Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity

Feelings of LGBTQ+ Community Belonging Among Diverse Youth with LGBTQ+ Parents in the United States

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Madi T. Diomede[1], Winnie E. Durant[2], Kay A. Simon[3], and Rachel H. Farr[1]
[1] Department of Psychology, University of Kentucky
[2] University Honors Program, University of Louisville
[3] Family Social Science, University of Minnesota

Although numbers of LGBTQ+ parents have grown in the United States, research about these families has focused more on children's adjustment rather than community belongingness. Utilizing minority stress, self-determination, and belongingness theories, our study qualitatively examined feelings of belonging among youth with LGBTQ+ parents who are diverse in social identities and geographic region in the United States. Using inductive thematic analysis, four themes were identified. This study supports and extends findings on community belongingness among diverse youth with LGBTQ+ parents. Belongingness was impacted by internal (e.g., identity) and external factors (e.g., parents' coming out experiences, other communities). Overall, youth with LGBTQ+ parents experience belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, especially locally, and feel positively about it. We describe implications for research, practice, law, and policy.

Public Significance Statement
This study is an exploration of LGBTQ+ community belongingness among a sample of 51 racially, economically, and geographically diverse youth (12–25 years old) with LGBTQ+ parents in the United States. Guided by minority stress, self-determination, and belongingness theories, we used strength-based and intersectional approaches to understand themes uncovered from interviews with these youth that offer implications for policy, practice, and law about the benefits of LGBTQ+ community for diverse youth with LGBTQ+ parents.

Keywords: community belonging, LGBTQ+ community, LGBTQ+ parent families, LGBTQ+ youth

LGBTQ+ parents, and adults with LGBTQ+ parents, endorse the importance of LGBTQ+ community belonging (i.e., sense of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community; Cashen, 2022; Frost & Meyer, 2012; Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009). Indeed, LGBTQ+ community belonging is associated with better mental and physical health among LGBTQ+ people (Heck et al., 2011; Meyer, 2015; Rosario et al., 2006). Extensive literature examines the benefits of LGBTQ+ community belonging among LGBTQ+ adults and adolescents, with some among adults with LGBTQ+ parents (Cashen, 2022; A. E. Goldberg, 2007; A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012; Kuvalanka &

Goldberg, 2009; Kuvalanka & Munroe, 2020). There is little, however, on this topic among adolescents and emerging adults (i.e., youth) with LGBTQ+ parents. Regardless of their own gender or sexual identities, children with LGBTQ+ parents face stigma associated with their parents' and families' identities (Farr et al., 2016). Considering the prominence of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric in the United States (Hegarty & Rutherford, 2019; Miller, 2023) and the growing numbers of LGBTQ+ parent families (Gates, 2013; S. K. Goldberg & Conron, 2018), it is vital researchers examine protective factors for this population, including LGBTQ+ community belonging. Here, we use minority stress, self-determination, and belongingness theories to explore feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community among diverse youth with LGBTQ+ parents in the United States.

Much research on LGBTQ+ community belonging among individuals with LGBTQ+ parents is focused on adults (Cashen, 2022; A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012) rather than youth. Despite this, exploring and developing one's connection to a community is especially salient during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2015; Erikson, 1994; Sotardi et al., 2021). Adolescence as a developmental stage is marked by increased awareness of one's own identities and the identities of those around them (Arnett, 2015; Erikson, 1994). As individuals enter adulthood, they are often confronted with the task of forging their own community connections without their parents (Arnett, 2015). Indeed, young adults

with LGB[1] parents report that their relationship with and feelings toward the LGBTQ+ community changed upon entering adulthood (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012): some describe feeling closer to the LGBTQ+ community during their youth, but less so during adulthood, while others note the opposite experience. Similarly, some with LGB parents describe more support from the LGBTQ+ community during childhood, yet as adults, the community made less space for them (Cashen, 2022). Exploring LGBTQ+ community belonging among youth with LGBTQ+ parents could provide insight into mechanisms and factors that impact youth's feelings of belonging in adolescence and early adulthood, as well as the potential psychological and social benefits for these youth.

Broadly, research with LGBTQ+ families has been saturated by white,[2] coastal samples in the United States with higher socioeconomic status (Patterson et al., 2021; Stone, 2018). LGBTQ+ parents, however, are proportionately more likely to be people of color (The Williams Institute, 2019), lower-income (Badgett et al., 2019; National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2020), and live in the Midwest and South (Patterson et al., 2021), compared to cisgender heterosexual (cis-het) people. Each of these demographic factors meaningfully impacts belonging; for instance, racial/ethnic identity and geographic region both have been identified as relevant to access to the LGBTQ+ community (McCormick & Barthelemy, 2021; Paceley et al., 2016). LGBTQ+ people in rural communities report barriers to access to LGBTQ+ community (McCormick & Barthelemy, 2021), and many BIPOC LGBTQ+ individuals report difficulty accessing LGBTQ+ community due to racial stigma from the LGBTQ+ community (McCormick & Barthelemy, 2021; Paceley et al., 2016).

Theoretical Framework

Minority stress theory considers the impact of systemic and structural social inequality on people with marginalized identities (Brooks, 1981; Meyer, 2003). LGBTQ+ community members endure unique stressors stemming from law, policy, institutions, and cultural norms (Levitt et al., 2023; Meyer, 2003). Stigma toward those with LGBTQ+ parents appears regularly in hateful speech and challenges to family identity (e.g., asking a child who their "real" parent is; Breshears & Braithwaite, 2014; Cody et al., 2017; Farr et al., 2016). Further, people with LGBTQ+ parents often feel a burden to properly represent their parents and family identity to dissuade stereotypes (Fitzgerald, 2010). Those with LGBTQ+ parents describe pressure to be cis-het and well-adjusted (which the literature supports) to avoid confirming stereotypes like "gay parents raise gay kids" (assuming this is a negative outcome) and "gay individuals cannot raise well-adjusted children" (Farr et al., 2022; Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009). To manage stigma and minority stress, those with LGBTQ+ parents often cite the LGBTQ+ community and others with LGBTQ+ parents as sources of support (Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009). LGBTQ+ community belonging may be a vital tool for coping with adversity and promoting positive adjustment.

