

# Length of Time During the Adoption Process for Lesbian and Gay Compared to Heterosexual Parents

Krystal K. Cashen & Harold D. Grotevant  
University of Massachusetts Amherst

## Introduction

Adoption by lesbian and gay parents has been a controversial issue for some time. Despite evidence to suggest that children of lesbian and gay parents do not differ from children of heterosexual parents on many psychosocial outcomes, (Patterson, 2006), lesbian and gay couples still face many barriers to completing the adoption process (Goldberg, Moyer, Weber, & Shapiro, 2013; Brodzinsky, Patterson, & Vaziri, 2008). These barriers may include both legal barriers and barriers that represent more subtle forms of discrimination that reflect the view that lesbian or gay adoptive parents would be less fit to parent than heterosexual adoptive parents.

Although lesbian and gay adoptive parents do still face some challenges in many states, there have been many advances in the movement for lesbian and gay rights in the last decade. For example, numerous states have legalized gay marriage and Florida, the last state to explicitly ban adoption by any lesbian or gay individual, has overturned its ban (Goldberg, Moyer, Weber, & Shapiro, 2013).

## Present Study

Given these recent advancements, the present study sought to examine the question of whether or not lesbian and gay adoptive parents face barriers because of their sexual orientation during the adoption process in Massachusetts. Although lesbian and gay adoptive parents do not face any legal barriers, they may still experience other forms of discrimination.

In this study, we used the length of time it took to complete the adoption process as a marker of the potential experiences of barriers related to discrimination. We hypothesized that if lesbian and gay parents were experiencing such barriers, that it would take them longer to complete the adoption process than heterosexual adoptive parents.

## Methods

Participants were part of a larger study conducted by the Adoption Task Force created by the Massachusetts Legislature to understand the cost and time associated with adoption in the state of Massachusetts. As part of the study, participants completed an online survey about their experiences with adoption in the last five years.

## Participants

In total, 121 adoptive parents filled out the survey. For this study, only parents who had provided information about both their own gender and their partner's gender were included ( $n=113$ ). Of these parents, 23 were identified as being lesbian or gay and 90 were identified as heterosexual. Because only 3 lesbian or gay adoptive parents had adopted through private adoptions and none had adopted internationally, this study focused only on those who indicated that they had adopted through the domestic child welfare system. This included 20 lesbian or gay adoptive parents and 47 heterosexual adoptive parents.

## Measures

- Sexual Orientation – Participants were considered to be lesbian or gay if they indicated that both they and their partner shared the same gender. Participants were considered to be heterosexual if they indicated that one partner was a man and one partner was a woman.
- Timing – Participants were asked to report the amount of time in months that had passed during different parts of the adoption process. The three time periods of interest for this study included:
  - Between inquiring about adoption and having an approved home study
  - Between having an approved home study and having a child placed in their home
  - Between having a child placed in their home and having the adoption legally finalized.

## Results

### Average Time in Months Spent During the Adoption Process

	Inquiry- Home Study	Home Study – Placement	Placement - Finalization
	$M(SD)$	$M(SD)$	$M(SD)$
Lesbian/Gay	11.30(12.36)	8.83(7.56)	14.05(6.99)
Heterosexual	8.54(5.47)	7.02(9.14)	16.37(7.19)

- The main effect of adoptive parent sexual orientation on length of time was not significant,  $F(1,65) = 0.325$ ,  $p = .571$ .
- There was not a significant interaction between sexual orientation and part of the process,  $F(1.65) = 0.325$ ,  $p = .571$
- However, there was significantly more variability for lesbian and gay adoptive parents in the time spent between inquiry and home study,  $F(1.65)=5.352$ ,  $p = .024$

## Follow-Up Analyses

To better understand why lesbian and gay parents may be experiencing more variability during the period between inquiry and home study, several follow up analyses were conducted.

### Quantitative

There were no differences between lesbian and gay and heterosexual parents in the following adoption related factors:

- Number of times previous competed adoption through domestic child welfare system  $t(55) = -1.553$ ,  $p = .126$
- Number of times previously started an adoption through domestic welfare system that was not completed,  $t(58) = -.796$ ,  $p = .429$
- Number of times fostered a child,  $t(58) = .788$ ,  $p = .434$

### Qualitative

As part of the online survey, participants were given spaces to share their thoughts and concerns about their experiences with the adoption process. Responses of lesbian and gay adoptive parents were examined

- Two lesbian adoptive parents noted that they experienced perceived discrimination from officials involved in their home study. In at least one of these cases the situation was addressed by the agency.
- Other lesbian and gay parents reported having positive experiences working with agencies and that staff were helpful and supportive

## Conclusions

Although there were no significant differences in length of time spent during the adoption process, the data suggest that lesbian and gay adoptive parents have variable experiences in the adoption process.

One potential limitation of this study is the difference in group size between lesbian and gay adoptive parents and heterosexual adoptive parents.

## Future Directions

There are several potential for future research:

- More work should be done to understand factors related to the within group variability for lesbian and gay adoptive parents
- Comparisons should be made to other types of adoption (private, international)
- Comparisons should also be made to the experiences of adoptive parents in other regions of the country

## References

Brodzinsky, D. M., Patterson, C. J., Vaziri, M. (2014). Adoption agency perspectives on lesbian and gay prospective parents. *Adoption Quarterly*, 5(3), 5-23. doi:10.1300/J145v05n03

Goldberg, A. E., Moyer, A. M., Weber, E. R., & Shapiro, J. (2013). What changed when the gay adoption ban was lifted?: Perspectives of lesbian and gay parents in Florida. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 10(2), 110–124. doi:10.1007/s13178-013-0120-y

Patterson, C. J. (2006). Children of lesbian and gay parents. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 15(5), 241–244. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8721.2006.00444.x

