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SAME-SEX ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

Parents' and children's experiences
across the family life cycle

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When I started to work on this research I was young, a dreamer and passionate student: my desire was to study same-sex families in order to increase their visibility in our society and contribute to the construction of a more inclusive world.

Over the years and during my research, my position towards this topic evolved and refined, making me consider the whole range of complex elements involved in this topical issue. This process implicated deep personal reflection and questioning my own personal representations and scientific convictions, which proved to be extremely enriching, but also very demanding.

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DEDICATION

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INTRODUCTION (FRANÇAIS)

Il y a encore quelques années, être homosexuel, en couple et adopter un enfant relevait de l'utopie. Aujourd'hui, l'adoption par des couples homosexuels est devenue une réalité légale et une possibilité concrète dans plusieurs pays du monde.

Pourtant, lorsqu'il faut placer les enfants dans des familles adoptives, l'orientation sexuelle des futurs parents demeure une question controversée qui divise l'opinion publique (Patterson, 2009). Souvent, le débat oppose « le droit de l'enfant », défendu par la Convention internationale des droits de l'enfant, et « le droit à l'enfant », réclamé par les homosexuels ou sympathisants (Herbrand 2006).

Entre les débats socio-politiques, les controverses de nature idéologique et éthique, ces nouvelles familles, de plus en plus nombreuses, affirment haut et fort leur droit à « sortir de l'oubli » et s'engagent dans une bataille dont l'objectif est de normaliser leur contexte familial aux yeux de la société.

Malgré l'expansion de l'adoption homoparentale, l'expérience de vie de ces nouvelles familles est à peine abordée dans la littérature scientifique actuelle. En effet, même si, ces quarante dernières années, de nombreuses recherches ont été consacrées à l'homoparentalité, très peu d'études se sont focalisées sur les familles ayant choisi l'adoption comme mode de filiation, surtout dans le contexte européen.

L'objectif de la présente recherche était de combler ce vide dans la littérature, en analysant les expériences de la première génération de familles adoptives homoparentales résidant en Europe. Pour ce faire, nous avons donné la parole à 31 familles adoptives homoparentales, sur un total de 62 parents adoptifs (46 gays et 16 lesbiennes) et de 44 enfants adoptés (entre 3 et 18 ans) en Belgique, France et Espagne.

Ces trois pays ont été choisis pour les éléments qu'ils partagent ou qui les opposent dans le contexte socio-politique des droits des minorités sexuelles et la procédure d'adoption.

La Belgique et l'Espagne sont considérées aujourd'hui comme deux des pays les plus avant-gardistes et gay- friendly en Europe et dans le monde entier. De fait, ces deux pays ont été parmi les premiers à ouvrir l'adoption aux couples de même sexe

(respectivement en 2006 et 2005). En revanche, la France n'a légiféré sur cette question qu'en 2013, après des débats longs et houleux qui ont suscité de nombreuses réactions.

Etudier les familles homoparentales dans ces trois pays nous a permis d'avoir accès à des situations d'adoption différentes: en effet, tous les participants belges ont adopté des enfants en bas âge via une procédure d'adoption conjointe nationale, tandis que tous les participants français et la plupart des espagnols ont adopté des enfants à l'étranger et généralement plus âgés, via une procédure où seul l'un des deux partenaires adoptait légalement l'enfant.

La théorie qui a orienté notre étude est celle du cycle de vie de la famille adoptive (Brodzinsky, Smith & Brodzinsky, 1998; Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991). S'inspirant du schéma « classique » du cycle de vie (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980) cette théorie identifie des phases clef à travers lesquelles la famille adoptive transite : la phase pré-adoption, durant laquelle le couple est souvent confronté à l'infertilité et décide d'entamer un parcours adoptif ; la procédure d'adoption, souvent vécue comme un moment de stress et d'incertitude; l'arrivée de l'enfant dans la famille, suivie du processus de « parentage » de l'enfant adopté, différent en fonction de l'âge de celui-ci (préscolaire, scolaire, ou adolescent). Selon cette conception, à chaque étape du cycle de vie, la famille adoptive est confrontée à de nouveaux défis et tâches développementales, qui sont à la fois similaires et différents de ceux vécus par des familles non-adoptives.

Cette recherche avait pour but d'éclairer à la fois le vécu des homoparents adoptifs et des enfants adoptés au sein de ces nouvelles familles, en analysant leurs expériences en fonction de l'étape de leur cycle de vie.

En ce qui concerne les parents, nous avons analysé trois moments clefs: le processus décisionnel, le parcours d'adoption et leurs expériences en tant qu'homoparents suite à l'arrivée de l'enfant dans la famille. Plus précisément, les questions suivantes ont guidé notre recherche : quel cheminement a été celui des homoparents avant de choisir l'adoption ? Quels sont les enjeux de la transition à l'homoparentalité adoptive ? Et

quels sont les défis et les tâches parentales auxquels ils sont confrontés suite à l'adoption ?

Concernant les enfants, nous avons analysé leur construction identitaire à différentes étapes de leur développement. Notre attention s'est portée sur les questions suivantes : quelle est l'expérience subjective de ces enfants ? Quelles sont les spécificités de leur construction identitaire à l'intersection de la situation adoptive et homoparentale ? Quelles sont leurs questions, leurs demandes tout au long de leur développement ?

Ainsi, un intérêt particulier a été consacré à la thématique de la perte des parents de naissance et à l'exploration de dynamiques familiales au tour de cette issue. Plus précisément, nous avons analysé la communication familiale concernant la « double appartenance » des enfants (famille d'origine et famille adoptive) afin de répondre aux questions de recherche suivantes : comment ces familles gèrent-elles la perte des parents d'origine ? Quels sont les sentiments des homoparents et des enfants adoptés vis-à-vis des parents de naissance ? Et comment cela impacte-t-il les dynamiques familiales ?

Du point de vue méthodologique, nous avons conduit des entretiens semi-structurés et soumis les homoparents et leurs enfants à un test projectif graphique (La Double Lune, Greco 1999). L'entretien visait à approfondir les expériences des participants ; le test projectif, en permettant d'accéder à une dimension « plus inconsciente », a complété les informations obtenues. Cet instrument projectif s'est révélé particulièrement utile pour l'exploration des sentiments et des dynamiques relationnelles autour de la thématique de la perte de la famille d'origine.

L'originalité de la présente recherche consiste dans le fait qu'elle est pionnière dans le contexte européen ainsi que dans le domaine psychologique. Notre étude a le mérite de fournir des réponses scientifiques à une question sociale de grande actualité, en recentrant les débats sur les principaux intéressés : les homoparents et leurs enfants. Leurs récits nous ouvrent la porte à un nouvel univers familial, dont les « points de repères » et les critères sont uniques et nouveaux.

Les familles adoptives homoparentales sont des avant-gardistes de la société, des petits laboratoires de nouveaux mondes possibles. Ces familles anticipent et précèdent. Par leur exemple, elles accélèrent les changements de la société, elles poussent vers le futur. Les expériences des familles rapportées dans la présente thèse nous amèneront, page après page, à déconstruire nos propres préconceptions de la famille, du couple et de la filiation et à porter de « nouveaux regards » qui permettent de saisir l'incontestable richesse dont ces nouvelles géométries familiales sont dépositaires. Leurs témoignages nous permettront de concevoir une nouvelle manière de faire famille, mais aussi de « repenser » et « réinventer » le principe de l'adoption, sur base de leur expérience inédite.

INTRODUCTION (ENGLISH)

Only a few years ago, being homosexual, in a relationship, and adopting a child was a utopia. Nowadays, same-sex adoption is a legal reality and a concrete possibility in many countries in the world. However, the right of gay and lesbian people to adopt a child remains a controversial issue that strongly divides public opinion. In the debate there are often those who defend “the right of the child” (according to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child) and those, these being sexual minorities and their sympathisers, who defend “the right to a child” (Herbrand 2006). Among socio-political debates, ideological and ethical controversies, these new families, who are becoming more and more numerous, claim, loud and clear, their right to "emerge from oblivion" and engage in a "battle" of which the objective is to normalise their family context in the eyes of society.

Despite the progressive diffusion of same-sex adoption, the life experiences of these new families remain practically unexplored in scientific literature. In fact, even if in the last 40 years a great deal of research was dedicated to same-sex parenting, very few studies focused on families who chose adoption as a pathway to parenthood. Especially in the European context, there is a dearth of data on this topic. In order to fill this gap in literature, the present research aimed to analyse the experiences of the first generation of gay and lesbian adoptive families living in Europe. To this end, we gave the floor to 31 adoptive same-sex families, totalling 62 adoptive parents (46 gay men and 16 lesbians) and 44 adopted children (between 3 and 18 years old) living in Belgium, France and Spain.

The choice for these three countries was motivated by the fact that they have a number of elements in common but also differ at some points as to the socio-political context of the rights of sexual minorities and the adoption process.

Nowadays, Belgium and Spain are considered to be two of the most avant-garde and gay friendly countries both in Europe and worldwide. These two countries were among the first to open adoption to same-sex couples (respectively in 2006 and 2005). In turn,

France legislated this aspect only in 2013, after long and controversial social debates. Studying same-sex families in these three countries enabled us to have access to varied adoption situations: in fact, all Belgian participants adopted infants through a joint national adoption procedure, while all the French and most of Spanish participants adopted generally older children abroad, through an international adoption procedure in which only one of the two partners legally adopted the child.

Our study was oriented by the adoptive family cycle theory (Brodzinsky et al., 1998; Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991). Inspired by the classic theory of the family life cycle (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980), this theory identifies key phases through which the adoptive family transits: the pre-adoptive phase, during which the couple is often confronted with infertility and decides to start an adoption path; the adoption process, often experienced as a period of stress and uncertainty; the arrival of the child in the family, and the successive process of parenting the adopted child which changes according to the child's age (infancy, preschool, school, or adolescence years). According to this theory, in each stage of the life cycle adoptive families encounter new challenges and developmental tasks, which are both similar and different from those experienced by non-adoptive families.

This research aimed to study the experiences of both same-sex parents and the adopted children in these new families, by taking the stage of the family life cycle in which they were into account.

On the side of the same-sex parents, we analysed three key moments: the decision-making process, the adoption procedure and their daily experiences as same-sex parents after the arrival of the child in the family.

More precisely, the following questions guided our research: What is the personal journey of gay and lesbian people before choosing adoption? What are the main barriers encountered during the transition to same-sex adoptive parenthood? What are the main challenges and parental tasks they face after adoption? On the side of the adopted children, we were interested in exploring their identity construction process at different stages of their development.

Our attention was focused on the following research questions: What is the personal experience of these children? What are the specificities of their identity construction at the intersection of their adoptive and family minority statuses? What are their questions and their developmental issues during their growing years?

In addition, special attention was paid to the theme of the loss of birth parents and to the exploration of family dynamics surrounding this issue.

We particularly studied the family communication concerning the double family connection of adopted children (family of origin and adoptive family), answering the following research questions: How do these families deal with the theme of the loss of the birth family? What are the feelings of same-sex parents and their adopted children towards the birth family? How does this element impact the family dynamics?

From a methodological point of view, we conducted semi-structured interviews and applied a projective graphical test (the Double Moon Test, Greco, 1999) to both same-sex parents and their children. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the participants' experiences, while the projective test enriched the information obtained through the interviews, giving access to a more "unconscious" dimension. This projective instrument in particular, proved to be very useful for the exploration of feelings and relational dynamics connected with the theme of the loss of the birth family.

The originality of this research is that it is pioneering in the European context as well as in the field of psychology. Our study has the merit of providing scientific answers to a very topical social question, by refocusing debates on the main stakeholders: gay and lesbian parents and their children. Their stories lead us into a new family universe whose distinguishing features and criteria are unique and new. Same-sex families are the avant-garde of society, small laboratories of possible new worlds. These families anticipate and precede. By their example, they accelerate changes in society, they push towards the future. The experiences of the families reported in this thesis will induce us, page after page, to deconstruct our own preconceptions of family, couples and filiation and bring about "a new perspective" that allows us to grasp the undeniable wealth for

which these new family geometries are custodians. Their testimonies will allow us to imagine a new way of being a family, but also to "rethink" and "reinvent" the adoption clinic, based on their unique experience.

GENERAL ORGANISATION OF THIS THESIS

Chapter 1 is aimed at contextualising the issue of same-sex adoption in both socio-anthropological and socio-political perspectives. In the first part of this chapter we will illustrate the changes in the modern family's notion and in social attitudes towards the rights of sexual minorities. We will describe in particular, the social debates raised by same-sex adoption, analysing the main arguments that have been raised for and against it. In the second part of this chapter we will explain the socio-political context of same-sex adoption in Europe. We will focus our attention on participants' countries of residence: Belgium, Spain, and France. For each country, we will retrace the main steps of the evolution of sexual minorities' rights, analysing the changes in legislation which led to the legalisation of same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption. We will also describe the adoption procedure in each of these countries, shedding light on the barriers encountered by gay and lesbian people on the journey to adoption.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to a literature review on adoptive families. In the first part of this chapter we will illustrate three main research generations in the field of adoption, shedding light on the evolution of the research questions and goals, and on their impact on clinical practice. The second part of this chapter explains the adoptive family life cycle, describing the main issues and developmental tasks encountered by adoptive families. We will shed light on two main elements : the challenges connected with being an adoptive parent; the identity-related issues experienced by adopted children during growing years, with particular focus on the double family connection (family of origin and adoptive family) and on the theme of loss.

In **chapter 3** a literature review on same-sex adoptive families will be presented. The goal of this chapter is to summarise what we know and what we need to know about both children's and adopters' experiences in these households. To this end, we will first examine the main studies investigating the development of children adopted by

same-sex parents. Secondly, we will describe the studies exploring same-sex adoptive parents' experiences, competences and family functioning variables. Finally, the strengths and limits of the existing studies will be discussed, setting out some perspectives for future research.

Chapter 4 is aimed at explaining the general objectives and the methodology of our research. We will present the research protocol, consisting of a semi-structured interview and a graphic projective test (the Double Moon Test, Greco, 1999), proposed to parents and adopted children in two separate moments. In this chapter we will also illustrate the interview analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2005) and the coding instructions of the projective test. An explanation is given of the way data obtained from interviews was grouped and analysed in three studies: a) a study focusing on same-sex adoptive parents' experiences (study 1); b) a study exploring the identity construction process of adopted children (study 2); c) a study analysing the feelings and communication strategies relating to the child's double family connection (study 3).

In chapter 5 the results from study 1 will be presented. This study focuses on same-sex adoptive parents' experiences before, during and after adoption. Participants retraced the main steps of their family experience. The information obtained will be presented in chronological order of the participants' narration. First, we will analyse the decision making moment, the phase in which the desire for parenting has appeared and matured, and then transformed into a concrete project. We will particularly explore the reasons why the participants opted for an adoption project and the personal and mutual journey on the road to adoption. Second, we will examine the institutional barriers and stressors encountered by the participants during the adoption process. Finally, we will analyse the main challenges and parental tasks experienced by same-sex parents in their everyday life after adoption.

In chapter 6, results from study 2 will be detailed. The results will be presented in a developmental perspective, analysing the identity construction process of children

adopted by same-sex parents during 4 stages of growing up: Pre-school years (0-5 years), Middle childhood (5-9 years), Pre-adolescence (9-13 years) and Adolescence (13-18 years). For each phase, we will analyse the main questions, issues and developmental tasks experienced by adoptees. Particular attention will be paid to the analysis of risk factors and resources at each developmental stage.

