

## LGBTQ Parent Adoption

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Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) adults express a desire for parenthood (Riskind & Tornello, 2017; Stotzer, Herman, & Hasenbush, 2014), and often report adoption as a preferred pathway (dickey, Ducheny, & Ehrbar, 2016; Mallon, 2011). The numbers of adoptive families headed by LG parents have recently doubled (Gates, 2011), and same-sex couples are seven times more likely than other-sex couples to have adopted children (Goldberg & Conron, 2018). Controversy, however, continues to surround adoption by LGBTQ adults (Farr & Goldberg, 2018). Although LG adults may jointly adopt as same-sex couples, adoption laws remain regulated on the state-level (Farr & Goldberg, 2018). Given different state-level laws that govern adoption (e.g., religious freedom bills; Movement Advancement Project, 2018), experiences vary among LGBTQ adults who adopt. A growing body of research on the adoption of children by LGBTQ parents has helped to address questions raised in public debates. As a note, much of the literature addressing non-heterosexual parent adoptive families has focused on LG parents—to the exclusion of other sexual and gender minority identities. Thus, I use LGBTQ inclusively wherever possible, and acronyms that represent the identities described in the research I review (e.g., LG).

### Adoption as a Pathway to Parenthood

While LG and heterosexual adoptive parents share a number of demographic characteristics such as often being older, well-educated, affluent,

and predominantly White (Gates, 2011), adoption motivations are both similar and distinct among LG and heterosexual adults (Goldberg, 2012; Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014; Mallon, 2011; Tornello & Bos, 2017). Farr and Patterson (2009) found that virtually all couples (lesbian, gay, and heterosexual) “wanted to have children” for why they pursued adoption. LG couples, however, less often report a commitment to biological parenthood, attempts to conceive, or pursuit of fertility treatments than do heterosexual couples (Farr & Patterson, 2009; Goldberg, 2012; Goldberg, Gartrell et al., 2014; Goldberg & Smith, 2008; Jennings, Mellish, Tasker, Lamb, & Golombok, 2014). Indeed, many LG and transgender adults report adoption as their preferred pathway to parenthood (dickey et al., 2016; Farr & Goldberg, 2018; Tornello & Bos, 2017).

LGBTQ adults may also express greater willingness to adopt children from different racial-ethnic backgrounds, as compared to heterosexual adults (Goldberg, 2009). LG adoptive couples also appear more likely than heterosexual adoptive couples to have completed transracial adoptions (Farr & Patterson, 2009; Lavner, Waterman, & Peplau, 2014; Raleigh, 2012). Conversely, among a recent and large sample of LG and heterosexual adoptive parents, no significant differences emerged in likelihood of completing a transracial adoption (Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2016).



Discrepancies in transracial adoption rates warrant further review.

Research has also explored dynamics among LG adoptive families related to openness arrangements (e.g., contact between adoptive and birth families; Farr & Goldberg, 2015). Research suggests that as compared to heterosexual adoptive parents, LG adoptive parents may be more open to contact with birth relatives (Goldberg, Kinkler, Richardson, & Downing, 2011), and some report more positive relationships with birth relatives (Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2016). These findings may reflect a less strong emphasis on heteronormative nuclear family ideals among LG (versus heterosexual) adoptive parents (Farr, Ravvina, & Goldberg, 2018).

## Challenges and Strengths of Adoptive LGBTQ Parents

Although all prospective adoptive parents go through a rigorous application process including trainings, workshops, and home studies (Mallon, 2011), LGBTQ parents often face additional institutional and attitudinal challenges. (A home study is the in-depth evaluation that any prospective adoptive parent must complete in the US as a requirement of the adoption process. It is intended as a way to educate and support parents throughout the adoption process, and also to evaluate their fitness as potential parents; Mallon, 2011). Beyond variations in the legal and policy landscape for LGBTQ adoptive parents in the US (Farr & Goldberg, 2018), not all adoption agencies



and/or workers openly work (or are adequately trained to do so) with LGBTQ prospective parents (Brodzinsky, 2011). Some agency workers also lack knowledge of adoption laws pertaining to LGBTQ parent adoption (Brodzinsky, 2011; Farr & Goldberg, 2018). Discrimination from adoption agencies and workers is a recurring theme for LGBTQ adoptive parents in the US, Canada and Europe (Farr & Goldberg, 2018; Goldberg, Moyer, Kinkler, & Richardson, 2012; Kinkler & Goldberg, 2011; Malmquist, 2015; Messina & D'Amore, 2018; Pyne, 2012; Ross, Epstein, Anderson, & Eady, 2009; Stotzer et al., 2014).

