

# LGBTQIA+ Youth in the Child Welfare System

Mónica López López, University of Groningen  
[m.lopez.lopez@rug.nl](mailto:m.lopez.lopez@rug.nl)







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# **LGBTQIA+ youth are overrepresented in the child protection system**

(BAAMS ET AL., 2019; DETTLAFF ET AL., 2018; FISH ET AL., 2019;  
IRVINE & CANFIELD, 2016; WILSON & KASTANIS, 2015)







2

# LGBTQIA+ youth are an invisibilized group in the child welfare system

(MALLON, 2019; MCCORMICK, 2018; GONZÁLEZ ET AL. 2021)





3

# The child welfare system is not always a safe space for LGBTQIA+ youth

(COSSAR ET AL., 2017; GALLEGOS ET AL., 2011; GONZÁLEZ ET AL.,  
2020; LÓPEZ LÓPEZ ET AL. 2021; MALLON, 2019; MCCORMICK,  
2018; PAUL, 2018)





- Negative stereotypes and use of offensive language about the LGBTQIA+ community
- Rejection by peers after coming out: invisibility, refusal to share a room or change clothes in front of them
  - A boy from my children's home... When I arrived, he was super homophobic and super racist and sexist (...). He did not address me at all. He found out that [chosen name] was not my name, and he would not talk to me at all
  - I once shared a bed with my roommate, but at a distance because she was afraid I would do something to her. - Interviewer: And she said that to you or this is your guess? - Interviewee: She told me that at a distance

*identity  
invisibilization*

*myth of  
hypersexuality*

*LGBT-phobia permeates the child welfare system perpetuating damaging misconceptions about LGBTQIA+ youth and contributing to their isolation*



- Identity-based harassment by peers

- They would still tell me that I only knew about scissoring.
- Because this [residential home] is not such a good environment for transgender people and so. Because I got a lot, here I was bullied a lot and discriminated against, and that still happens. On Monday I had my lowest point, and I really did not want to continue. I didn't want to be here anymore

*denigrating comments  
and insults, sexual  
harassment*

- and also by professionals

- A social educator told me that if I liked two people at the same time [referring to two people of different gender] I was sexually greedy; that I had to choose either one or the other. And she made me doubt again

*invalidation and  
policing sexuality*



4

# LGBTQIA+ youth are exposed to discrimination and violence in different social contexts

(FRIEDMAN ET AL., 2011; GOLDBACH ET AL., 2014; GOLDBACH & GIBBS, 2017; LÓPEZ LÓPEZ ET AL., 2021; LÓPEZ LÓPEZ ET AL., 2023; MALLON, 2019; MEYER ET AL., 2003; TESTA ET AL., 2015).







5

# **LGBTQIA+ youth experience less stability in child protection**

(JACOBS & FREUNDLICH, 2006; MALLON & WORONOFF, 2006;  
MALLON ET AL., 2002; MCCORMICK, 2018)



# 6

## LGBTQIA+ youth in care benefit less from family placements

JACOBS & FREUNDLICH, 2006; MALLON & WORONOFF, 2006; MALLON  
ET AL., 2002; MCCORMICK, 2018)







7

# **LGBTQIA youth can Leave care less prepared for independent living**

(JACOBS & FREUNDLICH, 2006; MALLON & WORONOFF, 2006;  
MALLON ET AL., 2002; MCCORMICK, 2018)



8

**LGBTQIA+ youth in care  
are resilient and have  
unique skills to connect  
and build community  
resistance**

(YOUNG PEOPLE AT AUDRE AND FIRMUS)





# Friendships

- Cisgender and heterosexual friendships provide support to deal with the stress related to the process of self-knowledge and disclosure of their identities

*“First, I told my friends, who supported me. And then they gave me the strength or will to tell my parents”*

- LGBTQIA+ friends offer more LGBT-related support:
  - Sense of safety and security
  - Unconditional acceptance and understanding of the challenges
  - Models for navigating their identities, strategies to face experiences of LGBTphobia

*“I think it is a very, very important foundation (...) to meet someone who will understand you unconditionally. Because a person who does not belong to the community does not know to what extent you can feel displaced. Not displaced, but totally out of place”*



# Community

- Pride in belonging. Benefits: access to information, support networks and community resistance against LGBTphobia.