Chapter 7 will be dedicated to illustrating the results from study 3, based on the analysis of the Double Moon Test (Greco, 1999). We will in particular analyse the attitudes of both parents and children towards the children's birth family. By means of three case studies, we will illustrate and compare the attitudes of adoptive parents and their children, providing insight in the family communication on this topic.

Finally, in **Chapter 8** the general discussions and conclusions of this thesis are presented. To this end, the most significant results will be discussed, presenting directions for clinical practice and future research. Moreover, the implication for the adoption practice and public policies will be highlighted. Also, a number of answers to the public debates on same-sex adoption will be provided, on the basis of our results.

Chapter 1

L'ADOPTION HOMOPARENTALE EN EUROPE: ENTRE CHANGEMENTS LEGISLATIFS ET EVOLUTION IDEOLOGIQUE¹

1.1 INTRODUCTION

L'adoption en tant qu'« *introduction dans une famille d'un enfant ou d'un adulte sans lien de consanguinité avec ses parents* » (Camdessus, 1995, p. 21) est une pratique ancienne, présente dans de nombreuses cultures. Néanmoins, la possibilité légale pour deux personnes de même sexe d'adopter conjointement un enfant est un phénomène récent et inédit dans la société occidentale.

La famille adoptive homoparentale, nouvelle forme de famille, a connu une rapide et progressive diffusion au cours de la dernière décennie. D'après le dernier rapport de l'ILGA (2017), à l'heure actuelle en Europe, 17 pays ont déjà légalisé l'adoption conjointe par des couples de même sexe (table 1) : Andorre, Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Danemark, Finlande, France, Islande, Irlande, Luxembourg, Malte, Pays-Bas, Norvège, Portugal, Espagne, Suède et Royaume-Uni. En outre, cinq pays — Allemagne et Estonie, Italie, Slovaquie et Suisse — permettent aux couples de même sexe d'adopter l'enfant du conjoint (step-child adoption). Dans le reste des pays européens, cette thématique continue à faire débat, mais s'ouvre peu à peu à de nouvelles perspectives.

Le présent chapitre se propose d'explorer le contexte socio-législatif de l'adoption homoparentale en Europe et, plus précisément, des trois pays objets de notre recherche :

¹ Des parties de ce chapitre s'inspirent des articles suivants :

- Messina R. & D'Amore S. (in press). *Être un couple gay et adopter un enfant : l'expérience des parents homosexuels en Belgique*. Revue *Enfances Familles Générations*.
- Messina R. (2018). *Adopter un enfant... en cachant son partenaire. Le cas des familles homoparentales françaises*. Manuscript in preparation.
- Messina R. (in press). *L'expérience de l'adoption homoparentale : la parole aux familles et aux enfants*. Article présenté dans le Cadre de la 2eme Journée de Recherche en Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles, Décembre, 2017.

Belgique, France et Espagne. Dans cette perspective, la première partie de ce chapitre replace la question de l'adoption homoparentale dans un cadre socio-anthropologique plus vaste en retraçant les principales étapes de l'évolution de la famille contemporaine ainsi que les débats suscités par l'homoparentalité. Dans une deuxième partie, nous allons davantage approfondir le contexte socio-législatif des trois pays en question, en étudiant l'évolution des droits des homosexuels ainsi que les spécificités de la procédure d'adoption.

Table 1 : Les droits des couples de même sexe en Europe

Pays	Mariage homosexuel	Union civile	Adoption homoparentale conjointe	Adoption de l'enfant du conjoint
Andorre	–	2014	2014	2014
Autriche	–	2010	–	2013
Belgique	2003	2000	2006	2006
Croatie	–	2014 ¹	–	2014
Danemark	2012	1989	2010	1999
Estonie	–	2016	–	2016
Finlande	2017	2002	2009	2009
France	2013	1999 (PACS)	2013	2013
Allemagne	2017	2001	2017	2004
Islande	2010	1996	2006	2006
Irlande	2015	2011	2017	2017
Italie	–	2016	–	2016
Luxembourg	2015	2004	2015	2015
Malte	2014	2014	2014	2014
Pays-Bas	2001	1998	2001	2001
Norvège	2009	1993	2009	2009
Portugal	2010	2001	2016	2016
Slovénie	–	2005	–	2011
Espagne	2005	1998 ²	2005	2005
Suède	2009	1994	2003	2003
Suisse	–	2004	–	2018
Royaume-Uni	2013	2005	2005/2009/2013 ³	2005/2009/2013

¹La « Life Partnership Act » est une loi qui règle la cohabitation entre personnes de même sexe, y compris la création d'une nouvelle institution de tutelle par un partenaire, similaire à l'adoption de l'enfant du conjoint (step-child adoption).

²La Catalogne a été la première communauté espagnole à introduire une législation sur les unions de facto.

³Légale en Angleterre et au Pays de Galles depuis 2005, en Écosse depuis 2009 et en Irlande du Nord depuis 2013.

1.2 LES TRANSFORMATIONS DE LA FAMILLE CONTEMPORAINE

L'apparition de l'adoption homoparentale, controversée et débattue, s'inscrit dans la continuité de changements qui ont intéressé la famille tout au long de ces quarante dernières années. Pour comprendre les réactions passionnées du public à cette nouvelle réalité familiale, il est intéressant de se pencher sur les notions de base qui ont historiquement orienté notre conception de la famille.

Il s'agit du modèle dominant de famille occidentale, développé avec la révolution industrielle, qui se cristallise entre les années 1940 et 1960 : on parle ici de famille nucléaire, composée du père et de la mère mariés vivant avec leurs enfants sous le même toit (Cicchelli & Cicchelli, 1998).

Ce modèle de famille repose sur deux piliers fondamentaux : le mariage et la procréation. Ainsi au cœur de cette notion de famille il y a la centralité du lien de sang (Fine, 2001), qui véhicule une idée de parenté comme « biocentrée » (Herbrand, 2008). Cette idéalisation du biologique et de sa valeur de vérité absolue, tend à favoriser « *une conception déterministe de la parenté comme si la procréation suffisait à fonder la parenté* » (Lévy-Soussan, 2002, p. 51). Il en dérive une survalorisation de la filiation par la « vérité biologique » comme seul critère significatif au détriment des autres modes de filiation (ibid.).

Le modèle de parenté occidental se fonde ainsi sur une idée de « filiation bisexuée », c'est-à-dire présupposant nécessairement une différence de sexes entre les partenaires. Cette notion se reflétait aussi dans le fonctionnement relationnel du couple, marqué par une différenciation nette des rôles en fonction du sexe : le père, pourvoyeur de revenus de la famille, travaillait, tandis que la mère, au foyer, s'occupait des tâches domestiques et des enfants, sous l'autorité de son mari.

Une autre norme à la base de ce modèle de parenté implique l'exclusivité de la filiation biparentale et bilatérale (Fine, 2001), c'est-à-dire l'idée que chaque individu ne peut avoir que deux parents et que la filiation s'établit par les deux branches, paternelle et maternelle. Dans ce modèle de parenté, les dimensions biologiques, sociales et légales de la parenté tendent à se superposer.

Pendant longtemps, ces notions se sont imposées comme cadre de référence culturel ainsi que juridique à notre droit de la famille : toute configuration familiale qui s'éloignait de ce modèle apparaissait incomplète ou illégitime.

C'est seulement à partir des années 1960 que s'amorce le déclin progressif de ce modèle de famille traditionnel. L'approche structurelle et dichotomique des relations cède de plus en plus la place à une idée de famille déterminée par la dimension affective et le choix individuel. On assiste progressivement à l'émergence d'un nouveau « multivers familial » (D'Amore, 2010, p. 35), caractérisé par une pluralité de liens biologiques, affectifs et relationnels qui peuvent organiser une grande variété de configurations familiales différentes.

Pour définir ces nouvelles familles, un nouveau terme a fait son apparition : « constellations affectives » (Caillé, 2010, p. 72). Ces structures relationnelles « *s'affirment en contestant l'intégrité du modèle traditionnel, faisant siennes certains de ses valeurs tout en bannissant d'autres* » (ibid.). Ces systèmes couvrent un très large spectre de situations relationnelles dont les dénominateurs communs sont l'existence de liens affectifs intenses entre les membres du système et un rapport parental entre adulte et enfant.

Herbrand (2008, 2011) met en lumière trois éléments qui ont joué un rôle central dans ce processus de transformation de la famille contemporaine et qui ont ainsi permis l'émergence de l'adoption homoparentale.

Premièrement, sous l'impulsion des mouvements féministes, le rôle de la femme change radicalement : celle-ci connaît une forte émancipation tant au sein de la famille que dans la société. Les femmes ne sont plus considérées comme une « propriété » de l'homme, mais revendiquent la possibilité de disposer de leur corps et de leur sexualité comme elles l'entendent, en dehors du mariage et de la procréation (Tahon, 1995).

Deuxièmement, l'amour devient un élément central et indispensable pour les relations de couple. Ces dernières, librement choisies, sont vécues comme une affirmation de sa propre indépendance, visant la satisfaction personnelle, et non plus comme un « devoir » (Giddens, 2004).

Troisièmement, un changement important intéresse à la fois la notion de parenté et le rôle attribué à l'enfant. L'importance accordée aux liens affectifs au sein de la famille laisse de fait émerger une notion de « parentalité élective » (Commaille, 2006). Pratiquement, la parenté n'est plus exclusivement basée sur le rigide déterminisme biologique imposé par le lien de sang, mais devient un espace de choix personnel. Par ailleurs, dans la continuité de ce mouvement d'individuation, l'enfant commence à être considéré comme une personne, dont il faut protéger les droits et la volonté. Il devient à la fois « dépendant et autonome » et son intérêt doit être préservé et défendu en justice. Dans la droite ligne de tous ces changements qui intéressent la famille contemporaine, nous assistons à une progressive diffusion et légitimation de l'adoption, d'abord par les couples hétérosexuels et, plus récemment, par les couples de même sexe. L'adoption, destinée historiquement à assurer une descendance et la transmission du patrimoine, commence à être animée par deux nouvelles motivations: donner des parents aux enfants abandonnés (Mécary, 2006), mais aussi répondre au désir de parentalité des adultes (Lévy-Soussan, 2005). Cette modalité de filiation, en dissociant la dimension biologique et affective de la parentalité, bouscule déjà le concept de famille traditionnel, en multipliant les parents « en plus » qui n'ont pas de lien biologique avec l'enfant. L'ouverture de l'adoption aux couples de même sexe bouleversera ultérieurement ce modèle dominant, en questionnant non seulement l'universalité du lien de sang, mais aussi la « présomption d'hétérosexualité » (Le Gall, 2001, p. 204) du couple parental.

1.3 LES ATTITUDES VIS-A-VIS DE L'HOMOPARENTALITE

Lors des dernières années, on a assisté à une ouverture progressive aux droits des minorités sexuelles. Pourtant, le droit des homosexuels de faire famille et, a fortiori, d'élever des enfants, demeure une question controversée qui défraie la chronique et divise fortement l'opinion publique (Patterson, 2009). De nombreuses études ont mis en lumière que si les attitudes envers le mariage homosexuel tendent à être de plus en plus

ouvertes, c'est surtout le sort des enfants au sein de ces familles qui pose question et suscite des inquiétudes.

D'après l'étude de Clarke (2001), il est possible d'identifier six arguments principaux dans les débats sociaux contre l'homoparentalité.

Tout d'abord, celle-ci serait « un péché » (argument 1), ainsi qu'une chose non naturelle (argument 2). Ces deux arguments trouvent leur source dans un discours de type religieux tendant à considérer la parentalité hétérosexuelle comme la seule forme de parentalité possible et à lier la notion de « naturalité » à la reproduction biologique.

De plus, l'homoparentalité s'inscrirait dans une envie égoïste (argument 3) des parents, qui ne prend pas en compte les besoins des enfants, en les privant d'un référent parental à la fois masculin et féminin (argument 4). Par ailleurs, l'absence de l'une de ces figures parentales pourrait non seulement déterminer une confusion chez l'enfant quant à son orientation sexuelle (argument 5), mais aussi l'exposer au harcèlement à caractère homophobe (argument 6). Ces arguments se focalisent sur le sort des enfants au sein de ces familles, et considèrent le contexte homoparental comme déficitaire et porteur de problèmes.

Ces résultats ont été confirmés par des études plus récentes, qui montrent à quel point des représentations négatives persistent sur ce sujet. Une recherche de Pennington et Knight (2011), sur un groupe de 9 adultes hétérosexuels a mis en lumière que l'homoparentalité était perçue comme une configuration « incomplète » dans laquelle les enfants sont confrontés au manque de références de l'un des deux sexes et, par conséquent, confus du point de vue de leur identité sexuée et de leur orientation sexuelle. Une autre recherche de Hollekim, Slaaten et Anderssen (2012) sur un échantillon de 1246 participants en Norvège, a révélé que le principal prédicteur des attitudes négatives vis-à-vis de l'homoparentalité se fonde sur une crainte concernant le développement psycho-émotionnel des enfants au sein de ces familles. D'après les participants, les enfants issus de familles homoparentales sont confrontés à plus de défis, comme le harcèlement et la discrimination, qui peuvent influencer négativement leur développement. L'idée à la base de cette position est que si l'homosexualité relève de la

sphère du privé, l'homoparentalité adoptive relève de la sphère du social : la parentalité expose forcément, au regard de la société, non seulement les homoparents, mais aussi les enfants (Tacàks & Szalma 2013). Cette conception du couple homoparental comme contexte à risque et exposant à davantage de défis se retrouve dans les études de Becker et Todd aux Etats-Unis (2013) et de Scali et D'Amore en Belgique (2016).

Certaines études ont mis en lumière que bien que les représentations soient en train d'évoluer, les attitudes négatives vis-à-vis de l'homoparentalité sont répandues aussi parmi les spécialistes et les intervenants du champ médico-psychosocial (Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni & Jordan, 1999; Choi, Thul, Berenhaut, Suerken & Norris, 2005; Vecho & Schneider, 2012). Par ailleurs, les professionnels manquent souvent de repères théoriques sur l'homoparentalité susceptibles de les guider dans leur pratique (D'Amore, Misciosa, Scali, Haxhe & Bullens, 2013 ; Scali & D'Amore, 2016). En conséquence, leurs représentations s'appuient souvent sur un savoir naïf, fruit des idées personnelles (ibidem).

Heenen-Wolff et Moget (2011) ont analysé les positions des psychanalystes à ce sujet, en soulignant la persistance de préjugés difficiles à abandonner. Plus précisément, les auteurs expliquent que l'inquiétude des psychanalystes concernant le devenir des enfants au sein des familles homoparentales « *provient de la nécessité présumée d'avoir un père et une mère – chacun hétérosexuel – pour un développement harmonieux de l'enfant, la différenciation sexuelle et la « bonne orientation sexuelle » étant d'emblée présentes chez le couple procréateur* » (Heenen-Wolff et Moget, 2011 p. 232). En effet, l'homoparentalité vient bouleverser certains piliers de la pensée psychanalytique, notamment la notion du complexe d'Œdipe, qui a été classiquement pensée pour les enfants des couples hétérosexuels (Heenen-Wolff, 2011; Lingardi & Carone, 2013). Un défi pour la psychanalyse d'aujourd'hui est alors de dépasser les préconceptions et d'adapter des concepts classiques aux nouvelles configurations familiales (Heenen-Wolff, 2014).

