

**Assessing Lesbian and Gay Prospective Foster and Adoptive Families:
A Focus on the Homestudy Process**

Gerald P. Mallon

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Abstract

Foster care and adoption by gay men and lesbians is not a new phenomenon. Children and youth have always been placed by states and public agencies in homes with gay and lesbian parents. Some gay men and lesbians have fostered or adopted children independently from private agencies or have made private adoption arrangements with individual birth mothers; others have fostered or adopted through the public system. Drawing on research literature, practice wisdom from 34 years of child welfare experiences, and case examples, this article offers child welfare professionals guidelines for competent assessment with prospective foster or adoptive parents who identify as lesbian or gay.

Key Words: adoption, foster care, homestudy assessment, gay and lesbian parents, child welfare

Gay and lesbian fostering and adoption

Lesbians and gay men in the U.S. have created families, through adoption, foster care, the establishment of kinship networks (Weston, 1991) and in a wide variety of ways. In some cases, lesbians and gay men became parents without disclosure or discussion of their sexuality with adoption and foster care agencies. However, as many lesbians and gay men have become able to live their lives more openly, more are considering parenthood in ways they might not have thought possible in the past (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001).

For many lesbians and gay men foster care or adoption is not a second choice, as it may be for heterosexual men and women who are infertile (Turner, 1999), but rather a first choice. There is a growing body of research which supports the fact that lesbians and gay men make good parents (Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Golombok, Tasker, & Murray, 1997; Golombok, Perry, Burston, Murray, Mooney-Somers, & Stevens, 2003; Patterson, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1996; Shuster, 2005; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Vanfraussen, K., Ponjaert-Kristofferson, I. & Brewaeys, A., 2002, 2003). Wainright & Patterson, 2006; Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Lesbians and gay men represent an untapped resource of potential parents for some of the many children and youth who need permanent families. Although lesbian and gay men may have been historically discouraged from fostering or adoption by some, changes in legislation and policy over the past ten years in some states reflect a more open attitude towards them as parents (Pace, 2005; Ryan, Pearlmutter, & Groza, 2004)).

Assessment of lesbian and gay foster and adoptive families

Deciding to adopt or become a foster parent for a child is a huge step. Potential parents are understandably apprehensive about what the process entails – lesbians and gay men, given their history of discrimination, may have even greater cause for concern. Overall, there are far greater numbers of lesbians and gay men who have successfully fostered or adopted, but the view that lesbians and gay men will simply be rejected is still a commonly held perception.

The assessment process

The assessment processes for lesbians and gay men who are prospective foster or adoptive parents can become skewed if the assessing worker is either over-focusing on sexuality or totally ignoring it. Sexual orientation cannot be ignored in the assessment process, because an individual's sexuality is an aspect of

who they are as a total person and will impact on their life as a parent. What needs to be established early on in the assessment is the applicant's ability to constructively manage homophobia or heterocentrism in their own lives.

There has been a move from the model that has treated gay and lesbian applicants as being the same as their heterosexual counterparts, to acknowledging the different experiences that being a gay or lesbian parent brings to fostering and adoption. As gay and lesbian parents have demonstrated their unique strengths as foster parents and adopters, there has been less need to argue that they 'are just as good as heterosexual parents', with the underlying presumption that the heterosexual model of family life is best.

States and child welfare agencies are required by law to carry out a full assessment of applicants before approving them as foster or adoptive parents. The information to be collected and required checks, are detailed in the relevant state regulations and standards. Although this process may vary from state to state, prospective parents should be made aware of the flow of this process at the start of their initial engagement with the agency. The Texas Adoption Resource Exchange provides an excellent overview on its website about the steps to becoming a foster/adoptive parent

(http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Adoption_and_Foster_Care/How_to_Start/steps.asp, downloaded, June 28, 2005). This site might be useful for potential foster/adoptive parents to review.

The first contact

In initial interviews with the individual or couple, social workers must be clear in their language, their affect, and in setting the tone, that they are open and accepting of lesbians and gay men as parents. Social worker must also be aware that the applicant, at this initial interview, may not be "out". Many lesbian and gay applicants will be assessing both the social worker and the agency for "safety", trying to determine whether the agency will support them. Trust will develop over time, although some lesbians and gay men will come out directly at this first interview.

Pedro and his partner, Mark who became foster parents in the late 1980's made the following observations about approaching an agency and preparing for a first visit.

