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Protecting LGBTQ+ Children and Youth 29

Gerald P. Mallon, June C. Paul, and Mónica López López

Introduction

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ+) children and adolescents, an often-invisible population, frequently viewed as “different” by their own families and in fact by society as a whole, are at high risk for neglect, abuse and violence from family members and from within the child welfare systems that are designed to protect them. In case after case (González Álvarez et al., 2021; Mallon, 1998a, McCormick et al., 2017; Mountz & Capous-Desyllas, 2020; Paul, 2018), self-identified LGBTQ+ children and youth, and those perceived to be because of gender expansiveness, reported that they were the victims of abuse, neglect, and violence.

LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately impacted by multiple forms of trauma, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, dating violence, sexual assault, and peer violence. The practices

of child protection have made significant contributions to how systems respond to maltreated youth’s needs. However, LGBTQ+ youth are largely excluded from many child protection conversations (Mallon, 2020).

Drawing on insights gained from in-depth interviews and based on clinical practice experiences with LGBTQ+ children, youth, and their families, and numerous studies over several decades (Mallon, 1999, 2009; Paul, 2018, 2020), this chapter presents a framework for examining, understanding and intervening with LGBTQ+ young people who are at risk for abuse or neglect. The chapter examines maltreatment within the family and from the child welfare system which has an urgent need to better protect LGBTQ+ children and youth through policy modifications in child protection services worldwide.

In presenting such a framework, we plan to utilize case examples to address the issue of that lack of child protection within the family system—first, by exploring the phenomenon of parental neglect based a parent’s lack of knowledge or recognition of their child’s LGBTQ+ identity; and second, by examining the experience of various forms of abuse perpetrated on LGBTQ+ children and adolescents within their families or within child protection systems based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression. Practice and policy guidelines for child protection practitioners concerned about how and in what ways can they practice more effectively to protect

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LGBTQ+ children and youth from abuse and neglect are presented at the conclusion of the chapter.

A Review of the Literature

Youth who identify as LGBTQ+, on average, face more barriers to permanency and well-being in comparison to their non-LGBTQ+ peers in foster care (Baams et al., 2019). LGBTQ+ youth in this study reported poorer school functioning, higher substance use, and poorer mental health. Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth in this study reported more fights in school, victimization and mental health problems compared with LGBTQ+ youth who had stable housing and heterosexual youth in foster care. Similarly, in a study by Paul and Monahan (2019), maltreatment among sexual minority individuals showed strong associations with poor adult mental health (e.g., depression, anxiety, isolation, suicidal ideation), as well as fairly strong negative associations with general health outcomes (e.g., heart and lung problems) when compared to their non-maltreated peers. These researchers point to a need for protections for LGBTQ+ youth in child welfare systems and services that are affirming of their sexual orientation and gender identity expression.

Gender expansiveness in childhood and adolescence also may increase the risk of familial abuse and neglect (Robinson, 2020; Roberts et al., 2012). Identifying as LGBTQ+ alone does not mean a young person will experience negative outcomes; however, the higher proportion of youth who identify as LGBTQ+ and who have these experiences in comparison to youth who do not identify as LGBTQ+ demonstrates the importance of ensuring that youth who identify as LGBTQ+ in vulnerable situations, such as foster care, have competent foster parents and child welfare professionals that can support them and are available to meet their needs.

Youth who self-identify as LGBTQ+ enter the child welfare system for a variety of reasons, not always related to their sexual orientation or gender identity expression, but many do not find themselves any safer in foster care than they

were in their families of origin. A survey of youth who identified as LGBTQ and were in foster care, living in New York City Administration for Children's Services (2018) group homes, found that 78% of youth had been removed or ran away from their foster placements because of hostility toward their sexual orientation or gender identity expression. This study also found that of the youth who identify as LGBTQ+ and had lived in group homes, 70% reported experiencing physical violence and 100% had experienced verbal harassment. Further, youth who identify as LGBTQ+ had disproportionately longer stays in care, greater placement instability, and a greater risk of mistreatment and neglect in their care setting as compared to their peers who identify as heterosexual and cisgender (Lorthridge et al., 2018).

Despite the risk factors that LGBTQ+ children and youth appear to exhibit for possible maltreatment by their families and by society as a whole, child welfare advocates in the U.S. and Europe and especially those in child protection have not, with a few exceptions (González Álvarez et al., 2021; Mallon, 2000, 2020; Paul & Monahan, 2019), heretofore written about, investigated or explored the incidence of abuse and neglect in this population. A careful content analysis of the child protection literature in the U.S. and Europe (Berrick, 2017; Gilbert et al., 2011; Merkel-Holguin et al., 2019) does not yield a single citation or make one reference to the level or existence of abuse or neglect which this population of children has endured. Yet countless case studies and carefully collected and analyzed qualitative interviews with self-identified LGBTQ+ youth refer to the experience of perceived family neglect and abuse. Concurrently, LGBTQ+ young people also experience discrimination and maltreatment from other systems they encounter in their lives, even in the very systems that are designed to protect them (Mallon, 1998a, 1998b; Paul, 2018, 2020; González Álvarez et al., 2021). The professional lack of attention to this "closeted" issue is no surprise, but the fact that the leading child protection experts have never discussed or even mentioned the child protection issues specific to LGBTQ+ children and youth

who have suffered abuse at the hands of their own families, should concern both scholars and practitioners.

