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Same-sex Adoption

Imagine a world where simply being different can classify someone as having a mental disorder. Since the early 1970's, the mental health community of the United States did just that. They classified homosexuality as a mental disorder, stating why they believe homosexuals exist (Ryan, Pearlmutter, and Groza 86). Although the mental health community got rid of that statement, discrimination towards homosexuals still occurs today. Same-sex couples are sometimes denied the privileges of raising a family because adoption agencies and state laws discriminate against homosexual parenting. But with LGBT (Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) communities growing in America, the issue of same-sex adoption is becoming popular with well-founded arguments for and against same-sex adoption. Because same-sex adoption is highly controversial, social workers within adoption agencies should carefully consider the various effects same-sex adoption have on children.

Today, the legal status for same-sex adoption differs throughout the United States. The states have to adhere to Federal requirements, but adoption laws are regulated by each state, resulting in laws that have no uniform standards and vary from state to state. Currently, all fifty states in the United States allow same-sex adoption, but only some allow same-sex couples
joint custody. Presently, there are only four states that accept full parental status of same-sex couples and grant joint custody to both partners: California, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Vermont (Ryan, Pearlmutter, and Groza 86).

When dealing with same-sex couples looking to pursue a family with a foster child, the literature suggest that social workers have guidelines for certain standards the couple must possess. Mental health and parenting skills are the two main focuses on potential parents (Ryan, Pearlmutter, and Groza 87). Following these standards, social works then determine what effects the same-sex couple may have on the child. The primary standard social workers in adoption agencies are supposed to adhere to is the best interest standard. The best interest standard states that decisions made by social workers are to be determined for the best interest of the child. Social workers values sometimes will get in the way of the best interest standard and overtake approval of the couple or placement (Ryan, Pearlmutter, and Groza 88). Traditionalists even admit that discriminatory laws are in the best interest of children.

Adoption agencies throughout the world have different policies towards who is allowed to adopt. According to Scott D. Ryan, Sue Pearlmutter and Victor Groza, adoption agencies look for traditional two-parent heterosexual families or single-parent families before homosexual families (85). But on average, children within married family households do better than single family homes (Wilson and Wilcox 883). Then why do adoption agencies place children with single parents who are heterosexual over married or unified homosexual couples? Some believe that answer lies within the social workers' moral beliefs. Particular social workers have a difficult time accepting a person or couple who is any different from the norm and are unable
to fathom the idea of placing a child within a non-traditional environment, impeding the process.

According to David Brodzinsky in his national study, adoption agencies consider potential same-sex parents based on the child, and the religious affiliation of the agency (Penn 16). Results from the study show that private agencies, such as Jewish, protestant and Catholic Church affiliated agencies vary in acceptance of same-sex adoption. Jewish-affiliated agencies were accepting towards same-sex adoption, less than half of mainstream protestant affiliated agencies were for same-sex adoption, and only fourteen percent of Catholic Church affiliated agencies were willing to accept gay and lesbian applications (Penn 16). Even worse, some religious agencies had polices that only allowed married couples permission to adopt from their agency. With this policy in effect, same-sex couples who lived in states that banned gay marriage were already denied acceptance. States such as North Dakota, Utah, and Arkansas have policies that indirectly make it very difficult if not impossible for homosexual partners to adopt. In North Dakota, social workers are allowed to base their decisions of possible adoptive parents off their moral grounds and religious beliefs. By the same note, Utah and Arkansas have laws that only qualify married couples the rights to adopt, while in these states same-sex marriage is illegal (Haugen and Musser 112). Brodzinsky's study also researches which types of children adoption agencies place with homosexual parents. In his study, Brodzinsky finds that agencies who allowed same-sex couples to adopt more often placed them with children with special needs because so many people are unwilling to take responsibility and care for these children. Children whom are older, mentally or emotional unstable, and seek medical treatment are the children social workers try to find to place with homosexual parents (Penn 16).
With so many different restrictions on same-sex adoptions, some same-sex couples look elsewhere in hopes to starting a family of their own. International adoptions are well known agencies that look to send children into homes with supportive families and better living situations. International adoptions are usually more flexible when working with same-sex couples, but in recent years they have become stricter about permitting adoptions to potential same-sex parents. Beyond the United States boarders, same-sex adoption restrictions have increased, making it tough on the gay community to find an out of the country adoption agency. As stated by Brodzinsky and Chibbaro in 2002, countries like Guatemala, Thailand, and China have prohibited adoption applications from gays and lesbians (Ryan, Pearlmutter, and Groza 86).

