Ward v. Ward*; Brydum, 2012). A documentary called *Unfit: Ward vs Ward* (Carmichael et al., 2012), which details the case, reveals how religious ideology shaped the ruling, as well as the broader community attitudes surrounding the case. Being raised by a lesbian was seen as more of a threat to the "best interests of the child" than being raised by a murderer, presumably because lesbianism was more of an abomination, and less redeemable, than killing someone.

Since the 1990s, research has continued to compare the experiences and outcomes of lesbian mothers and their children with those of heterosexual parent families and their children. But this research has also evolved, expanded, and diversified. There are now numerous studies that are distinguished by both their methodological rigor and their diversity. Research comparing lesbian-mother families with heterosexual parent families now includes nationally representative samples, longitudinal designs, and mixed (qualitative, quantitative) methods, and such studies have increasingly added gay-father families to the mix, enabling investigation of the role of gender, sexual orientation, and relational context in parenting and family experiences (Carone & Lingiardi, 2022; Farr, 2017a; A. E. Goldberg & Sayer, 2006; A. E. Goldberg & Smith, 2009a; Wainright et al., 2004; Y. Zhang et al., 2023). This has resulted in an increasingly robust sense of the "state of the science" with regard to LGBTQ+ parenting and families (Farr et al., 2022; A. E. Goldberg, 2023b; A. E. Goldberg & Allen, 2020).

But even as valuable studies that include same-gender and different-gender parent families proliferate, there is a growing awareness among LGBTQ+ parenting scholars of the need to critique the heteronormative ideologies that underlie this comparative approach. Rather than just seeking to determine whether LGBTQ+ parent families perform as well as heterosexual-parent families, researchers must also explore the ways that heteronormativity has shaped or harmed such families, as well as families' unique strengths and assets. In other words, scholars deserve the freedom to explore the various ways that LGBTQ+ parent families do not necessarily look "just like" heterosexual parent families (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Farr et al., 2017).

In turn, from about 2005 onward, studies shifted from their emphasis on "no" or "few" differences between LGBTQ+ parent families and heterosexual parent families to incorporating a more nuanced focus on family processes and dynamics within LGBTQ+ (or queer) families, including parents' division of labor and parental roles, gender and racial socialization processes, and families' relationships with their children's sperm donors (Farr et al., 2017;

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A. E. Goldberg & Allen, 2020). Some of this work explicitly examined processes unique to this family context, such as how parents socialize their children in preparation for heterosexism and stigma, as well as how aspects of these families can be seen as unique strengths. For example, in the mid-2000s, I interviewed 46 young adults with LGBQ+ parents about their experiences growing up in queer families and about their perspectives on how this family context uniquely informed their development (A. E. Goldberg, 2007a). Many adults reflected on their belief that they were more open-minded and tolerant and had more flexible and dynamic ideas about gender and sexuality as a result of their family structure and their parents' values, attitudes, and behaviors. Studies like this helped to establish how research on LGBTQ+ parent families is limited by relying exclusively on a heteronormative paradigm that necessitates a comparative approach, wherein LGBTQ+ parents and their children are compared to the "gold standard" heterosexual, two-parent families. Recent work has also pushed back against the norms and benchmarks to which LGBTQ+ parent families are being compared. For example, the idea that gender normativity is an ideal to which parents and children should aspire and the notion that such normativity corresponds to or leads to well-being are both open to critique (K. H. Averett, 2016; Farr et al., 2022; A. E. Goldberg & Garcia, 2016).

Research has also expanded to increasingly explore the role that ecological and sociopolitical contexts play in LGBTQ+ parent families (Patterson et al., 2021). LGBTQ+ parents are shaped by their national, regional, community, and neighborhood contexts, including the legal and social climate in which they live, at both the federal (e.g., United States) and state (e.g., Massachusetts, Texas) level (Perrin et al., 2019). In turn, researchers have examined how anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and stressful political events such as election cycles impact the well-being of LGBTQ+ people and families, as well as how LGBTQ+ parents seek to minimize, offset, and cope with their impacts (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010, 2019). Research has found, for instance, that LGBTQ+ parents often experienced uncertainty and stress associated with the 2016 election of Donald J. Trump, which they tried to deal with by seeking support and connection from trusted people, distancing themselves from extended family members who voted for Trump, engaging in activism, and disengaging from news media (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021). Parents of color and parents of children of color voiced heightened fears related to their family's safety, with some striving to minimize their exposure to harm by becoming more vigilant around safety—such as by decreasing their visibility as queer, Black, and/or multiracial families or by deciding not to travel to certain areas of the United States (Gabriele-Black et al., 2021; Radis & Nadan, 2021).