*"You will always have support. There are groups, there are associations, and wherever you go now, there will always be an LGBT person who will understand you, will support you. It is like unconditional support that we have (...). It is true that we have quite a feeling of brotherhood, because when they attack one it is as if they were attacking all of us. Because more or less we have all experienced the same thing and we help each other a lot and defend ourselves"*

- Importance of giving back to the community:
  - Supporting other members personally or through their social media

*"Like my cousin, she told me that she was bisexual and I was talking to her, and I was guiding her"*

- Promoting social change through activism



"I would love to serve for something, something that helps. Serve as... to be aware and raise awareness, and help everyone who asks me, whoever needs it. Be a support for people who feel vulnerable or marginalized. What I am very clear about is that I do not want to be a person who wastes her life not helping anyone or doing anything. I don't want to just belong to the [LGBTQIA+] community and that's it. I want to serve so that other people feel safe and express who they are without fear"





# Some priorities...

- Professionals' co-responsibility in the promotion of LGBTQIA+ youth's resilience from different systems
- Development of policies that allow professionals to build safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ young people
- Intersectional perspectives
- Participation of LGBTQ+ youth in the development of policy, practice and research

*The children are always ours, every single one of them, all over the globe; and I am beginning to suspect that whoever is incapable of recognising this may be incapable of morality*

