

Communication about children's origins among same-gender adoptive parent families in Belgium, France, and Spain

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Abstract

Objective: This study explored communication about children's origins among same-gender parent adoptive families.

Background: Although this topic has been widely researched among different-gender parent adoptive families, communication about origins among those with same-gender parents, as well as sexual minority identity dynamics relevant to this crucial task, remain unexplored.

Method: A sample of same-gender adoptive couples ($N = 31$) from Belgium, France, and Spain with children aged between 4 and 18 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 8.9$ years) participated in a semistructured interview and a graphic projective test aimed at explore their feelings and communication process about their adopted child's birth family.

Results: Inductive thematic analysis yielded a continuum of three main stances conveyed by adoptive parents regarding their child's origins: (a) critical/minimization, (b) cautious/uncertainty, and (c) open/validation. The first (critical/minimization) was associated with experiences of sexual minority stigma and poorer communication about children's origins and sexual minority family-related issues, while the second (cautious/uncertainty) was characterized by mixed feelings (i.e., at times open, at times critical) in communicating about origins and parents' sexual minority experiences. The third (open/validation) was associated with positive feelings toward adoptive and sexual minority family statuses, as well as identity integration as a lesbian or gay parent and low internalized sexual stigma.

Conclusion: Our findings underline the importance of sexual minority identity issues in relation to communication

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about children's origins in same-gender parent adoptive families.

Implications: These findings have important implications for both adoption assessment and therapeutic work with same-gender adoptive parent families.

KEYWORDS

adopted children, birth family connections, family communication, lesbian and gay adoptive parents, qualitative research

Abundant literature exists on outcomes for children and parents in sexual minority parent families, including those formed via adoption, yet few studies have focused on unique family processes experienced by same-gender adoptive parents (Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020; Schneider & Vecho, 2015). Adoptive families can be conceptualized as a "metafamily" (Greco, 2006), meaning that the family network encompasses both new (adoptive family) and original members (birth family), both in psychological or practical terms (Wood & Tasker, 2021). One important task among adoptive parents over the family life course is communicating with their children about their origins, helping them to integrate feelings about this double family connection (Brodzinsky, 2006). Communication about children's origins has been studied among cisgender heterosexual parent adoptive families, but less is known about how same-gender adoptive parents manage their child's double family connection.

Although some adoption challenges are common to all adoptive parents, others should be understood within specific contexts, such as those faced by same-gender adoptive parent families (Farr & Vázquez, 2020). In particular, it is unknown whether and how sexual minority status-related experiences (e.g., internalized sexual stigma and legal barriers to adopt a child as a same-gender couple) influence parents' feelings and communication style about children's origins. Greater scientific knowledge on these topics would be informative, given progressive legalization granting joint adoption orders to same-gender couples and the increasing numbers of families led by lesbian or gay (LG) parents around the world (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, 2022).

In this study, we sought to explore how same-gender parents view their adopted children's birth family connections and the messages these views could convey to their child. We reflect on how prior experiences connected with sexual minority status influence this crucial task and then consider the implications of this for clinical practice with same-gender parent adoptive families. We first situate adoption communication theory within the adoptive family life cycle to provide a conceptual framework in which to consider how parents talk to their adopted child about birth family origins. Next, we consider the unique challenges experienced by same-gender adoptive parents during the transition to parenthood.

ADOPTION COMMUNICATION THEORY WITHIN THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

In line with adoption communication theory, we consider that communication about children's origins is a crucial parenting task that plays a pivotal role in adopted children's self-acceptance and psychological adjustment (Brodzinsky, 2005, 2006). Adoptive parents' communicative openness regarding children's origins is considered an essential predictor of adoptees' adjustment and capacity to develop a positive identity as an adopted person, while closed attitudes about origins can contribute to an unintegrated adoptive identity (Von Korff & Grotevant, 2011). Messages communicated to children about adoption by adoptive parents and other adults are likely to

affect how children present information to others. For example, the openness with which the child asks questions about their adoption history is related to how their parents introduce the topics (Santona et al., 2022). Likewise, a young adult's pride in talking about having been brought up by LG parents appears to be associated with experiences of parental disclosure and openness (Goldberg, 2007; Tasker et al., 2010).

Using adoptive family life cycle theory (Pinderhughes & Brodzinsky, 2019), we considered that parental communication could be influenced by the way adoptive parents navigate through personal and partner relationship challenges while building their identity as adoptive parents. Considering that both the motivation to adopt and the pathway to adoption are often different for same-gender versus different-gender couples, we hypothesized that same-gender couples may experience specific feelings about their children's origins that connect to intersections of their sexual minority and adoptive parent identities (Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020).

Heteronormative ideals of parenthood include cisgender heterosexual couples, often married, having children who are biologically related to both parents (van der Toorn et al., 2020). Thus, for heterosexual couples, the adoption process can involve coming to terms with grief related to expectations about joint biological parenthood (Foli, 2010). Heteronormative expectations of parenthood thus present adoptive parents with the psychological challenge of bringing up a biologically unrelated child juxtaposed against an ethical welfare argument about giving a child in need the best opportunity for a fresh start (Pralat, 2018). Additionally, for same-gender couples making decisions about adoptive parenthood, heteronormative expectations could also include concerns (based on societal stigma) about whether this would be fair to a child or fears about being a "good enough" parent (Pralat, 2018).

TRANSITION TO ADOPTIVE PARENTHOOD: IDENTITY-RELATED ISSUES AND SOCIOLEGAL STRESSORS

The transition to adoptive parenthood is considered a major and stressful life event (Neil & Beek, 2020). Research with LG adoptive parents has indicated unique and additional stressors both in their journey to adoptive parenthood and in forming their identity as LG parents (Farr & Tornello, 2022; Farr & Vázquez, 2020; Messina, *in press*). Same-gender adoptive parent families are confronted with specific developmental tasks resulting from the overlap of their adoptive and minority statuses; thus, it is important to consider how adoptive family life cycle experiences are built on these intersecting identities (Messina & Brodzinsky, 2020; Simon & Farr, 2022). For example, for many cisgender LG partners, having children would not be considered a realistic plan without assistance through accessing donated gametes or adoption (Mellish et al., 2013). In addition, many LG people have indicated adoption as their first choice for embarking on parenthood (Farr & Tornello, 2022; Jennings et al., 2014). Same-gender adoptive couples also are less likely than different-gender couples to contact adoption services after encountering fertility problems (Mellish et al., 2013).

To varying extents, by the time parenthood is pursued, LG people have often undertaken processes of accepting their sexual identity, disclosing their sexual minority status to others, and grieving heteronormative expectations of biological parenthood (Simon & Farr, 2021; Smietana, 2018). In choosing parenthood, same-gender couples may experience an "LG family coming out" process disclosing romantic partnerships and parenthood to additional people (Gianino, 2008). Thus, deciding to adopt is often a pivotal experience for LG people that involves engaging multiple individual and relational identities and overcoming possible doubts (Brown et al., 2009; Simon & Farr, 2021). Across the transition to adoptive parenthood, LG people may interface with negative stereotypes and stigma but also develop an integrated and positive sense of self as an LG parent (Goldberg & Smith, 2009; Messina & D'Amore, 2018a).