It is important to understand the impact of social inequalities by situating minority stress in historical context for LGBTQ+ people and their families (Hammack & Cohler, 2011; Hegarty & Rutherford, 2019). Following heightened LGBTQ+ visibility and empowerment during the gay liberation and lesbian feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the United States saw a sharp increase in lesbian and gay (LG) parent families from the 1980s to the turn of the 21st

century—the "gayby boom" (Pressley & Andrews, 1992; Rivers, 2013). More resources emerged for LGBTQ+ parent families such as LGBTQ+ parent family summer camps, Family Equality (an organization for LGBTQ+ families; https://www.familyequality.org/about-us/who-we-are/), COLAGE (an organization created by people with LGBTQ+ parents that promotes support and community for them; Kuvalanka et al., 2006), and "R Family Vacations" (https://www.rfamilyvacations.com/about-us). As children of the gayby boom have come of age, the LGBTQ+ community has further grown in visibility (e.g., national recognition of pride month in June; The White House, 2021) and been centered in many controversies, including marriage equality (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015), adoption rights among trans and gender diverse people (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2020), and access to parenthood for LGBTQ+ adults (Patterson & Farr, 2022). Both advances and public backlash situate youth with LGBTQ+ parents in a unique historical context that must be considered to better understand belongingness in the LGBTQ+ community.

Theory of belonging (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995) is relevant in emphasizing factors that influence belonging. In their transdisciplinary, scoping review about sense of belonging, Mahar et al. (2013) describe multiple factors central to belonging across populations. One of these, self-determination, is particularly evident in the connections between youth with LGBTQ+ parents and the LGBTQ+ community. Self-determination theory theorizes that each individual is motivated toward autonomy, competence, and relatedness to ensure well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Mahar et al. (2013) emphasize these factors and define self-determination in the context of community belonging as the choices each person makes about whether and how to engage in or feel part of the LGBTQ+ community (Cashen, 2022; A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012). This tenet is developmentally relevant, as youth make decisions about identity and community status separate from their family (Arnett, 2000; Cashen, 2022).

LGBTQ+ Community Belonging

Feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community are influenced by many factors, including personal and family connections (Gartrell et al., 2019; A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012; Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009) and geographic location and context (Paceley et al., 2016; Sotardi et al., 2021). Previous literature describes the impact of parent outness on community belonging. Young adults raised by parents who were out as LGBTQ+ describe frequent interactions with the LGBTQ+ community via their parents, parents' friends, and LGBTQ+ organizations (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012). Adults with "out" LGBTQ+ parents often feel "queer by proxy" or "culturally queer" (Cashen, 2022; A. E. Goldberg, 2007). In contrast, young adults whose parents came out later in life do not tend to describe similar early connections to the LGBTQ+ community; they recount discovering the community in adolescence or beyond (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012).

Personal identification as a child of LGBTQ+ parents can relate to feelings of LGBTQ+ community belonging, as they may experience

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[1] We use acronyms (e.g., LGB) that reflect those in the cited sources.

[2] We capitalize minoritized racial/ethnic identities (e.g., Black) and lowercase white in deference to those who have been oppressed by whiteness as a social construct and power, and to acknowledge that minoritized racial/ethnic identities, such as Black, Latino/a/x/e, and Asian/Pacific Islander, constitute specific cultural groups whose members have distinct shared histories and experiences (Crenshaw, 1991).

community with others who have shared life experiences and identification (Cashen, 2022; McKnight, 2016). Organizations like COLAGE (Kuvalanka et al., 2006) give youth opportunities to connect with others in LGBTQ+ families. Youth who are LGBTQ+ and have LGBTQ+ parents represent "second generation" LGBTQ+ people with unique experiences of navigating their personal connection to the LGBTQ+ community and the connection via their parents (Cashen, 2022; Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009; Kuvalanka & Munroe, 2020). While many LGBTQ+ youth report strong identity-related support from their LGBTQ+ parents, others do not (Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009). The latter cites generational gaps in attitudes toward outness, pride, and gender-diverse identities (i.e., transgender, nonbinary (TGNB), etc.; Kuvalanka & Munroe, 2020).

Lastly, geographic location relates to connections to the LGBTQ+ community (Stone, 2018). LGBTQ+ community activity is sometimes limited in rural areas, particularly in the South and Midwest (U.S.). Paceley et al. (2016) explored LGBTQ+ community in a non-metropolitan Midwestern county and found several barriers to LGBTQ+ individuals' community connections, including marginalization based on other identities, hostile groups, exclusionary practices by LGBTQ+ groups, and community size. Little is known, however, about geographic factors and connection to the LGBTQ + community among youth with LGBTQ+ parents.

Individuals with LGBTQ+ parents from metropolitan or more progressive regions of the United States (e.g., the Northeast) describe creating community connections via visible LGBTQ+ activities, events, and organizations in their area (e.g., COLAGE, LGBTQ+ family camp; A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012). Those with strong connections to the LGBTQ+ community emphasize pride and LGBTQ+ community events as fortifying those connections (Cashen, 2022). In contrast, those from rural communities describe a lack of LGBTQ+ visibility, and subsequently, a lack of connection to their LGBTQ+ community (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012). Thus, attending to geographic regions is imperative in investigating feelings of LGBTQ+ community belonging.

The Current Study

Guided by minority stress, self-determination, and sense of belonging theories, we investigated feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community among youth with LGBTQ+ parents. We intended to fill gaps and extend the literature on these topics by including a sample of youth with LGBTQ+ parents characterized by racial/ethnic, gender, and geographic diversity (e.g., Stone, 2018). Using a qualitative, exploratory approach, we examined these questions:

1. How do youth with LGBTQ+ parents describe their feelings of belonging (or not) to the LGBTQ+ community?
2. What factors do youth with LGBTQ+ parents describe as encouraging their connection to the LGBTQ+ community?
3. What barriers to community belonging do youth with LGBTQ+ parents describe?

Method

Participants

Participants were ages 12–25 years ($N = 51$; $M_{age} = 19.63$, $SD = 3.48$), each with at least one parent who identified as LGBTQ+. Participants reported diverse racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual identities,

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Baseline characteristic	Sample total ($N = 51$)	Percentage of sample
Gender		
Cisgender woman	28	55
Cisgender man	14	27
Transgender man	2	4
Nonbinary	4	8
Transmasculine	2	4
Questioning	1	2
Race/ethnicity		
white	31	61
Black	5	10
Latinx	5	10
Asian	1	2
Multiracial	9	18
Sexual orientation		
Lesbian/gay	6	12
Bisexual	7	14
Queer	5	10
Confused/questioning	5	10
Asexual	1	2
Pansexual	2	4
Heterosexual	25	49
Age		
Adolescent (<18)	13	25
Emerging adult (18+)	38	76
Geography		
South	22	43
Midwest	14	27
Northwest	9	18
West	6	12

as well as subjective social status (SSS; $M = 5.71$, $SD = 1.26$, range = 2.5–8 on 1–10 scale) and geographic region (see Table 1). Overall, 26 participants (51%) were LGBQ, 20 (39%) BIPOC, and 9 (18%) TGNB or questioning their gender. About a quarter (25.49%; $n = 13$) were under age 18. At the time of data collection, all but one lived in the United States (originally from and lived for an extended time in the United States). Most were from the Southern and Midwestern U.S.: Kentucky (33.33%; $n = 17$), Ohio (21.57%; $n = 11$), and one each from Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas. Others were in the Northeastern or Western U.S.: California (7.84%; $n = 4$), Pennsylvania (5.88%; $n = 3$), and one each from Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Utah.