Quelques études (Matthew & Cramer 2006, Messina, D'Amore, 2018), ont ainsi analysé les attitudes des travailleurs sociaux dans les organismes d'adoption. Les

résultats ont montré que les travailleurs sociaux manifestent des formes directes ou indirectes de discrimination vis-à-vis des candidats homosexuels et que cela impacte fortement leur bien-être (Goldberg, Downing & Sauck, 2007; Brooks & Goldberg, 2001). Une recherche menée aux Etats-Unis (Brodzinsky, Patterson & Vaziri, 2002) a investigué le profil des organismes d'adoption et leur disponibilité à travailler avec les candidats homosexuels. Les résultats ont montré que les organismes d'adoption non affiliés à des groupes religieux et travaillant avec des enfants à besoin spéciaux sont plus susceptibles d'accepter les candidatures des personnes gays et lesbiennes. Au contraire, les organismes d'adoption catholiques et ceux qui travaillent surtout dans le cadre de l'adoption internationale sont moins enclins à accepter les minorités sexuelles.

La recherche scientifique nous dit que les attitudes face à l'homoparentalité varient en fonction de nombreux facteurs. Le sexe est déterminant, les femmes semblant généralement plus larges d'esprit que les hommes (Steffens, Jonas & Denger, 2014 ; Davies, 2004; Nagoshi et al., 2008). En outre, ces derniers se montrent plus fermés vis-à-vis des gays que des lesbiennes (Costa & Davies, 2012; Moskowitz, Rieger, & Roloff, 2010; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). L'âge joue ainsi un rôle important : les jeunes adultes ont souvent des attitudes plus positives que les personnes plus âgées (Herek, 2009 ; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). Pareillement, les personnes avec une orientation politique de gauche sont généralement plus ouvertes que les personnes de droite (Schwartz, 2010).

Selon Hereck (2009), les attitudes changent ainsi en fonction du niveau d'éducation, du statut socio-économique et du degré de religiosité. Concrètement, les personnes qui ont atteint un plus haut niveau d'études et un plus haut statut socio-économique, qui vivent dans des grandes villes, et qui sont en contact avec des homosexuels témoignent de plus d'ouverture. En revanche, on observe chez les personnes qui se disent chrétiennes une plus grande intolérance.

De nombreuses études ont ainsi démontré que les hommes gays seraient évalués plus négativement que les lesbiennes comme potentiels parents adoptifs. Ceci est lié aux stéréotypes de genre, définissant les hommes comme moins « nourriciers » (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) que les femmes, raison qui conduit souvent à considérer la

figure maternelle comme nécessaire et indispensable au développement de l'enfant (Gato & Fontaine, 2016). Par ailleurs, les gays seraient souvent soupçonnés de pédophilie et leur style de vie plus « libre » serait moins indiqué pour une vie familiale stable (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007 ; Gato & Fontaine, 2014).

En revanche, il faut souligner que quelques recherches n'ont pas relevé de différences dans les comportements envers des lesbiennes ou des gays (Crawford et al., 1999 ; Camilleri & Ryan, 2006 ; Gato, Freitas & Fontaine, 2013). L'ensemble de ces éléments suggèrent que bien que les stéréotypes subsistent, les attitudes sont en train d'évoluer.

1.4 LES ARGUMENTS POUR ET CONTRE L'ADOPTION

HOMOPARENTALE

En ce qui concerne le cas spécifique de la filiation via l'adoption, la question se fait encore plus épineuse et riche en débats. Selon un sondage d'opinion mené à large échelle dans 25 pays européens (Eos Gallup, 2003), 53% des participants étaient d'accord pour légaliser le mariage gay, tandis que seulement 38% défendaient l'adoption homoparentale. Des résultats similaires ont émergé du sondage Eurobaromètre (European Commission, 2006), auquel ont participé plus de 15000 personnes dans 25 pays d'Europe. D'après cette étude, 44% des participants étaient favorables à la légalisation du mariage homosexuel, mais seulement 32% acceptaient l'adoption par les couples du même sexe (figure 1). Or, il faut souligner que ces enquêtes ont été menées il y a longtemps et qu'on n'a pas de sondages récents. Il est donc possible qu'entretemps les représentations de la société aient changé, reflétant la progressive évolution législative. Néanmoins, le droit des homosexuels d'adopter un enfant reste un sujet qui a fortement divisé l'opinion publique ainsi que la communauté scientifique dans plusieurs pays du monde (Farr, Forssell & Patterson, 2010). Il semble donc important de relever les éléments principaux des débats sociétaux à ce sujet.

Quels sont les arguments pour et contre l'adoption homoparentale ?

L'un des arguments les plus souvent avancés par les opposants est que l'enfant adopté est un enfant qui a souvent connu des conditions de vie difficiles. Il est alors du devoir de la société de lui garantir le meilleur entourage possible. Dans cette optique, il n'est guère dans l'intérêt supérieur de l'enfant adopté, déjà fragilisé par son abandon parental biologique, d'être placé dans une famille objet de singularisation et de stigmatisation sociale (Herbrand, 2006). Ce point de vue trouve ses racines dans une approche « à double stigmaté » : pratiquement, le stigmaté lié à l'adoption pourrait être aggravé par une stigmatisation homophobique ou « genderophobique » (Wilchins, 2004). Les enfants adoptés par des couples homosexuels risqueraient donc de souffrir non seulement de leur situation adoptive, mais aussi du préjugé de la société à l'égard de leur structure familiale (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

Un autre argument central contre l'adoption homoparentale est l'idée que tout enfant a besoin d'une mère et d'un père pour bien grandir (Clarke, 2001). Cette position se fonde sur le présupposé hétérocentriste selon lequel la configuration familiale basée sur la différence de sexe entre les parents serait la plus appropriée pour les enfants (D'Amore et al., 2013). Ce raisonnement sous-tend que l'homoparentalité serait une configuration « incomplète » dans laquelle les enfants, confrontés au manque de références de l'un des deux sexes, pourraient être incertains du point de vue de leur identité sexuée et de leur orientation sexuelle (Pennington & Knight, 2011 ; Hollekin et al., 2012).

Dans cette logique, les opposants à l'adoption homoparentale soulignent qu'il faut faire une distinction entre « le droit de l'enfant », défendu par la Convention internationale des droits de l'enfant, et « le droit à l'enfant » réclamé par les homosexuels ou sympathisants (Herbrand, 2006).

L'opposition à l'adoption homoparentale repose aussi sur l'idée que pour chaque enfant adopté il y a certainement un couple hétérosexuel qui serait disposé à l'accueillir (Takács & Szalma, 2007). Pratiquement, si des familles traditionnelles sont disponibles, pourquoi priver l'enfant du droit d'avoir un père et une mère et l'obliger à vivre dans un « nouveau chantier social » (ibidem) ?

Du côté des sympathisants, l'un des arguments les plus utilisés souligne le fait que c'est le seul lien d'amour qui crée une famille, et cela indépendamment de l'orientation sexuelle des parents. De nombreuses études ont de fait démontré que les homosexuels sont de bons parents et que leurs enfants se portent bien (Vecho & Schneider 2005; Golombok et al. 2003 ; Goldberg, 2009). Pourquoi dès lors interdire à ces familles la parentalité adoptive ?

Un autre argument met l'accent sur le droit de tout enfant à grandir dans une famille. Pratiquement, accroître les possibilités d'adoption signifie diminuer le nombre d'enfants qui doivent passer une grande partie de leur enfance en orphelinat dans des conditions de vie difficiles (Howard & Freundlich, 2008). Les partisans soulignent ainsi le fait que les homosexuels sont plus disposés que les hétérosexuels à adopter des enfants plus âgés ou avec des besoins spécifiques (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Alcalay, Tyebjee, Shahnaz, & O'Loughlin, 2001; Brodzinsky et al., 2002). Dans cette perspective, ces couples peuvent représenter d'importantes ressources, en garantissant aussi le droit à avoir une famille aux mineurs dont les chances sont réduites.

Par ailleurs, en dehors de l'enfant lui-même, les homosexuels peuvent aussi prétendre équitablement à une famille et à une parentalité, et ce, au nom des droits de l'homme. Dans cette logique, l'affirmation que ces familles n'offriraient pas un contexte familial adapté à l'enfant, de par l'orientation sexuelle des parents, soulève des interrogations sur sa nature homophobe.

Si la question est très controversée, opposants et sympathisants communient dans l'idée que la politique à cet égard doit viser le bien-être de l'enfant adopté (Herbrand, 2006). Néanmoins, l'intérêt de l'enfant est invoqué à la fois, sous des angles différents, par les opposants et les partisans. Si les opposants utilisent des arguments propres à démontrer à quel point le contexte homoparental peut être nocif pour l'enfant, les sympathisants soulignent à quel point la non légalisation de l'adoption homoparentale serait contraire à l'intérêt de l'enfant (ibid.). Les enjeux de ces questions sont évidemment multiples; ils concernent l'enfant, les parents, les stéréotypes de l'opinion publique et de notre perception de la famille traditionnelle.

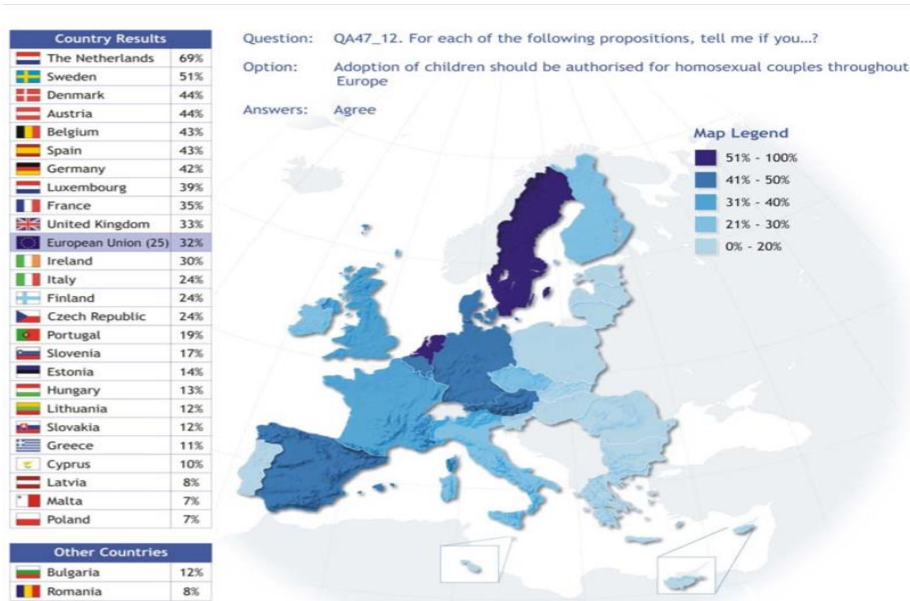


Figure 1: Sondage Baromètre 2006

(reperé à : http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_en.pdf.)

1.5 BELGIQUE

1.5.1 L'évolution des droits des homosexuels en Belgique

La Belgique est aujourd'hui considérée comme l'un des pays européens les plus avant-gardistes et les plus ouverts aux droits des homosexuels (Ilga, 2017). La Belgique est un pays neutre, où l'Eglise n'a jamais exercé un grand pouvoir.

Dans ce pays, la reconnaissance des droits des homosexuels a connu une rapide accélération au 20ème siècle, sous l'impulsion du mouvement féministe. Ce dernier a fortement contribué à déconstruire un modèle de famille basé sur la « domination masculine » (Bourdieu, 1998), ainsi qu'à remettre en cause l'idée de l'hétérosexualité comme seule forme de sexualité légitime (Herbrand & Paternotte, 2010). Dans le sillage des débats sur la libération sexuelle, en 1970, la Constitution belge pose le principe de non-discrimination, et en 1972, l'homosexualité est décriminalisée. Dans les années suivantes, la thématique de l'homosexualité continue à susciter de l'intérêt dans l'opinion publique. En janvier 1975, un premier débat télévisé aborde cette question.

Parallèlement, la communauté homosexuelle se renforce de plus en plus et on assiste en 1979 à la première manifestation pour les droits des homosexuels à Anvers².

La visibilité de la communauté LGBT s'accroît ultérieurement en 1996, quand Elio Di Rupo, à l'époque vice-Premier ministre, ministre des Entreprises publiques et de l'Économie, fait publiquement son coming-out. La même année, la première Lesbian and Gay Pride a lieu à Bruxelles. Du point de vue légal, un important pas vers l'égalité a été franchi avec la loi du 23 novembre 1998³, qui modifie le Code civil en vue d'instaurer la cohabitation légale. Par la suite, le 30 janvier 2003, la Chambre des représentants belge adopte la « proposition de loi ouvrant le mariage à des personnes de même sexe ». Avec cette loi, la Belgique devient le deuxième pays au monde à légaliser le mariage homosexuel (après les Pays-Bas). Cette loi a pour objectif de fournir une réponse à une situation de discrimination dont les minorités sexuelles font l'objet depuis longtemps déjà. En effet, de nombreux couples de même sexe ne pouvaient pas bénéficier d'une reconnaissance légale de leur statut. Cette loi est un important pas en avant pour la reconnaissance des droits de la population LGBT (lesbiennes, gays, bisexuels, transgenres), mais présente de nombreuses limites et lacunes. Premièrement, elle interdit l'union entre citoyens provenant d'un pays qui ne reconnaît pas le mariage homosexuel. Cet obstacle a été rapidement levé grâce à la substitution du critère de nationalité par celui de résidence. Deuxièmement, la thématique de la parentalité n'est pas réellement abordée et reste pratiquement en suspens. En effet, le texte de 2003 ne permet pas de régler la filiation des couples de même sexe et interdit ainsi l'adoption homoparentale. Cette question sera réglementée en 2006 : la Belgique est à l'époque le théâtre d'un débat politique controversé de plus de huit mois, qui débouche sur l'ouverture officielle du droit à l'adoption conjointe aux couples de même sexe. Dans le sillage des controverses politiques, on assiste à deux manifestations contre l'adoption homoparentale. La première, appelée la « Marche pour la famille » a été promue par des

² Récupéré de : <http://www.Homo-hetero.be>

³ « De la cohabitation légale », articles 1475 à 1479 du Code civil.

groupes qui soutiennent une idéologie chrétienne (notamment les évêques de Belgique, des enseignants de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, les chrétiens-démocrates francophones). La deuxième manifestation, organisée par le collectif « Papa, maman et moi », réunissait davantage de groupes de l'extrême-droite. Parallèlement, de nombreuses associations LGBT se sont alors aussi mobilisées pour faire valoir leurs droits à « faire famille ». Les réactions à cette vague de manifestations ont été contrastées et contradictoires. L'opinion publique et les acteurs politiques restaient fortement divisés sur la question. Finalement, le 18 mai 2006, le Parlement a adopté la loi sur l'adoption homosexuelle⁴ par un vote très serré de 34 voix « pour », 33 « contre » et 2 « abstentions » (Herbrand, 2006).

1.5.2 Les étapes du processus d'adoption en Belgique Francophone

Avant d'analyser spécifiquement les enjeux de l'adoption homoparentale, il nous semble important de fournir une description du processus d'adoption, tel qu'il est proposé à tout candidat adoptant. En particulier, nous allons décrire en détail le processus d'adoption interne en Belgique Francophone, puisque tous les participants à cette recherche ont adopté leurs enfants selon ce processus.

