

Invisible families,  
invisible conflicts:  
Lessons learned from  
examining the added  
layer of  
WFC for employees with  
LGB families

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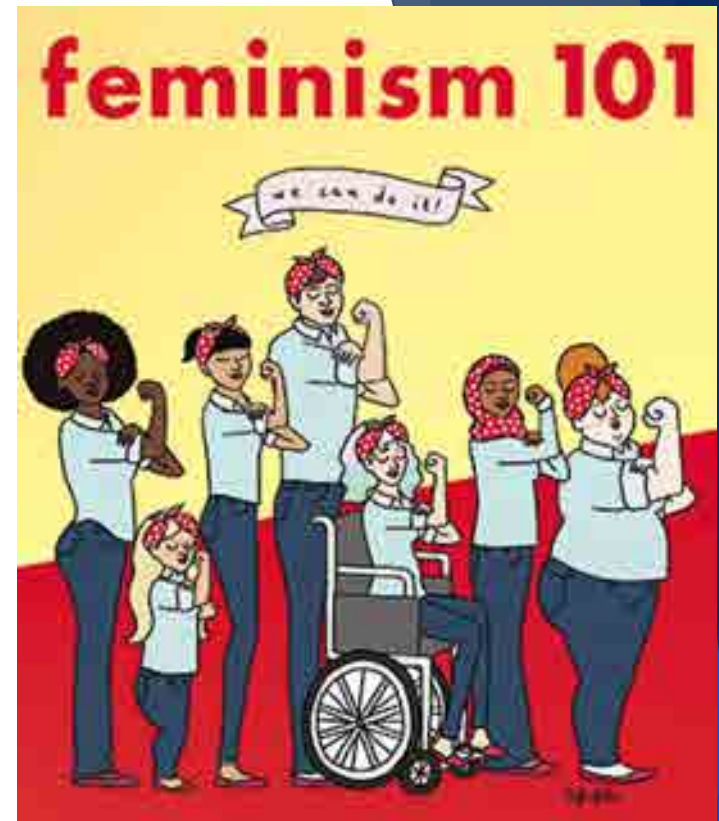
JAMIE LADGE, NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

# Roadmap

- ▶ A little bit about me
- ▶ Study design and findings
- ▶ Implications and lessons learned
- ▶ What now - for all of us?



A little bit of background...



Where did I start?



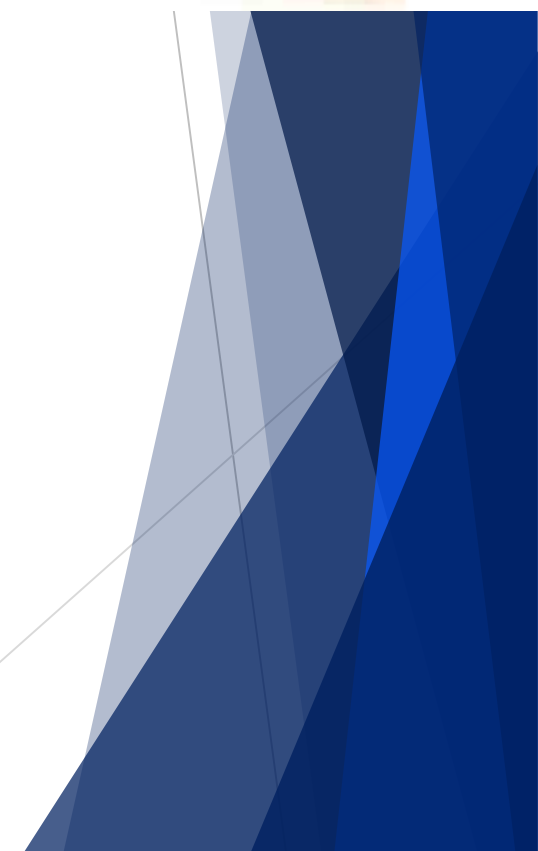
# First - what is work-family conflict?