An Overview of the Child Protection Issues for LGBTQ+ Youth

Serving children, youth and families who are LGBTQ+ requires that practitioners and child welfare systems identify and address social problems, in this case child abuse and neglect, that affect them individually and collectively. These include discrimination in children and family services organizations, in health care systems, in educational settings, and in family courts, as well as violence perpetrated against LGBTQ+ persons (Elze, 2014). Addressing such problems requires child welfare professionals to advocate with and on behalf of LGBTQ+ clients, to be vigilant against institutional discrimination against LGBTQ+ clients, and to be visible in joining with the LGBTQ+ communities to address community and social problems.

The following vignettes illustrate the relevance of the range of experience that many LGBTQ+ youth experience.

Welcome to New York

Jose, a twelve-year old, Spanish-speaking youth was sent from Puerto Rico where he had resided with his 49-year-old maternal grandmother since he was three months old to live in Manhattan with his biological mother. This move was precipitated when his grandmother alleged that he was engaging in same-gender sex work. When he arrived in New York his mother, whom he had not seen since he was three months old, had remarried and started a life apart from him.

Jose was at his mother's home for five days when his step father, whom he did not know and who did not speak Spanish, immediately became concerned about his perceived feminine mannerisms and his late hours. When Jose arrived home late one evening, his

step-father became physically abusive toward him—punching him in the face and verbally abusing him—screaming: “I will not have a faggot in my house.” As a response to insuring his own safety, Jose left his house and wandered around Manhattan. Unfamiliar with the New York City area since he had arrived only days before from Puerto Rico, Jose, lost and confused, asked a stranger for assistance. The woman took Jose into her home and permitted him to remain there until she could contact the police.

The police returned Jose to his parents' home. His mother refused to keep him in her home, saying that she could not deal with him if he was “like that.” At this juncture, his mother brought him to Family Court where she filed a PINS (Person in Need of Supervision) petition against him, citing his late hours and incorrigible behavior as reasons for the court's intervention. Although bruises were apparent on his arms and neck, no one made note of the abuse that this child had endured. Since the judge, the child's social worker, and his attorney were uncomfortable with the issue of this child's sexual orientation and gender identity expression, no one addressed this issue in the courtroom. In fact, when the social worker was told by a Spanish speaking colleague what had in fact happened to Jose, her response was: “What do you want the parents to do? No parent wants their child to be “like that.” Sometimes families try to beat it out of them.” Jose was separated from his family, and placed with the City in a group home where no one spoke Spanish and where no one was trained to deal with the unique issues that his sexual orientation and gender identity expression presented. The issues pertaining to his abuse and neglect were never addressed.

“You Don't Know What I've Been Through”

Rain, a 12 year-old, queer, gender expansive youth, was adopted after moving from one

foster home to another, since the age of eight, only to end up back in care at age 17, after their adoptive parents forced them from their home. “I started school with my adoptive brother and she (referring to their adoptive mother) started to see a difference in how I was and I wasn’t really like her. My fashion was different, I didn’t want to be a girly girl. I am pansexual, bi-gender. I dressed like a boy sometimes, I dressed like a girl sometimes, I dressed like me. . .and they did not like that.”

Over the years, things between Rain and their adoptive parents only got worse. Rain states “I was scared for those 5 years, I was terrified. I physically fought them. It was crazy. If they told me not to speak no words, I wouldn’t even breathe; they trained me to fear them. They trained me that nobody was going to love me.” Although Rain ran away on several occasions, they always ended up being returned back to the home where they were being abused.

The last night Rain was in their adoptive parent’s home, they had come home from school to find that they were locked out. Their father was inside, but refused to let them in, despite the cold, rainy weather. Rain explained “I had came from school cuz I was in a play, I told him I was coming home from my play, I said, ‘I have rehearsal tonight, can you please open the door or have the door unlocked because when I knock you act like you don’t hear me’, he’s like, ‘yeah ill open the door’ so I come home, I’m knocking on the door for 3 hours damn near, it’s starts to rain and I’m knocking for another two hours. He is inside, I could hear the TV and everything.” After being left outside for hours and refusing to open the door, Rain’s adopted father called the police and said they were not welcome back home, at which time, Rain was placed back into state custody.

Rain remembers sitting in the police station waiting for the social worker to come, and feeling hopeless and distraught about what was going to happen to them. “I was like, every time I go to court, every time I need a new foster parent, I tell the social worker ‘this

has happened too many times before, you don’t know what I been through’. How many foster homes do you have to go through and keep getting abused, like how many are you going to until you are like, ‘fuck it?’”

Jose and Rain’s (Paul, 2020) cases of abuse, neglect, abandonment of parental responsibilities, and incidence of familial violence are not isolated episodes of family conflict. The exploration of these distressing narratives, act as a foundation for child protection professionals interested in ameliorating these conditions for LGBTQ+ youth.

The Neglect of LGBTQ+ Youth by Families

In clinical work with families affected by issues of sexual orientation and gender identity expression, many parents reported that they frequently were caught off guard when their LGBTQ+ child disclosed their LGBTQ+ identity to them. In fact, many parents were so staggered by their child’s disclosure that their response could be characterized as psychologically neglectful.