Participants joined their family in myriad ways. Half were born via reproductive sex in a different-sex relationship (50.98%; $n = 26$). Others reported their parents pursued alternative routes, including donor insemination (25.49%; $n = 13$), foster care adoption (3.92%; $n = 2$), private domestic adoption (3.92%; $n = 2$), international adoption (1.96%; $n = 1$), surrogacy (1.96%; $n = 1$), or multiple approaches involving two or more of these pathways (9.80%; $n = 5$).

Participants reported information about their parents; participants' parents did not directly participate in the study. Participants described their parents (LGBTQ+ and otherwise) as having the following sexual identities: lesbian (43.22%; $n = 51$), heterosexual (23.73%; $n = 23$), gay (16.10%; $n = 19$), bisexual (11.86%; $n = 14$), queer (1.69%; $n = 2$), pansexual (1.69%; $n = 2$), or multiple sexual identities (5.93%; $n = 7$; lesbian and bisexual). Regarding gender identity, most parents were reported to identify as cisgender women (67.86%; $n = 76$). Other parents were reported to identify as cisgender men (25.42%; $n = 30$), transgender women (3.39%;

$n = 4$), nonbinary (0.85%; $n = 1$), and genderfluid (0.85%; $n = 1$). Regarding racial/ethnic identity, most parents were reported to be white (78.57%; $n = 88$), then Black (12.5%; $n = 14$), Latinx (2.68%; $n = 3$), Asian (3.58%; $n = 4$), Middle Eastern (0.89%; $n = 1$), and Multiracial (9.80%; $n = 5$).

Procedure

Participants were recruited via targeted and snowball sampling from many sources such as LGBTQ+ community centers, alumni groups, and national organizations like COLAGE (Kuvalanka et al., 2006). The study was advertised over a local radio show, via flyers, advertisements in pride pamphlets, and emails from community center listservs. All recruitment materials contained a link to a brief eligibility Qualtrics survey. Eligibility criteria ensured the sample represented (a) the developmental period of adolescence to emerging adulthood and (b) LGBTQ+ parent families. Participants needed to be between 12 and 25 years old, to have one openly LGBTQ+ identified parent who had been out for 5 or more years, and to have lived with that parent for some time growing up. Eligible participants under age 18 completed assent forms; their parent/guardian filled out permission forms. Next, trained research personnel conducted individual semi-structured, audio-recorded, one-on-one interviews about participants' experiences being part of an LGBTQ+ family, experiences with the LGBTQ+ community, personal identity, and community support. Transcriptions were generated using Otter.ai (i.e., a secure, third-party platform) and then checked and de-identified by trained research personnel. Interviews lasted approximately 90 min. Participants were compensated $50 via e-gift cards. The University of Kentucky's Institutional Review Board approved the research protocol. Data were collected between December 2018 and February 2020.

Materials

Demographic Questions

Participants answered both demographic questions in the eligibility survey and in the interview itself. Participants reported their gender, sexual and racial/ethnic identities, geographic region, age, income (both current and growing up), subjective social status (SSS) ranking (on 1–10 scale—the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status—with higher scores representing higher perceived status in jobs, money, education, etc.; Adler et al., 2000), how their family came together (e.g., adoption), their parents' identities, and current family structure. Questions included, but were not limited to: "Please describe a little bit about how your family was formed (e.g., adoption)" and "Where do you currently live, and how would you describe your home and neighborhood (Probe for rural, suburban, urban)? If where you currently live is different from where you grew up, could you describe where you grew up (home, neighborhood, name of the place, etc.)?" This method of obtaining demographic information was particularly enhanced by our qualitative approach. Each participant was free to elaborate on demographic questions, and many did (e.g., when asked to describe their current neighborhood, many added feelings about and experiences in it).

Interview Guide

The interview (Farr & Simon, 2022) focused on feelings toward the LGBTQ+ community, other communities broadly, feelings of belonging to them, and how participants exercise belonging to or involvement with their communities in everyday life. Interview questions (Farr & Simon, 2022; https://osf.io/x3btc/?view_only=cf12307 f4b474df493a2b50a5636c43f; drawn from literature; e.g., Frost & Meyer, 2012) included, but were not limited to, "We throw around this big word, 'LGBTQ community,' but what does that really mean?," "What do you think of when you hear someone refer to the LGBTQ community?," and "Tell me about some activities you have participated in related to the LGBTQ community, if any."

Data Availability Statement

Data represented here are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Data Analysis

We conducted a thematic analysis via a multistep inductive approach with reflexive and structured practices and codebook creation (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2021). A coding team of four trained personnel, including the first and second authors and two research assistants, familiarized themselves with constructs of interest (e.g., sense of belonging), population (i.e., youth with LGBTQ+ parents), and transcripts. Coders engaged in memo writing and met for initial open coding (Braun & Clarke, 2021). They documented broad thematic notes via brief, impactful statements and then built consensus around multiple themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The team met weekly to discuss developing themes and to resolve any coding disagreements.

Team members regularly discussed positionality, acknowledging the ways identities impact perceptions of participants and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Levitt et al., 2018). Coders hold diverse gender identities (i.e., cisgender woman, cisgender man, nonbinary persons), sexual identities (i.e., lesbian, gay, queer), and represent multiple U.S. geographic regions (i.e., South, Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, Northeast). All are white; none have LGBTQ+ parents. They also received guidance from the third and fourth authors, who collectively represent LGBTQ+, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ parent identities (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Levitt et al., 2018). With refinement, the team developed and coded mutually exclusive, dichotomous ($0 = $ absent, $1 = $ present) themes. Krippendorff's alpha provided additional rigor to the teams' consensus-based approach; themes had good average interrater reliability ($\alpha = .77$; Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007).

Results

Thematic coding led to four themes of varying frequency among participants and subgroups: (a) psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community ($n = 23$); (b) engagement with and feelings of belonging to local LGBTQ+ communities ($n = 25$); (c) overlap in LGBTQ+ and other community belonging ($n = 18$); and (d) barriers to feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community ($n = 30$; see Tables 2 and 3 for further details).

