

Inter-Country Adoptee Perspectives on Gay Adoption

© ICASN, June 2007

'While most adoptions work well, no adoption is ever simple'

Douglas & Philpot, 2003

Dear Lynelle,

'While most adoptions work well, no adoption is ever simple', Douglas & Philpot, 2003 is a possible thinking/framework to start with.

The topic about ICA and Homosexual couples has been a huge discussion for many years in the Netherlands. The major part of (potential) adoption parents seems to have no problem with this issue, figuring their own wish to adopt. The debate about the equality has been primarily the issue here instead of focusing to the rights of the children and the well being of potential adoptive children. The decision was, that they can adopt!

Soon the discussion landed in the very tricky and sensitive question about quality of family constructions and upbringing of adopted children. No one dared to touch the subject that it might be an extra obstacle for adopted children to cope with parents of the same sex. Even in a self-called Liberal country like the Netherlands, the idea of equality of sexes has been of more importance instead to raise the question about the best way to create an environment which should protect and care for future lives of adoptive children around the world.

To answer this question you arrive in a 'minefield' of dangerous interests of 'power groups (adoption parents etc.)' and the political (sensitive) arena were no prospective adoption parent (except the homosexuals as pro of course) dared to express their concern about the placements of adoptive children. The concept of this discussion seems to round up with the remark of homosexual couples that they even can be better parents than bad hetero couples. My opinion is that this is an 'ad baculum' and does not show any consideration for the status of an adopted child. The fact that an adoptee has to cope already with a social and psychological difference compared to non-adopted child, would suggest, that a placement within a homosexual couple creates an extra obstacle to cope with, nonetheless, how people think about this issue in, religious, psychological, or social context to be political correct.

The danger of this suggestion is, that this might be used in and for different other reasons. For example in the nineties were in the US 'Afro Americans' wanted to adopt a Caucasian child which was objected by the social workers of the agency. So you see, this discussion could lead to, and in a way it already is, a web of constricted arguments and ideas of pro and anti lobby's in the world.

- What I see is this. That many cultures where adopted children are coming from are against homosexuality and family constructions from this point of view. I would like, that we respect their point of view and that we should not force ICA to be used for childless couples in Westernized countries.
- I guess, were possible we should ask birthmothers who relinquish their babies for adoption in the western world explicitly for their consent. If this is not possible, no adoption by homosexual couples should be available.

To conclude, no adoptee has ever been part of a governmental research committee. Judges, Lawmakers and some Social Scientists (mostly pro adoption and adoptive parents themselves) decided about us without consulting or inviting us for these major and live changing decisions.

I hope that more and more adoptees will understand, if they do not get involved in these and other major discussions they (in) directly decide for future adoptees and their lives.

Hilbrand W.S. Westra
The Netherlands

My point of view is very simple.

Gay couples nor infertile couples have A RIGHT to adopt children.
I find the discussion about "right" to adopt disgusting.
It has nothing to do with the interest of the child or it's natural family.
They are not united, they don't have a voice nor do they have lobby groups.

Regards
Arun
Belgium

Adoptions by gay couples is quite common in the United States. Couples who are willing to provide **loving** and **stable** homes to waiting children, regardless of sexual orientation, should be considered.

That being said, children have no ability to say how they would like to be raised in this world. That is why I advocate "open adoptions" where a child will have the full rights and privileges to access their file and birth family history. I think knowing our past makes it easier to better understand our present situation and helps us move into the future with a full understanding of who we are and what we want to be.

Thanks for the question.
InterDoptee
USA

Hi,

Gay adoption makes me feel sick because of the lie about adoption being only in the case of the "best interest of the child." To develop properly children need a parent of each sex. The adoption would be an inescapable fact every day and obvious to everyone. What would it do to the child's sense of belonging? It's hard enough with heterosexual adoptive parents. I think it is incredibly selfish and discrimination against the needs of children who need to develop with a mother and father and to feel as normal as possible after the loss of their original parents. I'm distressed and disgusted that adoption is about meeting the needs of parents and not about giving children the best scenario. It has always been that way, most evident was the cases of child stealing and pressuring mothers to give up their children because infertile couples "needed" them. The child is suppose to feel grateful when the adoptive parents were just meeting their own needs. In gay adoption the child is a trophy for the status of parents! Everyone is to scared to say anything in case they get accused of discrimination against gay people, what about the frigging child!!!!