A study from the Netherlands (González Álvarez et al., 2021) found that many young people interviewed for their study experienced a lack of acceptance of their sexual orientation and gender identity expression and faced discrimination based on it from their families, peers, foster carers, practitioners and from society (e.g. public spaces). The coming out process and the reactions to it were some of the most crucial moments that determined the acceptance and affirmation, or the lack thereof, of their sexual orientation and gender identity expression. Stress and fear prevailed, even in the period prior to coming out. To counteract and manage this difficult process, some young people found ways to first test the acceptance of their sexual orientation and gender identity expression with family and friends by employing jokes, games or other subtle ways to talk about sexual orientation or gender identity

expression, before actually coming out, as this young person reflected:

I yelled for a very long time “I’m gay” and if someone asked, are you gay, no, no, I’m not gay, I’m not gay, it’s a joke.

A young person in New York had a similar experience of rejection:

Peter came into the kitchen while his father and I were having a snack. He looked so serious that we asked him if something was wrong. At first, he didn’t answer and he fixed himself a snack, then he sat down at the table with us. It took him a while before he looked at us. After what seemed like an eternity, he said, “I have something to tell you and it’s not an easy thing to say.” I felt myself steel against whatever it might be, a plethora of things ran through my mind: was he doing drugs? did he get someone pregnant? was he dropping out of school? did he have an accident with the car? We all seemed frozen in place waiting to hear what it was. Then he said, “I’m gay!” I couldn’t believe it. I felt as though this child whom I had raised was an absolute stranger. I thought, “Oh, no, not my son. I would have known this, why did I ever see this coming?” It was like being told that he was dead. Suddenly the person sitting across from me wasn’t my son anymore. I felt as if we were talking with a stranger. I’ve lost my child.

Are some of the parents of LGBTQ+ children neglectful by child welfare standards? It is an important question for child welfare practitioners to consider. The feelings of most parents of LGBTQ+ children, so well-illustrated in the excerpt from a case above, found parents who were shocked and completely dumbfounded by their child’s disclosure of a LGBTQ+ identity. These thoughts represented an internal response that they, at least initially, could not bear.

Why don’t the parents of LGBTQ+ children notice that their child is different? If they did, would it make a difference in how they were treated? Perceived “difference” which was also identified as a contributing factor for child maltreatment (Mallon, 1998b) is an important factor

to consider. The case below provides an example of a situation where a child was perceived as different by his family at a young age.

A “Different” Child

Pedrito, a seven-year old Latino boy lived with his mother, father, and two siblings, a nine-year old sister, and a three-year old brother in a small apartment in Chicago. Pedrito is soft spoken, bright, and described as “a sensitive boy” by his parents. Last Christmas, when his sister received a doll, Pedrito spoke up and said that he would like one too. Pedrito’s parents immediately insisted that boys do not play with female dolls. They offer him a Spiderman doll as an alternative, Pedrito insisted that he wanted the doll like his sister had. His parents are concerned and feel that maybe he needs to be less sensitive and more involved in traditional “boy” activities. They wonder if they should involve Pedrito in more sports activities like football.

If Pedrito is in fact gay and not just “sensitive” as his parents describe him, is their way of dealing with him, which suggests a reparative theme, psychologically neglectful? There are several questions which should be explored. Are parents who attempt to change their child’s sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, neglectful? Due to their own fear that he might be gay or transgender and to their own lack of knowledge about a LGBTQ+ orientation, will Pedrito’s parents be able to fully parent him and meet his emotional, developmental, and physical needs? Will they be able to support his emerging identity as he grows into adolescence or will they encourage him to suppress his identity? Will the family be able to endure the stigma that comes with having an LGBTQ+ member? In the cases where we have conducted clinical work with the parents of LGBTQ+ children and youth, the response from many parents can best be described as a “corrective” to an emerging LGBTQ+ identity which is viewed as shameful and stigmatizing.

This type of “corrective response” has also been illustrated in Paul’s (2018) case study work.

Toughening Up

Matthew, a 14 year-old, African-American boy lived with his mother, a single parent, in a poor, urban area of Wisconsin. “I wore a wig to school. I took one of my mama’s wigs and I had already had tight skinny jeans, I put on a little purple shirt and I went to school like that. The teacher had called my mama when I was at lunch and said ‘Did you see your son wearing a wig to school? Do you know your son is walking around like that?’ She acted very funny after that. She put me in the military school, ‘tossing me out’, that’s what she said.” Matthew says he knew that his mother sent him to military school to ‘toughen him up’, but it only made him hide who he was to protect himself. Now, he and his mother no longer speak.

Although the thought of parenting an LGBTQ+ child might be enough to send some families into a complete crisis, not all families respond negatively. The following vignette illustrates an affirming approach held by one parent:

“Setting Them Straight”

Ten-year old Marisol, lives with her mother, Sonia in a quiet neighborhood in Los Angeles. Marisol is an athletic child, and not at all interested in activities typically associated with other girls her age. She prefers outdoor activities and is very involved in playing football, running, and gymnastics and wears clothes usually associated with clothes that boys would wear.

One day, the counselor in her after-school program approached Marisol’s mother to tell her that some of the other parents were concerned that her daughter was very masculine. The counselor, who was inexperienced and not

professionally trained, suggested that she should consider involving her daughter in more “feminine” activities. Sonia laughed and asked if the counselor and the other parents were afraid that her daughter might be a lesbian or transgender? The counselor uncomfortably acknowledged that this was indeed their fear.