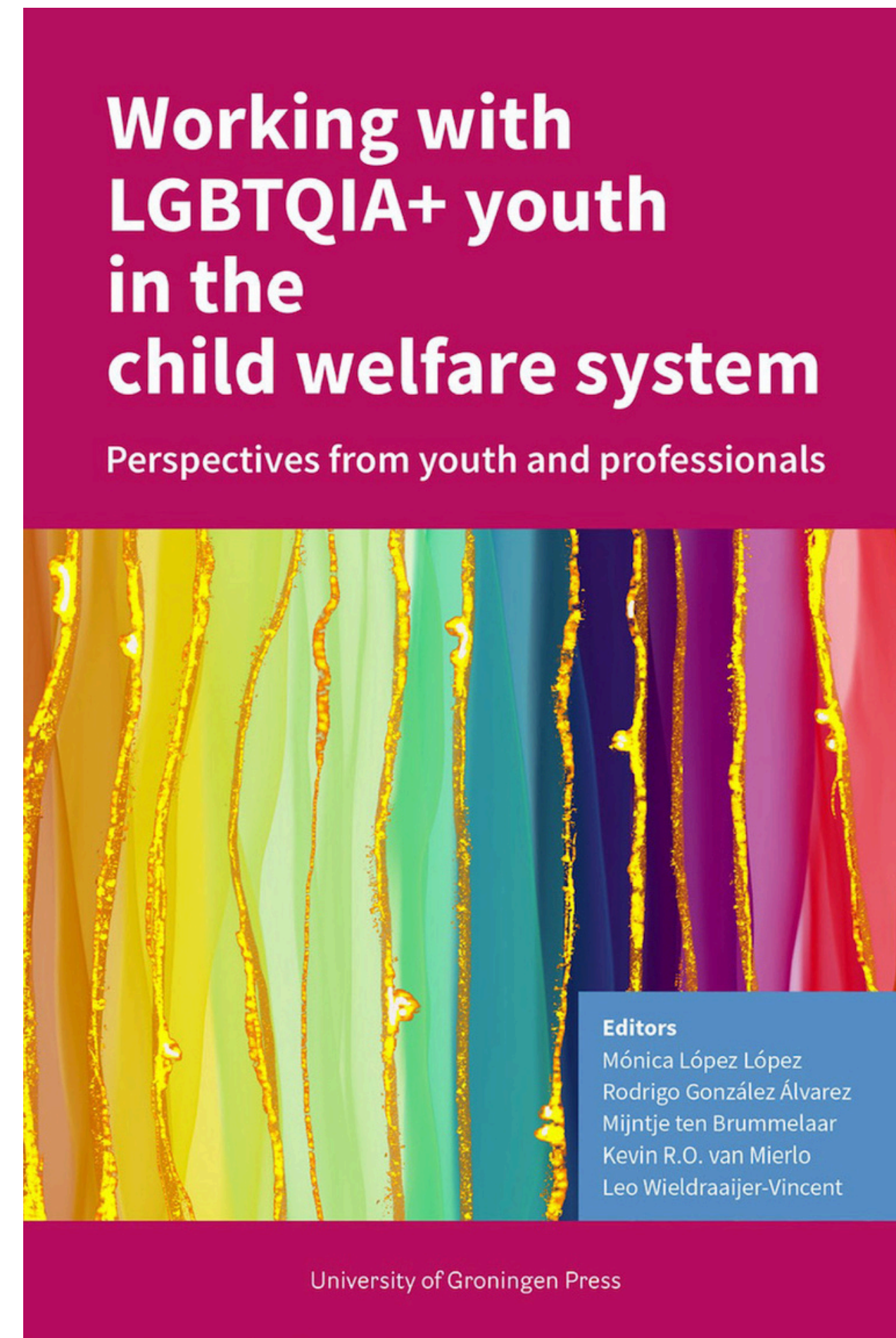
—James Baldwin







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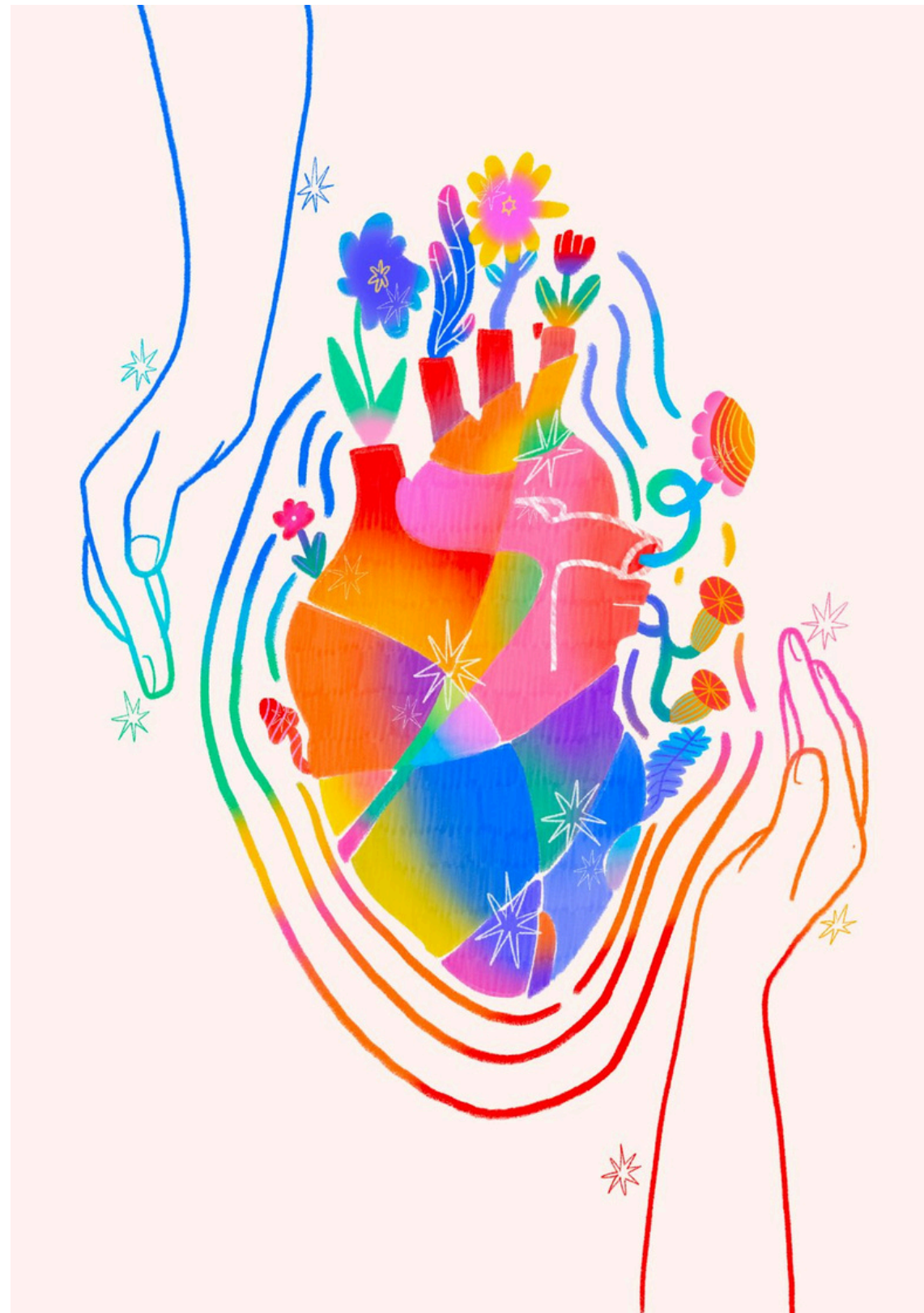
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# QUEER AND IN CARE

**NUEVO LIBRO!**



Ilustrado por Eli Verdugo (they/them)





**THANK YOU**

**m.lopez.lopez@rug.nl**  
**@M\_Lopez\_Lopez**  
University of Groningen