A further challenge faced by LG adoptive parents involves navigating through the potentially stressful adoption approval process, including anticipating or encountering prejudice and roadblocks because of heteronormative expectations about who and what constitute an optimal adoptive family (Goldberg & Smith., 2011). When same-gender couples live in countries that only permit different-gender married couples to adopt, LG couples need to bypass legal barriers to complete an international adoption as “single” parents, which often means withholding information about their sexual and family identities (Messina, *in press*). Even when same-gender couples live in countries where same-gender joint adoption is legal, heterosexist institutional discrimination and negative attitudes of individual social workers may be encountered (Goldberg, 2012; Mellish et al., 2013). For example, in Belgium one policy that disproportionately limits the access of same-gender couples to adoption is the “gay quota” system, which stipulates that a maximum of only 20% of approved adopters on waitlists can be occupied by LG prospective parents (Messina & D’Amore, 2018b; Aromatario et al., 2020). Another element that may curtail the chances of an approved same-gender couple having a child placed with them is the right granted to birth parents to choose the type of family structure in which their child is placed (Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2012). This decision-making power may result in a refusal to relinquish a child to a same-gender couple, thus arousing feelings of resentment among same-gender couples (Messina & D’Amore, 2018b).

ATTITUDES TOWARD CHILDREN’S BIRTH PARENTS AMONG DIFFERENT-GENDER ADOPTIVE PARENTS

To date, adoptive parents’ attitudes toward birth parents have been mainly studied among heterosexual parents. To provide a framework for our study, we first describe research among different-gender parent adoptive families and then focus on the emerging literature exploring this topic among same-gender parent adoptive families.

In a qualitative study of 20 different-gender couples in Italy, Greco (2006) identified a continuum between integrative and non-integrative positions to delineate parental attitudes toward adopted children’s origins. Parents in the integrative position displayed openness about their child’s double family connection. Parents in non-integrative position, however, considered only the adoptive family and appeared in denial of the birth parents’ psychological presence, displaying signs of anxiety about the topic. Likewise, a qualitative study of four different-gender couples in Belgium revealed two ways in which adoptive parents managed their child’s double family connection (Rosenfeld et al., 2006). By using “superpositioning,” the adoptive parents added birth and adoptive family systems together to create a new coherent system spanning both. In contrast, by “substituting” in adoptive family relationships, the adoptive parents in effect supplant and delete the birth family system.

Based on their clinical practice in France, Tendron and Vallée (2007) described a continuum of three main attitudes shown by adoptive parents toward children’s birth family. These attitudes varied between idealization to condemnation, with a mix of gratitude and reservation at the midpoint. Tendron and Vallée viewed the midpoint as an optimal position to facilitate parent–child communication about adoption, as parents not only willingly acknowledge the birth parents’ role but also remain steadfast as to their child’s best interests.

Among different-gender adoptive parents, one factor that has played a crucial role in parental attitudes and communication about children’s origins is how couples have navigated their own infertility-related issues across the transition to parenthood (Brodzinsky, 2005). In particular, anxieties about birth parents’ potential to claim the adopted child may contribute to unresolved grief around the loss of their own expectations for biological parenthood and consequently undermine their feelings of parental legitimacy. Thus, anxieties around who is entitled to parent may present substantial impediments to

adoptive parent–child communication about children’s birth family origins (Pinderhughes & Brodzinsky, 2019).

ATTITUDES TOWARD CHILDREN’S BIRTH PARENTS AMONG SAME-GENDER PARENTS

Growing research has focused on examining how LG families who pursue surrogacy and gamete donation manage third-party involvement in their reproductive arrangements (Carone et al., 2020). Yet data exploring this topic in LG adoptive parent families remain sparse (Schneider & Vecho, 2015). Studies have underscored the open approach of many same-gender couples in communicating with their child about their origins, which in turn facilitates children’s development of a coherent sense of self (Golombok, 2015; Lingiardi et al., 2016). Emerging literature on gay fathers throughout surrogacy indicates that they start the process of explaining their path to parenthood to their children in the early stages of their family life cycle (Carone et al., 2018) and that they also tend to maintain a relationship actively with surrogate mothers, showing a great level of satisfaction about this contact (Blake et al., 2016). Confirming the importance of open communication about birth origins for children’s well-being, levels of satisfaction with gestational carrier contact and children’s understanding of surrogacy have been found to be protective factors for the behavioral adjustment of school-age children born through surrogacy (Carone et al., 2021).

Studies in open-adoption contexts in the United States have found some support for the idea that LG adoptive parents may be more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to be open to contact with their child’s birth parents. Goldberg et al. (2011) compared the views of 15 lesbian, 15 gay, 15 heterosexual adoptive couples in the United States to reveal that same-gender couples reported more positive attitudes about open adoption compared with different-gender couples. Same-gender couples often noted that open adoption practices facilitated transparency in and recognition of their joint status as their child’s two adoptive parents. In another U.S. study by Farr and Goldberg (2015) with a sample of 103 adoptive families (34 lesbian, 32 gay, 37 heterosexual) each parent was asked about the extent of contact with adopted children’s birth families. Findings revealed that heterosexual parent and gay father families were somewhat more likely than lesbian mother families to have contact with birth families. However, another study, comparing 38 adoptive families headed by sexual minority women and 479 headed by heterosexual parents found that children adopted by sexual minority mothers had more contact with their birth family than did children in the heterosexual adoptive parent group (Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2017).

In Europe a qualitative study conducted by Messina and Brodzinsky (2020) revealed that curiosity about origins among children with same-gender adoptive parents may center on the birth parent whose gender is perceived to be absent in their adoptive family (i.e., the birth mother for children of gay men or the birth father for children of lesbian women). Thus, in families led by a same-gender couple, there may be a specific parental agenda related to discussing and legitimizing children’s questions both about their adopted status and about their membership in a same-gender parent family. Notwithstanding, depending on the circumstances leading to the child’s adoption, discussing birth family circumstances can pose substantial challenge for an adoptive parent. Messina and D’Amore (2018b) reported that many of the 14 LG adoptive parents interviewed refused to consider their child’s birth parents as having any ongoing importance in the child’s life and criticized the societal injustice of the Belgian adoption system in which a child’s birth family members could prohibit the placement with a same-gender couple.