- ▶ “A form of interrole conflict in which role pressures from work and family domains are incompatible in some respect. That is, participation in the work (family) role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family (work) role” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985)
- ▶ Time, strain and behavior-based dimensions (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000)



## What were some of the limitations I found?

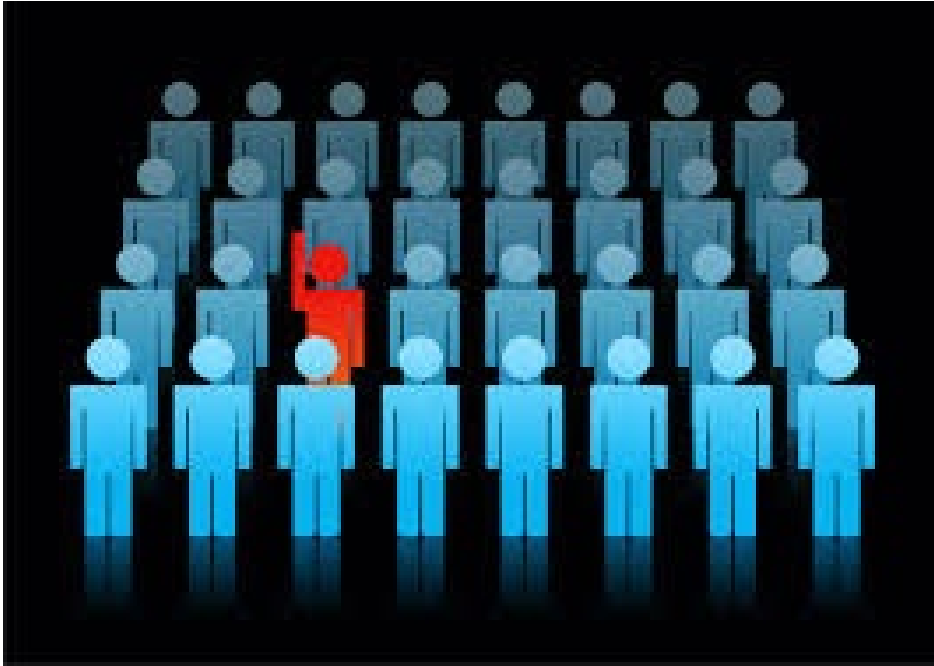
- ▶ No real examination of family structure or family type
- ▶ We don't ask about sexuality when administering WFC surveys
- ▶ No clear idea of how WFC/FWC may be experienced differently by LGB families
- ▶ Our current measures assume that all families look alike and have the same issues



# Why might WFC be experienced differently for LGB employees?

- ▶ Most states do not have an Employment Non-Discrimination Act which prohibits LGB employment discrimination
- ▶ No federal protection against LGB discrimination
- ▶ 59% of non-LGBTQ workers say they think it's unprofessional to talk about sexual orientation even though they self report talking about their spouses, families and life regularly at work (HRC, 2018)
- ▶ 60 percent of LGB people reported being fired from a job or denied a job, compared to 40 percent of heterosexual people (Williams Institute, 2019)
- ▶ 48 percent of LGB people said they had been denied a promotion or received a negative evaluation, compared to 32 percent of heterosexual people (Williams Institute, 2019)







# Research Questions

- ▶ Does perceived membership in a stigmatized family create added stigma-related stress that promotes unique WFCs for employees with LGB families?
- ▶ Are there additional strains related to these WFCs that impact individuals with LGB families?





# Study Findings

## Repeating Ideas

- Certain family structures carry greater social stigma than others within different work environments
- Comparative representation of family structures in the workplace signal whether they are more or less accepted

- Awareness of prejudice and discrimination against same-sex couples in society at large
- Experiences of LGB discrimination outside of the workplace in the local environment

- Lack of formal invitation for same-sex partners to attend work-related events and social activities
- Lack of access to same-sex partner benefits in the organization
- Heterosexist pressure to suppress LGB family information among coworkers, supervisors, and others at work

- Desire of partners to attend work-related events and a desire for individuals to include partners at events
- Need of individuals to utilize same-sex partner benefits in order to support their families
- Desire of individuals to share LGB family information at work in order to stay true to their family identity