We both wanted so much to become Dads, but like most gay men we thought that we would never be able to do that. We loved our nieces and nephews, but being the greatest uncles in the world got old quickly and we wanted more -- we wanted a family. We saw in the news that there were more and more children being born HIV positive and that their Moms were either dying or unable

to care for them or had already abandoned them in the hospital. AIDS was all around us, we had lost many friends or had others who were very ill, so AIDS and HIV, horrible as it was, was not foreign to us. We heard about this agency in New York called Leake and Watts that were among the first to license foster homes for HIV positive babies and we decided to contact them. We were cautious at first, but they sounded pretty open minded, even to gay people becoming foster parents because they were really desperate to find families to love their children. So, we decide to pursue becoming foster parents, we didn't really even know the difference between foster care and adoption. We went to the orientation, we did the application, we got the references, and the physicals, the financial statements, and we did the training and completed our home study in record time. In retrospect, we were as desperate to become Dads as they were to get foster parents it was a good match for all of us.

Training groups

Many lesbian and gay parents say they felt isolated and vulnerable in a MAPP (Model Approaches to Positive Parenting) or PRIDE (Parent Resource for Information, Development, Education) training group, and some parents who were interviewed in previous publications (Mallon, 2004, 2006; Mallon & Betts, 2005) noted that they were nervous about dealing with other group members' homophobia in the group setting. All the parents interviewed recalled that they had not been prepared by their assessing social worker for the group training, either in general or specifically in relation to their needs as lesbian or gay parents. Some parents observed that they felt that the onus was on them to "come out" at the start of the group. Most of those interviewed commented that both social workers and other group facilitators 'did not have a great understanding of what it meant to come out'.

In truth, it is likely that there will be a range of reactions in the group – from shock that lesbians and gay men would be allowed to adopt or foster, to those who are comfortable and accepting of lesbians and gay men as parents. It is not the prospective parents' responsibility to either manage homophobia from group members or to educate the group; the responsibilities for this rests with the facilitating social workers. In this respect, it is important that clear ground rules for the group are set, which make reference to accepting and valuing diversity and challenging discriminatory comments.

Should the home study be different for lesbian and gay parents?

As lesbian and gay persons seek to raise children in growing numbers; social workers increasingly have the opportunity to write homestudies for these families. Lesbian and gay adoption and foster care is changing quickly and dramatically across the US. Because of the enormous variation in policies, expectations, practice, and culture across the United States, it may be impossible to agree on one best home study format. Homestudy formats vary from state to state, but recent changes in the some state

laws make the development of these guidelines an important step in the right direction. What is accepted practice in an urban area with large numbers of gay and lesbian applicants may be unheard of in a more suburban or rural area with less lesbian and gay adoption and fostering experience. Providing guidelines is useful because they:

- 1) Give social workers a sense of the formats other states and agencies are currently using to write homestudies for lesbian and gay applicants, and
- 2) Provide general cultural competency information so that those who work with lesbian and gay applicants can do so in a sensitive, respectful manner.

A continuum of Homestudy formats

The sections below present several formats that are currently being used to write homestudies for prospective lesbian and gay adoptive/foster parents. As with heterosexual applicants, the issues can be quite different for single adoptive/foster parents as compared with couples. When single people adopt or foster, often their sexual orientation is not known, or it seems less important; the issues of adopting as a single person often become primary rather than sexual orientation (Marindin, 1997).

Single Lesbians and Gay People: Out or Not?

When a gay or lesbian person does not currently have a partner and wishes to adopt as a single person, the homestudy can be written as any other single applicant. It is not important to always directly ask applicants about their sexual orientation, though the applicant may disclose this information in the process of discussions about his/her past and future.

If the worker does not know how the person identifies after the standard home visits, it is usually acceptable practice to write the homestudy without reference to the subject. It should not be assumed however, that every single applicant is gay or lesbian. If the applicant is described as single, any major past relationships or marriages can be mentioned (sometimes applicants do not mention past partners' genders in their paperwork), and the homestudy can indicate the applicant's thoughts on relationships in the future.

If the applicant tells the worker he or she is lesbian or gay the worker may discuss with the

applicant about how this information should be included in the homestudy. It may be mentioned as descriptive (i.e., "Mary is a single lesbian woman living in suburb of Hartford") or in more detail in the applicant's autobiography or description of past and anticipated future relationships. Some applicants feel more comfortable having this information included in the homestudy so that he or she doesn't have to worry about hiding information from children's workers he or she may meet with in the future. This way, the applicant knows that anyone who approaches him/her with a possible match is aware of the situation.