CURRENT STUDY

To date, adoptive parents' attitudes toward their children's origins and consideration of parents' own sexual identity have been treated in previous studies as two independent constructs, reducing the possibility of understanding the context-dependent and interactive foundation of these processes in LG adoptive parent families. We aimed to fill this gap by using qualitative methods to explore LG adoptive parents' feelings about their child's birth family, how they discussed this with their child, and each person's feelings about their own journey to becoming a LG parent with an adopted child. We focused on answering two research questions: (a) What feelings do same-gender adoptive parents describe about their children's birth parents? and (b) What role do sexual minority identity-related experiences play in adoptive parents' feelings, attitudes, and communication about children's origins?

METHOD

Participants

The sample comprised 31 same-gender adoptive families ($n = 23$ gay father families; $n = 8$ lesbian mother families) with children ($n = 33$; 5 girls, 28 boys) 4 to 18 years old ($M_{\text{age}} = 8.9$; $SD = 3.9$). Two families had two children, and the remaining 29 families had one child. Parents' ages ranged from 33 to 56 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 43.2$ years). Inclusion criteria included being in a same-gender adoptive family with married or cohabiting adoptive parents and having one or more adopted children in a stable placement without any contact with the child's birth family (as is common adoption practice in many European countries; Messina & D'Amore, 2018a). For this study, only two-parent families were included to provide a more homogeneous sample of adoptive family structures specific to this qualitative investigation.

Families lived in three European countries: 13 in France (12 gay father families, one lesbian mother family); seven in Belgium (seven gay father families); 11 in Spain (four gay father and seven lesbian mother families). Before starting the data collection, we publicized the study in adoption agencies and LGBT associations in each country. Adoption agencies and LGBT associations that agreed to collaborate in the study contacted families who could potentially meet our research criteria sending a confidential email containing a link to a pre-enrollment form to request further information on the study. The first author of this study then contacted the families and organized a research stay in each country to interview the families.

Belgium, France, and Spain were selected for investigation because these European countries have elements in common but differ in sociopolitical context regarding the rights of sexual minorities and some specifics of the adoption process. Belgium and Spain are considered to be two of the most gay-friendly countries both in Europe and worldwide (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, 2022). These two countries were among the first to open adoption to same-sex couples (in 2006¹ 2005², respectively). However, France permitted joint adoption by same-gender couples only in 2013³, after long and controversial social debates. Studying same-sex parent families in these three countries enabled us to have access to varied adoption situations.

All seven Belgian couples were married and had adopted their children through domestic, joint two-parent adoption. All the French families in our sample had internationally adopted children. Therefore, in each of the 13 couples, only one partner had become their child's legal

¹May 8, 2006. Law modifying provisions of the Civil Code to allow adoption by same-sex persons.

²Law 13/2005, July 1, 2005, amending the Spanish Civil Code on the right to marry.

³LAW No. 2013-404, May 17, 2013, opening marriage to same-sex couples.

adoptive parent due to legal barriers in children's birth countries that prohibited adoption by same-sex couples. Among the French couples, eight were married, one had a contractual civil union, and the remaining four couples lived together without legal recognition of their union. Among the 11 Spanish participating couples, eight were married and three lived together without any legal recognition of their union. At the time of the study, two of the Spanish couples were registered as permanent foster families waiting to adopt their children. Two additional couples had adopted their child jointly through Spain's domestic adoption system after initially being their child's foster carers. The remaining seven Spanish couples had adopted their children via international adoption as single parents, having done so before Spain permitted joint adoption by same-sex couples. We did not have specific information about participants' income, education, or racial/ethnic identities.

Procedure

This study involved a joint semistructured interview session and a graphic projection test with each couple, which took place in their home without children being present. The interview session lasted approximately 2.5 hours, was video-recorded, and was conducted by the first author. Data were collected from 2014 to 2018. Participation was voluntary, and there was no compensation. The study was approved by Ethics Committee of the University of Liège.

The qualitative research protocol created for this study was informed by previous research investigating communication about origins among different-gender adoptive families (Greco, 2006) and sexual minority identity-related issues experienced by LG adoptive parents during the transition to parenthood (Gianino, 2008; Goldberg et al., 2012). The interview prompted retrospective reflection about the main events involved in becoming parents with a specific focus on being LG adoptive parents. Additional questions explored whether and how the couple had discussed their children's adopted origins. Data were derived from responses to the following open-ended questions in each topic area.

1. Sexual minority status-related experiences: What was the decision-making process to adopt a child like? What were the main challenges encountered during the adoption procedure and during the transition to parenthood as sexual minority parents?
2. Adoptive parents' feelings and communication style about children's past: What are your feelings and thoughts about your child's birth parents? What terms do you use to talk about them? When your child expresses feelings or questions connected to her birth family, how do you feel? How do you respond to your child's questions?
3. Adoptive parents' feelings and communication style about family minority status-related issues: What does your child ask you about your family structure? How do you feel about this, and how do you respond to your child?

To expand on information gathered from the interviews, participants completed the Double Moon Drawing (Greco, 2006). This graphic projective test has been used in previous studies to facilitate adoptive parents' discussions about their child's past and explore parental feelings regarding their child's double family connection (Callaghan et al., 2016; Greco et al., 2020). The test's material consists of a sheet of paper with a rectangular shape. The following instructions were given to participants: "This rectangle represents your own world, the people who are important to you, and the things that interest you the most. What lies outside the rectangle represents everything else." The Double Moon Drawing included five main instructions: (a) Draw a symbol that represents yourself. (b) Now, still using a symbol, draw the people who are important to you, no matter how close or distant from you these important people might seem

at this moment, and place them wherever you wish. (c) Enclose within a circle the people who, in your opinion, belong to the same family. If the adopted child's birth family members were not spontaneously represented, then before the final question, participants were prompted by the following: (d) Where do you think your child's birth parents could be placed in this sheet? Where do you think your child would place his or her birth family in this sheet? (e) If you had a magic wand, would you change anything in your drawing?"

Data analysis

Our analysis, using an inductive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was organized in three steps. In the first step, participants' interviews and interactions during the Double Moon Drawing were transcribed verbatim, read multiple times, and then analyzed by the first author to create an initial thematic map. The initial themes emerging from the interviews were organized in three ways: (a) feelings experienced during the adoption procedure and during the transition to parenthood, (b) feelings related to sexual minority status, and (c) feelings toward children's origins. Data from the graphic projective tests were coded through consideration of the following elements: graphic elements in the drawings (type of symbol and its placement on the page) and participants' verbal reports and stated (or evident) feelings during the Double Moon Drawing. Interview and graphic projective test data were combined and analyzed together, creating coherent categories that captured couples' attitudes toward their children's birth parents.

In the second step, seven master's-level graduate students trained in qualitative methods (by the first author of this study through formal seminars) were involved in an independent analysis of a random selection of interviews and Double Moon Drawing (in total, 24 of 31 cases were analyzed by the independent coders). Before analyzing the data, the coders and the first author read numerous papers and discussed their own attitudes concerning same-gender couple adoption to facilitate a reflexive approach to the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

In the third step, themes were reviewed and discussed multiple times (i.e., through weekly meetings across several months) until consensus was reached among coders and the first author. These discussions allowed us to refine and specify three final themes concerning how couples described their views of their child's birth parents: (a) critical/minimization, (b) cautious/uncertainty, and (c) openness/validation. We present detailed descriptions of these thematic positions below, along with a case study illustration for each (using pseudonyms).