Sonia’s reply was, “My child will be who they are. If she is a lesbian, that will be fine with me. If she is transgender, that would be fine with me. If she is not a lesbian or not transgender, that would be fine too. All the so-called “feminine” activities in the world are not going to make her different than who she is. And it doesn’t matter to me what sexual orientation or gender identity expression she is as long as she is a good person.

Sonia withdrew her child from the after-school program and sought a different one with more enlightened staff and perhaps less judgmental parents.

Limited research with the parents of LGBTQ+ children suggest that there was a gap of several years between the time that their child knew of their LGBTQ+ identity and the point at which they disclosed their identity to their parent (D’Augelli et al., 2005). One parent interviewed in Mallon’s study recalled:

I always knew someplace deep inside that my son was different, but I guess I just repressed that observation. When he did come out to his father and I when he was 26, I asked, after getting over the initial shock of the disclosure, how long he had known and when he responded since he was 15, I felt so bad. How could my child have suffered in silence for so long? I felt guilty too, how could I have been so blind to his identity?

Empirical evidence from early research (Hershberger & D’Augelli, 1995:433) suggests that most LGBTQ+ young people do not first come out to their families. These researchers note that the majority of LGBTQ+ youth (73%) disclosed first to a friend. Mothers were first told

only 7% of the time; fathers, or both parents were told first 1% of the time. The fact remains, however that parents are not privy to integral information about their child's identity should cause most professionals and parents to be concerned. Such a response could be characterized, we believe, as psychological neglect.

While we posit that from a clinical perspective it would be more helpful for parents to know of their child's sexuality and gender identity/expression at an earlier age, Baker (2014, p.19), the mother of two gay sons, expands further with an opposing viewpoint:

I cannot help but wonder if we had known that our children might grow up to be gay, what would have been different in the way we treated them? Would we have loved them as unconditionally as we did or would we have been anxiously trying to shape their sexual orientation and gender identity expression? Would we have looked upon some of their characteristics as less endearing? Would we have tried to force them to play football and basketball rather than spend their time reading and studying nature? What damage might we have done to their personalities, their emotional development, if we had known? These are all questions that cannot be answered but that call attention to the particular problems in child rearing that arise from anti-gay prejudice and parental ignorance about sexual orientation and gender identity expression.

Baker's (1998, 29) feelings of guilt and helplessness are further explicated in her recollection:

We, as parents, had been of absolutely no help to our children with their growing up gay. It would have been so simple, if, at times during their childhood and adolescence, we had only known enough just to have explained homosexuality to our children, to have told them that some people fall in love with people of the same sex, and that it isn't a sickness or deviance, it is just the way some people are. We could have told them that if they should grow up to be gay, it wouldn't mean they couldn't

have a normal life. But, sadly, my husband and I never told them any of those things.

Parental attitudes toward their child's disclosure are mediated by stereotypical perceptions of what it means to be LGBTQ+, in fact, one study Potoczniak et al. (2009) suggested that many parents to view their child's sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression disclosure as a phenomenon akin to mourning a death. Paul's forthcoming study of the experiences of transgender and non-binary youth in foster care features this all too common and disturbing type of parental response, as well as the health and wellbeing consequences for LGBTQ+ youth.

Hungry and Homeless

I came out around that time and grew up and being trans, I at least thought I would get support from my mother. Not at all. I was always beaten and homeless. I remember the days I was hungry and homeless and didn't have nowhere to go and she would know this and she wouldn't care. That's when I said she finally had a gave me away to the state and signed off her rights for her to be able to not have me in her custody anymore. Even though she knew neglect was going to be on her record, she was taking that risk for me to be able to be homeless or even dead.

"Ya'll Can Take Him With You"

The day I came out to my mom, she busted out crying and yelled, 'Go to your room!' I went to my room and I started packing my clothes. I went to school the next day and told them I didn't have nowhere to go. They sent CPS to my mom's house and she was like 'Ya'll can take him with you', and I really didn't want to leave but it was like, 'Wow, you're my mom, you won't accept me.'

Invisible

I used to see her and I was fully dressed as female at the time. We were at a gas station, and my mom saw me with my friends. I was homeless at the time, I had run away and was crashing on friend's couches and stuff like that. So, I saw her pulling in and she looked at me and my stepdad. He had a smirk on his face and laughed. I remember my mom walking into the gas station and we were in different aisles, but we saw each other, and I turned around and she looked at me like she didn't see me. She didn't say anything, like if you were a stranger you would've thought we didn't know each other. It was that bad. I remember crying when I walked to the car, it hurt bad. I couldn't believe she just didn't say anything.

Clearly, accurate information about sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, including open discussions that address LGBTQ+ orientation, could assist parents in dispelling myths which are parent blaming, and erroneously link a LGBTQ+ identity to an unhappy childhoods and disturbed relationships with parents. Although changing cultural values and beliefs about LGBTQ+ sexuality and gender identity/expression, oftentimes reinforced through personal or religious bias, will take many years, in the case of young people who are LGBTQ+ who find themselves the victims of parental or familial rejection and violence, there is a great deal that child welfare practitioners can do immediately.