WAKE UP AUSTRALIA!
Sue

My view is that adoption is complicated no matter whether it's to another country (inter-country) or to gay or hetero couples. As an adoptee, I believe what has to be of highest consideration is what's best for the child. The disadvantage for the adoptee child is that we are often too young to speak up for ourselves to ensure our needs are prioritized. Adoption is complex because people disagree on what is "best" for the child and the needs of the child, the adoptive parents, and the birth parents are all pitted against one another.

My particular view is that I don't have a problem with gay people adopting as long as they are assessed adequately and are deemed capable of parenting and providing emotional support to the adoptee – they, along with any other adoptive parent need to be aware that when they adopt inter-country, they are taking on a child who has lost its birth country, culture, heritage, family, identity, etc. So to assume this child is going to have a better life because it now is materially better off neglects the emotional and spiritual aspects of what makes anyone human.

Where I do see a problem with gay people adopting a child is that given society's view at large is still that gay (or lesbian) families are a minority and not always positively viewed, this stigma could then compound the adoptee's issues that they have before being adopted i.e., issues of abandonment / loss. I also acknowledge that heterosexual couple issues can have a similar impact in compounding these adoptee issues. For example, adoptive parents divorcing, any sexual / physical / emotional abuse by adoptive family, the death of an adoptive parent, etc.

I also question what the impact will be to the adoptee if they don't have a female role model as a parent. I wonder about the importance of the female given the adoptee has been abandoned or given up (for whatever reasons) by the birth mother. From my own experience, I've felt need to find the birth mother first rather than the birth father. Is this because the mother figure plays a more important role in our mind as an adoptee, or is it simply because of logic where fathers may not know they've fathered a child whereas the mother would never forget? Is there some mystical link between mother and child that will need to be repaired via another substitute mother-child connection somewhere in the life of the adoptee and how will this be impeded if both parents are men?

Ultimately, I question the whole "adoption" thing as a solution to infertile couple's dilemma or to couples who by "natural means", can not conceive because in doing so, this ultimately places the needs of the adopted child second to the adoptive parents. At the same time, how society can question the right for gay/lesbian couples to adopt if they don't also question the right for infertile couples to adopt?

Lynelle

My opinion is that gay couples should be considered exactly as heterosexual couples are for adoption. I believe that gay couples have to look at how they are seen in society and consider a lot more about how they live their lives and how they may be perceived. I also believe that in some instances, gay couples could be better candidates for adopting than some H couples who consider adopting.

I have no problem in my name being put forward. I have a gay brother and I see what life he has led and he and his partner are successful in life and in business and they would make amazing parents if they considered having children and were allowed to.

Saran

It is a very complicated subject because I think it is hard enough to be adopted by a family with a mother and father figure so same sex would be hard. The other point is that society thinks that

the adoptee should be grateful for being adopted and a child might grow up having to face that. I think that if the gay family plays the role of heterosexual parents, it would be ok. Unfortunately we will only know the repercussions of this with time (once they try). The world's view on "normal" adoption has changed so much already from 40 years ago.

I believe heterosexual parents should have priority on any adoption always.

Erika Freire Gitsham

Challenging Prejudices and Improving Collaborations – response by Indigo Willing, researcher, community volunteer and Vietnamese adoptee.

The question of what adopted people think of Gay and Lesbian adoptions is most timely and the issue deserves our deep consideration. Before I detail six particular thoughts I have on the matter, I feel it's important to disclose that I do not have any personal experience of being adopted by Gay or Lesbian parents. My interest in the topic arises from a social justice perspective, as well as my researching the wider topic of adoptive parenting, and professional work in reviewing one of the publications in an upcoming issue of the Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology (GLIP) Review journal.