RESULTS

Our analysis allowed us to distinguish a continuum of three positions occupied by adoptive parents regarding their child's origins: (a) critical/minimization, (b) cautious/uncertainty, (c) and open/validation (Table 1). As shown in Table 2, most couples (45%) displayed a position of critical/minimization; 29% presented an open/validation position, and 16% were characterized by cautious/uncertainty. A few couples (10%) showed mixed stances as they displayed critical/minimization concerning the child's birth father and expressed cautious/uncertainty regarding the child's birth mother.

When parents' positions were analyzed according to parental gender and adoption type, findings revealed that half of the gay fathers (52%) displayed critical/minimization, while half of the depictions by lesbian mothers (50%) indicated open/validation. Similar numbers of those who had adopted domestically displayed a critical/minimization position (50%), as did 42% of those who completed an international adoption.

TABLE 1 Parents' communication positions

	Critical/minimization	Cautious/uncertainty	Open/validation
Words used to talk about the birth parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Belly” and a “seed”• “Spawners”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Verbally cautious: “mother” and “father” vs. “mum” and “dad”; biological parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents of origin• “Mother and father”• “Mom and dad”
Place on the sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not represented or outside the frame	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outside the frame• At the limit of the frame, between the inside and the outside of the rectangle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inside the frame• At the limit of the frame, between the inside and the outside of the rectangle
Kind of symbols	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not represented• Sperm and ova• XY; “belly and seed”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stylized human figures• “Belly and seed”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Human figures or symbols
Feelings toward birth parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intense menace• Illegitimacy• Rivalry between heterosexual and LG parenting• Judgmental about perceived abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Menace• Lack of legitimacy• Dissent concerning abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Empathy• Sadness• Absence of judgmental feelings regarding birth parents• Gratitude
Feelings and behaviors during the interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extremely proud of LG identity• Ill at ease in talking about origins• Minimization of the children’s questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Difficulty talking about origins• Talking about their children’s questions about birth parents and same-gender parenting arouses doubts, culpability, and questioning concerning the impact of their family structure on the child’s well-being• Desire to be validated in their parental role	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Openness to talk about origins• Thoughtful attitude and curiosity while exploring their children questions about origins and about their family structure• Understanding and validation of their child’s questions• Confidence and legitimacy

Note. LG = lesbian and gay; XY = referring to male and female chromosomes.

Analysis by parental nationality revealed that all Belgian couples (100%; all gay fathers) and most of the French ones (55%; 12 of 13 were gay father families) displayed a position of critical/minimization, whereas most of the Spanish participants (64%; seven of 11 were lesbian mother families) presented an open/validation position.

Critical/minimization

This position was characterized by adoptive parents who to some extent displayed denial concerning the involvement or existence of the child’s birth parents. When the topic of birth parents was introduced, the interview atmosphere often became tense. Adoptive parents’ narratives displaying critical/minimization suggested reticence, defiance, discomfort, and feelings of threat, as well as a tendency for a fragmented view or minimization of any contribution from the birth parents. Adoptive parents seemed to reduce birth parents to procreative agents, describing them in terms of a “belly” and “seed” or as the “woman who brought the child to life” and “man who planted the seed.”

TABLE 2 Parents' positions toward child's birth family by parent gender and adoption type

		Critical/minimization	Cautious/uncertainty	Open/validation	Mixed position ^a
Family composition	<i>N</i> = 31 couples	45% (<i>n</i> = 14)	16% (<i>n</i> = 5)	29% (<i>n</i> = 9)	10% (<i>n</i> = 3)
	GC: <i>n</i> = 23	56% (<i>n</i> = 13)	9% (<i>n</i> = 2)	22% (<i>n</i> = 5)	13% (<i>n</i> = 3)
	LC: <i>n</i> = 8	13% (<i>n</i> = 1)	37% (<i>n</i> = 3)	50% (<i>n</i> = 4)	—
Country of residence					
Belgium	<i>n</i> = 7 couples	100% (<i>n</i> = 7 G)	—	—	—
	GC: <i>n</i> = 7				
	LC: <i>n</i> = 0				
France	<i>n</i> = 13 couples	55% (<i>n</i> = 7 couples)	15% (<i>n</i> = 2 GC)	15% (<i>n</i> = 2 GC)	(<i>n</i> = 2 GC)
	GC: <i>n</i> = 12	47% (<i>n</i> = 6 GC)			
	LC: <i>n</i> = 1	8% (<i>n</i> = 1 LC)			
Spain	<i>n</i> = 11 couples	—	27% (<i>n</i> = 3 LC)	64% (<i>n</i> = 7 tot C)	9% (<i>n</i> = 1 GC)
	GC: <i>n</i> = 4			27% (<i>n</i> = 3 GC)	
	LC: <i>n</i> = 7			37% (<i>n</i> = 4 LC)	
Type of adoption	DA: <i>n</i> = 12	50% (<i>n</i> = 6)	17% (<i>n</i> = 2)	25% (<i>n</i> = 3)	8% (<i>n</i> = 1)
	IA: <i>n</i> = 19	42% (<i>n</i> = 8)	16% (<i>n</i> = 3)	32% (<i>n</i> = 6)	11% (<i>n</i> = 2)

Note. DA = domestic adoption; GC = gay couples; IA = international adoption; LC = lesbian couples.

^aMixed position = negation/minimization toward the birth father; cautious/uncertainty toward the birth mother.

During the Double Moon Drawing, adoptive parents in the critical/minimization group either did not represent the birth parents on the page, or they did so only with pictographic symbols of biological conception (e.g., stylized sperm and ova or standard symbols for male and female). Some participants described both birth parents in these terms, whereas others gave the birth mother a fuller set of characteristics but talked of the birth father as only the origin of the child's seed. Adoptive parents with this perspective often underlined the distinction between biological procreation (represented by birth parents) and the love and nurture that makes an adult worthy of being considered as a "parent," emphasizing that the birth parents had no ongoing importance in their children's life. Some in this group also passed negative judgment on birth family members for perceptions of abandoning the child.

Parents displaying a critical/minimization position often tended to minimize the relevance of either their children's questions about birth family or their child's feelings about being adopted. Alternatively, parents reported that their child asked few questions about growing up in a same-gender family or that their child was not curious about their adoption. In these cases, the interview moved quickly through both topics. Some couples simply said little, while others showed signs of discomfort at being asked.

In reflecting upon their journey to becoming LG adoptive parents, couples often recounted distress at discrimination they faced during the adoption. Many seemed to hold on to unresolved past sexual minority status-related experiences, such as challenging coming out processes or sadness at the lack of support from their family of origin.

