



University of  
Massachusetts  
Amherst

## **Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Parents Adopting Through the Child Welfare System: Challenges and Surprises During the Transition to Parenthood and Beyond**

Item Type	event;event
Authors	Goldberg, Abbie;Moyer, April;Brodzinsky, David
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.7275/R5319T4Z">https://doi.org/10.7275/R5319T4Z</a>
Download date	2025-03-22 11:21:36
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/43021">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/43021</a>

# Contact with Birth Family in Child Welfare Adoptions: Comparing Families Headed by Heterosexual, Lesbian, & Gay Male Parents

David Brodzinsky  
National Center on Adoption and Permanency

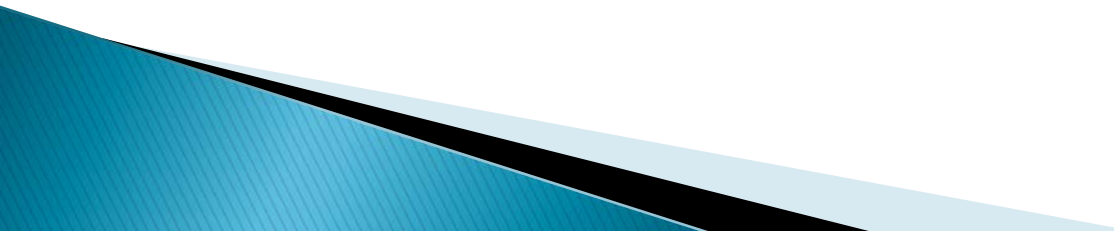
Abbie Goldberg  
Clark University



# Introduction

- Interest in adoption by sexual minority adults has grown rapidly over the years, especially as laws, regulations, & policies preventing or discouraging them from adopting have been overturned
- Currently, over 65,000 adopted children are being raised by families headed by LGBT parents
- Same-sex couples are at least 4 times more likely to be raising an adopted child than heterosexual couples

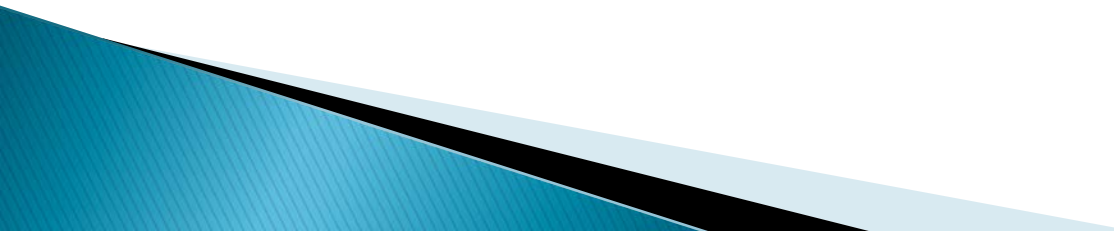


- ▶ Parent preparation and support in adoption by sexual minority parents
  - ▶ Open adoption in families headed by lesbians and gay men
  - ▶ Do lesbian and gay male parents approach adoption from a different vantage point than heterosexual parents?
  - ▶ Research on contact with birth family in families headed by lesbian and gay male parents
- 

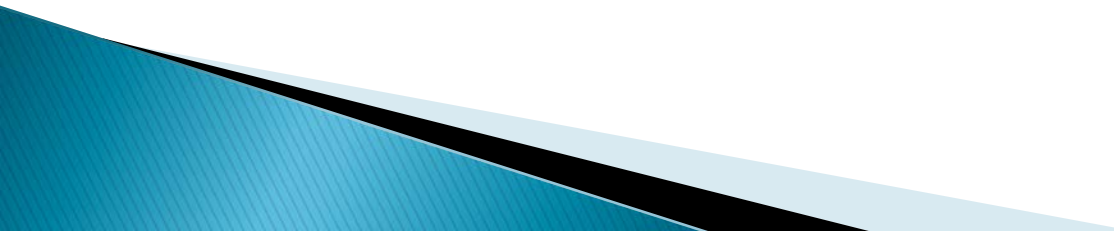
# Focus of Study

- ▶ In light of the growing number of adoptions by sexual minority adults, including their propensity to adopt from the child welfare system, we sought to compare patterns of contact as a function of family type (H v L v G) at three different points in time:
  - prior to or at the time of placement
  - following adoption placement
  - currently in the family's life

