Risk and Resilience in Planned Lesbian and Gay Families

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Outline

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- Risk & resilience in adoptive same-sex families
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- Study 2 – New Family Social: LGBT adoptive and foster families in the United Kingdom
- Study 3 – Empowering Adoptive Families – A study about adoptive families in the United Kingdom and in Portugal
Social context of gay and lesbian planned families in Portugal and in the United Kingdom
About 20% of these were adoptions by single men/women (n = 357)

From these, it is hypothesized that a few dozen were from gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals, either single or hiding their relationship status.

Some evidence suggests that single adoptions are preferred by gay & bisexual men. Lesbian women are more likely have DI abroad.

[Pordata, 2015; Costa & Bidell, 2015]
In 2015
90% children were adopted by couples, and 10% by single people

91% were adopted by different-sex couples, and 9% by same-sex couples

[Adoption Register for England and Wales, 2015]
Legal situation of same-sex parented families in the European Union.

**Same-sex Marriage:** 11 EU member states

- Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

**Registered Partnerships:** 17 EU member states

- Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Slovenia, United Kingdom.

**Same-sex Adoption:** 10 EU member states

- Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal (2016), Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

**Co-Adoption:** 12 EU member states

- All of the above plus Finland & Germany.
Support for same-sex marriage and parenting in Europe

“Homosexual marriages should be allowed throughout Europe”

“Adoption of children should be authorized for homosexual couples throughout Europe”

[European Commissioner for Human Rights, 2013]
Comparison between Portugal and the UK

“Lesbian and gay couples should have all the same parenting rights as heterosexuals do”
Portugal: 16% agreement  UK: 48% agreement

“Lesbian and gay male couples should be legally permitted to marry”
Portugal: 13% agreement  UK: 63% agreement

“Homosexuality is a sin”
Portugal: 87% agreement  UK: 8% agreement

[Costa et al., 2014; Ellis et al., 2003]
Risk & Resilience in adoptive same-sex families

- No differences between children raised in same-sex families and children raised in different-sex families in terms of their social, psychological, and behavioural adjustment. Similarly, no differences for parental competences and emotional involvement in gay/lesbian and heterosexual parents.

- However, same-sex families face unique experiences caused by social oppression and multiple discriminations that may have repercussions on their family dynamics. Literature has just recently started to uncover possible mediators that prevent these experiences from undermining same-sex families’ well-being, especially the disclosure of the family configuration both inside and outside the family.

[Anderssen et al., 2002; Clarke, 2002; Gartrell & Bos, 2010]
Similarities & Differences

Even sympathetic researchers to same-sex parented families are not immune to institutional heterosexism!...

Research that has focused on similarities and differences have suffered from a need to proof that gay and lesbian parents “are not less successful or less worthy than heterosexual parents” [Stacey & Biblarz, 2001]

This line of research implies that heterosexuality, and heterosexual parenting, are the norm to conform to.
Theoretical basis

• It is family processes (co-parenting, parent-child relationships, etc.), and \textbf{NOT} family configuration (different-sex vs. same-sex parents) that link to child’s developmental outcomes;

• Being out as a family poses additional stress to the families, and may put children in potential victimizing situations (e.g. at school);

• The “no difference in outcomes” studies are limited, and do not consider resilience and compensatory processes used by families.
Study 1 - A qualitative examination of gay & lesbian adoptive families in Portugal
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**Objective:** The purpose of this study was to address the question of how adoptive gay parented families remain healthy and stable despite the oppression they face. This was done by addressing the different forms of oppression that these families experienced and the resilient behaviours that they may have employed to deal with these experiences.

**Design:** Qualitative study, through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were analysed using Thematic Analysis (theoretical, “top down” approach).

**Sample:** Purposive and snow-ball sampling.
Interview Script – Example Questions

Parenting experiences
• Could you please tell me about your family configuration, and how you came about being a parent?
• What are your main concerns as a parent?
• How has being out (or not being out) affected your life? Your child’s life? Your partner’s life?