Case study

Carlos and Rodrigo (43 and 44 years old, respectively), a Spanish gay male couple, adopted Pablo (13 years) abroad when he was 2. They were one of the first Spanish gay couples to use single-parent adoption to circumvent legal barriers in Spain to full joint same-gender adoption. The couple discussed many challenges they had faced in adopting as a legally registered single-parent family. Both partners reported experiences of homophobia during the adoption process

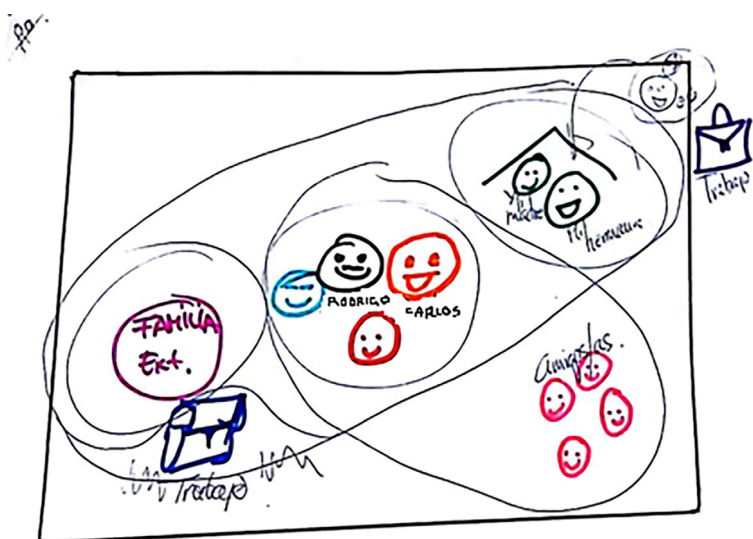


FIGURE 1 Carlos and Rodrigo (Double Moon Drawing)

and before gay parenthood, yet the couple seemed very proud of their family and considered their experiences to be an example for all LG people who want to actively defend the rights of sexual minorities. Throughout the interview, they sometimes appeared very defensive, repeatedly emphasizing that Pablo was fine and without problems. For example, when discussion was prompted about their child's birth parents, the couple cut this short:

Rodrigo: Pablo has always known that he was adopted. But he was very young, so he has no memory of any family apart from us ... he never had questions ... there are no problems about this.

Carlos: Sometimes, but very rarely, he asked why she [the birth mother] did not take care of him ... we answered rapidly that she was ill ... and he never asked questions about his birth father, ever.

Rodrigo: He is very fine with us.

In their Double Moon Drawing, Rodrigo and Carlos did not spontaneously represent Pablo's birth parents (see Figure 1). After standard interview prompts, Carlos and Rodrigo reluctantly talked about Pablo's origins. They seemed anxious to convey that they were Pablo's rightful parents. From their perspective, Pablo's birth parents could be dismissed because they had abandoned him and thus had no moral claim to be represented as part of Pablo's family.

Researcher: Do you think Pablo's birth parents could be placed on the page?

Rodrigo: They are not on this sheet. They are distant, very far away ... they are not even his parents ... there is no reason to put them in our world.

Carlos: (pause) ... We can say that they are just a belly and a seed ... nothing more, they don't exist [Carlos rapidly adds in two small symbols outside of the rectangle, then immediately deletes them, and returns the page to the researcher].

Researcher: Do you think that Pablo would put his birth parents in this drawing?

Rodrigo: They are not his parents ... giving life and being heterosexual doesn't mean automatically be parents ... they abandoned him, while we—a same-gender couple—are there and will be there for him. We fought a lot to adopt him ... his parents of origin—and I stress, I would not even call them “parents”...—were not

by his side, while we were ... I think this is clear for him, this is why he has no questions or feelings about his origins. This is part of the distant past. We are his parents now. He is happy and healthy with us.

In Carlos and Rodrigo's conversation, some tensions emerged between notions of same-gender couples adopting children versus heteronormative family approaches predicated upon biological parenthood. These adoptive parents appeared to defend the superiority of their connection with their child by directly juxtaposing this against Pablo's biological (and heterosexual) parents who did not "want" to take care of the child who they had made. Here Carlos and Rodrigo expressed this tension by distinguishing biological versus social parenthood, which Rodrigo expands on by detailing the strength of their "rival" claim as a gay male couple to be Pablo's true parents over and above any past biological claim by progenitors. Carlos and Rodrigo seemed to interpret discussion about Pablo's birth parents as threatening and they justified their legitimacy as "true parents" with their commitment to Pablo as his two gay fathers.

Cautious/uncertainty

A position of cautious/uncertainty represented an intermediate position between critical/minimization and open/validation. Here, parents voiced affirming feelings about their adopted child's double family connection but also displayed uncertainty or were defensive about how to assign a role to birth parents. These adoptive parents often acknowledged the child's birth parents as the original life-giving figures for their child by calling them "birth mother" and "birth father." However, they also caveated their acknowledgment of the child's birth parents elsewhere in the interview by emphasizing the distinction between terms signifying biological connection (e.g., "mother/father") versus those signifying endearment and "everyday" parenting (e.g., "mom"/"dad"). During the Double Moon Drawing, these adoptive parents usually represented their child's birth parents with human-stylized figures that were often placed outside or near the edge of the rectangle. When a question about the birth family was asked, parents either hesitated or disagreed over where to place one or both birth parents. This often resulted in an interchange of perspectives, with couples often landing on an intermediate position with which both partners were moderately comfortable. Adoptive parents in this group expressed mixed feelings regarding the birth parents' relinquishment of the child for adoption by conveying veiled dissent but withholding blatant disregard.

Among couples who displayed cautious/uncertainty, one or both partners tended to note discrimination challenges during adoption or difficult sexual minority-related experiences—namely, previous difficulties regarding coming out or distress in reconciling their parenting aspirations with sexual identity. However, compared with couples who expressed critical/minimization communication, these parents' views appeared to be more nuanced and integrated into their accounts. Further, these parents seemed more aware of and open to answering children's questions about their birth origins.

Case study

Gay fathers Nicolas and Vincent (age 46 and 39, respectively), who live in France, adopted Kenia (age 7) from Haiti when she was 3. Both fathers planned to parent together from the start. Out of necessity, Nicolas adopted as a "single parent" and Vincent had no legal link to his adopted daughter, despite being involved in all aspects of parenting. During the interviews, Nicolas repeatedly described extensive discrimination that the couple experienced during the

adoption process, contextualizing this within his broader experiences with homophobia. Nicolas's narratives suggested a strong need to be recognized and legitimized as a gay father. Compared with Nicolas, Vincent seemed less flooded with emotion when he discussed his own challenging sexual identity journey.