Other workers and applicants may feel that sexual orientation is not necessary to share, and that as a single person it has no relevance to the applicant's ability to parent a child. Some workers routinely advise gay or lesbian single people that they will not include this information in the homestudy because it is irrelevant. Workers who consider themselves "allies" for lesbian or gay applicants in more conservative agencies or states may decide that not mentioning a single lesbian or gay person's sexual orientation is not only valid, it will remove the barrier of homophobia that could delay or deny appropriate placements.

Same gender couples: as a two-parent family

Increasing numbers of social workers are writing the homestudies of gay and lesbian couples the same way they write the homestudies of heterosexual couples. Both people's names are listed as the adoptive/foster parents, and both receive an equal amount of attention within the homestudy.

The homestudy is written in the same format as if the couple were male-female, including information about the length of their relationship (since same-gender couples cannot marry, information about marriage would not apply) and its strengths and weaknesses.

Many social workers have said they prefer this type of straight-forward homestudy because it gives them a better understanding of the type of family that may be adopting or fostering a child/youth on their caseload but some states' policies or laws may not allow homestudies to be written in this way.

This format is "groundbreaking" in some places; it also is a very natural way to write this important document. But most lesbian and gay people are applying to adopt because they want to be parents, not because they want to be groundbreakers.

Same gender couples: as a single parent with a domestic partner

A modification on the two-parent homestudy is the single parent with a "domestic partner." Some social workers choose this approach because of laws or policies that require same-gender couples to adopt as single people, or because other social workers in their agency or part of the country are more comfortable

with this format. The homestudy is written primarily about one partner, focusing on that person's social history and interest in adoption, and listing his/her name alone as the adoptive/foster parent. The second partner is included in the homestudy process and is described in the homestudy as a domestic partner/friend. The length of their relationship and co-habitation is described, and the homestudy explains that both partners will consider themselves parents of the child to be adopted.

This type of homestudy is clearly a hybrid: it is honest about the situation of the couple, but conforms to current policies about lesbian and gay adoption. In agencies or states where people are uncomfortable or unwilling to consider a homestudy with two same-gender parents, this approach may be a good fit. It can be however confusing to see one person listed as the adoptive/foster parent when a couple is really a two-parent family. The format may misleadingly suggest to children's workers that this family consists of a "primary parent" and the parent's partner, instead of two parents who will share parenting responsibilities.

Same gender couples: as a single person with a roommate

Until recently, most homestudies of same-gender couples were written using this format. One partner is described as a single parent, and the entire homestudy focuses on this person alone. Since homestudies are required to list other individuals in the home, the other partner is listed as a roommate, and criminal clearances are obtained. Very little other information about the relationship is mentioned, though often a sentence is included saying that this "roommate" is supportive of the roommate's plans to adopt.

This type of homestudy can be the safest in a state or agency that is extremely uncomfortable with gay and lesbian adoptions, or it may be mandated by policy or law. This type can be problematic, if is not clear to a person reading this type of homestudy what this family's structure really looks like. Some social workers reading the homestudy may take it at face value, assuming this is truly a single parent family. Other social workers may read between the lines and wonder what the relationship is between the two "roommates." When a child's worker expresses interest in placing a child with the "single parent," he or she may be given more information about the situation verbally or in writing.

Although this approach to writing a gay or lesbian homestudy seemed the safest way to do so when these homestudies in the early 1980's, some families have found that today, this method can backfire. One child's worker thought a specific child on her caseload would do extremely well placed with a

single man and selected a "single person" homestudy written in this way. After investing considerable time pursuing the match, she found out that it was actually a two-parent family, not the situation she believed could best meet this child's needs (although she had had positive experiences placing other children with gay or lesbian couples in the past). She also raised concerns that if the agency - not one with which she had worked previously - was willing to omit such major information about the family from the homestudy, she felt less willing to trust that other important information had not been omitted. Social workers and agencies that choose to follow this format should do so with these concerns in mind. Homestudies should always be written with the best interest of the child/youth in mind, not the best interest of the potential parent. It is important to heed the words of adoption expert Joyce Maguire Pavao (2005) who reminds us that adoption is about finding families for children, not about finding children for families.

Issues to address in a homestudy

Many issues are common to all homestudies, regardless of the sexual orientation of the prospective parents.