Managing discrimination and oppression
• Have you experienced direct discrimination or prejudice because of your family configuration? Has your child?

Community involvement
• Do you maintain close contact or friendship with other families like yours? How did you meet these families?
Family configuration

Family A
- 46 yrs
- 5 yrs relationship
- Adopted for 3 yrs
- Lecturer

Family B
- 50 yrs
- 5 yrs relationship
- Adopted for 2 yrs
- Physician
- 6 yrs
- Journalist
Results – Social oppression

- **Institutional / Structural heterosexism** (Herek, 2009)

Both families had to deny their relationship, in particular, the existence of a coparent, otherwise, no child would be placed in the care of a same-sex couple.

*How does this form of heterosexism constitute a risk factor?*
Results – Social oppression

Even after the adoption is finalized, the families are faced with a difficult choice:

• Do they want to adopt a second child or do they want to have their couple relationship legally recognized?
• Even if they do get married, the coparent (social parent) will not have any rights or responsibilities over the child.
Results – Communication within the family

- One of the most important topics for these families is how they communicate with their children about their family configuration.

- This topic has also been identified as one of the most important protective factors.

- In general, the attitude is one of “normalization”
Results – Communication outside the family

- Another important topic for these families is how they disclose their family configuration in social contexts.
- Furthermore, it is also important how they convey this to the child so that they feel safe in talking about their family.
- In general, the attitude is again of “normalization”
Compensatory processes to contend with social oppression

Risk factors:
- Internalized stigma
- Discrimination experiences
- Acceptance from family of origin

Protective factors:
- Openness about family
- Management of family “secret”
- Anticipation of discrimination

Same-sex parenting

Intrafamiliar dynamics

Extrafamiliar processes

Child development
Study 2 - New Family Social: LGBT adoptive and foster families in the UK

http://www.newfamilysocial.org.uk/
Study 2 - New Family Social: LGBT adoptive and foster families in the UK

**Objective:** Survey LGBT people’s experiences of adoption and fostering

**Design:** Online survey with mixed-methods research design

**Sample:** $N = 366$
- 231 Adopters
- 83 In the adoption assessment process
- 52 Considering adoption
Main demographics

Only parents who adopted or are in the process of adopting
Did you think that being LGBT would be a barrier to becoming an adoptive parent?

- No: 38%
- Yes: 62%

- No significant sex differences
- No significant region differences
Did anyone ever tell you you shouldn’t be a parent because you are LGBT?

- No significant sex differences
- No significant region differences
If yes, please say who told you
Do you think that the assessment and matching process would have been easier if you were not LGBT?

- No significant sex differences
- No significant region differences
Do you think the process would have been different if you were not LGBT?

- No significant sex differences
- No significant region differences

39.5 no

60.5 yes
Did you think that being LGBT meant you would only be considered for harder-to-place children?

Interestingly, answers are almost evenly split.

- Women were more likely to think YES.
- No significant region differences
How long did you think about adopting before taking the first steps?

Men tended to take a significantly more time than women to decide to adopt.
What made you choose adoption over other routes to parenthood?
ALTRUISTIC / MORAL MOTIVATION

- Helping children in need (of a permanent home)

Professional experience
Adoption after fostering
“Give back” / “Pay it fwwd”

WIN-WIN

REASONED MOTIVATION

- Circumstantial motivation
- Ethical / moral objections
- Personal limitations
- Legal / financial concerns
- Reproduct. limitations

Philosophical

Experiential

WIN-WIN

INTRINSIC / PERSONAL MOTIVATION

- Wanting a family (forever family)
- Equal status parenthood
- No biological imperative

Circumstantial motivation

Desired family

WIN-WIN
Helping children in need (of a permanent home)

Altruistic / Moral Motivation

Circumstantial motivation

Professional experience
Adoption after fostering
“Give back” / “Pay it f wd”