- Preventing same-sex partners from attending work events that coworkers' family members are able to attend
- Discouraging same-sex partners from visiting individuals' workplace or calling them during work hours

- Concealing or misreporting family information around coworkers, supervisors, and others at work
- Hiding weekend plans or participation in other family-related events around others at work

- Inconsistently revealing family information across various groups at work (i.e., supervisors, coworkers, etc.)
- Revealing family information to coworkers, but not to customers or clients (or vice versa)

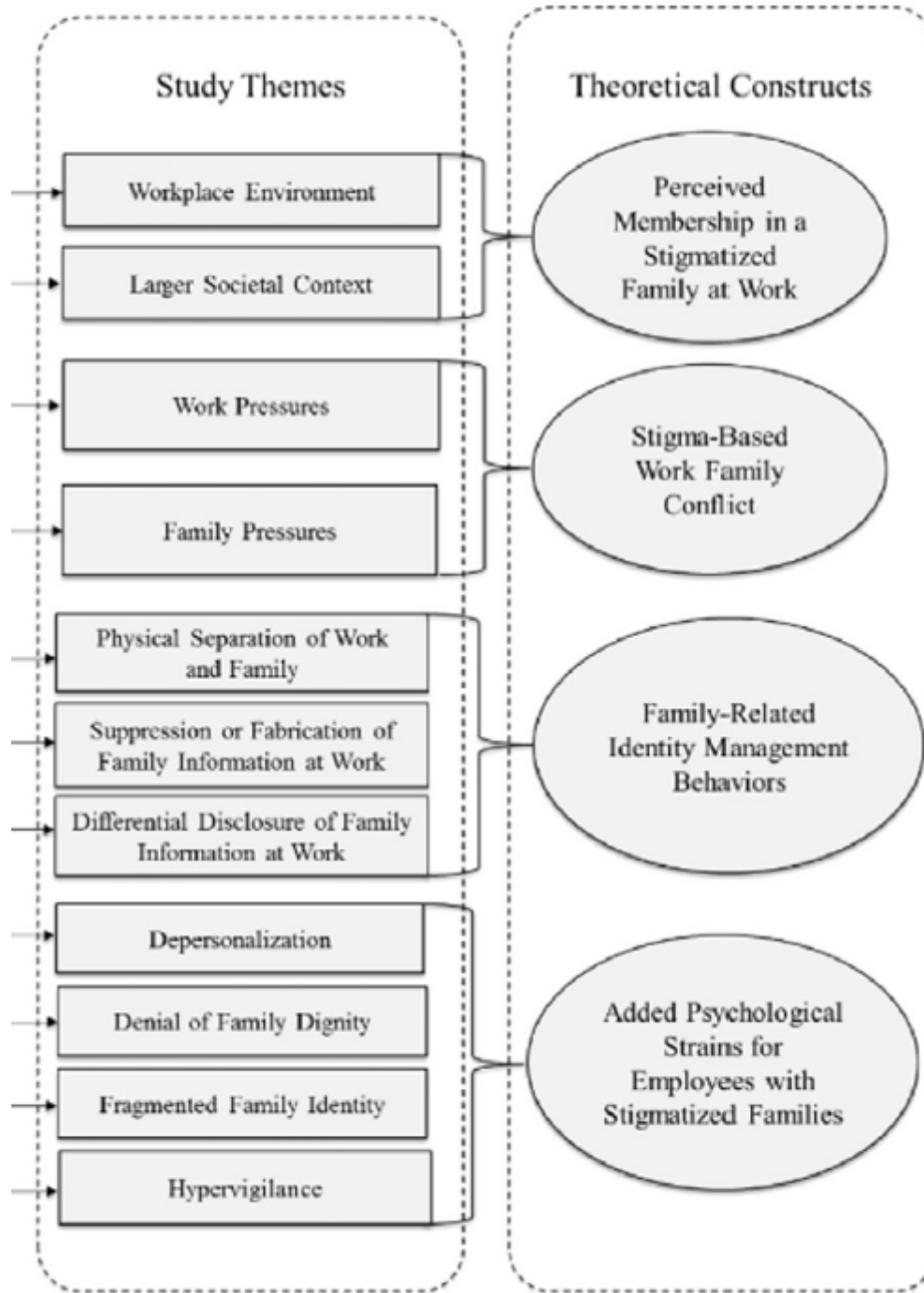
- Sense of detachment from one's core self due to felt pressure to separate one's work and family lives
- Feeling unable to build close bonds with coworkers as a result of feeling forced to conceal one's family at work