Abuse of LGBTQ+ Youth

The literature clearly suggests that LGBTQ+ children and youth are at risk for abuse within their homes and in their communities runaway and homeless youth, may experience familial abuse at higher levels (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016); Rural LGBTQ+ youth (De Pedro et al., 2018); LGBTQ+ Latinx youth (Gattamorta et al., 2019); LGBTQ+ youth of color (Grooms, 2020; Perez-

Carrillo, 2018; Potoczniak et al., 2009) and transgender youth (Mallon, 2021a, 2021b; Robinson, 2020) face even greater risks. It is important to note, that there is a paucity of research on transgender and nonbinary youth who have experienced maltreatment as well as scholarship which focuses on LGBTQ+ youth of color. Indeed much of the initial work on this population was and still is, focused on sexual orientation rather than gender identity expression and on people of white, European descent.

Abuse of LGBTQ+ children and youth, like their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts, takes the form of physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. Each of these areas are illustrated with case examples below (Mallon 2009; Paul, 2020).

Physical Abuse

Robert's Physical Abuse

Roberto is a 17-year old teen who lives their mother, Rosa, who is a homemaker, his step-father Pedro, who is a carpenter's assistant, and three younger brothers. Roberto is an effeminate young person and has been teased by peers and his family about being a "fag" since he could remember. Roberto and his step-father have always had an acrimonious relationship, he and his mother have generally been close, but his mother's religious beliefs frequently come into conflict with Roberto's sexuality.

One evening when Roberto returned from being out with his friends he returned to find his mother crying in the kitchen reading letters that he had kept in his "secret box" that his boyfriend has written to him. He immediately knew that there would be trouble when he realized what she was reading. As Roberto entered the kitchen Rosa began screaming at him that he was a "faggot" that she had always knew it and now she had proof. She jumped up from the kitchen table and began punching him on the back and slapping him across the

face. He tried to protect himself, but Rosa did not stop. When Roberto's step-father, Pedro heard the commotion he came running into the kitchen. Rosa was screaming that Roberto was a faggot and rather than attempting to stop the violence, Pedro joined in, taking off his belt and beating Roberto with his belt. Roberto finally escaped from the beating by pushing his mother down and running out of the apartment. He had nowhere to go, but decided to go to the police. When he arrived at the police station and explained what happened he was told "if you're going to live that kind of lifestyle, that's what you'll have to expect." He had nowhere to go, but knew that he couldn't go home. He slept that night, and many other nights on the streets. Home was not a safe place for him to be, and paradoxically, the streets were apparently safer.

Maliyah's Physical Abuse

Maliyah is a 15-year-old, emerging trans female living with her mother and step-father; the two adults met shortly after Maliyah turned 15. Although Maliyah had not yet begun to fully present as female, or come out to her mom or step-father, she recalls how her mother would often ask her if she was gay, or check her phone to see if she was communicating with any girls. Maliyah's step-father's behavior was far more violent. She explains "My stepfather, he used to hide my stuff, my clothing, he used to beat me up so bad my when my mom left the house. He once beat me up so badly, because of how expressed myself, I could barely walk. I said 'I'm sorry... please.' Just because I got my ears pierced like a girl. He beat me with a belt buckle, in the corner, I will never forget that. I told my mom about it and she said, 'What did you do for him to get so mad?'. I told her 'I just had my earrings in', and she said 'Well, you shouldn't do shit you're not supposed to be doing.'

Kayden's Physical Abuse

Kayden, a 19 year-old, transgender male, recalls the abuse he experienced when he was placed with his aunt and uncle, after his mother passed away "He was abusing me when I was in eighth grade. He was beating on me and everything and my aunt knew he was beating on me and she didn't care. And my grandma didn't want me to stay with her and she was full on Christian. I told my teacher and we got put out the house. I lived with my teacher for two weeks, because I had nowhere to go."

Kayden still struggles from the trauma he experienced at the hands of his uncle. "I'm still scared of when he gets out of jail. When I see someone that looks like him, I get scared. I don't know what would happen if I ran into him. Honestly, I feel like he would kill me, but I have no idea what's gonna happen. So that's always in the back of my mind. I lose count of how many years he has left; I think he has three years left. Hopefully by that time I move somewhere else.'

Many LGBTQ+ youth report physical abuse by their parents directly linked to their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. According to the youth and families interviewed, fathers had a more difficult time accepting sexual orientation and gender identity expression than did mothers which may account for issues having to do with gender biases towards a LGBTQ+ identity.

Overwhelmingly, the comments of most young people who had endured abuse, suggested that female care providers were better suited to working with LGBTQ+ young people than were male care providers. Control issues and macho attitudes were identified by young people as impairing most male's ability to care for LGBTQ+ young people (Mallon, 1998a, 1998b).

The siblings of a LGBTQ+ child or adolescent may also respond in an ambivalent manner to a family member's disclosure. While some siblings

may be supportive, others, could join in the familial abuse of a LGBTQ+ brother or sister. Sibling reaction to the disclosure of a family member is evidenced in this occurrence recalled by this 16-year old lesbian young woman in Los Angeles:

It wasn't bad enough that my Mom was freaking out and beating on me, but my older brother was also really upset when I came out. He was so mad. I remember him saying, as he was punching me in the face—"if you think I am gonna defend you in school—you're crazy—you stupid lesbo. Why did you have to go and tell everybody you were a dyke—why couldn't you just keep it to yourself." I guess he was worried that people might think that if he had a sister who was lesbian, then maybe he might be gay too. But I didn't count on him joining in with the bashing.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse, which most self-identified LGBTQ+ youth claimed to endure as an almost daily occurrence, can be associated with physical abuse or neglect, or can be a separate psychological phenomenon. The emotional harm that occurs without physical abuse or neglect often fall beyond the legal and practice scope of child welfare intervention. Nonetheless, except for physical scars, emotional abuse has pervasive emotional consequences. Unpredictable emotional trauma from a parent or family member can cause extreme anxiety and feelings of worthlessness for a LGBTQ+ young person. Destiny, a 15-year old trans youth from New York experienced emotional abuse firsthand by her family.