# Methods

- ▶ Data were drawn from the Modern Adoptive Families (MAF) project, a nationwide, non-random online survey conducted from 2012–2013 in conjunction with the Donaldson Adoption Institute
  - ▶ Focus of MAF was to examine similarities & differences in experiences, needs, attitudes, and outcomes among a wide range of adoptive families
  - ▶ Because one of the primary goals of MAF was exploring adoption experiences in families headed by sexual minority adults, we purposely oversampled from this group of families
  - ▶ See Brodzinsky (2015) on DAI website for an overview of the MAF project, including descriptive data of the sample.
- 

## ▶ Current Study Sample

- 432 families whose oldest adopted child was < 18 years, had been adopted from foster care, and in which parental sexual orientation was identified
  - 317 families headed by heterosexual parents; 61 families headed by lesbian parents, and 54 families headed by gay male parents
  - Oldest adopted child was the target of study
- 

# Respondent Demographics

	H	L	G
Age (yrs)	42.7	41.9	44.3
Race Caucasian (%) *	84.9	88.3	66.7
Partner Same Race (%) *	92.6	75.5	45.5
Partnered (%)	83.2	86.9	81.5
Married (%) *	81.4	41.1	55.6
Time Partnered/Married (yrs) *	16.1	12.1	13.7
College Graduate (%) *	62.2	86.9	88.9
Household \$ > \$100,000 (%) *	36.9	58.4	85.2

[Findings to be reported were not impacted by group differences in respondent/family characteristics]



# Demographics of Oldest Adopted Child

	H	L	G
Age (yrs)	9.5	9.2	8.9
Gender Male (%) *	50.5	47.5	88.9
Child Caucasian (%) *	43.2	34.4	11.1
Transracial Placement (%) *	42.0	55.7	64.8
Age at Placement (yrs)	3.6	4.0	3.4
Time in Family (yrs)	6.1	5.3	5.7

[Findings were not impacted by group differences in demographics for oldest adopted child]

# Contact with Birth Family Prior to or at Time of Placement

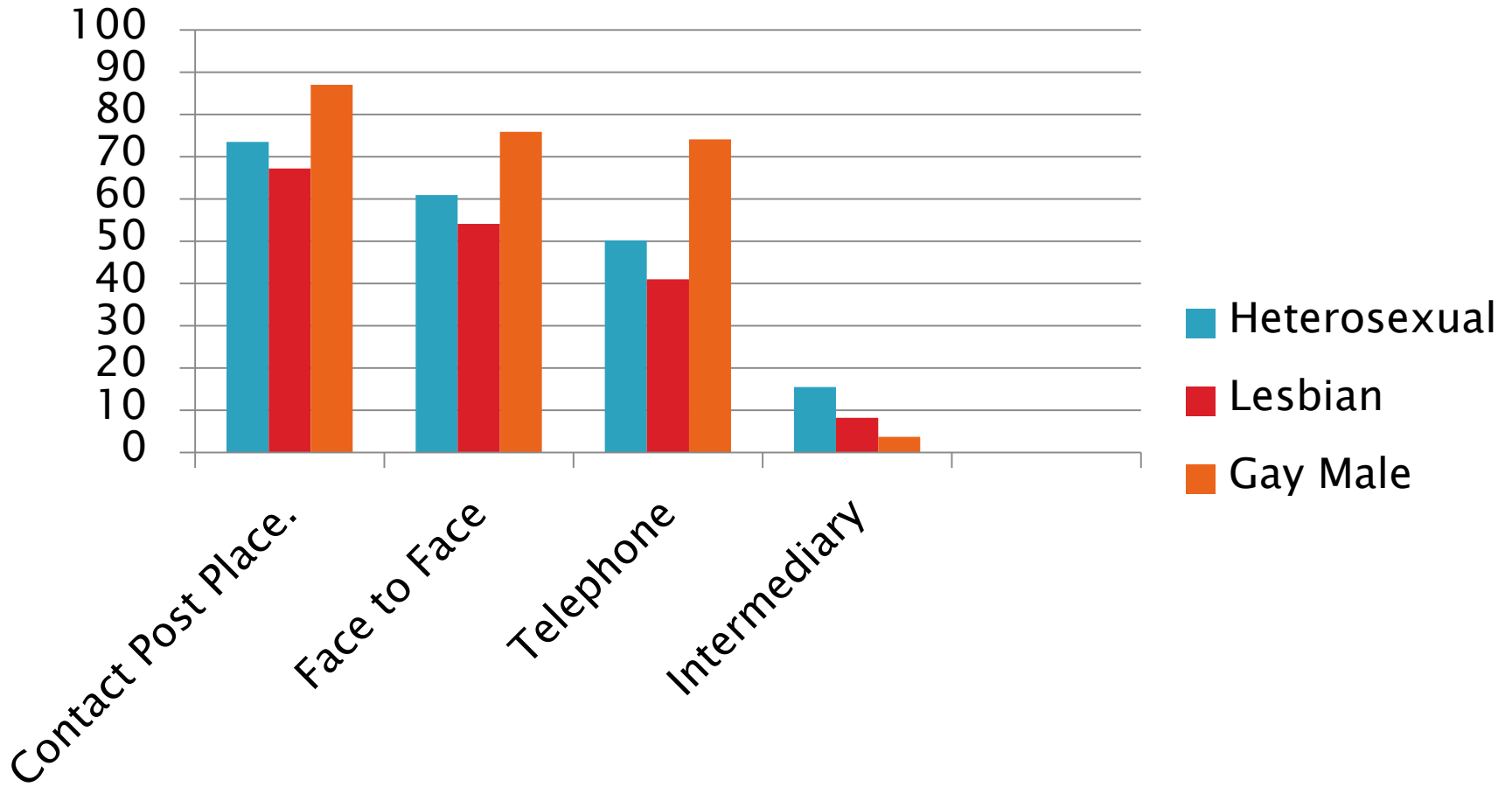
- ▶ No family type differences in contact