Specific areas to be addressed

Gender, sex and sexuality are important areas to be considered in *all* assessments, but for lesbian and gay parents the following specific areas should be addressed.

The individual's experience of their lesbian or gay identity, their own and their family's response

Clearly, sexual orientation will be an issue to be fully and openly discussed at this point in the assessment process. Many lesbians and gay men who have been through this process found that some social workers either unnecessarily focused on their sexuality too much, or conversely, did not address the issues of sexuality at all. Most lesbian and gay applicants have spent a lot more time thinking about their sexuality than most heterosexuals have, and that the reticence to address this issue more often lies with the social worker.

Many prospective applicants write their autobiographies as part of the assessment process, and they may choose to address issues relating to their sexual orientation as part of this. For many lesbians

and gay men, realising their sexual orientation and coming out to friends and family is a significant life event, as is meeting their partner. The autobiography should not focus on issues relating to sexual orientation, since this is only one part of a whole person's life experience. Neither should the applicants be encouraged to hide or downplay this aspect of their lives.

Additional questions could be considered such as: When did you first feel different in terms of your sexuality? Who did you talk to? Where did you find support?

How confident do they feel in relation to their sexual orientation? How comfortable are they as lesbians or gay men?

It will be important to explore with potential parents their experience of coming out, and the impact this process has had on their significant relationships within their family and community. The coming out process is so central in the identity development of lesbian and gay persons, that social workers must have a full understanding of the importance of this phenomenon.

Assessing potential parents' level of 'outness' and exploring with them at what point in their development they did actually come out are an important element of practice, as is understanding the need to hide or selectively disclose one's orientation. Comfort level with one's "outness" is a key factor for the prospective lesbian and gay adopter or foster parent, as being uncomfortable about being out can complicate the parenting process. Being comfortable with being out suggests that one has integrated their lesbian or gay sexual orientation into their lives.

Some questions social workers may wish to consider are:

- At what point did you consider coming out to others?
- Are you out in the community? At work? With your family? With friends?
- Are you out to your partner's parents and extended family?
- What has been the attitude of your extended family to your partner? Have they been inclusive and welcoming?
- Is your family supportive of you (and your partner) fostering/adopting a child?

Some lesbian and gay men and their partners are cut off from their extended families because their relatives are unable or unwilling to respect their identity. Of course applicants should not be penalized

because of their extended family's choices, but this information should be included so a worker reading the assessment has a picture of the broader family system the child would join. In addition, a social worker should be available to explore what support networks are available to the potential adopter or foster parent.

Some questions social workers may wish to consider are:

- How have homophobia and heterosexism impinged on their lives, how they feel they have dealt with this and what present coping devices they use?
- What are their present relationships – sexual, emotional, supportive, family, etc? How do they negotiate homophobia within close relationships, for example with their siblings.
- With reference to the future, have they thought about relating to birth parents, relationships with other parents – e.g. at school, playgroup, etc. How much research have they done in relation to attitudes of local institutions, e.g. schools? How would they help a child who experiences prejudice because of their (the parent's) sexual orientation?

Partnerships and relationships

There is some debate about whether social workers should ask applicants about their sexual relationships, and if they do ask, what should be done with this knowledge? I would argue that questions about sexual relationships should be part of the assessment for *all* couples. Sexual expression is a form of communication and intimacy. How one feels about themselves physically and sexually is likely to have profound implications for the development of children in our care. How children feel about themselves physically and sexually will also have implications for how they relate to others and society. This is all part of developing a good enough sense of self, and helping this development is one of the major tasks for prospective parents. Parents will meet with challenges in dealing with their adolescents' sexuality, and they have a responsibility to help young people think about the nature of sexuality and relationships and provide them with information about sexuality.

The following questions relating to significant relationships need to be explored with *all* applicants:

- What qualities does each partner bring to the relationship?
- What makes the relationship positive for each partner? How do they support each other? How do they cope with stress and difficulties?
- How will a new child affect this relationship – for example, how will they cope with a child who becomes attached readily to one partner and much more slowly to the other?
- Have other options been considered and explored as pathways to parenthood?
- How are decisions made? Is there wider family involvement in the decision-making process?
- What are the strengths and vulnerabilities of the partnership?
- Have there been previous significant relationships, and if so what has been learned from these? Do they affect the present partnership? Are there children from any previous relationships, and if so, how will those children be affected by the decision to become parents?