"Hey sissy boy!"

"You fucking homo, faggot, sissy, queer, tranny" these were words that Destiny had hurled at her since she could remember. It was bad enough that kids in school harassed her, but her own family joined in, it really got her depressed. It seemed that whenever anything

went wrong at home these were the words that her brothers, sister and even her mother and father used to deride her. It wore her down, it made her feel terrible. One night she had had enough and tried to end her life. Destiny took a combination of prescription drugs that her mother kept in her medicine closet. Her parents found Destiny in her room, rushed her to the emergency room and couldn't figure out why she was so upset that she would try to end her life. She told her social worker that it was the words . . . they were hurtful, they made her feel inferior, when your own family hurts you like that, what can you expect from the rest of the world?

But it was more than just the words, it was the emotional battering that she had endured which caused her to try to end it all.

Tee, a 15 year-old, queer, nonbinary youth, talks about a similar feelings of helplessness, depression and loss (Paul, 2020).

"Less Of A Human Being"

They told me there was something wrong with me. I felt so much less wanted. It made me feel like less of a human being. I felt like I had a disease. I didn't have a mother. I didn't have a relationship with my brother. I didn't have a relationship with any of my family members. I had no friends—they had turned their backs on me, I had nowhere to go, I couldn't find a job, I couldn't go to the doctor, I didn't have a vehicle, I was on the bus, everywhere I went, I had very bad anxiety and my depression was severe, I was suicidal.

Parents and family are a child's most important source of praise and support needed to develop confidence, self-worth, self-esteem, and a sense of accomplishment. Parental approval and support are a vital prerequisite to healthy emotional development and the most powerful predictor of mental health for gay, bisexual, and lesbian youth (Russell & Fish, 2016). LGBTQ+ children who

are emotionally belittled and verbally assaulted can suffer serious emotional consequences and are at high risk of emotional harm. Feeling of self-worth comes about for some abused youth only after they leave an abusive environment and find a positive view of their sexual orientation and gender identity expression and acceptance from a peer group.

A study by McCormick (2018) found that 36% of the young LGBTQ+ people surveyed had been insulted or verbally abused by at least one member of their immediate family. Although parental reaction to a child's disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity expression are varied, in addition to verbal taunts and physical violence, LGBTQ+ children and youth confront more surreptitious and insidious forms of rejection, including withdrawal of affection or exclusion from family activities (Robinson, 2018).

Parental indifference, which is at times a consequence of a child's disclosure of a LGBTQ+ identity may have even more potential for emotional damage. The message of parental indifference is that nobody cares; that the child is not even worth a negative thought or interaction; and that the child is not worth anything. Negative reactions to coming out were deeply hurtful and could potentially cause young people to completely reject their sexual orientation and gender identity expression, as this young trans person noted:

But they ignored me head-on and laughed at me. So, then my body, or my brain then thought, yes, but you know, just look at this . . . I just put it back in quietly.

Parental indifference further robs children of a chance to earn parental approval, rewards, and reciprocal caring relationships, as evidenced by Rose's narrative:

Once my parents found out that I was lesbian, my home became like a tomb for me. No one talked, no one asked me how my day went, our relationship went from pretty good to terrible in such a short period of time. It was horrible and it made me feel so bad. I wound up spending more and more time away from

my home, not because I wanted to, but because I just couldn't stand the silence anymore.

Because it can also be difficult to identify risk assessment criteria with respect to emotional abuse that warrant agency intervention and family disruption, physical abuse and neglect have been child welfare's priorities for intervention. Although it is often difficult to assess the extent of emotional abuse, or to predict future pathology which can result, emotional abuse has devastating effects which left untreated, often prevent LGBTQ+ children from developing into emotionally healthy adults.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse refers to "contact with a child where the child is being used for sexual stimulation by another person"—it is assumed that the abuser is older than the child. Although child sexual abuse is a more complicated phenomenon than we are able to discuss in this chapter, sexual abuse perpetrated by adults against LGBTQ+ youth is not uncommon. The basic cause of child sexual abuse is the pathology of the perpetrator, exacerbated in some cases by the outlandish notion that the perpetrator can change the LGBTQ+ youth through sexual abuse, as in Leah's case illustrated below:

"I'll Show You What It's Like to Be With A Real Man"

Oh, you're a lesbian? All you need is a good man to show you what it's like and then you'll never want another woman again. That night my step-father came into my room, locked the door behind him, pushed his body on top of mine and raped me. I never expected that my step-father would do this to me. I was so ashamed, I was so embarrassed, I was so hurt. I left home the next day and went to live with friends. I never told anyone, until now, about that night. All I was being was myself, I wasn't hurting anyone, I was just trying to be myself. I didn't deserve what happened to me—no one does.

Because of the complexity of child sexual abuse cases it is not possible for the child welfare field to respond effectively without the assistance of law enforcement, prosecutors, mental health professionals, and the courts. It also requires that child welfare professionals master a variety of new, complex, and specialized skills. Child welfare professionals whose positions require intervention in child sexual abuse cases are urged to read related material, attend specialized training, and train with skilled experts before working within this area of child maltreatment.