H = 52.7%

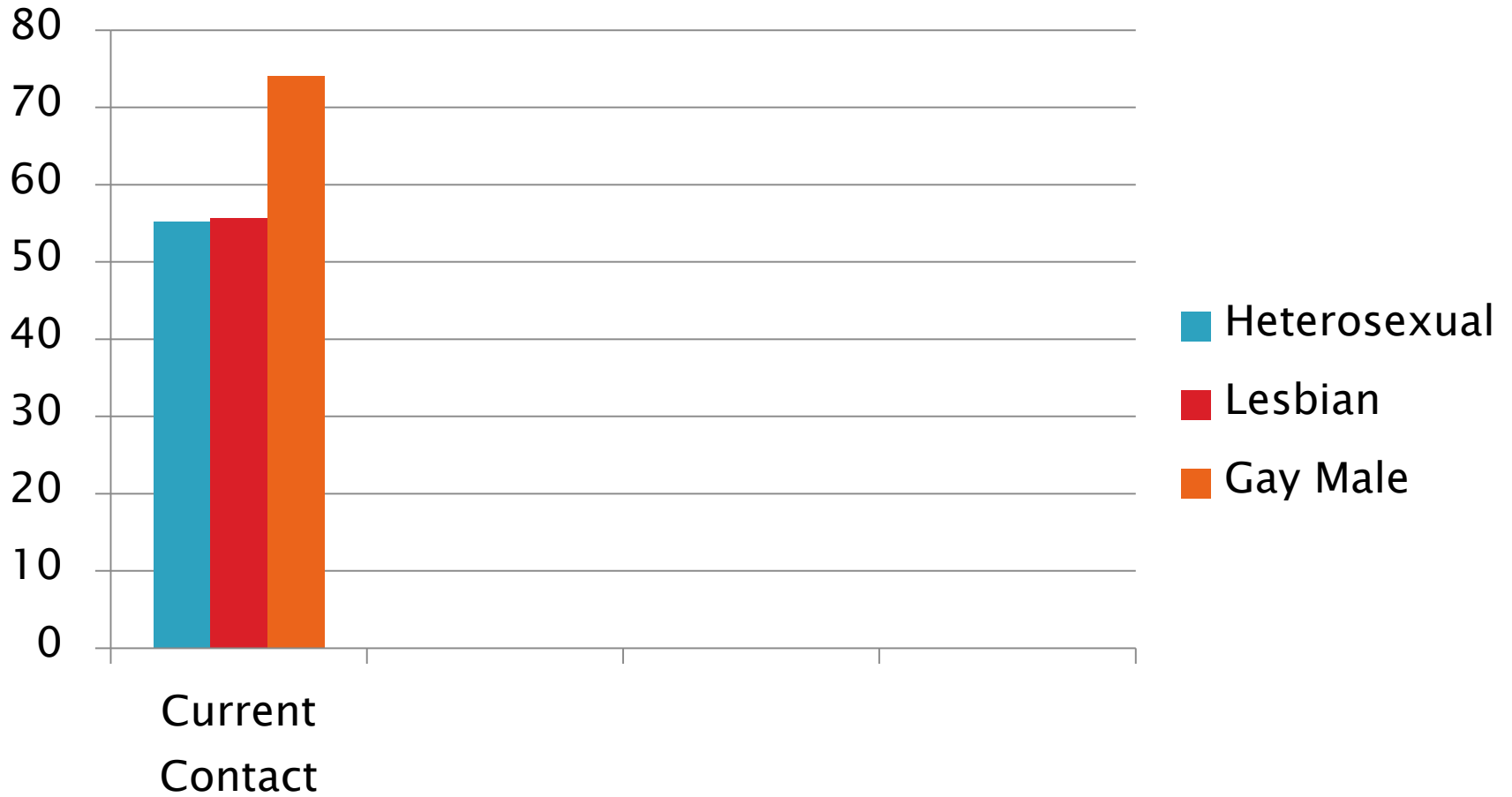
L = 44.3%

G = 44.8%