Other adult members of the household

This includes significant adults who live with applicant/s as well as those don't live within the household. What is their relationship to the applicant/s? What is their attitude to the proposed placement, and how important is that attitude to the applicant/s? Issues of sexual orientation may be relevant to discuss here.

Motivation

Parenting for most lesbian and gay families is a choice - while it is often not a choice in the heterosexual world. This may mean that a lesbian or gay parent may be more motivated and deliberated as they embark on deciding to parent. For lesbians and gay men, questions relating to motivation are very relevant for discussion because creating families by birth may not have been an option. Fostering and adoption is often their first choice.

Integration of one's lesbian or gay identity

For lesbian and gay prospective foster and adoptive families, an experienced and competent worker should inquire about the prospective parents' life, but should not over-emphasize the lesbian or gay issues. In reality, most lesbians and gay men have a gay or lesbian "life" not a gay or lesbian "lifestyle". Being lesbian or gay has become a part of who they are as people, not the entire issue. Some lesbians

and gay men attend gay or lesbian venues, i.e. lesbian and gay community centers or a gay or lesbian pride parade, and some do not. Prospective parents may need to evaluate the way in which individuals or couples spend their recreation and leisure time.

Valuing difference

Most lesbians and gay men have experienced discrimination. Most can, therefore, understand the impact on children and youth who have experienced discrimination and being different.

One approach: anticipate the concerns

Some social workers have success helping lesbian and gay families adopt by using a strategy in which they attempt to anticipate every concern a child's social worker might have. They first discuss these concerns openly with the prospective adoptive/foster parent(s), and then address each concern openly in the homestudy. This allows the family's worker to use the homestudy to educate as in, "Some workers worry that if they place a boy with a gay couple, he will grow up to be gay. However, all the studies that have been done on this subject show that children raised by gay men are no more likely to be gay than children raised by heterosexual people."

This approach also allows the family to address potential concerns before they become major barriers. For instance, "Bill and Sam realize that workers may fear that a child placed with them could be teased because s/he has "two Dads." Here is how they plan to handle this issue if it arises."

There are particularly barriers to single men adopting because of unfounded stereotypes that they are less stable or want to adopt children to meet their sexual needs. A worker using this "anticipate everything" method may choose to emphasize in a single man's homestudy his healthy adult relationships, the stability of his life, and (if he agrees that it would be beneficial to the goal of adopting a child) how he is getting his sexual needs met. Obviously, any worker using this method must explain the practical theory behind it and decide with the family whether it is a method they feel would be helpful.

Mistakes to avoid

Keep in mind that sexual orientation and gender identity is only one aspect of who someone is; it should not be a major focus of a

homestudy or child placement decisions (Nelson, 1997).

It is not appropriate to address who will parent the child if a same-gender couple splits up, unless this is a standard part of your agency's homestudy for a married male-female couple. If your professional assessment is that any couple's relationship - regardless of sexual orientation - is not strong enough to survive the challenges of parenting an adopted child, it is questionable whether that couple should be approved to adopt. If, however, your opinion is that the relationship is strong and stable, writing about a potential breakup inappropriately implies that a same-gender relationship cannot be as strong as a marriage and that it cannot be expected to last.

It is not appropriate to address prospective parent's sex life, unless this is a standard part of your agency's homestudy for a married male-female couple. It is appropriate to discuss applicants' personal experience with sexual abuse, to assess how well the applicants are prepared to parent a child with a history of sexual abuse or sexual acting out behaviors, and to discuss how they expect to deal with issues of sexuality with an adopted child. These discussions, however, need not be different with lesbian and gay headed families than heterosexual families.

It is a mistake to assume that same-gender couples assume roles in their relationship where one plays the "man" and the other plays the "woman". Although this is a popular misconception, it is not the reality for most gay and lesbian couples.

Do not assume that a child or adolescent whose words or behavior suggest s/he is questioning his/her sexual orientation or gender identity should be placed with a family who can "cure" the child and make him/her heterosexual.

Final Decision-Making

The responsibility of the social worker, his/her supervisor, and in some cases a treatment team to ensure that the assessor's recommendation is based on information which provides relevant and sufficient

evidence of the applicant's ability to meet the requirements for being an adoptive or foster parent. The team must then decide whether or not to endorse the recommendation.