At the same time, LGBTQ individuals and couples may offer special strengths that may benefit their adopted children (Golombok et al., 2014; Perry, 2017). Lesbian couples have been observed to show more supportive coparenting during family interaction than heterosexual or gay couples, and LG couples were less likely to be undermining than heterosexual couples (Farr & Patterson, 2013). Among all these adoptive families, more supportive and less undermining interaction was associated with positive adjustment for their young children. LG adoptive parents have also been found to internalize adoption stigma (e.g., feeling that adoptive parenthood is inferior to biological parenthood) less than heterosexual adoptive parents, and those parents with lower internalization also reported fewer depressive symptoms (Goldberg, Kinkler, & Hines, 2011). Finally, LG and heterosexual foster-to-adopt parents generally report satisfaction with their adoption, few depressive symptoms, and low parenting stress post-placement (Lavner et al., 2014). Indeed, many LG adoptive parents describe being a role model for other parents, receiving ideal levels of social support, and feeling satisfied overall (Goldberg & Smith, 2014).

## The Transition to Adoptive Parenthood

All new parents are faced with both joys and challenges. Consistent with the general transition to parenthood literature, including adoptive parenthood (McKay, Ross, & Goldberg, 2010), Goldberg, Smith, and Kashy (2010) found that relationship quality declined across the transition to adoptive

parenthood for LG and heterosexual couples. On the other hand, Goldberg and Smith (2009) also found that LG and heterosexual adoptive parents reported increases in perceived parenting skill during this time. Goldberg and Smith (2008, 2011) found that greater perceived social support and better relationship quality were associated with more favorable mental health across the transition to adoptive parenthood. Specific to LG parents, however, those who lived in areas with less favorable legal climates and had higher internalized homophobia experienced the greatest increases in anxiety and depression over time. Overall, the factors that contribute most to parental well-being and couple dynamics within LG adoptive parent families during the transition to parenthood include the child's age, presence of social support, and family processes broadly, rather than parents' sexual or gender identity (Goldberg, Kinkler, Moyer, & Weber, 2014; Lavner et al., 2014; Sumontha, Farr, & Patterson, 2016).

## Outcomes for Children, Parents, Couples, and Families

Adopted children's behavioral adjustment has been a topic of great interest in studies of LG adoptive parent families. Research has revealed that assessments of adopted children's behavior problems are unrelated to parental sexual orientation, even after controlling for child age, child sex, and family income (Averett, Nalavany, & Ryan, 2009; Farr, 2017; Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010; Goldberg & Smith, 2013; Tan & Baggerly, 2009). Golombok and colleagues (2014) reported that young children adopted by heterosexual parents had greater externalizing problems than did those adopted by LG parents. Thus, adopted children with LG parents show behavioral outcomes that are comparable to, if not better than, those with heterosexual parents.

Children's gender development has also been an outcome of interest. Some longitudinal research has revealed no significant differences in parents' reports, children's own reports, or observational data of children's gender development across early to middle childhood; rather, children were

typical of their gender regardless of parental sexual orientation (Farr et al., 2018; Farr et al., 2010). In Goldberg and Garcia's (2016) longitudinal study, children with lesbian mothers demonstrated less gender-typical play behavior than children with gay and heterosexual parents across early childhood. This could relate to findings that sexual minority (versus heterosexual) adults are more likely to endorse gender-flexible attitudes (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). Relatedly, Sumontha, Farr, and Patterson (2017) found that school-age children adopted by LG parents had more flexible gender attitudes when parents also had more flexible attitudes and divided childcare labor more evenly. Overall, parental sexual orientation appears to less strongly predict gender development among adopted children than parents' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., divisions of labor).

