SAVIE LGBTQ
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Des SAVOIRS
sur l'INCLUSION et l'EXCLUSION
des personnes LGBTQ

UNDERSTANDING
INCLUSION and EXCLUSION of LGBTQ People (UNIE-LGBTQ)

RESEARCH BRIEF
EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

UNIE-LGBTQ Research Partnership
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This research brief is a summary of the principal concerns of 8 LGBTQ people invited to participate in a reflective workshop organized by the UNIE-LGBTQ Research Partnership in June 2017 to document their experiential knowledge regarding the family sphere. These participants gave accounts of the realities of their family situations and those of other LGBTQ people in their lives. The information collected will primarily be used to develop research material and literature reviews*.

DIVERSE FAMILIES

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There is the family we choose and the one we don't: the family we form ourselves on our own or with another person, and the family we grew up with. In terms of family experiences, the concerns of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer) people are not the same when referring to 1) the family they form on their own or with another person or 2) their family of origin.

The concerns of LGBTQ people are also different depending on whether their family was established in an LGBTQ context (including same-sex or trans parents) or prior to coming out or transitioning as an LGBTQ parent. For example, families in which a parent comes out or transitions after children are born might go through significant periods of adaptation. Furthermore, LGBTQ parents can be subject to discrimination and rejection. Not so long ago, trans parents contesting custody arrangements in court would always lose. The first judgment in favour of a trans parent in one of these cases did not occur until 2015. Another issue concerning trans parents is the designation of "mother" and "father" on birth certificates, which still cannot be changed if the child's birth occurred before the transition process (i.e. a trans woman would still be designated as father on her child's birth certificate).

The concerns also vary depending on 1) the person's gender (whether or not it is legally recognized): man, woman or non-binary (a person who does not identify as one gender in particular or who contests the idea that gender can be reduced to two mutually exclusive categories, masculine and feminine) or 2) their sexual orientation: bisexual and pansexual individuals, for example, face significant prejudices when they want to adopt children - among other things, officials question the stability of their couple. Finally, concerns related to LGBTQ family life are also different depending on the family culture, their living environment, their age and their economic circumstances.

*These reflective workshops were carried out according to a model developed by the team **Vieillissement, exclusions sociales et solidarité (VIES, FRQSC) which highlighted seven principal dimensions of inclusion/exclusion: 1) symbolic, 2) identity, 3) socio-political, 4) institutional, 5) economic, 6) relational (significant social ties) and 7) territorial. The participants at this workshop were invited to give their opinions on these 7 dimensions.**

As we can see, the concerns related to the family sphere are very different from one person to another because there isn't one single LGBTQ family model, but rather an array of family configurations and distinctive characteristics which all together paint a large colourful mosaic, as was so well described by the participants involved.

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In this research brief, we will be exploring primarily the experiences of diverse "chosen" families and giving an overview of experiences concerning families of origin.

Diverse Families

The process that makes it possible to establish a family in an LGBTQ context is often long and complicated. In the vast majority of cases, it is also the result of a long thought out decision.

As an example, **medically assisted procreation** requires medical follow-up. A cisgender (people who identify as the gender they were assigned at birth, as opposed to the term "trans") woman or trans man rarely becomes pregnant on the first attempt. Individuals who opt for medically assisted reproduction are entering a long marathon of procedures taking them through big emotional highs and lows (from hope to disappointment, until finally, hopefully, pregnancy). People living far from a large city have to travel long distances in order to access services while still having to take care of their usual obligations (e.g. professional). One young mother from Gaspésie called this situation a "fertility rally." In addition to this challenge are the costs of travelling in order to attend medical appointments. For their part, trans people are faced with additional challenges. For example, the *Régie de l'assurance-maladie du Québec* (RAMQ) does not cover the preservation of gametes (sperm and eggs) taken before the transition process. They therefore have to pay high costs out of pocket in order to access this service.

Gay, bisexual or queer men, as well as trans men who have become infertile after their transition, don't have many options other than adoption or co-parenting. Another possibility is **surrogacy**, a process where a woman (known or unknown) will carry a child for intended parents. It should be noted that in Québec surrogacy is legal, but paying a surrogate is not. Lesbian, bisexual or queer women can also carry out at-home inseminations with a known sperm donor.

Individuals who wish to **adopt** a child can do so through the **Mixed-Bank Programs** of the Integrated Health and Social Services Centres (CISSS). This program handles children at high risk of being abandoned or whose parents are unable to respond to their needs. The aim is to place these children with a stable foster family as soon as possible, potentially with a view towards adoption. People who go through this program temporarily hold the status of a foster family and must accept the risk that the child will be returned to their biological family until the adoption or majority placement is official. Many children will eventually be eligible for adoption or majority placement, but before that, they must work with the Director of Youth Protection (DPJ) for all matters concerning the care and education of the child. Among other rules to respect over the course of this period is the requirement to live in the same region as the youth protection centre responsible for the child.

Finally, it should be noted that **international adoption** is usually not a possibility for LGBTQ individuals as the laws in countries open to this form of adoption do not currently permit adoption by LGBTQ people.

In short, starting a family is not as straightforward for LGBTQ people as it is for heterosexual and cisgender couples. Apart from having to involve third parties when they start their families, LGBTQ people may sometimes have to deal with **prejudice**, **stereotypes** and **discrimination** that they might encounter at their child's school, at work, or in medical settings.

Prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination

Many people still associate parenthood with biology. LGBTQ parents often hear things such as "they aren't a real family," "a child is missing something when they don't have a mother and a father," "who is the real mother or the real father?" and "will the child develop normally?" even when speaking to professionals in the education, health, or social services sectors. These prejudices, along with the feeling of facing extra scrutiny or "being under a microscope" can lead to feelings of insecurity, such as the feeling that they **must be better and do more than other parents**. When a child experiences some kind of problem, some social service providers may attribute the problem to the family structure, even though the situation has nothing to do with the parents' sexual orientation or gender identity.

All of this is related to the concept of **heteronormativity**. Quebec society is constructed around the heterosexual, cisgender model and the presumption of heterosexuality is extremely common. Anything different from the norm is often erased or forgotten in important discussions and documents, particularly in matters of parenthood. Many forms, certificates, reports or official policies still use the terms "father" and "mother" rather than "parent," a more inclusive term. Prenatal courses are still often focused on the traditional model and a large number of services offered to LGBTQ people, particularly to trans people, don't take their realities into account.

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Gender stereotypes can also lead to situations of exclusion. Some people still believe that a boy can't be adequately raised by two women, or that a woman considered less "feminine" will not be able to take care of a girl (and vice-versa). In addition, prejudice around showing affection, in particular because men in the West show less emotion, lead people to believe that two fathers will not have the ability needed to properly care for their child. That is why it is important to represent a diversity of parenting models and gender identities in the public sphere and on television. For example, we could see princes dressed in pink and female superheroes with muscles, or families with LGBTQ parents in television programs for children and teenagers. Similarly, few public figures are LGBTQ parents. Normalizing these kinds of families and bringing them to the forefront in the public sphere is necessary for dismantling prejudice.

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Experiences of ethnic and cultural minorities

LGBTQ parents from ethnic or cultural minorities may face stigma because of their LGBTQ family status, their origins or the colour of their skin. They may face problems due to both homophobia (biphobia or transphobia) and racism. Some parents may also have to deal with the disapproval of their families of origin who may hold religious or conservative values.

In this context, they may make the decision to avoid asking them for help or seeing them regularly in order to avoid facing their homophobic, lesbophobic, biphobic or transphobic comments and behaviours. This voluntary distancing from the family can also be observed among LGBTQ people who are not from an ethnic or cultural minority, but whose parents have conservative values.

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Finally, to avoid exclusion and to "melt further into the mass," some LGBTQ people from ethnic and cultural minorities prefer to live in an urban, rather than rural environment where their physical characteristics or origins tend to stand out.

New realities

The term multi-parenting refers to families in which parenting roles are held by more than 2 people. Currently, in Quebec, only two individuals can be legally recognized as parents, whether or not they are LGBTQ (for example "step parents" of blended families cannot officially be recognized as parents).

In LGBTQ families, multi-parent families can also be families made up of 3 or more individuals who are actively parenting a child. These individuals may or may not be together in a polyamorous relationship. Polyamory refers to consensual emotional and sexual relationships between more than 2 people. These families in particular can be subject to prejudice and stigma. When it comes to multi-parent families (whether headed by LGBTQ parents or not), we should consider the old

Possible solutions for promoting the inclusion of diverse families

- Education (for students, social service providers, and decision makers) to counter prejudice and to render services more accessible;
- Greater public awareness around legal and social issues regarding LGBTQ families;
- Refunding of assisted procreation;
- Legislation for surrogacy;
- Services adapted to diverse families (e.g. facilitate access to formula milk, create inclusive documents - currently, only 15% of school boards in Quebec have modified their forms);
- Expanded availability of assisted reproduction services in rural areas;
- Promotion of networks such as the *Réseau des alliéEs de la Gaspésie et des Îles-de-la-Madeleine of the Direction de la santé publique*, whose members all receive training on LGBTQ realities from the *Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ)*;
- Greater support for community organizations that foster networking and advocate for the rights of LGBTQ people;
- In the words of the participants, an understanding that "inclusion comes about through citizen movements favourable to LGBTQ families and more positive models."

adage "it takes a village to raise a child." This philosophy is held and put into practice by indigenous communities and other communities around the world. This way of thinking can be seen as providing a safety net, as well as additional important role models or bonds for children.

Another new reality is co-nursing, in which the mother who has not carried the child is also able, with medication, to produce milk. Many people are unaware of this possibility. Demystifying this practice and its benefits would make it possible to normalize it and facilitate access to it.

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The presence of families with LGBTQ parents helps to deconstruct social norms and prejudice connected to gender and family configurations that exist in Quebec. They encourage the public to think and act differently.

Families of origin

Many LGBTQ people have said that they have had difficulty maintaining relationships with their families of origin when they don't respect their sexual orientation or gender identity. As much as anyone else, diverse individuals need to feel accepted by their parents, siblings, extended family, and other family members. Unfortunately, some of them still face rejection from their family, hear or see homophobic, lesbophobic, biphobic or transphobic comments or behaviours in their family of origin, and end up excluding themselves when their family doesn't accept them as they are (if they haven't already been excluded).

At first glance, the only solutions for mitigating this problem are education and awareness. We will delve further into this issue with our study which includes thousands of diverse residents of Quebec. To be continued!

Thanks

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For more information on the Understanding Inclusion and Exclusion of LGBTQ People (UNIE-LGBTQ) Project of the Chaire de recherche sur l'homophobie at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM):
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