“My own story of adoption”
“Family/friends personal experiences”

“I want to be able to tell me son where he came from”
“Fostering would be heart-breaking for us to have a child leave our family home”
INTRINSIC / PERSONAL MOTIVATION

Wanting a family (forever family)

Equal status parenthood

Biological imperative

“Advantageous equal relationships”

“Not the second mum”

I wanted both my partner and I to have a level playing field as in not having a biological link.”
**Reasoned Motivation**

**Philosophical**
- Ethical / moral objections to ART

**Experiential**
- Personal limitations
- Legal / financial concerns
- Reproduct. limitations

- “Selfishness”
- “Artificial”
- “Shopping for sperm”
- “Creating a child to inevitably force a separation from their mother”
- “Creating a child to ultimately force a separation from their mother”
Conclusions

- In general, parents and prospective parents did not anticipate difficulties or barriers in the adoption process because they identified as LGBT+.
- Most parents were never told they shouldn’t have children. However, those who indicated that, were told they shouldn’t by their own families or by adoption workers.
- Half of the parents and prospective parents expected to adopt harder-to-place children.
- Men took longer to decide to adopt.
- The motivations for adoption were varied and interrelated. Altruistic motivation links with personal motivation as a “win-win situation”.
Empowering Adoptive Families
A study about adoptive families in the UK and in Portugal

At this time of changing government policies on adoption, we are looking for parents of adopted children to participate in a wide ranging online study to look at what helps in parenting school-age children and teenagers who have been adopted.

- Has your adopted child (or children) been placed with you for at least one year?
- Is your child currently aged 5-18 years old?

If the answers to these questions are YES, we would love to hear from you!

bit.ly/1OJmDSv

To help us with the Empowering Adoptive Families survey open the link above with all the information about our research. Alternatively for more information please access our website, or email us on empoweringadoptfamilies@gmail.com.

Thank you, Dr. Pedro Alexandre Costa & Dr. Fiona Tasker
Despite the limitations of the “no difference in outcomes” studies, there are only 2 studies about same-sex adoptive families conducted in Europe, 1 of them in the UK.

Little is known about the challenges for adoptive children and adolescents raised by same-sex couples, particularly in the long term.

Beyond the “no difference in outcomes”, there are resilient behaviours shown by these families, in particular regarding families of choice or “Fictive kinship”.

There are only a handful of studies about LGBT parented families in Portugal, and none with adoptive families.
Study 3 – Empowering Adoptive Families

**Objective:** The aims of this study are to compare family relationships and adopted child’s psychosocial adjustment, and to explore similarities and differences in the family maps of hetero and LGBT+ families. To make cross-cultural comparisons that may be useful for family & adoption policy.

**Design:** This study uses a mixed-methods research design.

**Sample:** Adoptive LGBT+ and heterosexual parented families. Inclusion criteria: Adopted children for at least one year; Children aged 5-18 years old.
Some of the topics we are interested in

- “Do in fact LGBT+ parents adopt harder to place children?”
- “What are the family processes and preadoptive experiences that mediate the effects of parents’ characteristics and child’s development? And whether these are the same for different families”
- “Are adoptive families open to maintaining contact with the child’s birth family? And if so, how are these arrangements going?”
- “Do families openly discuss adoption inside and outside the family?”
- “Do LGBT+ parents feel safe to reveal their family configuration in social contexts? How open are these families about discussing adoption and LGBT+ parented families?”
Where we are now…

- Face validity obtained with expert evaluation from Adoption and Fostering Agencies.

- Online survey in the UK open since February 2016.

- Advertising through adoption and fostering agencies in the UK, Facebook, and Twitter.

- 37 completed questionnaires in the UK.

- Still finalizing the Portuguese version of the survey.
Thank you for your attention!

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http://pcos59.wix.com/empoweradoptfamilies