How do children adopted by LG parents describe their experiences? Gianino, Goldberg, and Lewis (2009) explored adolescents' disclosure practices about their families with friends and at school. Adolescents described varied strategies, from not disclosing to telling others openly. Although several noted feeling "forced" to disclose because of being a visibly transracial adoptive family with same-sex parents and many indicated apprehension in "coming out" about their families, overall, adolescents reported positive reactions. Adolescents adopted through foster care by LG parents have also reported feeling more open-minded and tolerant of others because of their parents' sexual orientation (Cody, Farr, McRoy, Ayers-Lopez, & Ledesma, 2017). Despite experiencing some bullying related to their families, school-age children adopted by LG parents have described positive feelings and general comfort disclosing about their family (Farr, Crain, Oakley, Cashen, & Garber, 2016; Farr, Oakley, & Ollen, 2016). Gianino et al. (2009) argues that family communication about adoption, racism, and heterosexism may help children in negotiating the disclosure process. Existing evidence suggests that LG adoptive parents value these practices (Wyman Battalen, Farr, Brodzinsky, & McRoy, 2018), and that parents often engage in adoptive, racial-ethnic, and sexual minority parent family socialization with their young children (Goldberg &

Smith, 2016; Oakley, Farr, & Scherer, 2017). Future research should explore how such socialization shapes children's experiences.

Some research about adoptive LG parent families has examined parent and couple outcomes, parent-child relationships, and family functioning. This research reveals that LG adoptive parents report few depressive symptoms, low parenting stress, and high family functioning; they also appear no different from heterosexual adoptive parents in overall well-being (Farr, 2017; Goldberg & Smith, 2008, 2011, 2014; Lavner et al., 2014; Tornello, Farr, & Patterson, 2011). LG adoptive couples demonstrate low conflict and high couple relationship satisfaction (Farr, 2017; Goldberg & Smith, 2009), although some studies have indicated higher dissolution rates over time among lesbian adoptive couples than their gay and heterosexual peers (Farr, 2017; Goldberg & Garcia, 2015). Consistent with broader literature (e.g., Lamb, 2012), quality of parenting and parent-child relationships appear more important than parental sexual orientation to individual outcomes (Erich, Kanenberg, Case, Allen, & Bogdanos, 2009; Farr, 2017; Farr & Patterson, 2013). In Golombok et al.'s (2014) adoptive families study, gay fathers reported significantly greater parental well-being and more positive parent-child relationships than did heterosexual parents. Thus, when associations between parental sexual orientation and outcomes have emerged, the results have favored families with LGBTQ parents.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the adoption of children by LGBTQ parents is a growing reality. Although LGBTQ individuals face challenges in becoming adoptive parents, LGBTQ parent families formed through adoption appear to experience generally positive outcomes. Much remains to be learned, however, about the diversity of LGBTQ adoptive parents and their children.

## Implications for the Future of Adoption: Research

- More diverse samples and methodological approaches could enrich our understanding about the experiences of LGBTQ adoptive parent families, particularly with attention to intersectionality, adoptees' perspectives, and adoption pathways (Fish & Russell, 2018).

## Implications for the Future of Adoption: Practice

- More than 100,000 children are currently awaiting adoption in the US (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2017). One challenge of finding permanent homes for children is a perceived dearth of parents. If adoption agencies recruited more LGBTQ parents, more children might find permanent homes (Brodzinsky, 2011).
- Programs to support LGBTQ adoptive parents would be beneficial, such as the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) "All Children – All Families" program (HRC, 2017). In completing the HRC's training program, agencies can become recognized as affirming to LGBTQ prospective adopters (Farr & Goldberg, 2018; HRC, 2017).

## Implications for the Future of Adoption: Policy

- In terms of law and policy, if the Aderholt Amendment were to become US law, otherwise qualified LG prospective adoptive parents could be discriminated against by state-funded foster and adoption agencies (Movement Advancement Project, 2018). States with anti-discriminatory policies based on sexual orientation could also lose funding. Research findings clearly demonstrate LG adult as proficient parents, and thus do not support such policies as beneficial to children.



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