Theme 1: Psychological Identification with the LGBTQ+ Community

The first theme represented participants who felt a sense of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community through psychological identification with the broader LGBTQ+ community. Of the 51

Table 2

Thematic Analysis of LGBTQ+ Community Belongingness Among Youth with LGBTQ+ Parents

Theme (*n*)	Theme description	Example	Quote
Psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community (*n* = 23)	Feelings of belongingness to the larger LGBTQ+ community through identification with the LGBTQ+ community	Activism on a national level, involvement in a national organization	"I haven't ever felt like I didn't belong or that it is difficult to be a part of. The community is so large and accepting of everyone." (Grace, 17, white, cisgender female, gay/lesbian, South, suburban, lesbian mothers)
Engagement and feelings of belonging to local LGBTQ+ community (*n* = 25)	Feelings of belongingness to a localized LGBTQ+ community through engagement	Local activism and involvement in LGBTQ+ organizations	"as I've gotten older, it's kind of a bonding point at this point in our lives, going to pride parades and stuff as a group…maintaining the tradition." (Brooklynn, 20, Mixed or Black, masculine-presenting woman, lesbian/queer, Northeast, suburban, lesbian mother)
Overlap between LGBTQ+ and other community belonging (*n* = 18)	Overlap between belonging to the LGBTQ+ community and another community	Overlap between religious (or another) community and LGBTQ+ community	"Yeah, it's pretty cool…even knowing them has made me feel like I have a Jewish community of people with like, lesbian parents." (Taylor, 21, white, cisgender woman/questioning gender, queer/bisexual, West, rural, lesbian mothers)
Barriers to feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community (*n* = 30)	Obstacles to a participant's feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community	Being unable to go to LGBTQ+ events due to lack of transportation or for fear of violence; feeling excluded	"…there aren't a lot of opportunities to participate here in [U.S. state]." (Josh, 14, Cuban American, cisgender man, questioning his sexuality, South, suburban, multiple lesbian parent households, experienced divorce)

Note. Pseudonyms replace participants' actual names. All participant demographic information is self-described.

participants, 23 endorsed this theme and said they did identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community ($\alpha = .76$). They were probed to expand on their answers. Based on participants' responses, and connected with existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2021; A. E. Goldberg, 2007), coders defined psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community as a relationship to the community broadly, not based on personal sexuality and gender identity labels (i.e., identifying with an LGBTQ+ identity label did not automatically place participants in this theme) nor exclusive to one's local community. Instead, psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community was established by asserting membership to the community, having a stake in major events or rulings, or taking actions shared with a large group from the community (e.g., marching in a pride parade). Among those endorsing this theme, 18 were LGBTQ+ and described a sense of belonging to the community through that identity. Not every LGBTQ+ participant endorsed this theme, however, given that this theme involved expressions and an internal, psychological sense of community belonging beyond one's own identity labels.

Psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community could be expressed through personal reactions to major events or rulings related to LGBTQ+ people. Once again, this code was not based on the interactions one had directly with the community, but instead a connection to the LGBTQ+ community at large. For example, some participants noted feeling a sense of identification with the community when same-gender marriage equality became a federal right in June 2015 after the U.S. Supreme Court case, *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Claudia[3] (see Table 4 for participants' individual demographic information),[4] who became a political activist because of involvement with the LGBTQ+ community, indicated that these experiences impacted her career decisions: "Someone pointed out to me just last week, can you imagine like, what would have happened if that Supreme Court case hadn't been decided, then would I be on a completely different, you know, career path?" Nineteen participants mentioned same-gender marriage legalization as a

significant and/or joyous event. Participants noted this ruling allowed their parents' relationships and families to be legally recognized in the United States. Major events involving the LGBTQ+ community also impacted participants. Amber described psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community through grief in the wake of the Pulse Nightclub shootings in Orlando, Florida in June 2016: "We were actually in FL when the Pulse Nightclub shooting happened, and I remember because we were on vacation…we heard about it in the news and we were just crying in our RV. Because we were going to Orlando like two days after it happened, we ended up going and donating blood at one of the hospitals for the victims."

Finally, participants identified with the LGBTQ+ community through involvement with relevant large events or celebrations. Some described traveling far distances to go to pride events outside of their local community (e.g., driving hours to New York City for a pride celebration). While some talked about belonging by emphasizing relationships with people with whom they have attended pride events, others emphasized feelings of belonging to a community bigger than themselves and loved ones. Josh said, "You know, during Pride fairs when I'm walking with a bunch of other people protesting all the homophobia, I'm really proud to be a part of that."

The presence of psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community was mixed among cis-het youth. Some purposefully did not include themselves as LGBTQ+ community members (these participants who did not identify with the LGBTQ+ community were not probed with follow-up questions, yet we include their relevant quotes to show the contrast between those included and not in Theme 1). Beth said, "I don't really continue to feel the differences that a lot of people in the LGBT community do. And so I don't want to put myself in that category, almost taking away from

[3] Pseudonyms replace participants' actual names.
[4] All participant demographic information is self-described.

Table 3

Endorsed Themes by Participant's Racial/Ethnic Identity, Gender and Sexuality, and Urbanicity

Themes	Total $N=51$ n (%)	Racial/ethnic identity					Gender and sexuality		Urbanicity		
		Black $(n=5)$ n (%)	Latinx $(n=5)$ n (%)	Asian $(n=1)$ n (%)	Multiracial $(n=9)$ n (%)	white $(n=31)$ n (%)	LGBTQ+ $(n=25)$ n (%)	Cisgender Hetero-sexual $(n=26)$ n (%)	Rural $(n=8)$ n (%)	Suburban $(n=36)$ n (%)	Urban $(n=7)$ n (%)
Psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community	23 (45.10)	4 (80.00)	2 (40.00)	0 (00.00)	7 (77.78)	18 (58.06)	18 (72.00)	5 (19.23)	6 (75.00)	13 (36.11)	4 (57.14)
Engagement with and feelings of belonging to local LGBTQ+ communities	25 (49.02)	2 (40.00)	2 (40.00)	0 (00.00)	5 (55.56)	17 (54.84)	21 (84.00)	5 (19.23)	5 (62.50)	16 (44.44)	5 (71.43)
Overlap in LGBTQ+ and other community belonging	18 (35.29)	3 (60.00)	1 (20.00)	1 (100.00)	7 (77.78)	12 (38.71)	11 (44.00)	7 (26.92)	6 (75.00)	10 (27.78)	2 (28.57)
Barriers to feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community	30 (58.82)	2 (40.00)	3 (60.00)	1 (100.00)	5 (55.56)	19 (61.30)	20 (80.00)	10 (38.46)	6 (75.00)	21 (58.33)	3 (42.86)