During the interview, both Nicolas and Vincent explained that Kenia was very curious about her birth mother and wanted to know what it would be like to have a mom:

Nicolas: Kenia always talks about her mother. She asks, "Shall I meet her again? What was she like?" Or "I would like to have a mom! Why don't I have a mom?" This is because she is the only one in her class without a mom, so she is curious ... on the contrary, she never asks questions about her birth father ... she already has two dads, so she doesn't fantasize about it.

Researcher: How do you feel when she expresses curiosity about her origins?

Nicolas: I don't understand why she thinks so much about her mother ... I don't know if what she is missing now is her birth mother or a mother in general ... if she wants just to have a mother to be like the others ... it can make me feel guilty ... because adopting a child as a gay couple entails a responsibility ... that the child will not have a mom anymore ... and we can't change this.

During the interview, Nicolas and Vincent returned at several points to the issue of Kenia's birth mother, explaining that it is a difficult aspect of communication to manage.

Nicolas: "We don't know how to call her ... Should we call her mom? Mother? The woman who gave birth? I think she is only the mother from Haiti; there is a stronger emotional sense in the word "mom." When Kenia calls her "mom," I say, "She was your mother because you were in her belly, but now you don't have a mom. You have two dads, we are your family." She never had a mom, and she will not have a mom anymore ... and she has to understand it ... she needs to make a grieving process about having a mum and it is painful.

When Nicolas spoke about this topic, he seemed ill at ease. Kenia's interest in her birth mother seemed to make him feel anxious as an adoptive and gay father. Possibly for these reasons, Nicolas minimized the importance of this absent maternal figure during the Double Moon Drawing (Figure 2). Nicolas and Vincent did not initiate any representation of Kenia's birth family. When they were asked where they would place Kenia's birth family, Nicolas seemed anxious and presented a somewhat defensive attitude. Vincent initially remained silent and then asserted a different viewpoint.

Researcher: Where would you place the biological parents of Kenia in this drawing?

Nicolas: No ... they are not in the frame ... they are outside the frame. ... She is just someone who gave birth, we don't want to represent her.

Researcher: Where do you think that Kenia would put her in this drawing?

Vincent: I think that Kenia would place her here [indicating the center of sheet].

Nicolas: Here? In the center? The biological family? She is a part of her history, yes, but ... we could put the biological mother outside the frame maybe [he draws a stylized figure] ... and Kenia ... she could maybe put her there [he adds dotted arrows to connect the mother to the center where the nuclear family is].

Vincent: She has the right to think about her ... thinking about her mother doesn't mean that she is unhappy with us because we are two dads ... she can fantasize

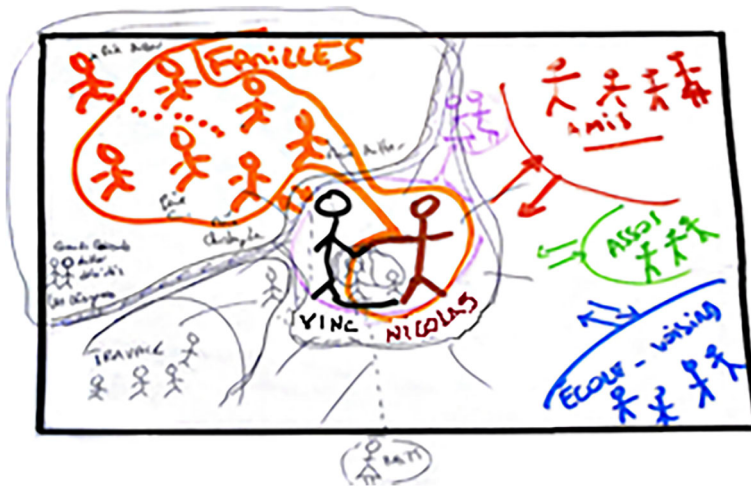


FIGURE 2 Vincent and Nicolas (Double Moon Drawing)

about how it would be to have a mother ... this doesn't mean that she doesn't accept us.

Nicolas: Her biological mother might be in her imagination, but, but she will never have contact with her ... that's why she will stay outside of the frame.

Researcher: And her birth father?

Nicolas: To me he is outside the framework ... for me he is not on this sheet.

Vincent: He is only a seed.

As shown in this exchange, Nicolas appeared preoccupied about the role of Kenia's birth mother. His attempts to keep his daughter's birth mother off the page in the Double Moon Drawing seemed to prompt his need to justify the couples' position as Kenia's parents. On the contrary, Vincent seemed more at ease in communicating about Kenia's birth origins, perhaps reflecting a stronger feeling of legitimacy as an adoptive gay father. Interestingly, the couple reached a final compromise suggesting that they were finding a way to manage Kenia's birth mother's psychological presence in the symbolic family space. In contrast, Nicolas and Vincent conveyed a position of negation/minimization as they quickly agreed that Kenia's birth father is only a "seed" and did not want him in the figure capture.

Open/validation

Parents displaying an open/validation approach tended to speak about their child's birth parents with openness and transparency, spontaneously bringing them into the conversation and calling them "mom" and "dad" or "mother" and "father" without emphasizing distinction from adoptive parents. These parents did not seem to express judgments about birth parents, but rather, spoke of their suffering over the painful choice to place a child for adoption. Some expressed gratitude toward the birth parents, noting that without the events of birth and adoption, the child would not have arrived in their lives. Parents' open attitudes toward their children's origins suggested their capacity to facilitate conversations with their child, conveying respect and empathy for their child's painful feelings.

During the Double Moon Drawing, parents displaying open/validation depicted the birth parents within the rectangle, near the child or close to the entire family, demonstrating a

willingness to incorporate birth family into their symbolic family space. Parents often drew human symbols (e.g., a face, a body) to represent birth parents, indicating an appreciation of them as people, not gametes. Adoptive parents also talked about difficult experiences related to their own sexual minority status, revealing thoughtful reflection and resilience, as well as a capacity to manage challenges without being overwhelmed. These narratives suggested the integration of sexual minority-related experiences and lower internalized sexual stigma compared with participants showing the other communication patterns. Parents with an open/validation communication approach did not seem perturbed by their children's feelings and questions about being adopted by a same-gender couple. Rather, they facilitated their children to seek out information to explore and understand their family structure.

Case study

Nadia and Yeni (both 44 years old), a Spanish lesbian couple, had two children: Aure, age 6 (adopted at age 2), and Lucas, age 3 (adopted at 5 months). Aure and Lucas were adopted by Nadia as a single parent. Yeni accompanied her, but she remained hidden during the process. At the time of the interview, Nadia and Yeni were both involved in all aspects of parenting. During the interview, both seemed relaxed and very willing to talk about their children's origins. When discussing Aure's past and birth family, Nadia and Yeni appeared empathetic and respectful, as they spontaneously inferred their child's emotions.