La procédure d'adoption interne se compose de plusieurs étapes⁵. En premier lieu, tous les candidats adoptants sont tenus de participer à un cycle de préparation. Ce dernier se compose de trois séances collectives d'information, trois séances de sensibilisation et un entretien individuel facultatif de sensibilisation. À la fin du cycle de préparation, les candidats adoptants se voient délivrer un « certificat de préparation » avec lequel ils peuvent adresser à un OAA (organisme agréé en matière d'adoption), une demande de recevabilité de leur candidature. Si la candidature est recevable, l'étape suivante consiste en un examen psycho-médico-social effectué par l'OAA. Si une décision favorable est prise, les candidats adoptants signent une convention et sont placés sur une

1.1.1 4 18 MAI 2006. - *Loi modifiant certaines dispositions du Code civil en vue de permettre l'adoption par des personnes de même sexe*

⁵ Retiré de : <http://www.adoptions.be/index.php?id=1002>

liste d'attente. Par la suite, les OAA procèdent à la « phase d'apparement », au cours de laquelle ils proposent un enfant à la famille adoptive. Dès que l'enfant rejoint la famille, le Tribunal de la famille intervient pour le jugement d'adoption et ordonne une enquête sociale sur l'attitude des adoptants. A ce stade, bien que dans la plupart des cas l'enfant ait déjà été confié à la famille adoptive, il reste pendant six mois sous la tutelle légale des parents de naissance (ou des tuteurs légaux). Ces derniers ont donc le droit de revenir sur leur décision dans un certain délai. C'est seulement après vérification du consentement des parents de naissance que l'adoption est finalement prononcée par le juge. Une fois que la procédure a abouti, le couple entame un « suivi post-adoptif » qui comporte des entretiens et des visites à domicile afin de soutenir l'intégration de l'enfant dans la famille et l'accompagner en cas de difficultés. Par la suite, le couple peut demander un parcours ultérieur d'« accompagnement post-adoptif » à l'un des organismes agréés.

1.5.3 Les obstacles rencontrés par les couples de même sexe

Bien que la procédure d'adoption soit théoriquement la même pour tout candidat adoptant, dans la pratique, les couples de même sexe semblent avoir moins de chances de voir leur projet d'adoption aboutir. En effet, bien que la loi de 2006 ait levé l'exclusion injustifiée des couples homosexuels, le nombre d'adoptions homoparentales reste très faible. Selon une statistique du Service public Fédéral de Justice⁶, 48 adoptions par des couples de même sexe ont été recensées entre 2006 et 2014 sur un total de 6435 adoptions. Par ailleurs, on observe pour ces 48 adoptions une disparité significative entre les régions. En effet, la majeure partie des adoptions se retrouve en région néerlandophone, 36 exactement, pour seulement 12 en région à la fois francophone et germanophone.

6 <http://statbel.fgov.be/fr/statistiques/chiffres/population/autres/adoptions/>

Quelles sont concrètement les barrières auxquelles se heurtent les couples du même sexe candidats à l'adoption? Selon une récente recherche (Striges, 2017) c'est l'étape de la demande de recevabilité, celle où les candidats homosexuels se trouvent concrètement confrontés à la faible probabilité de voir leur projet aboutir. À ce stade les couples de même sexe se heurtent effectivement à un plus fort taux de refus comparé à celui des couples hétérosexuels. La disparité du niveau de recevabilité en fonction de la structure familiale des candidats adoptants s'explique par un système de quotas annuels établis préalablement par l'institution. Ces quotas sont calculés sur la base du taux de refus catégorique de parents de naissance de confier leurs enfants à un couple de même sexe. En effet le système d'adoption belge prévoit que les parents de naissance puissent choisir le type de famille à laquelle confier leurs enfants. Plus précisément, la convention de La Haye, à laquelle la Belgique adhère depuis 2005, établit, entre autres, que les parents de naissance doivent avoir donné leur consentement (art 4C et 4 d) et avoir été conseillés et informés dans la démarche (art 5 d). Selon les données fournies par Striges (2017), 80% des parents de naissance n'accepteraient pas de confier leur enfant à un couple de même sexe. Sur la base de ces taux de refus, l'institution envisage alors de confier seulement 20% des enfants adoptables en interne à des couples de même. Ce système de quotas est motivé par la volonté d'éviter que les parents de naissance puissent revenir sur leur décision, et afin d'éviter d'entretenir de faux espoirs chez les candidats adoptants. Malgré les bonnes intentions de l'institution, une telle politique ne manque pas de susciter des questions et des mécontentements parmi les couples de même sexe, pour son potentiel pouvoir discriminatoire. Par ailleurs, il faut considérer qu'il n'est pas toujours, voire rarement légal, qu'un couple homosexuel puisse adopter un enfant dans certains pays du monde. Certains pays stipulent explicitement qu'ils ne veulent pas voir leurs enfants confiés à des parents homosexuels. Pratiquement ces couples se trouvent dans la presque impossibilité de se voir confier un enfant à l'étranger et fondent presque tous leurs espoirs sur la faible probabilité de réussite du projet d'adoption interne.

1.6 FRANCE

1.6.1 L'évolution des droits des homosexuels en France

En France, le mouvement d'émancipation des minorités sexuelles trouve ses racines dans la Révolution française. Durant ce moment historique, animé par des idéaux de liberté, égalité et fraternité, s'amorce un premier changement de cap par rapport aux condamnations religieuses antérieures de l'homosexualité. La Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen de 1789 souligne de fait l'importance de ne pas se soucier des comportements des individus relevant de l'exercice de la liberté individuelle: "*La loi n'a le droit de défendre que ce qui est nuisible à la société*" (article 5). Malgré ce signal d'ouverture, la loi ne reconnaît pas pour autant l'homosexualité, que la société française rejette totalement pendant de nombreuses années. En 1945, le gouvernement de Vichy introduit dans le Code pénal le délit d'homosexualité ⁷ en cas de rapport avec un mineur (Sibalis, 2002). Les représentations négatives sur l'homosexualité perdurent ainsi tout au long de la 4^{ème} République. En 1960, le député Paul Mirguet fait voter un amendement qui qualifie l'homosexualité de « fléau social » (au même titre que l'alcoolisme et la prostitution) et durcit les peines en cas d'outrage à la pudeur du type acte contre nature avec un individu de même sexe (Bach-Ignasse, 2002). En 1968, la France adopte la classification de l'OMS classant l'homosexualité dans les maladies mentales. À cette époque, les homosexuels étaient traités par électrochocs et lobotomie (ibidem). Il faudra attendre les années 1980 pour assister à un réel changement. La loi n°81-736 du 4 août 1981 supprime toute pénalisation de l'homosexualité impliquant des personnes de plus de 18 ans, âge de la majorité sexuelle. En outre, la loi n°85-772 du 25 juillet 1985 sanctionne pénalement les auteurs de discriminations basées sur l'orientation sexuelle de la victime ; ainsi, la loi du 7 janvier 1986 modifiant l'article L.

⁷ *Alinéa 3 de l'article 331 du Code pénal : "Sera puni d'un emprisonnement de six mois à trois ans et d'une amende de 60 FF à 15000 FF quiconque aura commis un acte impudique ou contre nature avec un individu de son sexe mineur de vingt et un ans." L'article 331 sera modifié en 1974 avec la baisse de la majorité à 18 ans au lieu de 21 ans ; toutefois, la majorité sexuelle pour les hétérosexuels reste à 15 ans.*

122-35 du Code du travail stipule que les entreprises ne peuvent prendre des dispositions lésant les salariés en raison de leurs "mœurs". Un pas majeur dans la direction de l'égalité est franchi 15 septembre 1999, quand, après dix ans de batailles politiques, le Parlement crée un statut pour les couples du même sexe, le pacte civil de solidarité (Pacs)⁸. Le Pacs est créé dans le sillage de l'épidémie de SIDA et répond à une revendication des minorités sexuelles de protéger leur vie de couple. Néanmoins, il crée un débat sans précédent en France, en bousculant la conception du couple basée sur l'hétérosexualité et la différence des sexes. Dans les années qui suivent, les droits des minorités sexuelles sont de plus en plus au centre de l'actualité et préparent le terrain pour une progressive réduction des discriminations. Le 15 juin 2000, une loi autorise les associations de lutte contre l'homophobie à se porter partie civile lorsqu'un crime a été commis « en raison de l'orientation sexuelle de la victime ». Le 27 juin 2001, le tribunal de grande instance de Paris accepte pour la première fois l'adoption par une femme homosexuelle des trois enfants de sa compagne. Le 5 juin 2004, le maire de Bègles, Noël Mamère, célèbre le premier mariage homosexuel (qui sera définitivement annulé en mars 2007, la loi française ne permettant pas le mariage homosexuel). Une autre étape fondamentale consiste en l'adoption de la loi n°2004-1486⁹ du 30 décembre 2004. Cette loi réprime les propos homophobes au même titre que les propos antisémites ou racistes et crée la Haute Autorité de lutte contre les discriminations et pour l'égalité. En outre, la Cour de cassation accepte le 24 février 2006 qu'un parent homosexuel puisse déléguer l'autorité parentale à son partenaire. Un autre événement marquant a lieu le 22 janvier 2008, quand la Cour européenne des Droits de l'homme condamne la France pour refus d'adoption par une homosexuelle. En clôture de ce long chemin vers l'émancipation, le 12 février 2013, le Parlement français approuve la loi « Taubira ¹⁰» qui octroie aux couples de même sexe le droit de se marier ainsi que d'adopter

8 « Le pacs est un contrat conclu entre deux personnes majeures, de sexe différent ou de même sexe, pour organiser leur vie commune ».

9 « De La Haute Autorité De Lutte Contre Les Discriminations Et Pour L'égalité ».

10 LOI n _ 2013-404 du 17 mai 2013 ouvrant le mariage aux couples de personnes de même sexe.

conjointement des enfants. Lorsque cette loi était sur le point d'être promulguée, la France s'est hissée au sommet des tabloïdes. Sans doute s'agit-il du pays européen où cette question a rencontré la plus vive opposition et suscité les réactions les plus fortes, houleuses et contrastées. Lors de l'instauration du mariage pour tous, entre 340.000 (selon les associations « pour ») et 1 million de personnes (selon les associations « contre ») sont descendues dans la rue pour dire « non » au mariage et à l'adoption gay (Girard, 2013). En réponse, un grand nombre de manifestants, membres d'associations LGBT et sympathisants à cette cause ont exprimé leur accord sur ladite loi en insistant sur ce qui fonde une famille : le seul lien d'amour, indépendamment de l'orientation sexuelle des parents. Les répercussions de cette vague de manifestations, relayées par les médias, se sont fait sentir dans l'Europe toute entière. Citoyens, politiciens et acteurs sociaux ont été amenés à s'interroger sur leurs propres conceptions et idéaux de la famille et, plus largement, sur les droits des enfants.

1.6.2 Critères et procédure d'adoption en France

En France, l'adoption est ouverte à toute personne âgée de plus de vingt-huit ans (mariée ou non, vivant seule ou en couple) et aux époux (non séparés de corps) mariés depuis plus de deux ans ou âgés tous les deux de plus de vingt-huit ans. L'adoption est également possible pour un seul des deux époux, s'il a plus de vingt-huit ans et avec l'accord de son conjoint. Toutefois, si l'un des époux veut adopter l'enfant de son conjoint, il peut le faire même s'il n'a pas vingt-huit ans. L'adoption conjointe n'est pas ouverte aux concubins (union libre) ni aux partenaires d'un pacte civil de solidarité. Dans ce cas, l'enfant ne peut être adopté que par un seul des partenaires (qui est juridiquement célibataire). Deux personnes doivent être mariées pour adopter ensemble un enfant. En principe, l'adoptant doit avoir au minimum quinze années de plus que l'enfant qu'il veut adopter, sauf s'il s'agit de l'enfant de son conjoint (la différence d'âge minimale exigée n'est alors que de dix ans). Le juge peut accorder des dérogations pour des écarts d'âge plus faibles. Il existe deux types d'adoption en France : l'adoption simple et l'adoption plénière. L'adoption simple est permise quel

que soit l'âge, et est révocable. L'adopté conserve ses droits héréditaires dans sa famille d'origine. L'adoption plénière donne à l'enfant adopté les mêmes droits qu'un enfant légitime, et confère donc à la famille adoptive la place et la fonction de la famille d'origine. Le lien avec la famille d'origine est dès lors définitivement rompu et la nationalité française est attribuée aux adoptés étrangers.

La procédure d'adoption comporte deux étapes : une étape administrative, qui permet d'obtenir un agrément délivré par les services sociaux du département, et une étape judiciaire, qui est le prononcé du jugement d'adoption. L'étape administrative, mise en place par l'Aide Sociale à l'Enfance, dure environ neuf mois et prévoit une évaluation de la part des services sociaux qualifiés. Dans ce but, des investigations sont menées afin de s'assurer que les candidats présentent des conditions d'accueil satisfaisantes des points de vue éducatif, familial et affectif. Des psychologues, des psychiatres, des travailleurs sociaux et des médecins rédigent des rapports et émettent un avis qui sera remis à la commission d'agrément. Constituée de six personnes, cette commission décidera de l'obtention ou du refus de l'agrément. On accordera alors cinq ans au candidat titulaire d'un agrément pour effectuer les démarches nécessaires afin qu'on lui confie un enfant. Après ces cinq années, si la personne, ou le couple, n'ont pas réussi à adopter, il faut réintroduire une demande d'agrément. L'adoption peut se faire soit en France, soit à l'international avec les pays ayant accepté la convention de La Haye, auquel cas il faut obligatoirement transmettre le dossier d'adoption (dont l'agrément) aux autorités étrangères, soit par l'Agence Française pour l'Adoption (APA), soit par un organisme agréé pour l'adoption.

1.6.3 Les obstacles rencontrés par les couples de même sexe français avant et après le « Mariage pour tous »

Malgré le bruit fait par les opposants afin d'éviter la légalisation de l'adoption homoparentale, de nombreux couples français de même sexe avaient déjà adopté des enfants depuis des décennies. La loi Taubira a donc permis de régler juridiquement des liens de couple et de filiation tenus « sous silence » bien avant le passage officiel de

cette loi. Pratiquement, les couples de même sexe contournaient les entraves imposées par la loi en choisissant le conjoint qui entamait la procédure d'adoption en tant que « faux » célibataire (Gross, 2012). La question de l'homosexualité était évacuée puisqu'il s'agissait de construire in fine une famille adoptive monoparentale légale, officiellement du moins. Par ailleurs, il faut souligner qu'une telle procédure se révélait très difficile à suivre. En effet, avant la légalisation de l'adoption homoparentale, il n'existait pas de loi impliquant l'orientation sexuelle comme critère de sélection pour l'adoption, mais il n'en reste pas moins que de nombreux départements ne délivraient pas l'agrément, une fois l'homosexualité révélée (Gross, 2012). Il était déjà moins facile d'adopter pour un célibataire, mais le fait d'être un homme, et homosexuel de surcroît, compliquait encore les choses (Villeneuve-Gokalp, 2007). Concrètement, malgré que les services sociaux disaient vouloir travailler en toute transparence, le fait d'être homosexuel se révélait finalement un obstacle à l'adoption. Les candidats homosexuels étaient explicitement invités non seulement à se présenter en tant que célibataires, mais aussi à dissimuler leur homosexualité (Gross & Peyceré, 2005 ; Altman, 2005). L'ensemble de ces conditions transformait la procédure d'adoption pour les couples homosexuels français en un véritable « parcours du combattant » (Gross, 2012, p. 136). Face à cette « nécessité pesante de mentir », la légalisation du mariage et de l'adoption gay a représenté a priori une victoire des droits de la population LG française. Pratiquement, cette victoire n'a été que superficielle. À l'heure actuelle, il n'y a pas de statistiques officielles concernant le nombre d'adoptions gay depuis la date d'émission de cette loi. Néanmoins, d'après les associations LGBT françaises, aujourd'hui le processus d'adoption interne reste très complexe pour les couples homosexuels, qu'il s'agisse des files d'attente interminables ou des stéréotypes qui empêchent à terme de tendre réellement à une adoption. Voici pourquoi beaucoup d'homosexuels semblent se tourner vers l'adoption internationale. Cependant, puisqu'un nombre important de pays n'accorde pas aux couples de même sexe le droit d'adopter, « le mariage pour tous » ne permet pas de viser l'adoption. Si le statut officiel du couple homosexuel est celui d'un couple homosexuel marié, il ne sera pas chose aisée de

cache ce statut aux niveaux internationaux. Pour cette raison, nombre de couples homosexuels renoncent à se marier afin de pouvoir suivre la même procédure : l'un des deux partenaires entame la procédure en tant que célibataire, tandis que l'autre reste caché pendant tout le processus. Le statut de célibataire éloigne la suspicion, diminue la stigmatisation et facilite le processus d'adoption, qu'il s'agisse de la France ou d'un pays hors Union européenne. Néanmoins, la loi ouvre une perspective de second temps : une fois l'adoption aboutie, le parent social peut officiellement adopter l'enfant et se marier avec son partenaire afin de pouvoir ouvertement exprimer son statut et officialiser leurs droits parentaux.