- Sense of diminished family dignity as a result of feeling like one's family identity is devalued at work
- Feeling a need to confront discrimination against one's family identity in order to protect one's dignity at work

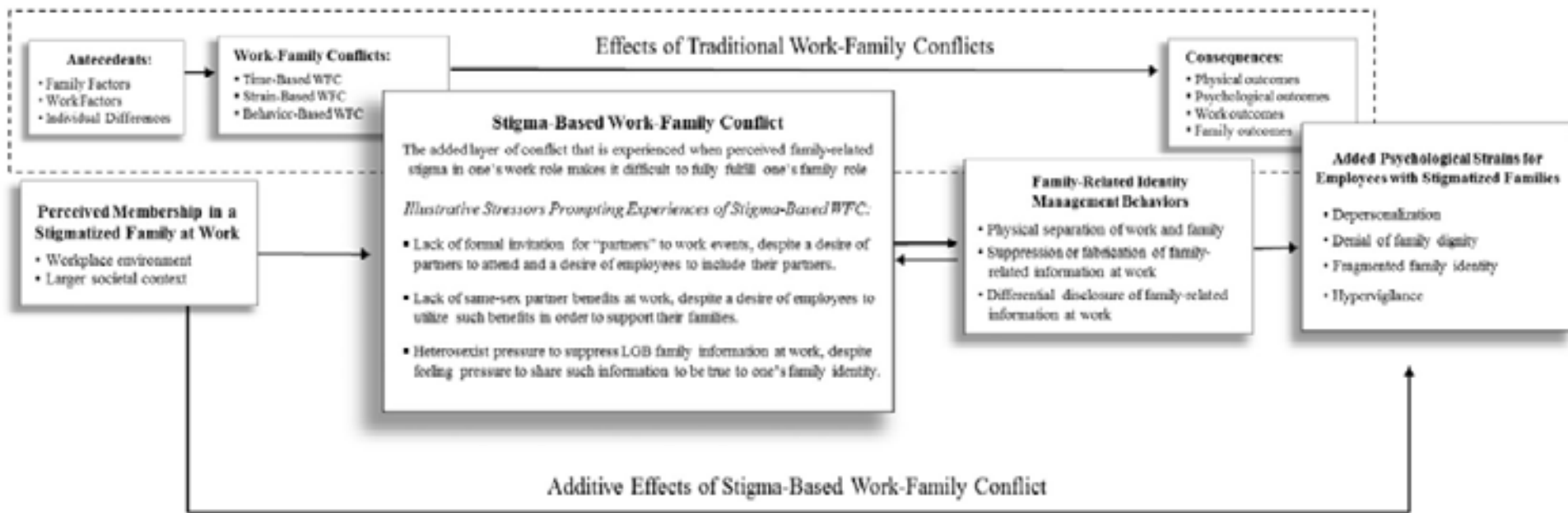
- Sense of discontinuity in one's family identity due to differential disclosure of family information at work
- Feeling mentally "scattered" as a result of family-related inauthenticity across the work and family domains

- Sense of distrust or suspicion around coworkers, supervisors, customers, and others at work
- Feeling constantly "on guard" when around conversations about family with others at work

# Study Findings



# Study Findings



## Stigma-Based Work-Family Conflict

The added layer of conflict that is experienced when perceived family-related stigma in one's work role makes it difficult to fully fulfill one's family role

*Illustrative Stressors Prompting Experiences of Stigma-Based WFC:*

- Lack of formal invitation for "partners" to work events, despite a desire of partners to attend and a desire of employees to include their partners.
- Lack of same-sex partner benefits at work, despite a desire of employees to utilize such benefits in order to support their families.
- Heterosexist pressure to suppress LGB family information at work, despite feeling pressure to share such information to be true to one's family identity.