Nadia: Year after year, he asks more questions ... he is sad when talking about his story, and he asks me to repeat it several times ... and then suddenly says, "Mom, why couldn't my birth mom take care of me? Therefore, I explain to him that unfortunately his birth mom didn't have the possibility to take care of him ... this is why she decided to give him up for adoption ... I explain to him that probably it was a difficult decision for her. ... This is the hardest thing for adoptive parents: respecting and not judging people who abandoned your child and who caused him a lot of pain. ... We can't know what we would be like if we were in their situation.

These parents expressed openness toward their son's birth family and seemed to understand the importance of linking past with present to help Aure develop a balanced identity. Their narratives suggested acceptance and normalization of Aure's feelings and questions about the family's minority status.

Nadia: Often he asks us, "Why don't I have a dad? Will I have a dad? He says that he would like to have a dad like the others. ... Sometimes he calls Yeni "Dad," he needs to play with her as if she were his dad.

Yeni: I explain to him that I am not his dad, I am his second mom ... that he is special because he has two moms ... but I understand that he is curious about having a dad.

Researcher: How do you feel when Aure raises this kind of question?

Nadia: I think that when you are a same-gender couple, you think a lot before to have a child and you prepare yourself for this kind of questions.

Yeni: Yes, it is normal that your child will ask himself how did I arrived in my family? What did it happen to my birth parents? Why don't I have a dad or a mum?

These are the same questions we asked ourselves while deciding to adopt.

As shown in this excerpt, Nadia and Yeni did not seem to feel threatened when Aure explored his feelings about both his origins and family minority status. These mothers seemed

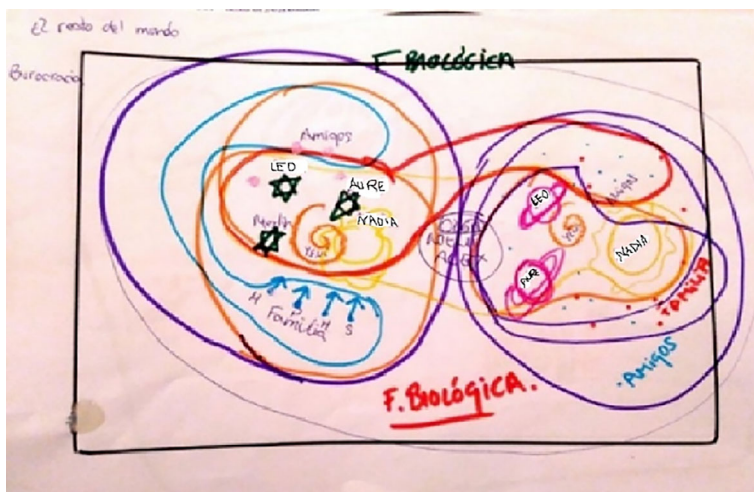


FIGURE 3 Nadia and Yeni (Double Moon Drawing)

empathic, understanding, and receptive regarding their child's questions. Their calm and open approach seemed to allow Aure to share and explore his deeper feelings when piecing together different aspects and phases of his life story.

During the Double Moon Drawing (Figure 3), Nadia and Yeni made two independent drawings, respectively, occupying two halves of the sheet. Both adoptive parents drew several circles depicting themselves with the children, friends, and extended family. Both adoptive parents agreed that the birth parents should be on the page.

Researcher: Where would you place the biological parents of Aure in this drawing?

Nadia: Here [indicating the center of the sheet]. They are certainly not outside the frame. This is a unique relationship, we can't delete it.

Yeni: I agree with Nadia, they will be present forever. ... But I would propose to put them near the edge, because they are not in our everyday life.

Nadia: I think that his past is a part of his history, we can't hide it. And they gave us the most important gift ... if they didn't exist, Aure wouldn't be here with us.

DISCUSSION

This research was the first European study (to our knowledge) to perform a qualitative exploration of the ways in which same-gender adoptive parents manage their children's double family connection, especially in relation to parents' sexual identity. Thematic analyses revealed three distinctive stances displayed by LG adoptive parents regarding their children's birth parents: critical/minimization, cautious/uncertainty, and open/validation.

The position of critical/minimization was characterized by strong defensive attitudes displayed by parents when communicating key information about the child's birth family origins and sexual minority family status. Children's questions about their birth parents, or curiosity about what it would be like to grow up with a maternal or paternal figure aroused intense, difficult-to-manage feelings in their adoptive parents. Parents then tended to interpret and defend against such questions by mounting a critique of heteronormative expectations suggesting that they, as a same-gender couple, would not be able to provide an equivalent or

optimal environment (Pennington & Knight, 2011). Adoptive parents who responded with defensiveness tended to speak about previous difficult experiences in their own sexual identity development stories (Goldberg & Smith, 2011; Green & Mitchell, 2008; Messina & D'Amore, 2018b). Similar to communication processes outlined in other studies on children's origins in LG parent families formed through surrogacy (Carone et al., 2020, 2021) and gamete donation (Lingiardi et al., 2016), parents displaying a critical/minimization approach described their children's birth parents as simply a "belly" and "seed" in ways that minimized the birth parents' roles. Similar to gay fathers via surrogacy who often choose to disclose only the use of a surrogate while omitting discussion of the egg donor and the respective father's genetic relatedness (Carone et al., 2021), the adoptive parents in our sample who showed a critical/minimization position underlined the superiority of the affective ties (represented by adoptive parents) instead of the biological ties (represented by birth parents). Like some heterosexual adoptive parents, LG adoptive parents can sometimes feel a need to strenuously defend their family boundaries from the birth family's psychological presence (Greco, 2006). However, our findings suggest these feelings for LG parents may specifically be rooted in a right to claim "good parenthood." Similar feelings for heterosexual adoptive parents are instead primarily linked to unresolved grief surrounding infertility and the loss of biological parenthood (Pinderhughes & Brodzinsky, 2019).

The position of cautious/uncertainty represented a middle ground: Adoptive parents' communication about their child's birth origins was often difficult, but these parents showed some flexibility and compromise in exploring their feelings about their child's origins. Parents displaying cautious/uncertainty talked about difficulties experienced in their own sexual identity journey and as they managed their children's questions about family structure and origins. Parents in this position called their children's biological parents "father" and "mother" and describe their own parenting position as their child's "dad" or "mom," using informal or everyday words, which underscores a stronger affective role in their child's life (compared with the remote nominal roles of a "father" or "mother"). Fearful representations about their children's origins seemed related to feelings of illegitimacy and guilt, tied to internalized sexual stigma and gender-role traditionalism (Meyer, 2003), although overall, most adoptive parents had reconciled parental and sexual minority identities (Goldberg, 2012; Messina & D'Amore, 2018a).

