



The Social History of the American Family: An Encyclopedia

Adoption, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People and

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Adoption by lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people (i.e., sexual minorities) has increased over the past several decades. However, no research has examined rates or experiences of adoption by transgender people. Sexual minorities who seek to become parents may consider reproductive technologies (artificial insemination or surrogacy) or adoption as a means of building their families. Sexual minorities who pursue adoption may decide on international adoption, public domestic adoption (through the child welfare system), and private domestic adoption (in which birth parents and adoptive parents are matched through an adoption agency).

Sexual minorities may choose private domestic open adoption because they are attracted to the idea of maintaining contact with birth parents, or being able to provide their child with information about their birth parents, or because of the greater likelihood of adopting an infant compared to international or public adoption. Sexual minorities may select international adoption to avoid the long wait associated with the domestic private adoptions of infants, or because they suspect that birth mothers are unlikely to choose them as adoptive parents because they are gay. Same-sex couples who pursue international adoption must weigh such considerations against the reality that if they choose to adopt internationally, some countries will not allow them to adopt as a couple, and they might have to closet their relationship (at this time, no country allows same-sex couples to adopt; thus, some couples choose one partner to pose as a single parent), which can create intra- and interpersonal tension. Finally, sexual minorities who seek to adopt through the child welfare system are typically in part motivated by finances or altruistic reasons. Sexual minorities may also believe that they have the best chance of adopting via the child welfare system, in that the number of children in foster care exceeds the number of heterosexual prospective adoptive parents. While it is true that LGB people may be welcomed by some child welfare workers and social service agencies, some sexual minorities report insensitive practices by child welfare workers.

The American Psychological Association has supported adoption by same-sex couples, citing social prejudice as harming the psychological health of lesbians and gays, while noting that there is no evidence that their parenting causes harm.



The Transition to Adoptive Parenthood

Some research has examined the transition to adoptive parenthood for sexual minorities, and for same-sex couples specifically. This research suggests that, like heterosexual biological-parent couples, same-sex adoptive couples experience

declines in their mental health and relationship quality across the transition. Factors that appear to buffer against poor mental health across the transition include support from family, friends, and coworkers, living in a gay-friendly neighborhood, and living in a state with pro-gay laws pertaining to adoption.

Research on the transition to adoptive parenthood by sexual minorities shows that certain subgroups of parents may experience particular challenges. Many LGB people adopt transracially (i.e., children who are of a different race). These families may face additional challenges related to their multiply stigmatized and visible family structure, in that these families are vulnerable to the stresses associated with both heterosexism and racism. Same-sex couples who adopt through the child welfare system also encounter unique challenges. They often adopt children who are older and/or who have behavioral or attachment difficulties, which may cause strain to their relationships. Furthermore, parents who seek to adopt through the welfare system usually foster their children before they can legally adopt them, and the legal insecurity of such placements has been found to impact sexual minority adoptive parents' well-being and attachment to their children.

Parent and Child Functioning

Some research has explored the well-being of sexual minority adoptive parents. These studies have found similar levels of parenting stress in LG and heterosexual adoptive parents. Aspects associated with less parenting stress for sexual minority parents include adopting babies or toddlers as opposed to older children; having children with few behavioral difficulties; having less depression before becoming a parent; and having a strong social support network. Likewise, research on children adopted via foster care by LG and heterosexual parents found no differences in family functioning as a function of parental sexual orientation. Parents who adopted younger children, and parents who adopted nondisabled children, report higher family functioning. Regarding parent-child relationships, children adopted by LG parents show similar levels of attachment to their parents as children adopted by heterosexual parents. They also show similar emotional and behavioral functioning compared to children adopted by heterosexual parents. Furthermore, children adopted via the child welfare system by both LG and heterosexual parents have been found to show significant gains in cognitive development and exhibit similar levels of behavior problems over time, despite the fact that LG parents tend to raise children with higher levels of biological and environmental risks prior to placement.

Studies have shown that children adopted by LG adoptive parents demonstrate normal gender development. However, research also suggests that the adopted children of same-sex parents may be less stereotyped in their play behaviors than children of heterosexual parents. This may be regarded as a strength because different types of toys and play facilitate different types of skill building.

Unique Challenges and Strengths in LG Adoptive Parent Families

Despite their positive outcomes, sexual minority adoptive parents and their children may confront a variety of challenges, including legal ones. Same-sex couples, for example, may live in states that do not allow same-sex partners to co-adopt. These couples must select one partner to perform the official adoption as a single parent, resulting in a situation in which the child has only one legal parent. In about half of U.S. states as of 2013, the as-of-yet nonlegal partner may complete a second-parent

adoption, thus enabling the child to have two legal parents.

Furthermore, LGBT adoptive families may face discrimination within their communities, workplaces, and the school system. While social support may help ameliorate the negative effects of these challenges, sexual minority parents have been found to receive less support from their families of origin in general and with regard to parenting, often because of their sexual orientation.

Although sexual minority adoptive parents encounter unique barriers, they also display distinct strengths. First, because they often must create families of choice (i.e., supportive communities that do not rely on biological ties), they have been found to possess more expansive notions of family, and thus may be open to adoption as a first choice. Similarly, they may be less threatened by relationships between the child and the birth parents, and therefore more accepting of open adoption arrangements. Furthermore, because they must work through unique challenges, same-sex parents may develop more resilience, and therefore may be better equipped to handle challenging parenting situations, such as special needs placements or transracial adoptions. Finally, because LG adoptive parents must go through a lengthy process to become parents, they may approach parenting more intentionally than their heterosexual counterparts.

- adoptive parents
- international adoption
- adoption
- birth parents
- child welfare
- heterosexuality
- children

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See Also:

- [Adoption, Mixed-Race](#)
- [Adoption, Open](#)
- [Adoption, Second Parents and](#)
- [Adoption Laws](#)
- [Gay and Lesbian Marriage Laws](#)
- [Parenting](#)

Further Readings

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