1.7 ESPAGNE

1.7.1 L'évolution des droits des homosexuels en Espagne

L'Espagne se situe aujourd'hui parmi les pays les plus ouverts au monde en termes de reconnaissance des droits des minorités sexuelles. Néanmoins, c'est seulement lors des dernières décennies que les droits des homosexuels ont connu une rapide et radicale amélioration. Si nous nous replongeons dans l'histoire du mouvement homosexuel espagnol, nous constatons que l'Espagne s'est montrée d'une grande cruauté à l'égard des minorités sexuelles, qui ont connu à plusieurs reprises des époques sombres d'intransigeance. Dans ce pays, la religion catholique a contribué à véhiculer une image négative de l'homosexualité, présentée comme un péché et contre nature. La Bible renforce de fait une conception de la sexualité uniquement destinée à la procréation et considère le mariage et la sexualité légitimes exclusivement dans le cadre d'une relation hétérosexuelle. Ces notions ont accompagné l'histoire et la culture espagnole pendant des siècles.

Durant l'époque de l'Inquisition, de nombreux homosexuels ont été torturés, condamnés à mort ou au bûcher pour délit de sodomie par les tribunaux de Valence, Barcelone et Saragosse (Ugarte Perez, 2008). Pendant la Renaissance, malgré les nombreux changements de mentalité, politique et culture, la situation des homosexuels reste inchangée. Sous l'influence catholique, les homosexuels continuent à être considérés

comme des malades mentaux ou des délinquants et sont souvent obligés de cacher leur orientation sexuelle afin d'éviter punitions et traitements cruels (ibidem).

Par la suite, les minorités sexuelles connaissent des années particulièrement difficiles sous la dictature franquiste. En 1954 est promulguée la Loi sur le vagabondage et l'escroquerie (Ley de Vagos y Maleantes¹¹) qui, en modifiant les articles 2 et 6 de la même loi du 1933, inclut officiellement les homosexuels parmi les gens dangereux ou antisociaux à condamner. Cette loi, édictée afin de protéger la paix sociale et corriger les comportements immoraux, punit sévèrement les « invertis » (invertidos sexuales) pour le simple fait de vivre leur homosexualité. Les peines prévues pour les homosexuels consistent en la réclusion dans des établissements de travail ou des colonies agricoles spécialisées, afin d'éviter toute forme de contact, « contagion » ou « perversion » du reste de la population espagnole. Concrètement, ces établissements sont de véritables camps de concentration où les prisonniers travaillent dans des conditions inhumaines et subissent des sévices, des châtiments corporels et connaissent la faim (Amnistia Internacional, 2005). Sous le régime de Franco, le nombre de personnes condamnées pour avoir manifesté des comportements homosexuels est estimé à 5 000 personnes (E. de B., 2004). L'Église et la médecine ont collaboré avec le régime en éliminant tout espace de dignité pour les homosexuels (Ugarte Pérez, 2008). Par la suite, une autre loi que l'Histoire retiendra est la Loi de Dangerosité et Réhabilitation Sociale (Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social¹²). Promulguée en 1970, cette disposition législative a pour fin de soigner l'homosexualité. Deux prisons spécialisées sont créées dans ce but : une à Badajoz (où sont enfermés les homosexuels actifs) et une à Huelva (où séjournent les passifs). Outre ces deux endroits, d'autres prisons réservent des quartiers aux détenus homosexuels. On applique dans ces établissements des thérapies par aversion, consistant à exposer les homosexuels à des chocs électriques dans le but de conditionner leurs comportements et de « guérir » l'homosexualité (Amnistia

¹¹ «BOE n° 198, 17 de julio de 1954».

¹² Ley 16/1970, de 4 de agosto, sobre peligrosidad y rehabilitación social. Boletín oficial del estado español (B.O.E) n°187 de 6/8/1970.

Internacional, 2005). Une autre technique utilisée dans ce but est la lobotomie (Vidarte & Llamas, 1999). Parallèlement à ce régime répressif, à partir des années 1970, le mouvement homosexuel commence à poindre, d'abord clandestinement puis, progressivement, au grand jour. A cette époque naissent les premières associations LGBT comme le « Moviment Espanol de Liberacion Homosexual » (MELH) et le « Front d'Alliberement Gay de Catalunya » (FLGC).

En 1977 naît à Barcelone l'« Institut Labda », par la suite rebaptisé Casal Lambda, qui est le premier centre de services pour les homosexuels. La même année voit ainsi la création de la première revue espagnole consacrée à l'homosexualité, le journal Hotsa. Le 26 juin 1977, dans les Ramblas de Barcelone, a lieu la première manifestation d'orgueil gay, à laquelle ont participé environ 5000 personnes¹³. Cette manifestation est durement réprimée par la police : on compte un grand nombre de blessés ; les manifestants sont arrêtés et soumis à un traitement de rééducation. Néanmoins, cet événement a un grand impact sur l'opinion publique et ouvre la porte à un progressif et radical changement.

Un autre pas important est franchi en 1979 quand les actes d'homosexualité sont éliminés du Code pénal : pratiquement être homosexuel n'est plus considéré comme un crime.

Ainsi, durant les années 1980, sous l'influence de « La movida Madrileña », un mouvement culturel qui couvre de nombreux domaines artistiques (musique, cinéma, photographie, peinture), l'homosexualité est de plus en plus représentée et vécue au grand jour. Le gouvernement ne réprime pas ce mouvement, qui marque fortement l'opinion publique et légitime l'expression de l'homosexualité. En même temps, les associations LGBT continuent à se multiplier en Espagne et à accroître leur influence politique. Tout au long des années 1990, on assiste à plusieurs débats autour de la législation pour reconnaître les couples de même sexe. En 1994 est créé à Victoria le premier registre des couples cohabitants et en 1998, en Catalogne, est approuvée une

13 Repéré à : <https://radiogay.es/barcelona-1977-primera-manifestacion-lgtb-de-espana/>

loi¹⁴ qui reconnaît les couples de fait hétérosexuels et homosexuels. En 2002, la communauté de Madrid approuve également un registre d'unions de fait¹⁵. Une étape supplémentaire est franchie en Andalousie¹⁶, Asturies¹⁷ et Estrémadure¹⁸, où la législation non seulement enregistre les couples de fait mais établit aussi qu'ils peuvent devenir famille d'accueil pour des enfants. En 2004, à Navarre, une lesbienne se voit accorder le droit d'adopter l'enfant biologique de sa compagne : il s'agit du premier cas d'adoption homoparentale en Espagne. Peu après, le 2 juillet 2005, sous le gouvernement de Zapatero, l'Espagne devient le troisième pays au monde à légaliser le mariage et l'adoption homoparentale. La loi¹⁹, approuvée par 184 votes pour, 147 contre et 4 abstentions, a généré de nombreux débats socio-politiques. Le 18 juin 2005, pendant la procédure législative de la loi, une grande manifestation est convoquée par le « Foro Español de la Familia » et par d'autres associations, catholiques ou non. Environ 200000 à 50000 personnes descendent dans la rue pour défendre la famille traditionnelle (Arroyo, 2006). En réponse, le 2 juillet 2005 entre 97 000 et 2 000 000 de personnes manifestent pour marquer leur accord et leur soutien à cette loi²⁰. Selon un sondage de l'institut Opina, à la veille du vote, 62,1% des Espagnols approuvent le mariage homosexuel et 49,1% soutiennent l'adoption homoparentale²¹. L'opinion publique espagnole a été interpellée sur deux questions centrales: premièrement, est-il juste d'appeler les unions homosexuelles « mariages », du moment que l'institution du mariage a toujours été basée sur l'union d'un homme et une femme ; deuxièmement, le

14 Ley 10/1998, de 15 de julio, de uniones estables de pareja

15 Decreto 134/2002, de 18 de julio, por el que se aprueba el Reglamento del Registro de Uniones de Hecho de la Comunidad de Madrid.

16 LEY 5/2002, de 16 de diciembre, de Parejas de Hecho.

17 Ley 4/2002, de 23 de mayo, de Parejas Estables.

18 LEY 5/2003, de 20 de marzo, de Parejas de Hecho de la Comunidad Autónoma de Extremadura.

19 Ley 13/2005, de 1 de julio, de modificación del Código Civil español en materia de derecho a contraer matrimonio.

20 Repéré à :

https://archive.is/20120525225545/http://terrannoticias.terra.es/sociedad/articulo/multitudinaria_marcha_or_gullo_gay_festeja_383264.htm

21 Repéré à :

<https://web.archive.org/web/20060129001727/http://www.angusreid.com/polls/index.cfm/fuseaction/viewItem/itemID/7887>

contexte homoparental peut-il avoir des répercussions sur le bien-être des enfants adoptés. Pour discuter les effets de cette loi, notamment sur le développement des enfants, ont été consultés de nombreux experts, qui ont exprimé des opinions opposées et contrastées²². Par ailleurs, un sondage *Metroscopia*²³ mené en 2013 révèle que selon 58% de la population espagnole, l'union homosexuelle doit être appelée mariage, tandis que 30% de la population estiment qu'elle devrait être nommée autrement. Le même sondage reproduit en 2015 montre que 68 % de la population trouvent opportun de le nommer « mariage », contre 22% qui voudraient attribuer un autre nom à ce type d'union. Ce sondage a ainsi montré que si, en 2010, 56% des Espagnols soutiennent l'adoption homoparentale, en 2015 le pourcentage de soutien s'élève à 74%. L'ensemble de ces éléments montrent que les attitudes des Espagnols vis-à-vis de l'adoption homoparentale sont devenues de plus en plus ouvertes au fil des années, et aujourd'hui l'Espagne se situe parmi les pays les plus ouverts et gay-friendly au monde (ILGA, 2017).

1.7.2 Critères et étapes de la procédure d'adoption en Espagne

En Espagne, conformément à l'art. 175 du Code civil, les adoptants doivent remplir les conditions suivantes: être âgés de plus de 25 ans (il suffit que l'un d'eux ait atteint cet âge) ; dans le cas des conjoints ou des couples de fait, entretenir une relation stable et positive (une cohabitation de minimum 2 ans est valorisée) ; la différence d'âge maximale entre adoptés et adoptants ne doit pas dépasser 40 ans (l'âge moyen est établi dans le cas d'un couple) ; l'environnement familial doit remplir les conditions psychopédagogiques et socio-économiques favorables pour accueillir un enfant. Pour engager une procédure d'adoption nationale, les candidats adoptants doivent d'abord demander un certificat d'éligibilité auprès des Services de Protection des Mineurs. Afin de recevoir ce certificat, les adoptants doivent participer à de nombreux entretiens

²² Repéré à: «*Psicólogos y juristas avalan adopción y correcto desarrollo del niño*». *Web de Hogar*. 20 de junio de 2005.

²³ Repéré à: <http://blogs.elpais.com/metroscopia/2015/07/no-todo-se-acaba-con-un-si-quiero.html>

psycho-sociaux, recevoir des visites à domicile des assistants sociaux ainsi que suivre un cours de préparation. Si les candidats reçoivent le certificat d'éligibilité, ils sont placés sur une liste d'attente pour accueillir un enfant. Dans un premier temps, l'enfant rejoint la famille, qui a le statut de famille d'accueil pour trois et cinq ans. A la fin de cette période, l'entité publique peut proposer l'adoption qui est approuvée par le juge. Pour finir, l'adoption est enregistrée dans le registre civil et le nom de famille de l'adopté est modifié. Pour adopter un enfant à l'étranger, les candidats doivent déposer une demande auprès de l'organisme compétent au sein de leur Communauté Autonome de résidence. Dans ce cas, le processus administratif se déroule en partie en Espagne et en partie dans le pays d'origine de l'enfant. A la fin du processus, le pays d'origine de l'enfant rend une ordonnance juridique et approuve l'adoption. Une fois l'adoption approuvée, les parents doivent se rendre au consulat espagnol dans le pays d'origine de l'enfant, afin de demander l'inscription dans le registre civil consulaire. Il est possible aussi de demander des visas de réunification familiale, permettant de vivre en Espagne pour une période supérieure à 90 jours, pendant laquelle le consulat vérifie que les critères d'adoption sont remplis.

1.7.3 La situation des couples espagnols de même sexe

Aujourd'hui, 12 ans après la légalisation de l'adoption homoparentale, nous n'avons pas repéré de statistiques officielles concernant le nombre d'enfants adoptés par des couples de même sexe en Espagne. D'après les associations LGBT espagnoles consultées dans le cadre de la présente étude, la procédure d'adoption nationale est une procédure très longue, avec un taux de réussite très faible et ce, indépendamment de l'orientation sexuelle des adoptants. En effet, le site officiel de l'adoption en Espagne²⁴, reporte que le temps d'attente estimé dans le cadre d'une adoption nationale est en moyenne de 9 ans. Pour cette raison, l'adoption nationale est rarement choisie par les couples de même sexe. Les parents LG qui veulent adopter ont deux possibilités principales: entamer une

²⁴ <http://adopcion.org/joomla/>

procédure d'adoption internationale en tant que parents célibataires (comme en France) ou devenir une famille d'accueil. Dans le premier cas, lorsqu'ils entament une procédure d'adoption dans un pays qui interdit aux couples de même sexe d'adopter, ils se trouvent souvent dans une situation difficile: ils doivent jurer devant la loi d'être hétérosexuels. Certaines de ces situations ont engendré des problèmes juridiques après un certain temps, lorsque les pays d'origine ont découvert l'orientation sexuelle des adoptants et leur véritable structure familiale. Concrètement certains pays d'origine ont révoqué les sentences d'adoption aux personnes qui ont occulté leur homosexualité pendant la procédure d'adoption (Adopción y homosexualidad, n.d.) Dans le second cas, lorsque les couples de même sexe optent pour un projet en tant que famille d'accueil, les enfants restent en contact avec leur famille de naissance pendant une certaine période, dont la durée peut être longue ou courte et pas nécessairement établie à l'avance. Dans un deuxième temps, si les circonstances le permettent, les parents peuvent légalement adopter l'enfant. A partir de ce moment, les enfants n'ont plus aucun contact avec leur famille biologique. Parfois, dans le pire des cas, les parents ne peuvent pas adopter légalement l'enfant et maintiennent un statut de famille d'accueil. Dans ce cas, l'enfant transite entre deux familles à vie. Même si l'incertitude due au statut de famille d'accueil peut se révéler difficile à vivre, de plus en plus les couples espagnols de même sexe optent pour cette solution, dans l'espoir de parvenir à adopter leur enfant dans un deuxième temps.