The position of open/validation was characterized by evident expressions of family communication, empathy, and warmth that are known to be crucial variables supporting adopted children to build an integrated adoptive identity (Brodzinsky, 2005). Parents spontaneously talked about their children's origins and mentioned facilitating their child's existential exploration of both adoption and being brought up by a same-gender-parent family without seeming undermined in their parental role. Narratives indicated that these parents had considered and reflected deeply on internalized negative stereotypes about same-gender parenting, linking to parents' confidence in understanding and legitimizing their children's questions about family structure and origins (Carone et al., 2020; Gianino, 2008). In line with emerging research with single fathers through surrogacy, our results indicate that the open/validation position can positively influence the understanding of origins and consequently support a positive adjustment among adopted children (Carone et al., 2021).

The most common stance displayed during interviews by the adoptive parents was critical/minimization (reported by 45% of participants), followed by open/validation (reported by 29%). Differences were observed according to parents' gender and sexual identity: approximately 50% of gay men occupied a critical/minimization position, whereas approximately 50% of lesbian women were categorized as showing open/validation. Gay fathers more often face lack of social acceptance, internalized sexual stigma, and negative stereotypes, compared with lesbian mothers (Costa & Davies, 2012; Steffens et al., 2014). Therefore, gay adoptive fathers' likelihood of displaying critical/minimization could represent a greater need to defend against the more severe societal prejudice directed toward gay versus lesbian adoptive parents. Thus, by

keeping the psychological presence of the biological conception (represented by their children's birth parents) at a distance, parents affirmed the superiority of "ties of the heart," or intentional kinship, and countered a heteronormative construction of family (Costa et al., 2021; Messina & D'Amore, 2018b). The overrepresentation of a critical/minimization position among Belgian participants can also be understood in relation to their children's age (Carone et al., 2021). Considering that all the Belgian participants have children in their preschool years, they were probably focused in creating a family with their children, which could contribute to their negative feelings of about the birth parents.

Variations in thematic patterns between the adoptive parents sampled were evident in comparing the three European countries from which participants were recruited and by considering the relative proportions of lesbian women and gay men in each national subsample. Many parents who exhibited a critical/minimization position were from Belgium, a country where birth parents retain the right to determine the type of family structure in which their children will be placed and where a "gay quota" on placement waiting lists can diminish the number of adoption opportunities for approved LG prospective adopters (Aromatario et al., 2020). The Belgian sample also comprised only gay father families. Therefore, the overrepresentation of critical/minimization position among adoptive parents in this study may be a consequence of sampling gay father families in Belgium who, during the course of adopting their children, had to defend their suitability as parents strenuously within a discriminatory adoption system.

In contrast, one reason for the overrepresentation of the open/validation position among Spanish families could be that the national system stipulates that at the last transition stage of the adoption process, the child resides in the home of the intended adopter as a foster child. During this transitory or trial period, adoptive parents may learn to manage their children's double family belonging while the child's adoption is not yet definite. During this compulsory transition period, some of the Spanish adoptive parents sampled had met members of the child's biological family. Furthermore, Spain is a country steeped in the traditional Catholic faith, emphasizing family values concerning the importance of motherhood and consanguineal kinship, and seven of the eight lesbian couples sampled in our study resided in Spain. Thus, the relative emphasis in the Spanish adoption system on taking into account the child's birth family may have chimed with a gender-based cultural tendency leading lesbian adoptive parents to empathize with the child's birth origins.

Implications for clinical practice and adoption assessment

With regard to clinical practice and adoption assessment with LG adoptive parents, an important contribution of this study is in casting light on the strong connection between the way LG parents understand their own identity and how they convey their attitudes toward their child's origins. The way in which LG people integrate specific challenges connected to their sexual orientation, such as legal and societal barriers, internalized sexual stigma, and assimilating LG identity and parenthood aspirations, can influence how feelings about LG parenthood is managed (Gross, 2012). Our study indicated that these specific sexual minority status challenges appear to impede or facilitate parental communication about adopted children's birth family origins. Expressions of anxiety and defensiveness about adequacy as a parent by heterosexual adopters have been previously connected to unresolved grief regarding the absence of biological parenthood (Brodzinsky, 2014). We suggest that similar feelings experienced by LG adopters may link to unresolved feelings concerning heteronormativity pressures on sexual and gender minority groups (Messina, 2018).

Thus, in therapeutic work with LG prospective or current adoptive parents, it is important to support LG people in navigating heteronormative assumptions about family. Our findings indicate that unpacking heteronormative ideals underpinning rivalry and exclusion between heterosexual biological parenthood versus sexual minority adoptive parenthood can assist LG

adoptive parents when thinking about their child's birth family. Additional therapeutic work could focus on assisting LG clients by discussing strategies regarding aspirations for parenthood, dealing with internalized homophobia, and managing social stigma (see, e.g., Bigner & Wetchler, 2012; Whitman & Boyd, 2020). Additionally, a consideration of where prospective adopters might place themselves along the dimensions of critical/minimization, cautious/uncertainty, and open/validation could be an important tool during the assessment process for potential adoptive parents. Thus, the Double Moon Drawing could be used therapeutically as a roadmap for adoptive parents to visualize their views about their child's origins. Practitioners should engage in reflexive practice around their own attitudes toward LG parenting to nurture a therapeutic atmosphere of trust and legitimacy in parental capabilities and resources (Gianino & Novelle, 2012). Finally, despite this study's strengths, our findings do not shed light on a variety of general factors that could influence parenting communication style (e.g., childhood family experiences and attachment style). Thus, we suggest integration of these elements in future research and clinical work with all adoptive families.

Strengths and limitations

The current study is one of the first to shed light on parental communication about children's origins in same-gender-couple adoptive families. Our use of qualitative methods facilitated the exploration of how sexual minority-related experiences can impact same-gender adoptive parents' feelings about their children's origins. The recruitment of subsamples of LG adoptive parents from three European countries has provided additional insights into the impact of specific sociolegal contexts on adoptive families. Nevertheless, our findings are limited both by sample size, particularly in terms of the small number of lesbian adopters (as well as not including adoptive parents with other sexual and gender minority identities), and by the variability of participants' pathways into adoptive parenthood (adoption via the domestic welfare system vs. international adoption; presumed "single-parent" adoption vs. joint adoption). This study was also limited in having little information about participants' racial/ethnic identities, income, and education, which should be addressed in continued research. Furthermore, the predominant sampling of families with young children has meant that the long-term implications of adoptive parents' stances on children's birth parents remain unexplored. Finally, our study did not allow for exploration of how parents' attitudes toward birth parents change according to children's age and stage in the family life cycle. We hope future research will investigate this topic, which is likely of crucial importance to clinical work with these new families.

Conclusion

This research makes important contributions to a previously unexplored but important topic: same-gender adoptive parents' feelings and communication approaches regarding their child's birth family. Our qualitative findings indicated that a lack of integration of sexual minority status-related experiences can have a negative impact on family communication about children's origins, while positive feelings and an integrated identity as a LG parent may facilitate this crucial parental task. During the adoption process, therapeutic work involving couple discussions, assisted by the visualization of family connections, may support LG adoptive parent families through affirming suitability as adoptive parents and by facilitating an open stance toward the child's birth family origins.

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