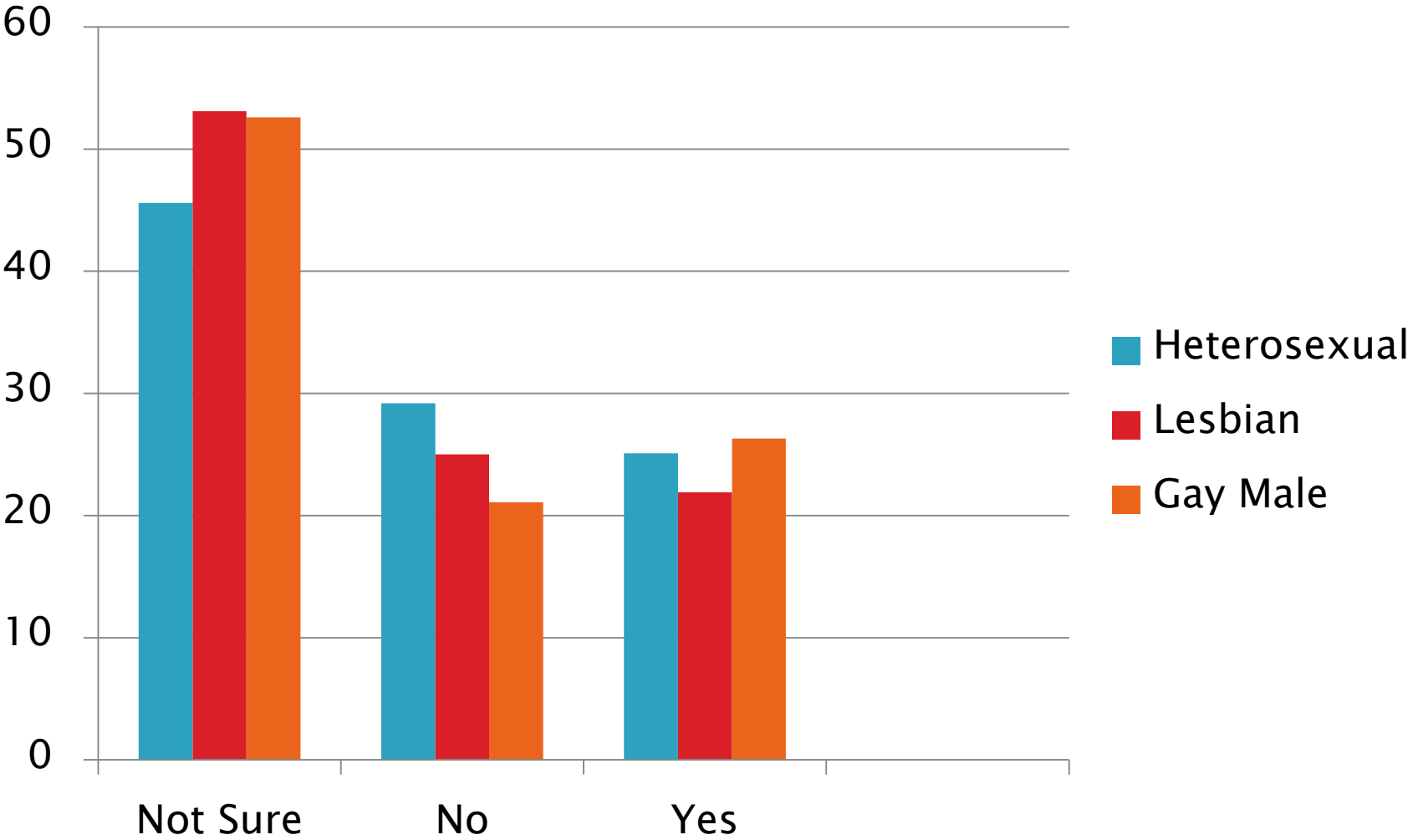
# Contact with Birth Family Following Placement