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Research has also documented how LGBTQ+ parents in Florida often experienced fear, anxiety, and shock in response to the passing of the Parental Rights in Education bill ("Don't Say Gay" law), which threatened to censure acknowledgment and discussion of LGBTQ+ people. LGBTQ+ parents managed their feelings associated with the threat of state-sanctioned invalidation of their families by seeking camaraderie and support, especially from other LGBTQ+ parents; engaging in activism, sometimes with their children as a form of "queer resistance"; pursuing alternative schooling environments for their children (e.g., private school, homeschooling); and contemplating moving out of state (A. E. Goldberg & Abreu, 2024; A. E. Goldberg, Abreu, & Flores, 2024). This research revealed the importance of economic resources and geographic mobility to coping with legislative oppression: namely, less privileged families, such as those who could not afford private school and those who could not relocate, had fewer options available to them.

Key Legal Battles and Landmark Cases That Have Impacted LGBTQ+ Parents

LGBTQ+ parents and prospective parents are affected both by legal battles that affect LGBTQ+ people more generally, such as those related to protection from discrimination in housing, employment, health care, and the like; and by those that impact their rights as parents. Marriage equality laws, parental recognition and parentage laws (which protect relationships between nonbiological parents and children), and religious exemption laws that allow adoption agencies to discriminate against LGBTQ+ prospective parents, all have implications for LGBTQ+ prospective parents and parents. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ parents are impacted not only by discriminatory laws and policies, but also by the sociopolitical discourse that often surrounds them. Both are aspects of "structural stigma" (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010, 2019).

As an example, legislation restricting LGBTQ+ people's ability to adopt has historically been framed as action necessary to "save the children," capitalizing on unsubstantiated stereotypes of LGBTQ+ people as predators and pedophiles (see A. E. Goldberg, Moyer, Weber, & Shapiro, 2013; A. E. Goldberg, Weber, et al., 2014). In Florida, a law preventing LGBTQ+ people from adopting was in place until just a decade and a half ago. But legislative efforts to restrict LGBTQ+ people from becoming parents did not end with the lifting of the gay adoption ban. As of late 2025, 14 states allow state-licensed child welfare agencies to refuse to place children with or to provide services to LGBTQ+ people if doing so conflicts with their religious or moral values (MAP, 2025b). "Save the children" ideology is also encapsulated in state laws surrounding education, where "regular" families and children are presumed to

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need "protection" from exposure to LGBTQ+ topics in curricula. In eight states, state law censors discussion of LGBTQ+ issues throughout school curricula (e.g., "Don't Say Gay" legislation), in five states, state law requires advance parental notification of any LGBTQ+-related curricula and requires parents to opt their children in, and in four states, state law requires advance parental notification of any LGBTQ+-related curricula and allows parents to opt their children out (MAP, 2025c). Significantly, in June 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Mahmoud v. Taylor* that public school systems are required to provide parents with an "opt out" provision whereby children are excused from class when class material conflicts with parents' religious beliefs (Totenberg & Ononye, 2025). Education advocates in some states warn that this decision threatens teachers' autonomy and students' exposure to diverse perspectives (New York State United Teachers, 2025).

LGBTQ+ people's ability to become parents is also impacted by recent federal legislation. Amid the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, access to reproductive technologies, such as donor insemination, in vitro fertilization, and surrogacy—which LGBTQ+ people disproportionately rely on to build families—is now more limited and is determined by the state in which people reside (Rummler, 2024). Surrogacy is not legal in all U.S. states; for example, Louisiana and Nebraska have strict restrictions on surrogacy (A. E. Goldberg, 2022; Rummler, 2024).

But some states have passed laws that enhance protections for LGBTQ+ parents. For example, the Massachusetts Parentage Act recently updated the state's parentage law such that it is "clear, equitable, and provides legal protection for all families, including LGBTQ+ families and families formed through assisted reproduction" (GLAD Law, 2025, para. 2). The law "clarifies who can be legally recognized as a parent and how to establish parentage," (para. 3), including by giving birth (except in surrogacy), adoption, signing a voluntary acknowledgment of parentage, adjudication (order from a court), presumption (including the marital and nonmarital presumption), genetic connection (except for sperm/egg donors), de facto parentage, and intended parentage through either assisted reproduction or a surrogacy agreement (GLAD Law, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This book aims to offer a comprehensive, contextually informed, scientifically grounded, and readable resource for clinicians—including couples therapists, family therapists, child therapists, and clinicians-in-training—who seek a deep

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understanding of the experiences, challenges, and resiliencies of LGBTQ+ families across the life cycle. Hopefully, my accounting of the state-of-the-research on LGBTQ+ families can also be useful to individuals seeking to apply this work to educational practice, policy reform, and other areas. Finally, I hope that members of the interested public, including LGBTQ+ parents, their families, and the people who care about them, will find this book to be an illuminating and informative tool for understanding.

Although deeply researched, this book is not exhaustive. It reflects my disciplinary background; my personal, professional, and cultural standpoints; and my overall capacity. It also reflects my choice to emphasize more recent research, while also acknowledging key foundational contributions. My ultimate goal is to provide readers with a solid understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ+ families across the life cycle, which will position them to (a) challenge various myths, inaccuracies, and misunderstandings about such families; and (b) meaningfully support, affirm, and guide them in living their lives.