	Total $N=51$ n (%)	Region				LGBTQ+ household					Divorce	
		South $(n=22)$ n (%)	Midwest $(n=14)$ n (%)	North-east $(n=9)$ n (%)	West $(n=6)$ n (%)	Single Mom $(n=11)$ n (%)	Single Dad $(n=3)$ n (%)	Two Moms $(n=29)$ n (%)	Two Dads $(n=5)$ n (%)	Mom and Dad $(n=3)$ n (%)	Exper-ienced Divorce $(n=26)$ n (%)	No Divorce $(n=25)$ n (%)
Psychological Identification with the LGBTQ+ Community	23 (45.10)	8 (36.36)	5 (35.71)	7 (77.78)	3 (50.00)	4 (36.36)	0 (00.00)	14 (48.28)	3 (60.00)	2 (66.66)	12 (46.15)	11 (44.00)
Engagement with and Belonging to Local LGBTQ+ Communities	25 (49.02)	11 (50.00)	4 (28.57)	7 (77.78)	4 (66.67)	6 (54.54)	1 (33.33)	14 (48.28)	3 (60.00)	2 (66.66)	17 (33.33)	9 (36.00)
Overlap in LGBTQ+ and Other Community Belonging	18 (35.29)	6 (27.28)	6 (42.86)	4 (44.44)	2 (33.33)	3 (27.27)	2 (66.66)	11 (37.93)	1 (20.00)	1 (33.33)	6 (11.76)	12 (48.00)
Barriers to feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community	30 (58.82)	14 (63.63)	6 (42.86)	8 (88.89)	2 (33.33)	6 (54.54)	1 (33.33)	18 (62.07)	3 (60.00)	2 (66.66)	17 (33.33)	13 (52.00)

Endorsed themes by participant geographic region, LGBTQ+ household, and divorce

Table 4

Individual Participant Pseudonyms and Demographic Characteristics

Participant number	Pseudonym	Participant characteristics
1	Lilly	20, Hispanic American, cisgender woman, lesbian, Midwest, urban, single mom; two dads; experienced a divorce
2	Hannah	22, white, cisgender woman, heterosexual, South, rural, two moms; single dad; experienced a divorce
3	Peyton	21, white, transgender man, bisexual/queer, Northeast, suburban, two moms; single mom
4	Megan	21, Biracial (Black/white), cisgender woman, heterosexual, Midwest, suburban, single mom; Single dad; experienced a divorce
5	Jack	24, mixed/Black, cisgender man, gay, Midwest, suburban, single dad
6	Jessica	20, white, cisgender woman, heterosexual, South, urban, two dads; mom and dad; experienced a divorce
7	Sam	20, mixed (Black/white), cisgender man, heterosexual, South, suburban, single dad
8	Charlotte	19, white, cisgender woman, heterosexual, Midwest, suburban, two moms
9	Sarah	15, white, cisgender woman, heterosexual, South, suburban, two moms; mom and dad; experienced a divorce
10	Chloe	17, white, cisgender woman, heterosexual, South, suburban, two moms; experienced a divorce
11	John	22, white, transgender man, pansexual, South, rural, single mom
12	Preston	20, Black, cisgender man, heterosexual, Midwest, urban, two dads; experienced a divorce
13	Riley	15, Black, nonbinary, gay, South, suburban, two moms; experienced a divorce
14	Abby	16, Black, cisgender woman, heterosexual, West, suburban, single dad
15	Beth	19, white/Hispanic, cisgender woman, heterosexual, South, suburban, two moms
16	Becca	22, white, cisgender woman, heterosexual, South, suburban, two moms; mom and dad; experienced a divorce
17	Matt	12, white, cisgender man, heterosexual, South, suburban, two moms
18	Josh	14, Cuban American, cisgender man, unsure of sexuality, South, suburban, two moms; two guardians; experienced a divorce
19	Rachel	14, Latina, cisgender female, heterosexual, West, suburban, single mom
20	Dan	13, white, cisgender man, pansexual, West, urban, two moms; mom and dad; experienced a divorce
21	Molly	21, white, cisgender female, heterosexual, South, suburban, two moms; experienced a divorce
22	Ben	25, white, cisgender male, heterosexual, South, suburban, single mom; single dad; experienced a divorce
23	Adam	24, white, cisgender man, bisexual, South, suburban, mom and dad; mom and dad; experienced a divorce
24	Luke	18, Hispanic, cisgender man, heterosexual, South, suburban, two moms
25	Will	24, Black, cisgender man, heterosexual, Midwest, suburban, two moms; experienced a divorce
26	Mary	24, Biracial (Chinese/white), cisgender female, heterosexual, Midwest, rural, two moms
27	Danielle	21, white, cisgender woman, bisexual, Midwest, suburban, single mom; single dad; experienced a divorce
28	Ashley	20, white, cisgender woman, heterosexual, Midwest, suburban, two moms
29	Taylor	21, white, cisgender woman, queer/bisexual, West, rural, two moms
30	Natalie	22, white, cisgender woman, heterosexual, Midwest, suburban, two moms; single mom; experienced a divorce
31	Zach	25, white, cisgender man, heterosexual, Northeast, suburban, two moms
32	Ryan	22, Biracial (Black/white), cisgender man, gay, Midwest, rural, two moms; experienced a divorce
33	Brooklynn	20, Mixed/Black, masculine-presenting woman, lesbian/queer, Northeast, suburban, mom and dad; single mom; experienced a divorce
34	Grace	17, white, cisgender female, gay/lesbian, South, suburban, single mom
35	Isabelle	18, white (half-Lebanese), cisgender female, bisexual/queer, Northeast, suburban, two dads; two moms
36	Jacob	18, Black, trans-masculine/ambiguously queer, bi/pan/aromantic, Midwest, rural, two moms; mom and dad; experienced a divorce
37	Tori	23, white, cisgender woman, heterosexual/bisexual, Northeast, rural, two moms; single mom
38	Morgan	21, biracial (Black/white), nonbinary woman/Neutrois, Northeast, urban, single mom; experienced a divorce
39	Chelsea	24, white, cisgender woman, queer, South, suburban, two moms
40	Audrey	21, white, cisgender woman, bisexual, Northeast, suburban, two moms; experienced a divorce
41	Claudia	20, white, cisgender woman, heterosexual, Midwest, rural, two moms
42	Averie	22, white, cisgender woman, heterosexual, South, suburban, mom and dad
43	River	21, white, nonbinary woman, queer/bisexual, Northeast, suburban, single mom; single mom
44	Tessa	19, Biracial (Black/white), cisgender woman, heterosexual, Midwest, urban, single mom; single dad
45	Anna	15, white, cisgender female, questioning sexuality, South, suburban, two moms; two moms; experienced a divorce
46	Todd	17, Multiracial, cisgender man, bisexual/heteroromantic, West, suburban, two dads
47	Nicole	25, white, nonbinary woman, queer, South, rural, two moms; two dads; single mom; experienced a divorce
48	Nathan	20, white, cisgender male, heterosexual, West, suburban, two dads; single guardian
49	Ella	12, white, cisgender female, questioning sexuality, Northeast, suburban, two moms
50	Amber	22, white, cisgender female, bisexual/questioning sexuality, South, suburban, two moms; single mom; experienced a divorce
51	Stephanie	23, Vietnamese, cisgender female, heterosexual, South, suburban, two moms; mom and dad; experienced a divorce

their identity." Other cis-het youth (see Table 3) emphasized psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community via their parents' LGBTQ+ involvement and identity. Nathan said, "I would say that I am a member even though I am not gay. I mean I go to pride day with my fathers. We do the parade. I told you both my dads work at the pride center. So, I do things out in the community, you know, go for fellowship at the parades and stuff."

Psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community via one's parents (and their LGBTQ+ identity) appeared among LGBTQ+ participants too. Isabelle said, "a lot of us just consider ourselves culturally queer in a lot of ways, because we were kind of born into the community." River noted: "I have such a historical relationship to the queer community."

Theme 2: Engagement with and Feelings of Belonging to Local LGBTQ+ Communities

Theme 2 was present in 25 of 51 transcripts ($\alpha = .78$) and reflected descriptions of engagement with or feelings toward a local community of LGBTQ+ individuals. We defined a local community as the

community surrounding the individual participant, whether represented by family, friends, a town, or an organization. This contrasted with psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community in Theme 1. While some participants did not identify with the community broadly, they did feel belonging to their local community ($n = 10$) and vice versa ($n = 7$). Some described both ($n = 16$). Todd purposefully stated he did not identify as a member of the larger LGBTQ+ community (no to Theme 1); instead, he, "felt much more of a connection to the people around [them] who are a part of…the LGBT community" (yes to Theme 2). In contrast, political activist Claudia noted as endorsing Theme 1 did not indicate engagement with or feelings of belonging to a local LGBTQ+ community; she said, "I want to help out with the community, but I'm also like, I'm a straight woman. I don't want to like overstep." In general, for Theme 2, participants discussed engaging with local organizations or individual chapters of national LGBTQ+ organizations, closeness with local LGBTQ+ community members, pride celebrations, peer groups, and activism on behalf of the community.

Further, some participants included in engagement with and feelings of belonging to local LGBTQ+ communities detailed how people in their local community impacted or welcomed them. Whether through local pride events, gay–straight alliances (GSAs), or birthday parties, LGBTQ+ parents, parents' friends, friends with LGBTQ+ parents, and LGBTQ+ friends all were sources of support and contributed to feelings of belonging. Anna described the belonging and acceptance she has felt: "I've never really felt like I didn't belong because I've always felt included in my family and I've never been like put out or anything for 'oh you're not LGBT, you're still deciding, whatever'; it's never been an issue." Notably, many participants coded for Theme 2 had experienced divorce ($n = 17$) rather than not ($n = 9$) (see Table 3).

Participants also demonstrated engagement with and feelings of belonging to local LGBTQ+ communities through traditions and persisting involvement in the local community. They described joining friends and family to attend annual pride celebrations in their own town or across the United States. Creation of tradition indicated a sense of belonging to the community immediately available to participants. As many attended pride events for other reasons (e.g., obligation to friends or family, making their parents happy, working at the event, etc.), Theme 2 specifically related to personal feelings of belonging to the community beyond those reasons.

Theme 3: Overlap in LGBTQ+ and Other Community Belonging

Theme 3 was present for 18 of 51 participants ($\alpha = .77$) and involved instances where participants' LGBTQ+ community belonging or LGBTQ+ identity interacted with belonging to another community (e.g., religious, racial/ethnic). This theme focuses on how and where overlap occurred, and if participants felt positively, neutrally, or negatively about it.

In contrast, instances of overlap in LGBTQ+ and other community belonging included reports of backlash from other communities toward the LGBTQ+ community that impacted their feelings of belonging to both communities. Some experienced negative attitudes toward LGBTQ+ community from their racial/ethnic minority communities and vice versa. Participants with minoritized racial/ethnic identities comprised nearly half of this theme ($n = 8$), with white participants making up the other half ($n = 10$) (see Table 3). Jacob

said when he enters a space, he is immediately aware of his queer and Black identities, reflecting: "Okay, this is a Black space. I'm like, oh, everyone's…going to lash out at me if they find out I'm transgender. I'm in a queer space. Like then there's still a lot of anti-Blackness within the queer community...it just gets difficult sometimes to decide what to do with a situation." Others cited religious communities as sources of negative attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community. Tori exemplified this theme when she noted her mother's belonging to LGBTQ+ and Catholic communities: "Explain to me how you can know you're a lesbian, be in a lesbian relationship, and still…believe in Catholicism to some degree? And I realized for her personally it was sort of this compartmentalizing."

Not all instances of overlap, however, were seen as negative or conflicting. Some noted that the overlap between communities strengthened their belonging to them. Taylor described her community of Jewish people with lesbian mothers who share a donor: "Yeah, it's pretty cool… knowing them has made me feel like I have a Jewish community of people with lesbian parents."

Theme 4: Barriers to Feelings of Belonging to the LGBTQ + Community

This final theme characterized 30 of 51 participants ($\alpha = .78$). Barriers to feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community were defined as anything that prevented full participation in community activities or forming relationships in it. Some barriers were mundane or general, such as participants noting that they (or their parents) were too busy to attend LGBTQ+ events or that other prior commitments conflicted. Other times, participants felt that pride events were intended for their parents. Chloe said, "I haven't been to that many [pride events] because [my mom] usually does it with her friends and I stay at home. I've been once or twice with them, but it's more like they're adults going out." Other everyday barriers were wanting to keep their small children out of the heat in June, not living near any big pride events, having limited financial resources, and preferring to attend LGBTQ+ communities with friends rather than parents.

Stigma—at structural and individual levels—also served among barriers to feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. At a structural level, some did not have access to a local LGBTQ+ community that reflected their identities. River said: "I don't really- I wouldn't say I have like a really big queer community here. I would say there's a gay community but not a queer community. Like it's very binary. I don't know- I don't know many other like nonbinary folks. And it's a lot of like white theater gays." Indeed, most who reported barriers lived farther from urban areas in suburban ($n = 21$) or rural communities ($n = 6$) (see Table 3). At individual levels, some reported gatekeeping in the queer community (e.g., anti-bisexual or anti-pansexual dialogue). Taylor said, "I think that the blatant acceptance that people predict is not necessarily what always happens, like, I remember I came out to one of my moms as pansexual when I was 12 and she was like, 'What is that?'" conveyed in a way that reflected a lack of understanding or ignorance. Others noted that a lack of identity representation in the media or internalized homo- and/or transphobia hindered feelings of belonging to the community. Peyton said, "I didn't fit in the community when I was just beginning my transition. I struggled a lot with the notion that, in coming out as a trans man, I had to behave, dress, and act in a very specific way to be perceived as a man or seen as a man or to feel comfortable as a man in myself."