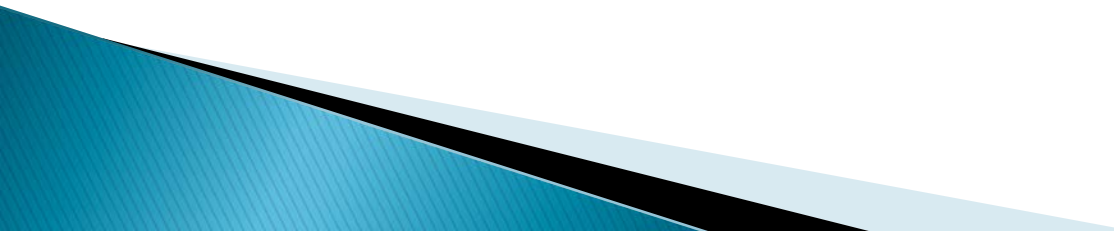
# Current Contact with Birth Family



# No Current Contact – Plan to Search



# Discussion & Implications

- ▶ Overall, rate of contact for child welfare adoptions is higher than has been reported in past research, including NSAP, which is somewhat surprising given the challenges that are often involved in these types of placements
  - ▶ Findings support previous research that sexual minority parents are at least as open to contact, and, in some cases, maybe more so, than heterosexual parents – at least in child welfare adoptions
- 

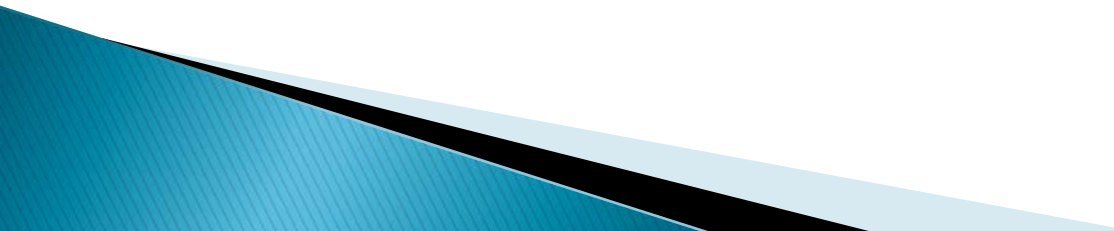
What accounts for the high level of contact in adoptions by sexual minority adults, especially gay men?

- Desire for openness and transparency among sexual minority adults in their relationship with others?
- Greater tolerance for boundary ambiguity in relation to family membership?
- Do adoption motives play a role? Infertility less often an issue in LG adoption, perhaps leading to diminished feelings of loss and less competition with birth family

At this point, we simply do not know.



# Recommendations

- ▶ Ensure that agency directors, supervisors, and adoption placement professionals receive comprehensive & objective training related to open adoption
  - ▶ Ensure comprehensive preparation and education of all clients regarding the benefits & challenges of open adoptions
  - ▶ Ensure that adoption professionals explore the receptivity of birth parents/relatives related to placing their child with sexual minority parents
- 



- ▶ Ensure that professionals are aware of the unique experiences and stresses that are associated with LGBT adoptions, especially those involving contact with birth family
- ▶ Managing “narrative burden”

# Conclusion

- ▶ Our findings provide an optimistic view of contact with birth family in child welfare adoptions
  - ▶ The fact that sexual minority adults are as motivated as heterosexual adults to support contact with birth family and, for gay men, perhaps even more so, suggests that these adults can be an important resource for children who have been freed for adoption, but continue to linger in foster care
  - ▶ Supporting adoption by families headed by sexual minority adults could well reduce the number of children in foster care, while at the same time supporting their connection with their birth heritage
- 