1.8 CONCLUSIONS

Le présent chapitre avait comme objectif de replacer la question de l'adoption homoparentale dans une perspective socio-politique plus large. Après avoir approfondi la question du concept de famille et de son évolution au sein de notre société, notre attention s'est portée sur les attitudes face à l'adoption homoparentale et les débats sociétaux autour de cette thématique. Comme souligné dans ce chapitre, il s'agit d'une question épineuse qui a fortement divisé l'opinion publique, en remuant des éléments de

nature idéologique et éthique et en bouleversant les conceptions traditionnelles de couple et filiation. Notre analyse a mis en lumière, en particulier, que les arguments contre l'adoption par de couples de même sexe se résument en deux idées clefs: 1) l'idée que les familles homoparentales ne constituent pas un contexte adéquat pour placer des enfants déjà fragilisés par leur abandon de départ; 2) l'idée que le développement des enfants pourrait être négativement affecté par les défis liés au statut minoritaire. En revanche, les arguments pour, se résument dans l'idée que l'adoption homoparentale représente une opportunité pour offrir une famille aux enfants en difficultés et que l'orientation sexuelle des candidats ne devrait pas constituer un critère de discrimination.

Dans le cadre du présent chapitre, nous nous sommes également penchée sur la définition du contexte socio-politique des trois pays objets de notre étude : Belgique, France et Espagne. Nous avons observé que l'histoire de l'évolution des droits des homosexuels dans ces trois pays a des éléments communs. Notamment, le fait d'être né sous le développement des mouvements féministes et de l'épidémie de sida (Paternotte, 2011). L'Espagne et la Belgique partagent ainsi l'étiquette de pays pionniers en ce qui concerne la reconnaissance de droits de mariage et d'adoption aux minorités sexuelles, tandis que la France a connu une évolution moins rapide sur ces points. Par ailleurs, dans les trois pays, l'instauration de la loi pour l'adoption homoparentale a fait l'objet de débats et de réactions contrastés (bien qu'avec une ampleur différente).

Aujourd'hui, ces trois pays partagent un élément commun : malgré les dispositions législatives, l'adoption homoparentale reste une voie parsemée d'embûches assortie de faibles chances de succès. Cependant, les couples de même sexe souhaitant adopter rencontrent des obstacles différents dans chacun de ces pays. En Belgique, les statistiques suggèrent que les couples de même sexe ont des chances d'adopter en adoption interne (bien que leurs possibilités de succès soient inférieures à celles des couples hétérosexuels) et très peu de possibilités d'adopter à l'international. En France il n'y a pas de statistiques officielles, mais d'après les associations LGBT, l'adoption interne reste très difficile. Pour cette raison, les couples homosexuels préfèrent souvent dissimuler leur identité et adopter à l'étranger en tant que prétendus célibataires.

En ce qui concerne l'Espagne, il n'y a pas non plus de statistiques officielles. Dans ce pays, l'adoption interne semble être un processus long et difficile. De nombreux couples préfèrent donc entamer une procédure en tant que famille d'accueil pour adopter officiellement leur enfant dans un deuxième temps. En alternative, comme les familles françaises, ils adoptent à l'étranger en tant que prétendus célibataires.

Le contexte socio-législatif de ces trois pays et les spécificités de la procédure adoptive sont résumés dans la table 2.

Table 2 : L'adoption homoparentale en Belgique, France et Espagne

	Belgique	France	Espagne
Statut législatif	Légalisation mariage= 2003 adoption= 2006	Légalisation mariage et adoption=2013	Légalisation mariage et adoption=2013
Statistiques	2006-2014 : sur 6435 adoptions, 48 par des couples de même sexe	Pas de statistiques	Pas de statistiques
Le type d'adoption le plus répandu parmi les couples de même sexe	Nationale	Internationale (en tant que prétendus célibataires)	-Adoption après une phase en tant que famille d'accueil ; -Internationale (en tant que prétendus célibataires)

Chapter 2

THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY: RESEARCH TRENDS AND CLINICAL ISSUES

2.1 THE ADOPTION PRACTICE: HISTORICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

The adoption of children by adults to whom they are not biologically related is an ancient phenomenon which has been documented in all eras, places and cultures (Bowie, 2004; Volkman, 2005).

The first evidence of the existence of adoption can be found in the Hammurabi code of ancient Mesopotamia (dated back to around 1750 BC), in which there are 9 articles enshrining the principles of the adoption practice (Cole & Donley, 1990). The ancient testament also reveals precise references to adoption, telling about the biblical fact of Moses, saved from the water and subsequently adopted by the daughter of the Pharaoh (Barker, 1995). Moreover, the mythology provides the story of Oedipus in Greek culture, and of Romulus and Remus, in that of Rome.

Examples of adoption are not lacking either in the history of ancient Rome: Tiberius was adopted by Caesar Augustus in the year 4 B. C. and renamed Tiberius Julius Caesar, and the same happened to Nero, who was adopted in 50 B.C. by the emperor Claudius, assuming the name of Nero Claudius Caesar (Cole & Donley, 1990). Adoption practice did not miss the change to also stimulate the imagination of writers, leading to the production of rich literature in which the trials and tribulations of the adoptive circumstances were explored (e. g. Perdita in Shakespeare, Oliver Twist in Dickens, Quasimodo in Victor Hugo).

Even if it existed throughout all cultures and eras, the adoption practice has been driven by different purposes and motivations over time. In Antiquity, the adoption was first and foremost considered a means to “repair families”, in two main ways. Firstly, to ensure a descendant, in case it was lacking, in order to transmit the heritage and to maintain the

pater familias' name. Secondly, to allow parents' soul's rest, as well as the transmission of family memories (Neuburger, 2015).

In the Middle Ages, the adoptive practice went through a period of decline. Indeed, in this period, the influence of the church implied that the only filiation form considered legitimate was the biological one, through familial ties founded by marriage (Mécary, 2006). After the French Revolution and throughout the nineteenth century, we observe a new, progressive diffusion of adoption, pursuing the same objective as in Antiquity, that is to say, to ensure the transmission of the name and heritage. Napoleon in particular, regulated the institution of adoption, motivated also by the fact that France needed many men to satisfy its expansionist aims. Thus the adoption of minors allowed the import of war orphans from other countries who would then join the national army. Gradually, new motives became the reason for adoption. After the First World War, the principal purpose for adoption was to provide parents for abandoned children or war orphans (ibid.). Since the middle of the 19th century, the adoption practice started to be motivated also by the desire of adults to become parents" (Lévy-Soussan, 2005).

The adoptive practice is marked significantly by the social point of view and it is considerably different according to culture. For instance, a negative conception of adoption is widespread in Japan, because of the great importance attributed to ancestor worship. In this context, the adoption practice is often frowned upon, given the lack of knowledge of the origins among adopted children (Cyrulnik, 2009). Indeed, in Japan adopted children often discover their adoptive condition only at the time of the adoptive parents' death when, unlike the biological brothers and sisters, they do not get access to the inheritance. On the contrary, adopted children are highly valued by other cultures. This is the case in some African countries, where "donated" children are considered good-luck charms. In this regard, Lallemand (1980) talks about the "children circulation" in Togo. This practice concerns the transfer of a minor to a close relative by delegating parental rights. In this context, the adoption is a polysemic phenomenon: by promoting family solidarity, this practice ensures posterity to the sterile subjects or allows individuals highly placed in the lineage hierarchy to obtain more prestige. The

circulation of children in traditional societies is supported by the fact that in Africa, the mother is rarely solely responsible for the children, whose care is usually socially shared (Delaunay, 2009). In these societies the child is not considered as the son or daughter of the individual or the couple, but as a lineage and extended family's child (Bonnet & Suremain, 2008). Similar behaviour can be observed among the Paci Kanaks in New Caledonia (Leblic, 2004). Another example comes from Polynesia, where the tradition of "child-giving", known as "fa'a'mu", is highly commonplace (Rosenfeld, & Duret, 2010, p. 341). Here, the circulation of children is a form of social regulation which permits all to take care of a child. This practice is often seen as a form of abandonment by Western culture, whereas in this society it is considered positive because of the possibility to establish a connection with another family (Leblic, 2004). As regards the Western society, as discussed in chapter 1, the family model of reference consists of a nuclear family, in which parents and children are biologically linked. This great importance attributed to the blood tie implies that all family forms deviating from the traditional model are considered to be inferior or deficient. This is the case for adoptive families, which often find themselves dealing with social stigma and pathologizing attitudes towards adopted children's development (Rosenfeld & Duret, 2010). In this regard, Rosenfeld, Burton, De Coster and Duret, (2006) highlighted that currently in Western society there are two different conceptions of adoption. On one hand, there are those who emphasise the presence of a "primitive wound" (Newton Verrier, 2004) which affects adopted children throughout their lives and which would cause identity fragility (Newton Verrier 2004, Cardona 2007). On the other hand, adoption is conceived just as "another way to enter into a family" (Neuburger, 2015), in which the absence of a biological tie between parents and children is not considered as a deficiency. According to this conception, parent-child ties derive above all from the parents' desire to have child, which is often pre-existing to the child's arrival in the adoptive family (Rosenfeld, 2006). All the above mentioned examples clearly show that *"filiation links are not an unambiguous notion either in time or in space"* (Kinoo, 2002,

p. 68) and that adoption practice is strongly related to the values and criteria shared in a society.

2.2 TRENDS IN ADOPTION RESEARCH

Whereas the adoptive practice exists since antiquity, the scientific research about adoption is relatively new. According to Palacios and Brodzinsky (2014), almost since its inception, adoption research was conducted according to two different points of view: the perspective prospective of social work and child welfare and the perspective of developmental psychology and psychopathology.

The first line of research aimed at establishing the best policies related to the placement of children. It concerned itself with practical issues connected with ensuring adoption stability and the well-being of all family members (such as matching children and prospective parents, adopters' need of services and satisfaction with its provision herein).

The perspective of developmental psychology and psychopathology focused on mental health issues and developmental patterns of adopted children. This line of research sought to understand the connections between adoption and mental health risks, investigating the impact of pre-adoption experiences on later adjustment and the implications of adoptive parenthood in adults. Given that this thesis is initiated from a psychological perspective, the attention will focus on the research conducted on the latter. According to Palacios & Brodzinsky (2014), in the research inspired psychologically, from its beginnings in the mid-20th century to the present time, it is possible to identify three different research trends, guided by different interests and questions. These three generations of studies will be illustrated in the following paragraphs.

2.2.1 First trend in adoption research: are adoptees at higher risk than non-adoptees?

The earliest systematic research and scholarly analysis of adoption was initiated in the late 1950's. This research trend primarily investigated two aspects: a) the abundant representativity of adoptive children in clinical settings; b) the typical clinical symptoms commonly manifested by adopted children, together with the higher risk of psychological and academic problems of adopted children compared to non-adopted children.

Concerning the first point, systematic studies in the United States, Canada and Great Britain, found that the rates of adopted children in outpatient mental health, in inpatient psychiatric and in residential treatment centres was approximately twice the level of the general population (Brodzinsky, Smith & Brodzinsky, 1998). Adoptees were also found to be younger at the time of first admission to a psychiatric centre, more likely to have had a previous hospitalisation, and to have longer stays in the hospital than non-adopted children and teenagers (Dickson, Heffron, & Parker, 1990). One of the first researchers to write about psychological risks for adopted children was Schechter (1960; Schechter, Carlson, Simmons, & Work, 1964). From a psychiatric and psychoanalytic prospective he suggested that these children might be at greater risk for emotional disturbance because of their history and unique psychodynamics, especially related to being informed of their adoptive status. The most common clinical symptoms manifested by adopted children were found to be externalizing (such as attention deficit disorders, hyperactivity disorder, behavioural problems and substance abuse). In addition, adopted children also showed higher rates in learning difficulties. However, few differences were found between clinic-referred adopted and non-adopted children in internalizing disorders such as depression and anxiety, or thought disorders such as psychosis (Brodzinsky et al., 1998). These studies, highlighting the psychological risks associated with adoption, were criticised because the data were based primarily on clinic-referred children and, consequently, may not be representative for the adoptees' adjustment pattern in the general population. Subsequent studies began to examine the relative

adjustment of adopted and non-adopted children in community settings. The results of these studies were contradictory. A number of studies failed to find any differences in the adjustment of adopted and non-adopted children, both in the early years of life (Plomin & DeFries, 1985; Singer, Brodzinsky, Ramsay, Steir, & Waters, 1985), and during childhood and adolescence (Benson, Sharma, & Roehlkepartain, 1994; Borders, Black, & Pasley, 1998). However, other studies, conducted in the USA and in Europe (Brodzinsky, Hitt, & Smith, 1993; Rosnati, Montirosso, & Barni, 2008; Stams, Juffer, Rispen, & Hoksbergen, 2000) found that elementary school-aged adopted children were more likely to manifest both psychological and academic problems compared to their non-adopted age-mates, supporting the conclusion that adopted children were at greater risk of adjustment difficulties. Some longitudinal studies (Bohman & Sigvardsson, 1990; Maugham & Pickles 1990) showed that there was a higher risk of adjustment problems for adopted children compared to non-adopted children during childhood and early adolescence, but there were little to no differences by late adolescence and adulthood. Several studies confirmed higher risks for adopted individuals of psychiatric hospitalisation, suicidal behaviour, severe social problems, lower cognitive functioning and poorer school performances (Dalen et al., 2008). These studies showed that the chances of maladjustment of the adopted individuals increased as a consequence of pre-adoption risk factors such as neglect and abuse.

In summary, the first trend of research supported the idea that there is a higher risk for adopted children than there is for non-adopted children to be referred to mental health services and to manifest a range of psychological and academic problems. Some authors (Rosenfeld & Duret, 2010; Cigoli, 2002) have criticised the epistemology of these studies, because of their negative impact on the social representations on adoptive families. In fact, by underlining the difficulties related to the adoptive condition, these studies contributed to stigmatising and pathologising this modality of filiation, considering it inferior to the biological one (Neuburger, 2015). An important limitation of these studies consisted in the lack of focus on the factors involved in children's adjustment difficulties. More specifically, while the difficulties of adopted children were

underlined, there was no focus on the individuation of the factors allowing children to overcome early adverse circumstances. These elements have been the object of study in the following research trends.

2.2.2 Second trend in adoption research: exploring the effects of early deprivation

The second trend in adoption research focused on the effects of early adversities and deprivations on the adopted child's well-being. The researchers' interest in this field was fuelled by the numerous adoptions of Romanian children in the years following Ceaucescu's fall in 1989. These children, who were exposed to high-risk circumstances during institutionalisation (such as undernourishment, lack of basic hygiene and health care, extremely poor social and non-social stimulation, inadequate caretakers to child ratios, etc), presented severe retardations when they were placed in adoptive households in Western countries. Such a situation became an opportunity to study both the impact of early negative experiences, and identify the factors which can help adopted children recover from negative life circumstances. From this perspective, several psychoanalytic publications underlined the negative effect of children's institutionalisation (Lowry, 1940), which lead Spitz (1945) to coin the term "anaclitic depression" to describe the condition of children in a foundling home.