Discussion

Our study indicated that, despite barriers, many youth with LGBTQ+ parents experience strong identification with and feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. This aligns with earlier research with young adults with LGBTQ+ parents (Cashen, 2022; A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012). Results addressing our three research questions, and guided by minority stress (Brooks, 1981; Meyer, 2003), self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2012), and belongingness theories (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Mahar et al., 2013) extended previous findings. Adolescents and emerging adults, diverse in social identities, family structures, and geographic regions in the United States, shared multiple factors regarding feelings of LGBTQ+ community belonging. These included parent identity, family involvement, friends, major political rulings, and LGBTQ+ events. Our findings have implications for policy, law, and practice affecting LGBTQ+ families, including youth in them.

Sense of Belonging by Youth with LGBTQ+ Parents

Sense of belonging among youth with LGBTQ+ parents here can be understood through two recurring themes: psychological identification with the LGBTQ+ community (i.e., Theme 1) and engagement with and feelings of belonging to local LGBTQ+ communities (i.e., Theme 2). Many with LGBTQ+ parents expressed a strong identification with the broader LGBTQ+ community, as has been found among young adults who have parents with minoritized sexual identities (Theme 1; Cashen, 2022; A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012). Youth who identified in this way conceptualized the LGBTQ+ community on a national or global scale as one that was far-reaching and accepting. Participants described identification with the LGBTQ+ community through stake in major political rulings and events. Same-gender marriage equality in 2015 was a particularly influential moment to many, who described pride, joy, and a sense of community after the ruling. Additionally, one participant shared feelings of heartbreak and pain following the Pulse Nightclub shooting in 2016. This finding underscores the importance and impact of public policy, LGBTQ+ representation in the news and media for LGBTQ+ families, and considering historical context (Hammack & Cohler, 2011; Hegarty & Rutherford, 2019). Participants also expressed identification through trips to large pride events across the country. By participating in pride events like the New York Pride Parade, youth with LGBTQ+ parents felt deep belonging and connection to the LGBTQ+ community. This finding highlights the strength of the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, that youth with LGBTQ+ community could march with strangers and feel acceptance, similar to reports among LGBTQ+ people from previous research (Frost & Meyer, 2012; Meyer, 2015; Rosario et al., 2006), and extends the finding to youth with LGBTQ+ parents. Interestingly, these themes around major legislation, key events, and Pride have been reported among "gayby boom" parents, including lesbian mothers in previous research (Gartrell et al., 2019), and our study shows that the children of LGBTQ+ parents also express them.

For LGBTQ+ participants specifically, identification and feelings of belonging to the broader community were often intertwined with their personal LGBTQ+ identities, supported by some earlier research (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012). Importantly, however, cis-het participants also described similar experiences of how being raised in an LGBTQ+ family resulted in identifying with the community.

In contrast, some cis-het youth purposefully noted they did not identify with the LGBTQ+ community, and believed that identification was reserved for those with a personal LGBTQ+ identity. This finding reflects self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2012) as related to a sense of belonging (Mahar et al., 2013) and specifically in this population (Cashen, 2022; A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012). Regardless of involvement, each adolescent or emerging adult participant ultimately decided whether they belonged to the LGBTQ+ community.

Independent from identification with the LGBTQ+ community, many participants felt strong feelings of belonging to their local LGBTQ+ community, as seen in Theme 2, engagement with and feelings of belonging to local LGBTQ+ communities, which aligns with research among those with minoritized sexual identities about the importance of community connectedness (Frost & Meyer, 2012; Sotardi et al., 2021). While participants conceptualized the LGBTQ+ community as broad and far-reaching, they also reported a more personal LGBTQ+ community where they lived. Friends, family, local pride events, school gay–straight alliances (GSAs; sometimes gender-sexuality alliances; Heck et al., 2011), and even gay birthday parties all comprised a local LGBTQ+ community for participants, and thus feelings of belonging to it. Youth with LGBTQ+ parents with local belongings recounted annual traditions of attending pride events as a family, with some even driving across the country to march in major cities.

Finally, participants emphasized the connection they had with other youth with LGBTQ+ parents and feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community via those connections, which is supported by research with adults with LGBTQ+ parents (Cashen, 2022; Kuvalanka et al., 2006). Across involvement, participants consistently described feelings of love and joy through their local community, which seems parallel to literature about the benefits of community belongingness for LGBTQ+ youth and adults (Meyer, 2015; Rosario et al., 2006), and some among adults with LGBTQ+ parents (McKnight, 2016). This finding was especially salient for LGBTQ+ participants. This is consistent with literature indicating associations between being strongly identified as LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ+ community involvement (Closson & Comeau, 2021; Frost & Meyer, 2012), and literature about "secondgen" queer youth (Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009). Interestingly, participants with divorced caregivers appeared likely to emphasize local community involvement, perhaps because support outside of the family can be heavily impactful for youth with divorced caregivers (A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012).

Factors Impacting Belonging

Across narratives, participants cited multiple influences on their feelings of belonging, such as their sense of belonging to other communities, geographic location, parents' involvement with the community, and stigma associated with LGBTQ+ identities. These influences are captured in overlap in LGBTQ+ and other community belonging (i.e., Theme 3) and engagement with and feelings of belonging to local LGBTQ+ communities (i.e., Theme 4). Belonging to other communities outside of the LGBTQ+ community impacted youth's feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community in several ways (Theme 3). For some, belonging to communities that may not traditionally accept LGBTQ+ individuals (e.g., the Catholic community and the Black community, as noted by participants) made LGBTQ+ community involvement difficult or strained. In contrast, involvement with accepting communities (e.g., LGBTQ+-affirming Jewish

communities) helped facilitate a stronger sense of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. These instances of outside community influence were especially salient among those with minoritized racial/ethnic identities, likely because racial/ethnic community belongingness is often important among those who are BIPOC (McCormick & Barthelemy, 2021). LGBTQ+ community belongingness should be studied at the intersections of multiple social identities and contexts (Crenshaw, 1991; Farr et al., 2022), including among youth with LGBTQ+ parents.

In barriers to feelings of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, geographic location also emerged as a key factor impacting belonging for youth with LGBTQ+ families, as with earlier research among LGBTQ+ people (Paceley et al., 2016) and now extending the research to their children. Participants from rural and suburban towns reported more barriers to belonging than those in cities, which has been demonstrated among LGBTQ+ youth (e.g., Hammack et al., 2022; Stone, 2018), and now among youth with LGBTQ+ parents. A lack of acceptance for and visibility of the LGBTQ+ community in their towns led to fewer LGBTQ+ events, organizations, and community involvement. When sharing the negative impact of their geographic location, participants often expressed disappointment. This is consistent with belongingness theory, the relevant motivation from our "need to belong" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and our motivation toward autonomy, competency, and relatedness from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Mahar et al., 2013). To participate in LGBTQ+ community events, some drove out of town to larger nearby cities, which was not possible for everyone due to limited resources. This finding emphasizes a need for more LGBTQ+ visibility and events in rural communities.