Same-sex couples are not the only ones who fear the potential outcomes of the adoption process. Social workers within adoption agencies have a difficult task of determining if someone is a correct fit for a child. In the past however, many of the social workers had a history of using their authority to deny homosexual couples their rights to adopt. With new laws in practice, anxiety among social workers has become apparent because regulations in some areas require them to not be homophobic against the potential parents (Cocker and Brown 3). An example of this scenario dates back to 2003, when a homosexual couple, Craig Faunch and Ian Wathey, was approved as foster care parents. As social workers feared being discriminatory, two sexually abusive men were granted approval of parenting four young boys within an eleven month period. Between the both of them, each boy was sexually abused in that time frame. The victims were between the ages of eight and fourteen, two of which were special needs children. In his article, Paul Sims states “The fear of being discriminatory led them
to fail to discriminate between the appropriate and the abusive" (par. 14). Now social workers are apprehensive when it comes to approving same-sex couples for adoption. They fear being branded homophobic, yet at the same time don't want to fail at blame for sexual assaults. This event caused many to view homosexual adoption negatively, questioning why anyone would allow couples of the same sex to adopt a child. On the other hand, homosexuals are not the only humans who can be sexually abusive. Heterosexuals are equally capable of sexually abusing foster care children.

One of the major debates of same-sex adoption is if it is possible that homosexual parents can provide the same quality of care to their children as heterosexuals can. So far, there has yet to be any significance between parenting skills and sexual orientation. Yet, a mother-father based household is ideal. According to Trace Hansen, children need to be raised in a household with both sex in order to be healthy psychologically, physically and mentally (Miller 32). Some believe that dual-couple parents provide children characteristics that same-sex couples cannot. Researcher analysts for marriage and family, Glenn T. Stanton, states that fathers and mothers set a healthy balance of discipline. While mothers discipline by stressing sympathy, fathers usually stress fairness, duty and justice (Espejo 47-48). In other research, studies have shown that children who are raised fatherless are more likely to drop out of school, smoke and abuse drugs and alcohol, while 56 percent of motherless daughter are more likely to go teen pregnancy (Haugen and Musser 124). The error in the study however, is that it does not focus around homosexuals. The reasoning behind these outcomes of motherless and fatherless children could in all fairness be due to parenting styles.
The gender combination of parents does not place risk on children. Other researchers say that homosexuals make just as good as parents as do heterosexuals. Researchers from the University of Virginia and developmental psychologist, Dr. Michael Lamb both agree that children raised by same-sex couples grow up just as sound, with no significant differences compared to children raised by heterosexual couples (Haugen and Messer 114-115). A study was conducted back in July and August of 2013 by Rachel H. Farr at the University of Massachusetts and Charlotte J. Patterson at the University of Virginia, that analyzed child adjustments with adoptive parents who were lesbian, gay and heterosexual. The study suggested that parental interactions with children were the main factor of the child’s adjustments, not the parents’ sexual preference (“Raising” par. 10). Another research study by the American Academy of Pediatrics states, “A growing body of scientific literature demonstrates that children who grow up with 1 or 2 gay and/or lesbian parent fare as well in emotional, cognitive, social, and sexual functioning as do children whose parents are heterosexual” (Miller 38). State policies should take into consideration these studies which provide valid information about the similarities of child development within homosexual and heterosexual households.

Furthermore, some opponents of same-sex adoption argue that children raised by same-sex parents are more likely to drift towards a homosexual lifestyle themselves. In 2002, Dr. Judith Stacey, a sociologist at the University of Southern California was interview on ABC primetime Thursday. In her interview she stated that results to her research showed it was likely for at least one same-sex experience to occur in children raised by homosexual parents (Espejo 45). Disorders are said to occur when children raised by homosexual start partaking in
homosexual activity. According to Trayce Hansen, psychiatric disorders, attempted suicide, domestic violence and sexual assault, abuse of drugs and alcohol and chronic diseases occur in children who begin to perform in non-heterosexual manners (Miller 33).

But if sexual orientation of the parents has any effect on children, how come some children raised by heterosexual parents turn out to be gay? Many studies have been conducted over the years that analyze the sexual development of children living with same-sex parents. Various studies suggest that there is a small amount, if any evidence that sexual orientation of the parents has any effects on the children (Cocker and Brown 3). Parents do not raise children to become heterosexual or homosexual, but instead humans are born with sexual preferences.

Same-sex adoption has been questioned, examined, and debated by authority figures and society throughout the years. But with an increase in both LGBT individuals and a rise in the number of children in foster homes, state policies should continue to change. Social workers within adoption agencies should consider their decisions and how they affect same-sex couples and more importantly the children. Social science is finding that children raised by homosexuals do not differ from children raised by heterosexuals. Instead of setting laws and regulations based on tradition, social science and evidence of the outcome of children should get rid of state policies banning homosexuals’ rights from fostering or adopting children. With a shortage of potential adoptive applicants who are suitable as caregivers, adoption agencies should reconsider gay and lesbians are prospective, applicable parents for foster children. If laws and regulations legalize same-sex adoption over the country, there could potentially be many more families and fewer foster children living in foster homes. But, Equality in the eyes of the law is
not always equal to equality in the eyes social workers, adoptive parents, or society and may never be.

Overall, the paper does a good job discussing a topic that is culturally relevant, and this is easy to follow. The glitches are mostly minor and don’t really affect the content of the paper.
Works Cited


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