An important role in this line of research was also played by Bowlby's attachment theory. The study of mother–infant bonding was stimulated by concepts and data imported from animal research. In some studies with rhesus monkeys (Harlow & Zimmerman, 1959), babies were separated from their natural mothers and were reared by a surrogate-terry cloth covered mother and by another one that was wire mesh. During the experiment, babies clung to terry cloth mothers, even though wire mesh had a bottle with food. This showed that, for babies, the need of closeness and contact is more important than eating. Based on this ethological evidence, Bowlby (1958) introduced the concept of "attachment" and explained that developing a close bond does not depend on hunger satisfaction. This research evidence, together with studies on the

mental health of homeless children in post-war Europe, led Bowlby (1969) to conclude that the earliest bonds formed between children and their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life. He postulated the need for a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with the mother (or a committed substitute) for a child's healthy psychological development. A confirmation of these findings came from the following studies (Dennis, 1973; Hodges & Tizard, 1989) which showed that the risk of cognitive and emotional problems in adopted children was directly proportional to the length of the institutionalisation. These studies highlighted the ill effects of institutional life and the advantages of adoption, especially if the placement took place before the age of 4,5. An important longitudinal study about the development of Romanian children was conducted in the UK by Rutter and the English and Romanian Adoptees (ERA) Study Team (1998). This research compared a sample of 150 Romanian children who were adopted in England after a period of institutional deprivation (for a review see: Rutter, Beckett, Castle, Colvert, Kreppner, et al., 2009), with a group of children adopted domestically. Adoptees were evaluated at 4, 6, and 11 years of age, taking into account several parameters such as physical growth, intelligence, language, social behaviour, and behavioural problems. Findings showed a varied picture. Some progress was assessed between the ages of 6 and 11, several years after adoption, especially among children who scored lower at the age of 6. Despite this progress, after adoption, some children still showed sequels of early deprivation. In particular, the major persistent problems were quasi autism, disinhibited attachment, and inattention/over activity in cognitive areas. However, findings revealed that these problems continued to be exhibited in a later stage only by children who had serious difficulties in earlier periods. In other areas, such as emotional and behavioural problems, the problems were present at certain ages but not at others (e.g. behavioural disturbances at age 11 not present at age 6). The ERA study also revealed that there was a clear, systematic difference between children adopted before they were 6 months of age and those adopted above this age, while no differences were found depending on the length of the institutional experience after 6 months. More recent meta-analytic studies (Juffer & Van Ijzendoorn,

2009) showed that there is an important difference between adopted children and those who remain in institutions for longer periods of time. As regards the attachment style for example, the portion of disorganised attachment in children who remain institutionalised is found to be twice the portion in children who are adopted. By comparing adopted children to their current peers however, more mixed results appeared. For instance, no or negligible differences were found in some areas (weight, height, IQ), while some differences were found in academic achievements, behavioural problems, use of mental health services, disorganised attachment regardless of age at the time of adoption, and attachment security for those adopted when they were older than 12 months of age.

In summary, results from the second trend of research confirmed the negative effects of the early deprivation of parental care, as well as of the institutionalisation. However, this research trend has borne a fairly consistent message: the adoption is an opportunity to “repair” the damage caused by early deprivation. In fact, longitudinal studies showed that positive experiences in the adoptive families can moderate the negative effects of the past. More precisely, by being raised in a warm and caring family, adopted children can recover and develop as well as non –adopted children. This aspect is supported by the attachment theory that believes that life cycle experiences can modulate and annul residues of past experiences (Fraley, 2002).

2.2.3 Third trend in adoption research: understanding the specificities of the adoptive condition

The third generation in adoption research emerged around the year 2000. This line of studies abandons the comparative perspective of the two previous generations, by focusing on the processes and typical factors of adopted persons and/ or adoptive families. This trend of research includes different approaches (biological, neurobiological and clinical), having the purpose to shed light on the specific elements involved in the adoption condition in common.

In the domain of biologically-related research, some studies focused on the influence of specific genetic markers of the adopted persons' characteristics. The 5-HTTLPR

polymorphism has been shown to have an influence on the functioning of the amygdala, a brain structure related to emotional reactivity and regulation. More precisely, a short variant of the specific allele was found to be in connection with an unresolved adult attachment among adoptees (Caspers et al., 2009). These findings suggest that experiences of loss, typical of the adoptive condition, can affect the interconnectivity of the brain networks related to emotional reactivity and thus increase the possibility to develop unresolved or disorganised attachment patterns. In a similar line of inquiry, some researchers tried to get a better understanding of the extent to which biological background can predict behavioural disorders in adopted children, as well as whether a good adoptive family environment can modulate the effect of genetic predisposition. A research by Cadoret, Yates, Troughton, Woodworth, and Stewart (1995) revealed that a biological background of antisocial personality disorder is a predictor of aggressiveness, behavioural disorder, and antisocial behaviour among adopted adolescents, only in the case of an adverse adoptive family environment (parental psychopathology, substance dependence, legal problems, marital problems, etc). Similar findings come from another study (Tienari et al., 2004) which compared a group of adopted children, whose birth parents were affected by schizophrenia, to adopted children with no such familial antecedents. Results revealed that in the adoptees at high genetic risk, there was a higher incidence of diagnoses of schizophrenia-spectrum disorder when the adoptive family environment was problematic, which was not found among adoptees in problematic families but without genetic risks.

In the neurobiological field, some studies examined the negative consequences of early institutionalisation on the volume of white and grey brain matter, for the metabolism and connectivity between different brain regions, and for the size of some limbic structures, notably the amygdala (Eluvathingal et al., 2009). Still in the neurobiological-related research, other studies examined the neurochemical processes implicated by early institutional deprivation, with particular focus on certain hormones such as oxytocin, vasopressin (connected to affiliative and positive social behaviour), and cortisol (related to the stress-responsive system). Findings from this body of research

showed that early adversity can be connected, even years later, with dysfunctional hormone levels in situations of stress and close interpersonal relationships, which can also impact the cognitive functioning of adoptees (Kertes, Gunnar, Madsen, & Long, 2008; Wismer Fries, Shirtcliff, & Pollak, 2008). Several studies also examined the theory of mind among adopted children, showing how adverse institutional experiences can compromise the adoptee's ability to understand and interpret other people's states of mind and emotions (Colvert et al., 2008; Tarullo, Bruce & Gunnar, 2007). This element seems useful in order to explain some of the problems experienced by adopted children in interacting with others.

As regards the studies in the clinical field, research focused on different aspects. A pioneer study in this field was conducted by Kirk (1964). This author explored the challenges from the adoptive parents' perspective, particularly focusing on the "role handicap" (Kirk, 1964) they experience in becoming parents after infertility and without behavioural models of reference. Others researchers explored the developmental changes in children's understanding of adoption as well as the role of the adoption-related losses in adoptees' life (Brodzinsky, Singer & Braff, 1984; Brodzinsky et al., 1986). In particular, Brodzinsky and colleagues (1984) emphasised that adoption-related losses could explain, in part, some of the adjustment difficulties experienced by adopted youngsters across the family life cycle.

Another central element investigated in this line of research is the adoptees' search for their origins, the characteristics of those who do, their motives for searching, and the outcomes of this process (Muller & Perry 2001a/b). Several studies also compared the outcome of adopted children with different degrees of contact with their birth family (Grotevant, Wrobel, Van Dulmen & McRoy, 2001) in the so called "open adoption" (a situation where there is some degree of contact between the birth relatives and the adoptive parents). In more recent studies the attention focuses on the processes involved with contact issues, such as the needs, desires and times of birth parents that can sometimes be very different from the exigencies of adoptive parents, generating some difficulties (Grotevant, 2009).

Finally, another area that research are looking into is communication attitudes towards adoption. A study by Brodzinsky (2006) in particular, showed that the adopters' openness to talk about adoption played a central role in child adjustment.

In summary, the third trend of research contains a rich variety of studies, investigating different areas. These studies in particular aimed to identify biological, neurochemical, interpersonal and intrapersonal processes underlying the psychological experience of adopted children, adoptive families, and birth families. These various research directions have the common aim to shed light on the processes connected to individual differences in adjustment to adoption. Results from this body of research show that the adoption experience is a complex one, implicating several levels which are different, but strongly interconnected. The present thesis lies in the third trend of research, given our interest in exploring the family processes experienced by same-sex adoptive parents and their children.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is represented by the adoptive family life cycle theory, which will be illustrated in the following section.

2.3 THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

The concept of the family life cycle has been introduced by Carter & McGoldrick (1980) in order to describe a sequence of developmental stages through which the family system transits over time. Every stage is characterised by some specific challenges that allow family members to build or to gain new skills. Gaining these skills helps them to handle the developmental changes that occur across the life cycle. This theory has a contextualistic and interactionist perspective. It indeed assumes, that the broader sociocultural system -within which the family exists- impacts the family functioning: some dynamic relationships between family members and their social context occur. The family life cycle theory revealed to be very useful with regard to the exploration of new challenges and developmental tasks experienced by adoptive families. In fact, several authors relied on such a theory with the aim of describing how

adoption-related tasks emerge over time and in which manner adoptive families handle these elements. Theorists in the field of adoption have underlined that adoptive parents and their children are each confronted with unique and specific issues during the family life cycle (Brodzinsky et al., 1998; Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991). Until today, the adoptive family processes have been explored mainly among opposite-sex adoptive families. This section aims to illustrate the main adoption-related issues from both the parents' and children's perspective, based on a long tradition of studies conducted mainly among opposite-sex headed families. The next chapter will focus on the studies conducted specifically among same-sex adoptive families.

2.3.1 Discovering infertility

The unicity of the adoption experience appears at the beginning of the family life cycle, when adopters have to deal with additional difficulties compared to non-adoptive parents (Goldberg, Moyer, Kinkler & Richardson, 2012). In fact, while the transition to parenthood, for biological parents, is generally considered a period of normative crisis (Cowan & Cowan, 1995) becoming parents through adoption involves even more difficulties, both individually and as a couple (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). The first challenge heterosexual adoptive couples (and often also lesbian ones) have to face is dealing with the frustration and emotional pain associated with infertility (Goldberg, Downing & Richardson, 2009). This phase is generally experienced as a moment of major personal and relationship crisis, in which the infertile couple lose the imagined child they fantasised of having before discovering the infertility (ibid.). As explained by Tai-Soon Bai (2012, p. 138) "*infertility is truly a wound to the body, the mind, and the soul of the couple*". Moreover, this painful discovery is often followed by long, expansive and intrusive medical treatments aimed to resolve infertility. In most cases, continuous and exhausting failures of these treatments lead couples to consider adoption as an alternative pathway to parenthood (ibid.). This is not the same for same-sex male

couples, for whom adoption is often the first choice (Jennings, Mellish, Tasker, Lamb & Golombok, 2014).

2.3.2 Deciding to adopt: mourning the loss of a biological family

When people decide to adopt, they generally go through a complex process involving deep changes in personal identity. During this critical phase, the prospective parents have to gradually let the biological parenthood expectations go and identify themselves as adoptive parents (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). In such a situation, couples often experience “*a grief for loss of the the hold-held dream of rearing biological offsprings*” (Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991 p. 80). This process of mourning the loss of a biological family is an ongoing one, experienced not only by the couple but also by the extended family. In this regard, some authors underline the importance of completely resolving infertility experiences before starting an adoption process (Daly, 1990; Covington, 1988; Le Pere, 1988; Mahlstedt & Johnson, 1988), while other clinical works reveal that a completed infertility resolution is not a necessary prerequisite to pursue this goal (Brodzinsky 1997). As explained by Brodzinsky and colleagues (1998, p. 22): “*individual and the couple to find a comfortable way of incorporating this painful loss into a healthy and comfortable sense of self*”.

The experience of infertility has mainly been explored among heterosexual couples, however some studies have shown that same-sex couples experience similar feelings. In particular, among same-sex couples, the coming out coincides with a mourning process of “heterosexual generativity” (Messina & D’Amore, 2018). Deciding to adopt is often experienced as a crucial moment in their life experiences, in which they must shift from an identity of childless homosexual, to the identity of parent (Giannino, 2008). In this delicate phase it is important for them to build a sense of legitimacy as same-sex parents. To do this, they need to deal with introjected sexual stigma and build a positive imagine of themselves (Messina & D’Amore 2018).

2.3.3 Homestudy: evaluation and a long wait

Another important challenge adoptive parents have to face is going through an approval and evaluation process by adoption agencies. During the homestudy, adopters often feel scrutinized, called into question and feel their privacy is invaded. All of these elements often determinate increased anxiety and diminished self-confidence among candidates to adoption (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). After surmounting this step, the prospective adoptive parents have to live with a waiting period -of varying duration- characterised by incertitude, a feeling of helplessness, doubts and the awareness of a possible placement disruption that is beyond their control (ibidem). According to literature, same-sex couples experience additional stressors during the adoption procedure (Goldberg, Downing & Sauck, 2007; Messina & D'Amore, 2018; Gross, 2012). In particular, they have to deal with homophobia, institutional barriers, and negative attitudes of social workers towards homosexuality (for more details see chapter 3).

2.3.4 The arrival of the child in the family: weaving a bond without biological ties

Subsequently, the arrival of the child in the family may represent another stressing event. While biological parenthood is preceded by a nine-month preparation period during pregnancy, as well as by social rituals which contribute to giving a sense of stability and irreversibility to parenthood, the adoptive parents often have to face parenthood promptly (Goldberg, Downing, & Richardson, 2009). Furthermore, in the adoptive families, the integration of the new family member is often complicated by the fact that the child is perceived, at least at the beginning, as foreign to both nuclear and extended families (Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991). More specifically, adoptive parents often worry that establishing a secure attachment with their child will be more difficult because of the lack of a biological tie between them (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). This concern is often stronger among adopters who still have infertility conflicts or who are not well supported by extended family and friends (ibidem). Moreover,

adopters know that a child's history characterised by losses and difficult life experiences could compromise the parent-child attachment process (Nickman et al. 2005). All these elements result in the fact that the arrival of the child in the family is often experienced in an atmosphere of excitement, mixed with anxiety and apprehension (Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991). An additional stressor experienced by adopters in this stage consists in dealing with social stigma towards adoption (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). Indeed, several authors underlined that in Western society adoption is still considered as a secondary and inferior form of parenthood compared to the biological one (Neuburger, 2015; Rosenfeld & Duret, 2010; Cigoli, 2002). As regards same-sex adoptive parents, literature shows that they have to deal with a double stigma, connected to both their adoptive and sexual minority statuses (Messina & D'Amore, 2018).

2.3.5 Communicating about adoption

Once the child has joined the family, adoptive parents are confronted with new challenges. Adoptive parents have the delicate role of accompanying their children during the lifelong process of building an integrated sense of self. To do this, they must develop a crucial ability: discussing the adoption with their child while taking into account their age, feelings and cognitive equipment. In particular, research evidence and clinical practice showed that one of the most important adoptive parents' tasks is to help their children understand—in a normative and healthy way—the meaning and implications of being adopted (Brodzinsky, Schechter & Brodzinsky, 1986; Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). This “work” starts during pre-school years, when adopters begin the telling process about adoption to their children. In this phase it is important to create a climate in which adoptees feel free to express their doubts and ask questions about their story. Literature shows that adopted children need to mourn the loss of the birth parents and feel comfortable with their genetic heredity in order to form a positive self-image as an adoptee (Brodzinsky, Schechter, Henig, 1992; Hoopes, 1990; McRoy, Grotevant & White, 1988).