Participants also cited their parents' involvement in LGBTQ+ community events as reasons for not engaging with the LGBTQ+ community, or doing so separately from them. Some shared that they used to attend events with parents, but now they do not want to do so; instead, they go with friends. They expressed discomfort at the idea of spending time with their parents and parents' friends, even for LGBTQ+ events. This finding is consistent with literature on adolescence and emerging adulthood. These developmental stages are marked by time with peers and individuating from parents (Arnett, 2000, 2015; Erikson, 1994). Although these families may be distinct in the constellation of sexual and gender identities represented, it is typical for youth with LGBTQ+ parents—like their peers with cis-het parents—to distance themselves from their parents in favor of peer groups (Arnett, 2015). Relatedly, previous literature shows that adults with LGB parents report their relationship with the LGBTQ+ community changed as they got older, such that they had been more involved as children and less so as young adults (Cashen, 2022; A. E. Goldberg et al., 2012), which is consistent with developmental expectations across adolescence and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2015). In contrast, some participants expressed a desire to attend pride events with their parents, aligned with self-determination in belongingness (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Mahar et al., 2013), but their parents were not interested in attending large LGBTQ+ events (e.g., lesbian mothers described as preferring to host backyard barbeques with their friends rather than march in a pride parade). This finding may underscore the importance of parent-child communication about LGBTQ+ topics and events in LGBTQ+ parent families. Indeed, previous literature finds that LGBTQ+ parent family members sometimes have discrepant perspectives on LGBTQ+ community involvement and

LGBTQ+ topic-centered discussions (Breshears & Braithwaite, 2014; McKnight, 2016).

The final barrier to community participation and sense of belonging for participants was stigma against LGBTQ+ identities, both from outside and within the community. Some expressed that the LGBTQ+ community was not fully accepting of gender-expansive identities, even if an active local community was present. This aligns with literature on the LGBTQ+ community (McCormick & Barthelemy, 2021), with predictions from minority stress theory (Brooks, 1981; Levitt et al., 2023; Meyer, 2003), and with current anti-LGBTQ+ legislative efforts targeting trans and gender-diverse identities (Miller, 2023). People with marginalized gender identities face prejudice from LGB individuals who continue to emphasize gender as binary (Levitt et al., 2023). Stigma and stereotypes regarding transgender identities were voiced by participants, with some feeling not "trans" enough to belong in the community. Groups in the LGBTQ+ community and society also broadly perpetuate exclusionary messages to those with plurisexual identities (e.g., bisexual, pansexual; McLean, 2008). Participants with these identities spoke about such exclusionary messages; gatekeeping made them feel unwelcome in the community. These experiences reflect stereotypes perpetuated in society, including within the LGBTQ+ community (Closson & Comeau, 2021; Levitt et al., 2023; McCormick & Barthelemy, 2021). Further, they point to a need for greater societal understanding of gender and sexuality.

Strengths and Limitations

This study is marked by several strengths and limitations. We included both adolescents and emerging adults who have LGBTQ+ parents. These youth are diverse in their own racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual identities, live in various geographic regions across the United States but notably the South and Midwest, and represent a range in subjective social class and family structures. As such, this sample may more closely resemble what we know about the diversity of LGBTQ+ parent families in the United States from demographic research (Badgett et al., 2019; NASEM, 2020; The Williams Institute, 2019). The sample size is large for a qualitative study, and these data allow for robust analyses of youth's experiences. We made use of quantitative interrater reliability analyses to enhance statistical rigor, in addition to engaging in thorough reflexive processes (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Levitt et al., 2018). The parents represented by this sample are less diverse in their described racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual identities and we cannot speak to outcomes associated with feelings of LGBTQ+ community belonging. Further, we had specific probes for participants who described identification with the LGBTQ+ community; as a result, this study cannot fully speak to the experiences of those who did not indicate identification or belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. Future research also could more comprehensively analyze such intersections of experiences and identities (Farr et al., 2022).

Implications and Future Directions

Our findings have several implications related to the importance of LGBTQ+ community representation, visibility, and support at national and local levels through law, policy, and practice. Firstly, at a time of substantial anti-LGBTQ+ legislative efforts in the United States (e.g., Miller, 2023), our results are in line with broader

empirical literature pointing to their harm; rather, laws and policies that acknowledge and protect LGBTQ+ parents and their children (as well as the broader supportive communities of which they are part) are imperative (Farr et al., 2022). Many youth with LGBTQ+ parents expressed that the June 2015 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, stood out as a significant, memorable event, and other participants discussed the significant impact of major events connected to anti-LGBTQ+ legislation (i.e., the Pulse Night Club Shooting, Orlando, Florida, June 2016). Based on this, we can tell that the legal protections, rights, and protected safety of the LGBTQ+ community do indeed impact youth with LGBTQ+ parents. Further, these results point to the detrimental impact a loss of protections or rights could have on this population's psyche (Farr et al., 2022).

Clinicians who work with LGBTQ+ parents and their children—particularly adolescents to emerging adults—may benefit from knowledge about how LGBTQ+ community is experienced among this population, and the potential benefits of feeling a strong sense of belongingness to the community at local and/or broader levels (McKnight, 2016). Clinicians might support clients in cultivating, maintaining, or strengthening such connections as one way to promote positive outcomes like belongingness. In general, having a clearer understanding of the lived experiences of the diverse members of LGBTQ+ parent families in the United States allows for richer comprehension of the broader LGBTQ+ community; in turn, these dynamics could contribute to dismantling stigma regarding LGBTQ+ identities, families, and communities.

Future research could explore outcomes linked with LGBTQ+ community belongingness, including well-being and identity development among youth with LGBTQ+ parents. Mixed method approaches with qualitative and quantitative data would allow for varying perspectives on LGBTQ+ community belongingness, as found in studies of LGBTQ+ youth (Hammack et al., 2022). Continued examination of distinct developmental stages (child, adolescent, young to middle adult, etc.), would provide important vantage points on how LGBTQ+ community belongingness is experienced differently across individual and family life cycles.

Conclusion

Overall, our findings highlight the diverse ways that youth with LGBTQ+ parents across geographic regions in the United States experience both local and broad LGBTQ+ community belongingness. Factors such as own personal LGBTQ+ identity, relationships to others with LGBTQ+ identities and/or with LGBTQ+ parents specifically, as well as access to local (or otherwise) LGBTQ+ community, surfaced as important to one's experience of LGBTQ+ community belonging. Geographic region and social identities outside of being part of an LGBTQ+ parent family were also commonly described as impacting (supporting and hindering) belongingness to the LGBTQ+ community. These results may help clinicians and other practitioners who serve LGBTQ+ parents and their children. Our findings may inform law and policy regarding access, visibility, support, and representation of the LGBTQ+ community, including all LGBTQ+ parent family members and their diverse identities.

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