The values and attitudes of team members are often an issue. Recurring themes from an untrained team with respect to lesbian and gay adopters or parents may include the following homophobic responses:

- 'Where is the positive male/female role model?'
- 'Who is the mother?'
- 'How will you explain your relationship to children placed with you?'
- 'Won't you make them gay?'

Arthur and Tom, who have had a baby girl placed with them, were asked by their social worker about role models; one of the issues that arose in connection with this was that they would not be able to teach a girl to put on make-up and do her hair. Both men laughed and said they were probably better placed to teach these skills than many women that they knew given that both were hairstylists. Their social worker also observed that they had identified an 'extensive list of female role models in their support networks – and here they did more work than would have been expected by heterosexual applicants.

Implications for Competent Practice and Assessment with Lesbian and Gay Prospective Foster/Adoptive Parents

The following are considerations for professionals developing policy around foster care and adoption and are adapted from Sullivan's (1995, pp.5-8) work:

1. The primary client is the child/youth in need of a foster/adoptive family. All families are potential resources for the child or youth. The issue is not "Do gay men and lesbians have the right to adopt?" No family ipso facto has the right to adopt or to be a foster parent - these are privileges afforded to those families who meet a standard, not a right. All individuals should be given equal consideration as foster/adoptive parents.

2. All placement considerations should focus on the best interest of the child or youth. Child welfare professionals should ask, "What is the best family resource for this young person at this time?"

3. No single factor, including sexual orientation, should be the determining factor in assessing suitability for adoption or foster parenting (see Ryan, 2000).

4. The capacity to nurture a child or youth and a parent's sexual orientation are separate issues. These must not be confused in decision making.

5. Gay and lesbian applicants should be assessed using the same criteria as all other foster/adoptive parents. Although gay and lesbian adoptive parents may present unique situations, they should not have to pass extraordinary tests to prove their worthiness as parents. Those working to certify gay and lesbian parents should ask themselves in making such an assessment: What are the prospective parent's individual strengths or weaknesses, and what is their capacity to nurture a child or children who were not born to them?

6. Each placement decision should be based on the strengths and needs of the child/youth and the perceived ability of the prospective adoptive family to meet those needs and develop those strengths.

There are unique considerations with respect to some aspects of foster parenting or adoption by gay or lesbian persons. Child welfare organizations should evaluate the following issues:

1. In most states, only one same-gender partner can be legally recognized as a parent. Although this is changing in some states (e.g. New Jersey), child welfare professionals should be aware of the consequences of having a legal and non-legal parent and must also assist potential adoptive parents in negotiating a careful discussion about this issue.

2. How willing are the parents to be open about their sexual orientation within their community? Having a child who attends school, makes use of health care services, and attends other child-oriented recreational events, causes parents to make decisions about their own comfort level with being out in the community. (see Mallon, 1999, 2000)

3. How willing are the parents to deal with and openly address the multiple levels of "differentness" that they and their adoptive child will experience? All adopted children face issues related to their sense of differentness about being adopted. Some differentness is easier to deal with than others.

4. As in all placements, children should be involved in the decision making process whenever possible. For example, in placing a 12 year old child with a gay or lesbian couple, it would be important to determine what the child knows about gay and lesbian persons, and gauge his or her understanding of the benefits and challenges evident in placement with a specific family.

5. Although the deficits of gay men and lesbians are frequently pointed out, gay men and lesbians are resilient individuals and as such bring many strengths to a family. Gay men and lesbians know first hand how important it is to allow children to develop naturally without having preconceived notions about what a child should be. Child welfare professionals should be aware of the multiple strengths of a gay or lesbian headed family.

Conclusion

I would not argue that all gay and lesbian people should be foster or adoptive parents. In the same way, I would never argue that all non-gay people would make suitable foster or adoptive parents. The question is not whether gay men or lesbians will be approved as adoptive or foster parents, but how publicly they will be, and whether these families will be offered the same fair process and open opportunity as non-gay people who seek to adopt or foster. Sidestepping the issue of adoption and foster parenting by lesbians and gay men, or pretending that concern about the issue doesn't exist, doesn't protect children. It runs counter to the Adoption and Safe Families Act legislation and prevents some children and youth from being part of a loving family, which all children deserve.

States and child welfare agencies are responsible for ensuring a timely and appropriate foster or adoptive family for every child who needs one. In meeting this responsibility, states and child welfare agencies must explore all potential resources for all children and youth awaiting placement in a family, including qualified lesbians and gay men who wish to parent and are eager to open their hearts and lives to children and youth in need.

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