My first thought is that I think it's important to commend people like Lynelle Beveridge – the founder of the Inter-country Adoptee Network (ICASN) – who amongst others, shows much resourcefulness, courage and community spirit in gathering her cohorts' comments on Gay and Lesbian adoptions. It is equally important to note how adoptee groups like the ICASN network are fostering, supporting and recruiting some of the leading voices in adoption today and whose contributions to our understanding of the practice have been influential in various professional and community bodies, as well as in the arts, government and research. Adoptees, both as individuals and as members of networks like ICASN, have again also demonstrated their enormous generosity (i.e. offering expertise without charging consultation fees common to adoption work), and in this particular case readers are very fortunate to be accessing Beveridge's own considered response on this important topic as well as the thoughtful replies of various other ICASN members.

My second thought is that, personally, I am very keen to see Heterosexuals, Gays, Lesbians, Queers and Transgender (GLQT) populations ALL collaborating with adopted people under the common aim of developing a range of strategies to improve the well being of children who are adopted from overseas.

Thirdly, and this thought cannot be made clear without some back up details, is that I think there is a need to identify and then resist how a lot of the moral discussions, as well as much of the political discourse that opposes Gay and Lesbian adoptions, almost always relies on reproducing damaging stereotypes and myths about non-heterosexuals. Sadly, there are many arguments against non-heterosexual adoptions that ignore the body of sociological and psychological literature that demonstrates how the presumption that children with parents who are same-sex attracted will fare worse than those raised by heterosexuals has no scientific basis.

Australian expert in the politics of family law Jenni Millbank, for example, revealed in a 1998 study that to date there is not "a single social scientist conducting and publishing research in the area of children's development who claims to have found that gay and lesbian parents harm children". She does however, observe how the "data is often ignored or overlooked in favour of the speculative view". Damien Riggs, an Australian scholar in psychology, has also published work that assists with moving past the myths and exploring more informed assessments. Across the

Pacific, Suzanne Johnson and Elizabeth O'Conner's psychological research on Gay and Lesbian adoptions in a 2002 study in American also stands as one of the more recent efforts to break through the prejudice and stereotypes and instead focus on proper data.

My fourth thought is that there is a need to further understand what the Australian federal and state laws on adoption by Gay and Lesbian populations actually are, and to learn from overviews that are more detailed than those provided by newspapers and other media reports. However, very few articles can clearly communicate the legal intricacies of the issue although an upcoming publication by Phillip Duffey, a legal scholar, does a commendable job of outlining the status of same-sex attracted people's rights in Australia in a comprehensive yet easy to understand manner. Such articles are absolutely necessary due to complexity and lack of consensus between states, as well as a wave of adoption legislation reviews and inquiries occurring across the country that further hinder the general public's ability to comprehend issues of rights for Gay and Lesbian populations in matters of parenting and adoption.

My fifth thought is that I fully agree with Lynelle when she states that adoption is a complex field and that we should continue to be open to considering a much broader and richer number of approaches in adoption rather than thinking there's one magic answer. In addition, because there are multiple ways that people can experience adoptions we need to always stay aware of how the numerous identities that can come into play are currently subject to an unfair hierarchy of privilege in society. Thus, there remains a need to identify and understand how the politics of (White) Gay and Lesbian adoptions in Australia, while marginalised, still intersects with wider questions of race and class privilege (as with White heterosexual ones). The point here is that there is an enormous gap in access to power between those who are most likely to adopt and those who are adopted; this is particularly the case with inter-country adoptions. Questions of power and their connections to Gay and Lesbian adoptions that are transracial and inter-country can be explored in more depth in some of the emerging literature by authors such as Damien Riggs, David Eng, Laura Briggs and (transracially adoptive parent and Lesbian) Arlene Ari Istar Lev.