It should be abundantly clear from these case illustrations presented above that all forms of neglect and abuse—physical, emotional and sexual are perpetrated against LGBTQ+ youths by some caretakers and family members. In some cases, the incidence of child maltreatment is discounted for what it truly is because protecting a child from the stigmatizing nature of a LGBTQ+ identity is seen by some parents as the “divine right of a parent” and preferable to having a child who is LGBTQ+ (Mallon, 2017).

Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect

The risk assessment process, which may differ in Europe, from the U.S. is the primary strategy utilized by child welfare practitioners to begin the process of treating child maltreatment is, according to Pecora et al. (2013) akin to a fact-finding mission which gathers pertinent information to make the following determinations:

1. Has the child been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused and/or neglected?
2. Is the child at risk of further harm or maltreatment?
3. Is the child in need of immediate protection?
4. If the child is at imminent risk, what must be done immediately to protect the child?

The following illustration of child maltreatment which will also be utilized to illustrate a risk assessment process, is derived from an actual case in New York City:

“It’s Just Hairspray”

Hector Allesandro is a 41 year old divorced father, who lives with his son Jorge, age 14 and his daughter Beatrice, age 17. Hector is employed full time in construction which causes him to leave his home at early hours and returning feeling spent from the physical aspects of his work. Beatrice cooks for the family, is responsible for keeping the apartment clean and watching out for her younger brother.

Jorge is a soft-spoken teenager who does well in school, and is not involved in negative social activities. His father always teases him that he needs to “toughen up”, to be more macho, because he feels that Jorge is “too soft”. Jorge usually laughs off these comments, but sometimes, he admits, it hurts his feelings that his father does not approve of the way he acts. One day, Jorge, who had been given money by his grandparents for his birthday, went out to the store to buy shampoo and other hair grooming products. Amongst his purchases was a can of hair spray. When he returned home as he unpacked his purchases, his father seeing the can of hair spray flew into a rage. He began screaming at Jorge, “What is this shit? What are you a woman? Men don’t buy this shit! I’m not going to have any son of mine being a faggot. If I have to, I’ll beat that faggot shit out of you.” He began to punch Jorge who fell on the floor crying—“It’s just hair spray, what’s the big deal? So what if I’m gay. Is that what you’re so afraid of?” Beatrice tried to stop her father from hitting Jorge, but he just pushed her away. Jorge ran out of the house, when he could get away and called the police. The police arrived and arrested Mr. Allesandro. Jorge sustained several injuries including bruised ribs, a cut requiring several stitches over his left eye, and a sore scalp.

Fearing for his safety, Jorge asked if he could go somewhere. The police brought him first to the local hospital Emergency Room for treatment and then to the New York City’s

Administration for Children's Services where he was placed in a diagnostic center for evaluation. He was scared, away from his family and felt that he was being punished for just being himself.

The caseworker assigned to the case from the local Social Service district went to the Allesandro home to conduct an assessment to determine whether Jorge had been abused and to calculate the risk of returning Jorge home.

The caseworker talked to Mr. Allesandro, who was released from detention after one night, about the alleged physical abuse and inquired about why it had occurred. Mr. Allesandro did not deny the physical abuse. He said further that he was glad that Jorge was "put away." If his son was gay, said Mr. Allesandro he did not want him in his home. As a good Latino father, he asserted it was his "right" to beat him to try to change him.

Beatrice was very upset that her brother was away from home and upset with her father who said that he would refuse to allow him to have home visits. Beatrice expressed concern about her brother and confided to the worker that her father was a "hothead" but usually came around after he had time to cool off. Mr. Allesandro, who prided himself on caring for his family, had never been arrested and was furious that his son called the police. He maintained that as a father he had a right to beat his son, especially if he was trying to correct what he perceived to be his son's gay behavior.

The caseworker explored Mr. Allesandro's previous relationship with his son Jorge. Mr. Allesandro said Jorge was always "soft" even as a young child. He believed that Jorge was soft because he was "not around him enough to show him how to act like a man." He said he tried hard to be a good father and to support his family, but "I just cannot have a son who is a faggot. It's not right, what would everybody think of me as a father?"

The caseworker tried to explain that sometimes parents do hurt their children when they are angry, or when they feel stress, or when they perceive their child to be "different" as in the case

of a child who is gay identified. She explained that it was her job to help him learn more about his son's gay identity, so that physical abuse wouldn't happen again. Mr. Allesandro responded, "Well if you can't change my son so that he is not a faggot, you can forget it! It will happen again, because if I need to beat him again to change him, I will." Mr. Allesandro made it clear that he was not open, at this point in the case, to learning about or to discuss his son's gay identity. Beatrice, however expressed the wish to visit her brother and to maintain close contact with him.

Family Support as a Possible Antidote to Child Maltreatment

Family acceptance and support has been shown to be critical to better outcomes for youth who identify as LGBTQ+. Groundbreaking research by Ryan et al. (2010) shows that families of youth who identify as LGBTQ+ typically become more accepting over time, even when family members had religious or cultural beliefs that rejected LGBTQ+ identities. These watershed findings suggest that anti-LGB and anti-transgender bias could be remedied given time and education, opening new possibilities for reunification and kinship placements.