# Family-Related Identity Management Behaviors

## ➤ Suppression or fabrication of family information at work

“So when [my workplace] had the whole photo contest and they wanted you to submit photos of your family. And I just felt that they wouldn't, I mean a photo of my family would actually be considered almost aggressive, I think, on behalf of the institution. Because it would be me kind of trying to make an 'activist point' about the very narrow definition of family that was circulating around the whole event. I just felt like that what they were asking for when they were using the word 'family', they weren't including me.”

## Physical separation of work and family

“I don't really feel like there is a place for him in my work environment that he could come visit me. I know everyone here really well and so I'm able to navigate the “sensitivities” of the people here. I know there are a couple of people who would make it uncomfortable that he is gay. Nothing bad would happen, but if he randomly appeared here, he would have to reserve himself. That's a terrible way of saying it. But I could imagine that being the case.”

## ➤ Differential disclosure of family information at work

“Traveling for work would be a lot easier if I could talk to the folks in HR about the fact that I have to coordinate with someone else. But they can't know about that.”

# Added Psychological Strains for Employees with Stigmatized Family Identities

## ▶ Hypervigilance

“People at work seem open and accepting of same-sex couples...but, I don't know, you just never know for sure.”

## ▶ Depersonalization

“I'm very frank and honest at home, but disconnected from that ‘me’ at work. If I was that honest about myself at work, it would impact my relationships with clients.”

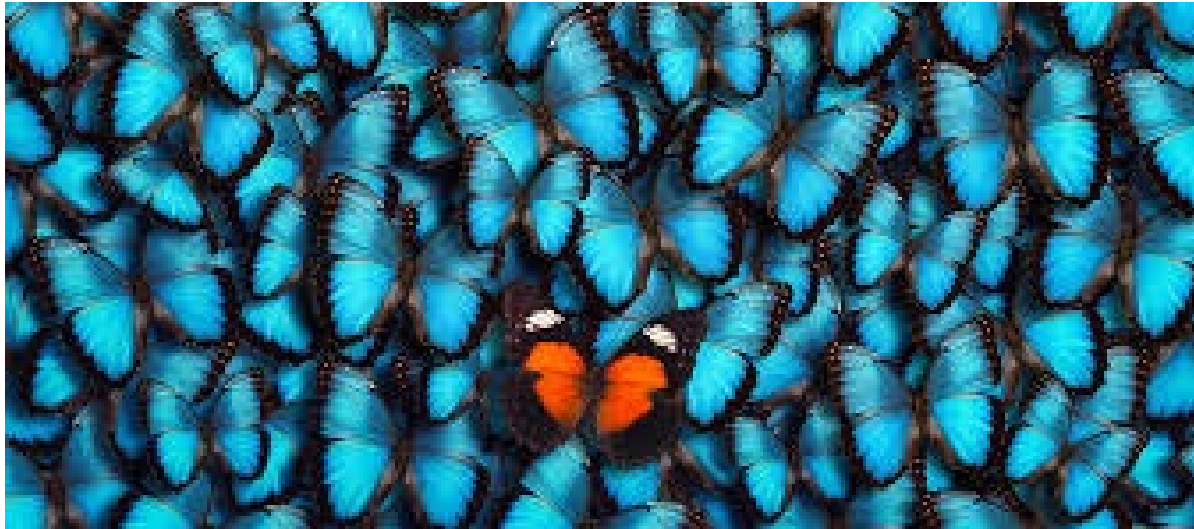
## ▶ Denial of family dignity

“In reference to assumptive comments that people make, one time a coworker said ‘My cousin FINALLY got married!’ and I wanted to say ‘Finally? What does that mean? Did that person and her partner have no value without marriage?’ These discussions happen infrequently but they do happen.”