Finally, my sixth thought concerns the need to continue to work with adopted people themselves. Whilst the use of sociological and psychological literature on the levels of self-esteem and social identifications of adoptees works well to reveal how negative attitudes towards Gay and Lesbian adoptions have no 'rational' basis, I do not believe that the best interests of children who are adopted across perceived lines of 'racial' and ethnic difference can be easily assessed by some of the more traditional (colour-blind) research approaches used to date. Thankfully, a number of social scientists and particularly sociologists and anthropologists are now beginning to learn from the advice, research and general life-experiences of adopted people. Texts that are authored by adult adoptees include a growing body of academic and creative literature, as well as personal narratives and memoirs by those who were adopted by Whites (mostly heterosexuals but can include people who are same-sex attracted) and have now reached maturity. What is important to note is that this body of work clearly reveals that for many adopted people their sense of well-being went awry due to a politics of identity in their families and society based on perceived racial and ethnic/cultural differences; this is separate from any impact that their adoptive parents' or own sexual identifications might have had on their identity. The question of how to best work with cultural biases in adopted people's birth countries also needs to be worked upon (rather than being allocated to the 'too hard' or 'impossible' basket) with adopted people and a range of others.

In closing, I think a good way forward is to resist subjecting GLQT populations who wish to adopt to old stereotypes or measuring them to heterosexual notions of parenting. Instead, everyone should be trying to improve the practice of caring for children in general through seeking more collaborative approaches and by referring to contemporary research rather than outdated and damaging speculation. I look forward to seeing a task force on this topic eventuate and am open to hearing more about how adopted people (who are also parents) like myself can offer their support.

"I love my mother, regardless of whether she's adoption, biologically or step-related, whether she's of a different skin colour, whether she's lesbian, bisexual, straight or transgender. Our love for one another is mainly what matters to my sense of family, identity and belonging."

Is family, identity and belonging something that is defined by nature, tradition, social/cultural views and practices or self-defined? To what extent is biological resemblance and mirroring important for a child's development and integration of their identity? Do children face fewer identity challenges if they are raised by parents of the same race and culture? Similarly, do children face fewer identity challenges if one of their adoptive parents is of the same sex as them?

Likewise, to what extent is it important that a child has both sexes within their family to develop a healthy sense of self? Given the relatively strong emphasis that many adoptees have in searching for their birthmother, if a child grows up with gay parents and no female mother figure, would this result in identity challenges?

To what extent are one's biological roots versus the social environment important for an adoptee to develop as an emotionally, spiritually healthy being? I was raised in a very open-minded adoptive family. My parents didn't discriminate against social, racial, ethnic, class or sexual orientation background. We have family members of all sorts of backgrounds and all are accepted for who they are. I am of the view that if we lived in a society whereby taboos about adoption were gone, whereby stigmas against gays, lesbian, bisexual and transgender as well as inter-racial families no longer existed, it would probably be a lot easier for adoptees and their adopted families, whatever their racial or sexual orientation background. However, I was also struck by how strongly biological aspects play within the adoption triad. For example, when I first met my birth siblings for the first time, I was astounded at how strong that biological connection is in creating a sense of 'being' and belonging somewhere geneologically on this earth.

I don't know what the answers are in regards to gay and lesbian adoptions. However, here are my views:

- The 'best interests of the child', rather than the rights of adults, whether they be gay, lesbian or hetero, to parent should be at the forefront of the discussion.
- I am in favour of removing stigmas about trans-racial families and homosexuality in general.
- I am not of the belief that heterosexual people are any better at parenting skills than homosexual people.
- Within our currently generally homophobic world, I am concerned about adoptees having to grapple with both taboos about being an adoptee and the stigma of having homosexual parents.
- I believe that in all adoptive families, regardless of sexual orientation, it's important that the adoptee has as much access to information about their biological roots.
- I am against anonymous sperm and egg donating since I think all people should have the right to know their biological roots.
- I think that all adoptive families should recognize the trauma, loss and grief that adoptees face as a result of being separated from their biological parents.
- I support exploring further research, both quantitative and qualitative, about the experience of adoptees raised by gay or lesbian parents. I believe that future policies and practices should be based on research and evidence, rather than unfounded assumptions or stereotypes.

Regards,
Ilan