A study completed by Ryan et al. (2010) for the Family Acceptance Project (FAP) was the first to identify how family relationships can impact an LGBTQ+ child's risk and resiliency. Children coming out at younger ages are at increased risk for victimization, including within their own homes. According to FAP, this victimization has long-term consequences for their health and development, and rejection by family can increase major health and related risks for LGBTQ+ youth. Results are useful to (1) help diverse families decrease rejection and provide support for their LGBTQ+ children to decrease their children's risk and to promote their well-being; (2) strengthen families and help maintain LGBTQ+ youth in their homes; and (3) develop a new family-related model of prevention and care

for LGBTQ+ children and adolescents for use in a wide range of settings.

Findings from this study (Ryan et al., 2010), examined the role of family acceptance in increasing positive outcomes among LGBTQ+ youth offer promise to LGBTQ+ youth who may experience maltreatment as they indicate that family acceptance is positively correlated with increased physical health, mental health, and social support.

These findings are extremely compelling and document how families really matter to LGBTQ+ young people, as this young person recalled:

I was one of the lucky ones. My Mom was initially thrown by the fact when I came out as a lesbian, but over time she came to be more comfortable with my sexuality. The message that she gave me, even when she was not so comfortable was: “I love you, you are my daughter and no matter what, I will always be here for you.” I can’t tell you how that made me feel to have someone, my Mom on my side. I wish every LGBT young person could have someone like that in their corner.

In fact, families as the authors note, have a deep impact on their LGBTQ+ children’s health and mental health. Follow-up work with families across ethnic groups shows that families can decrease rejecting behavior when they understand how their behavior affects their LGBTQ+ child’s well-being. A little change in decreasing family rejection can make a real difference in decreasing their LGBTQ+ children’s risk.

Implications for Practice and Policy Changes

Protective services for LGBTQ+ children, youth and families can be improved in four areas: Development of clear written policies, improvement of staff training, clinical case consultation, and advocacy for young people in communities, schools, child welfare agencies and health care systems.

In the absence of policies, professionals rely on their own, sometimes idiosyncratic practice wisdom to guide their practice. Social workers and supervisors, need clear, written policies on how one is expected to practice with LGBTQ+ youth and their families. There are several examples (Mallon, 2018; ACS, 2018; Paul, 2020) of what constitutes a comprehensive policy statement and organizations should make use of what exists and adapt it to their localities needs rather than try to re-invent new policy statements.

Training on competent practice with LGBTQ+ children, youth, and families, should not be a one shot deal, but consist of clear well designed curriculum on the wide range of topics necessary for such practice (Weeks et al., 2018). LGBTQ+ affirming training which is consistently integrated into the core protection curriculum is essential. In addition to agency based training, colleges and universities must become more active in providing skills-based training in child protective services which incorporates issues of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression (Mallon, 1998b). It is quite likely that child protection workers will find issues of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression at the root of a variety of child maltreatment situations.

One cannot discuss the need to improve child protection services for LGBTQ+ children and youth without stressing the importance of prevention and clinical case consultation. Prevention should not simply be seen as consciousness raising through awareness programs, but also as primary prevention, including integrating content of issues of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression in parenting programs and mediation programs in educational sites. Clinical case consultation should be available to social workers and youth care workers who are working directly with LGBTQ+ young people and who may need guidance on how they should address a range of critical issues that LGBTQ+ youth and their families may confront.

Finally, those child welfare advocates which claim to be concerned about the welfare of all children, must also include protection issues as they pertain to LGBTQ+ children and youth. To do otherwise is an abhorrent and unethical

violation of our values as a profession. If child protection espouses to provide for the safety and care of children and youth, it must include *all* youth, including LGBTQ+ youth and their families.

This chapter sought to drive home the urgency of developing comprehensive, informed approaches to evaluating potential and realized risks for LGBTQ+ children and youth. It is our hope that the cases presented herein provided the reader with a beginning context to understand the potential for such conditions.

Conclusions

Scraping below the already unpleasant veneer of child neglect and maltreatment one can sometimes find an additional concealed layer. One that when unveiled is clearly linked to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Competent definitions of child maltreatment must avoid extreme heterocentrism and cisnormativity. Just as a general lack of written policies, training and knowledge about cultural diversity has hampered child protection efforts, so has heterocentrism and cisnormativity in child welfare obstructed professionals in the system from responding effectively to a growing number of LGBTQ+ children who come to the attention of child protection services.

The position of heterocentrism and cisnormativity disregard sexual orientation and gender identity/expression differences and imposes a single standard for all child care practices. This is potentially harmful to children and adolescents who identify as LGBTQ+ as it denigrates their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression and prevents them from accessing the care and services they need to survive and thrive, as this young person commented:

No I wasn't allowed to be myself. And as a minor, you can't do much against that. If you have parents who really stand up for you, well then you would not come into the institution in the first place, but. . . if you don't have that, yes. . . what can you do then?

I was not allowed to talk about being a girl, I was not allowed to dress like that, and otherwise I had to go back to my parents, where I was abused. [. . .] I didn't really have a choice, right? The one was bad, the other even worse.

It is also potentially harmful to child protection efforts in that one strategy (that of a heterosexual/cisgender assumption) will be utilized for all young people regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Furthermore, Western society's tacit acceptance of some parent's attempts to "correct" their child's real or perceived LGBTQ+ identity, viewed as shameful and stigmatizing, through physically, sexually or emotionally abusive means should cause consternation for child welfare advocates or anyone who claims to be concerned about the protection of all children.

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