## ▶ Fragmented family identity

“At home there is a lot of stuff going on that is centered around my gay relationship. I honestly can't let any of that out at work. So, I channel my high school self. This is the first and foremost thing that I think of when I think of conflict between work and family.”

But, how do we know that this is unique  
to those with LGB families?





# Paired Data

- ▶ 12 pairs of LGB/heterosexual employees in the same company and in the same job role
- ▶ Both members of all pairs reported time, strain and behavior-based conflicts
- ▶ All LGB members of pairs reported stigma-based conflicts
- ▶ Heterosexual pairs did not report stigma-based conflict stemming from sexuality
  - ▶ “I am aware that there are more conservative conceptions of the family that are shared within my work community that I wouldn't share. So I know that's the case, but I don't feel any personal conflict. There is nothing about my family relationship that for me is a source of stress or concern with what workplace conceptions look like.”
  - ▶ “I feel like [my family identity] is pretty consistent across the two domains [work and family]. Yeah, we actually just had a work event where the family was able to come to sort of a ‘family day’ company outing, and I didn't feel like there was really a conflict between who I was at work and who I was with the family, or as a father.”



Does this apply to a broader sample of stigmatized families?



# Findings - Additional Predictors of Stigma-Based WFC

## ► Perceived Controllability

“Yeah, I would have thought if you had an abuse issue, either alcohol or drugs...that might have been seen as something which you could have some control over and therefore if you didn't want to have that be a problem, do something about it. Whereas an illness, unless you went off to the Amazon and didn't get your shots, exposed yourself to a bunch of badness, it sort of like blows in with the wind.”

## ► Perceived Peril or Threat

“I think, my guess is, it's because autistic people are not seen as threatening. So we've got movies like 'Rain Man' and 'The Other Sister'. There's this idea put out there by, I don't want to say by popular culture, but it's more like we paint autistic people as these kind hearted, these gentle souls, they just need to be helped more. I think that's what the perception is, is that autism isn't something to be feared; they're just a little bit more helpless, and autistic people are all kind, and they're not really the ones who are committing crimes, and they're not the ones who are stealing, and they're not...I think that's the image that is painted, and people want to embrace it. It's sort of like seen as an affliction like cancer, like you get behind that cause. It just happens to people, and it doesn't make them bad.”

# Findings - Additional Predictors of Stigma Based WFC

## ► Intersectional Stigmatized Identities

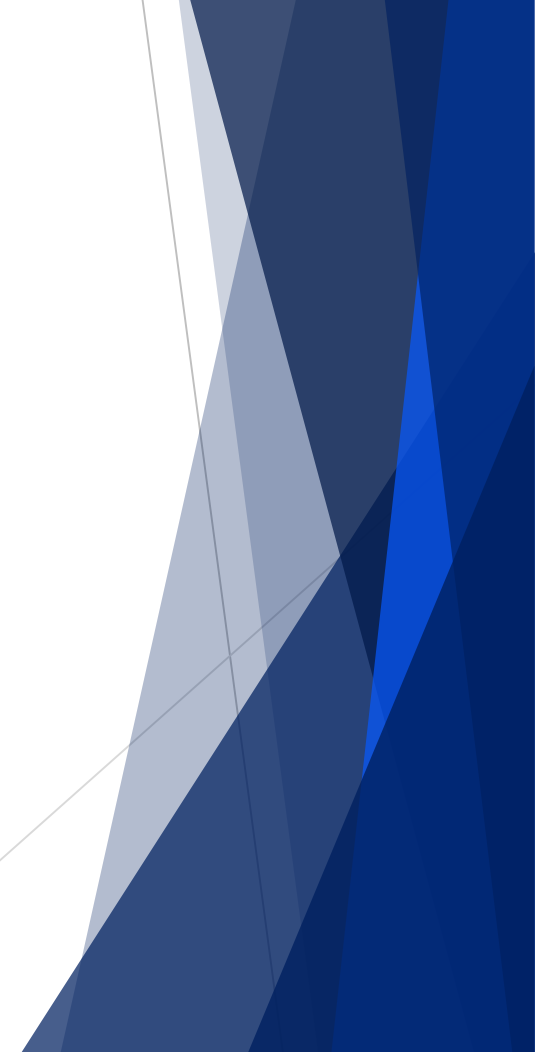
“Like for example, there’s a black woman in my department, and she has 4 kids, and people would be like, ‘Oh my god, like you’re so lucky to have this role model!’ But, I think the thing that people often didn’t get is that she had a husband, right? While she could in some ways...we could relate on the idea of being black women and being mothers, it’s also that like, she says things, like she put the time that she picks her kids up in the planner, like the days she picks up her kids on the planner, and I was like, ‘Oh, that must be nice. I don’t need it in my planner, because it’s every day!’ Those types of things, where like the part of not just about being a Black parent but being a single parent is that I have certain experiences that didn’t align.”

## ► Gender/Family Role Ideology

“I feel like in a way I suffer more from misogyny than homophobia because it’s a very male oriented environment and a male run company and they just don’t look at a woman the same way they look at men. And sometimes women have a harder time relating to the way men conduct business.”

# Takeaways

- ▶ Families that perceive stigma in the workplace DO experience a unique form of work-family conflict and deploy unique identity management techniques, experiencing differential strain as a result.
- ▶ While all participants also reported experiencing traditional WFC, this additional layer of conflict created exacerbating work-family challenges that previously went undetected.
- ▶ Organizations need to understand the full spectrum of work-family issues in order to create comprehensive solutions - and also need to understand work and family conflict stemming from stigma in order to be truly inclusive of diversity.



What can we do about it?



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We can't forget or get complacent when it comes to human rights...



## Gay and transgender workers lack comprehensive workplace protections

Under state laws it is currently legal in a majority of states to fire someone for being gay or transgender

### STATE LANDSCAPE

21 states and D.C. have laws that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation.  
16 states and D.C. do so based on gender identity.



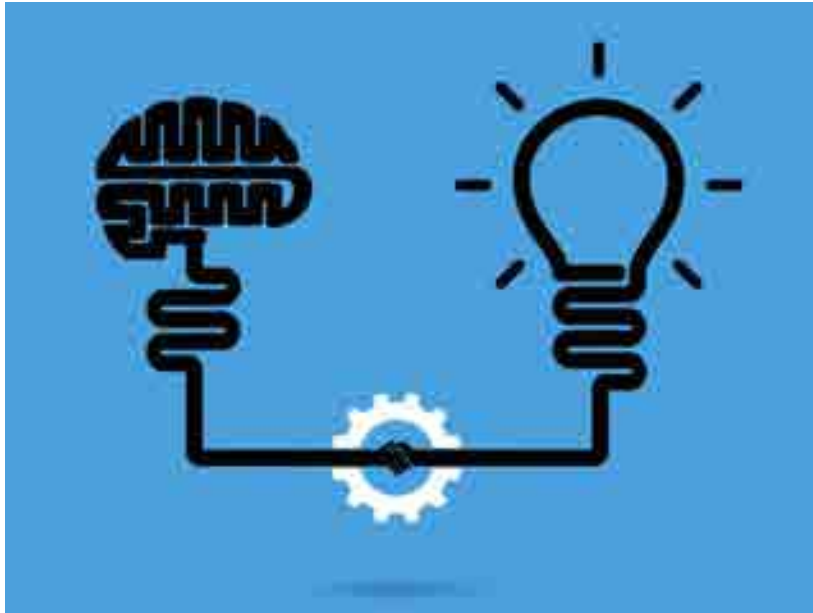
■ Sexual orientation and gender identity  
■ Only sexual orientation

29 states have failed to pass laws that protect gay and transgender workers. 73 percent of U.S. square miles have no protections.



■ No sexual orientation or gender identity protections

And we can honor those who foreground social progress in more appropriate ways...



RURAL QUEER



DRAG KING



HOMOSEXUAL AGENDER CHRISTIAN



LESBIAN VEGAN FEMINIST



# Thank you!

Questions?

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