Thus repeatedly telling stories about adoption can help the child feel reconnected with the past and integrate it into the adoption (Grotevant, Perry & Mcroy, 2005; Triseliotis & Hill, 1990). According to literature, the adoption story should usually include birth parents, reasons for the adoption, the situation existing when the child was born, and reasons why adoptive parents decided to put the child up for adoption (Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1992; Hartman & Laird, 1990). The telling process about adoption is often a source of stress and anxiety for adopters, who are afraid of their child's reaction. However, this process is a crucial one, which lays the foundations for a climate of trust between parents and adoptees, which is necessary to deal with the adoption-related challenges. In this regard, Brodzinsky (2005) highlighted the importance of "communication openness" which refers to emphatic and sensitive communication in which the parents support the child's emotions about adoption. In particular, research evidence has shown that openness in adoption communication is a strong predictor of adoptees' adjustment (Brodzinsky 2006), as it increases the parent-child relationship and facilitates the acknowledgement and grieving of adoption related losses in the child's identity development (Passmore et al. 2007; Donahoue, 2008). According to literature, infertile adopters who made an effort to resolve the conflicts related to the adoptive condition tend to acknowledge the difference between adoption and birth and are comfortable in open communication about adoption. On the other hand, adopters who had not resolved the conflicts tended to deny the difference and were more reluctant in talking about adoption (Elbow, 1986; Neil, 2003). Parent-child communication about adoption has also been explored among gay adoptive families. More precisely, fathers' warmth and empathy in discussing with their children their both adopted and minority statuses proved to be important to help children manage the complexities of such a condition as well as dealing with heteronormativity (Vinjamuri, 2015).

2.3.6 Managing the double bond and the adoption- related losses

Several authors underline that when an adoption takes place, the adoptive family not only adopts the child, but also takes along the child's birth family system with the birth relatives (Bradbury & Marsh, 1988; Reitz & Watson, 1992). In this regard, the adoptive family can be described as a "metafamily" (Hajal & Rosenberg 1991; Greco, 2006), which means a family representation involving both the new members (adoptive family) and the original ones (birth family). In such a situation, even if the child's biological relatives are not physically present in the adoptive family, "*their shadows hover over it and inevitably affect the newly established bonds and relationships in several ways*" (Hajal & Rosenberg 1991 p. 81). According to Greco (2006), one of the most important challenges experienced by adoptive parents consists in managing the connection with both the birth family, to which the child was born, and the adoptive one, which will take care of the child for the rest of his or her life. For adopters, as well as for adoptees, this effort of integrating the past in the present represents a crucial task to which they will be confronted during all life experiences (Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig, 1992). According to literature, during pre-school years the wish to deny the adoption is most intense and parents want to "*preserve the fantasy and magic of the earliest childhood when it was possible to pretend with impunity that the baby is mine*" (Hajal & Rosenberg 1991, p. 81). However, during school years the past becomes more present in the children's imagination. At this stage, children tend to ask many questions about their birth family and adoptive parents have the delicate task to help them cope with adoption related losses. One of the most important parent job in this phase is to support a positive view on the child's origin, as well as to promote a positive self-image in relation to the adoptive status (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002).

During adolescence, while continuing to manage the adoptees' curiosity about origins, adoptive parents must also be open to support them in the actual search of their birth family (ibid). Even if this event is often experienced as critical and a cause for anxiety for adopters, researchers agree in underlining its positive effect on adoptees well-being,

in that it allows them to make sense of their experience (Atwood, 2007; Mendenal, 2004).

2.4 ADOPTIVE PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE CHILD'S BIRTH FAMILY

In the field of this thesis, we have paid great attention to the exploration of adoptive parents' attitudes towards the child's birth family. As illustrated in the previous section, parents play a crucial role in facilitating identity development given that children depend on their parents' explanation to understand their connection to the adoptive and birth families (Brodzinsky, 2005). In this respect, adoptive parents have the delicate role of reflecting an image of the past to their children. In order to share information about origin with their children, adopters are induced to explore their own feelings towards birth family (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). As explained by Hajal and Rosenberg (1991, p. 80) *"in adopting a child, a couple is, in effect, inviting the "ghosts" of the biological parents and, by extension, of their families (their blood lines) into their own families"*.

Several authors have explored the adopters' attitudes towards the birth parents.

In her research, Greco (2006) talks about "the familial inter-systemic boundary" which is a demarcation line between what is inside the family framework (adoptive family) and what is outside (the birth family and all the elements connected to adoption). According to Greco (2006), from a clinical perspective, it is crucial to evaluate which kind of value is accorded to the situation of the past in the familial psychological experience. This author identified two main kinds of positions manifested by adopters towards the child's birth family.

The first one is the so called "integrative position", designating a situation in which there is an open attitude towards the past. In this case, adoptive parents accept to give the child's birth family a place in the new family story, by welcoming the child's questions, thoughts and fantasies about the past. In such a situation, adoptive parents

understand emphatically the child's pain about adoption related losses; they accept, recognise and valorise the child's double belonging, without feeling threatened or called into question about their parental role.

The second position described by Greco (2006) is the "non- integrative" one. In this case, adoptive parents tend to consider the child's past as negative and dangerous. They feel anxious and threatened when talking about it. With this attitude, adoptive parents do not promote an open communication about adoption, and transmit the implicit message that there is no place for the past in the present. Unconsciously, these parents try to "delete" the child's origins and affirm the "supremacy" of the adoptive family system. According to the author, while the integrative position promotes individual well-being and a good quality of family relationships, the non-integrative position has a negative impact on family dynamics.

In a similar line of inquiry, Rosenfeld and colleagues (2006) explain that there are two main ways of managing the double belonging: by "superposition" or by "substitution". In the first case the birth filiation and the adoptive one are summed, by creating a new coherent system composed by elements of both the past and the present. In the second case, the adoptive family aims to supplant and delete the birth filiation, as in a form of competition.

From the same perspective, Tendron and Vallée (2007) identified a continuum of three main attitudes manifested by adopters towards the child's birth family. On one extreme side, adopters can idealise the biological parents who allowed them to be parents. In such a situation, they feel grateful but also in debt towards the birth parents. As a consequence, they experience a lack of legitimacy as adopted parents, together with the risk of an overestimation of the biological filiation compared to the adoptive one. In this circumstance, adoptive parents tend to accord a prominent position to the child's past, which can negatively impact the feeling of belonging to the new family. On the contrary, on the other extreme side, adopters can have reluctant attitude towards the origins of the child. In such a situation they tend to provide a negative image of the birth relatives to the child, by judging them because of the abandonment. According to

Tendron and Vallée (2007) in such a situation, children feel rejected, and this could prove to be an obstacle to their integration in the adoptive family. The more equilibrated situation is represented by the middle position, in which adopters are grateful towards the birth family, while feeling legitimate in their role. Concretely, adopters feel comfortable in talking about the child's birth family and understand the importance of helping the child deal with his/her loss. In such a situation, which is similar to the integrative position described by Greco (2006), parents are capable of finding a balance between the past and the present.

By broadening these concepts, Colbère (2001) talks about the "origin" to design all the elements which are connected to adoptees' life before adoption, such as the story of their birth parents, the pregnancy, the child's birth, and the adoption application by the adoptive parents. According to this author, the place of the original, oscillates between a form of "denial" and of "omnipresence", according to the different moments of life. For instance, in the early phases of the family life cycle, parents prefer to deny the child's past and to consider the day of adoption as the day of the child's birth. In this optic, adoptive parents want to deny the primordial scene of biological parents which could lead them to face their own feelings towards infertility. On the contrary, in other stages of the family life cycle, parents can feel more secure of their connection with the child and feel grateful toward birth parents, which can lead them to accord more importance to the origin and move to the "omnipresence" position. Colbère (2001) underlines that even if this attitude of denial can be a source of difficulties, it can also be necessary to promote the "mythical graft" (Neuberger, 1997) and, consequently, increase the feeling of security in adopted children. This idea is also shared by Noël (1994) who underlined the risks connected to giving too much attention to the past for feelings of family belonging.

2.5 THE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION PROCESS OF ADOPTEES

After having illustrated the experience of adoption from the parents' perspective, the focus of attention will now move on to the adoptees' experience, by exploring the adoptive identity related- issues.

The concept of "identity" involves people's explicit or implicit responses to the question: "*who are you?*" (Vignoles, Schwartz & Luyckx, 2011). For adoptees the identity formation process is a critical task (Brodzinsky et al., 1992) because of the absence of biological continuity between parents and children.

As Small (2004) comments: "*adoption always means a loss of roots, of a sense of genetic identity and of a sense of connectedness. Becoming disconnected from one's ancestry is like floating in time and space without anchor. It means not belong in a way that all others belong*" (p. 36).

Adoptive identity addresses these questions: "*who am I as an adopted person? What does being adopted mean to me, and how does this fit into my understanding of myself, relationships, family, and culture?*" (Grotevant & Von Korf, 2011 p. 592).

The adoptive identity formation is inseparably linked to the theme of origins. Belonging to two lineages-the blood one and the adoptive one- requires continuous efforts to integrate the past and the future, dealing with the pain of multiple losses (Vadilonga, 2010). Thus for adoptees the question of identity is interwoven with specific questions about one's lineage, such as: who are my biological parents? Where was I born? What were my earliest days like? What is my genetic heritage? (Grotevant & Von Korf, 2011). More precisely, the unique psychodynamics of adoptees lies in the fact that there is (or was) an existing birth family somewhere, to whom they maintain an invisible connection during all of their life. As explained by Baran & Pannor (1994, p.318) "*adoptee has the knowledge that an essential part of the self has been cut off and remains on the other side of the adoption barrier, thereby confusing the psychological identity of the adoptee*"

According to Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, (2000), the adoptive identity is composed of three parts.

The first one is the intrapsychic component that involves the cognitive and affective processes connected to the self-constructed meaning and salience of adoption in a person's life. The importance attributed to the fact of adoption in one's identity is rather variable: while some individuals find little or no meaning in their adoptive status, others are highly interested in exploring this aspect, considering it as a crucial element of their identity. For most individuals, however, adoption occupies a more balanced place in their identity, even if it is evaluated as a meaningful event (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002).

The second component regards the meaning attributed to adoption in the context of family memberships. As noted previously, while some families communicate openly and easily about adoption, other families have more difficulties in sharing information and emotions about this event (Brodzinsky, 2006). In particular, the way in which family members communicate about adoption plays an important role in the individual and co-constructed salience given to adoption in the identity of each family member.

The third component of adoptive identity involves the internalization of the meanings attributed to adoption in the socio-cultural context. More precisely, the feedback received from peers, teachers and the whole social system can have an important impact on the adoptees' self-perception. For instance, when adoptees feel accepted and fitting into the community as adopted persons, they achieve a more secure sense of self. Conversely, receiving negative feedback or feeling rejected by their social context can highly undermine the ego identity.

Research evidence indicates that people who have adjusted to their adoption and have undergone identity work tend to have healthier relationships, improved personal well-being, and a more positive outlook on their adoptive experience (Brodzinsky, 2006; Mendenhall et al., 2004).

In this regard, Dunbar (2003) has analysed different types of adoptive identities. According to the author, when people have an "integrated adoptive identity", they have deeply explored their feelings and have resolved issues related to their adoption. This represents the most advanced stage of adoptive identity. On the other hand, when there

is a lack of integration of the different aspects of self and of the past story, people develop an unsettled, unexamined, and limited adoptive identity.

2.6 CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF ADOPTION

To an adopted person the identity is defined as one's understanding of what it means to be an adopted person (Dunbar & Grotevant, 2004). For this reason, it is of relevant importance to explore how adopted persons understand their adoptive condition at different stages of development. A child's understanding of adoption and adoptive identity formation is an ongoing and multifaceted process (Grotevant et al., 2000). Children's knowledge and feelings about adoption change over time, in relation to age, cognitive development, and family life cycle (Brodzinsky et al., 1984). In this section we will explore the way in which adoptees build their adoptive identity from early childhood to adolescence.

2.6.1 Pre-school years (3-5 years of age)

During the preschool period, adoptive parents begin to share adoption information and adopted children learn the language of adoption. At this stage children are often able to label themselves as being adopted, as well as able to talk about their birthmother and/or birth fathers. Sometimes they are also capable of describing that they were born from people other than the adoptive parents. Concretely, during preschool years they start to learn and repeat fragments of their adoptive story, however, their capacity to understand the meaning and the implications of being adopted is quite limited (Brodzinsky, 2011).

2.6.2 Middle childhood (6-12 years of age)

During middle childhood the cognitive and socio-emotional development determines a more realistic understanding of adoption and its implications (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). At this stage, children begin to understand the significance of biological connections among family members (Newman, Roberts & Syré, 1993). As a consequence, in this phase, children develop a great curiosity about their origins. Their

questions and thoughts are focused on birth parents (and mainly on the birth mother), on the country of origin (in case of international adoption) and on the reasons for the abandonment.

“Where did I come from? What did my birthmother and birthfather look like? Why didn't they keep me? Where are they now? Do I have any brothers and sisters? Can I meet them?”. According to Brodzinsky and Pinderhughes (2002) these are some of the most typical questions asked by adopted children during middle childhood. Concretely, during middle childhood, children realise that adoption means not only gaining a family, but losing one as well (Brodzinsky, 2011). This progressive acknowledgement causes them to be confronted with adoption-related loss (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Nickman et al., 2005). During this developmental stage, the birth parents could become very present in the adoptees imagination and assume more importance than the adoptive ones (Greco, 2006; Greco, Ranieri & Rosnati, 2003). For example, some children begin to wonder if their birth parents think about them and if so, if they are happy or regret their decision of giving them up for adoption. The curiosity about birth parents could be manifested as a “family romance” (Freud, 1959) which consist in daily dreams about the lost birth family and the life before adoption (Rosemberg & Horner, 1991). Sometimes adopted children fantasise about changing their adoptive family, and going back to their past life with their birth relatives (Soulé & Noël, 1985). With time, adoption-related loss can become quite profound and include not only the loss of birth relatives (parents, siblings, extended family), but also the loss of genealogical connections, as well as cultural, ethnic, and/or racial heritage (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002).

2.6.3 Adolescence (12-18 years of age)

A deeper comprehension of adoption forms throughout adolescence. At this stage, teenagers begin to understand the legal permanence associated with adoption, which reduces the fear that their bond with the adoptive parents could be destructed (Brodzinsky, Singer, & Braff, 1984). Furthermore, during adolescence, adoptees begin to conceptualise adoption within a societal perspective, which have both positive and

negative implications (Brodzinsky, 2011). On the positive side, adoption is considered as an institution which allows helping children in difficult circumstances. On the negative side, adoption is generally considered as a “second best route” to parenthood. Such understanding can lead adoptees to question their families, their value, and the ways they are viewed by peers and others. Furthermore, the search of self, common to all adolescents, could be complicated for adopted children because of the effort needed to integrate aspects of both families- biological and adoptive- into their emerging identities (Vadilogna, 2010). In this period of life, the curiosity about origins is often very strong and leads to the effective search of the birth family. At the same time, the strong feeling of “being indebted” to the adopters for having raised them causes the adoptee to experience contrasted feelings connected to their wish to discover their past. Concretely, the purpose in this developmental phase is to find a healthy balance between the “debt of life” towards the birth family and the “debt of love and care” towards the adoptive one (Rosenfeld et al., 2006). At this stage the so called “loyalty conflict” often appears (Le Run, 2012), meaning that adoptees feel that they are betraying their adoptive parents when talking or thinking about their birth family. The emergence of loyalty conflicts is strongly connected to the parents’ degree of openness in communicating about adoption (Brodzinsky, 2006). When adoptive parents are not at ease in exploring their children’s feelings about their past, adoptees can develop the so called “invisible loyalty” (Ducommun-Nagy, 2006, 2008, 2012). This feeling consists in showing loyalty towards the birth family by manifesting an indirect opposition to the adoptive family system. For instance, adoptees could identify themselves with the values of their country of origin, as well as idealising their past and discrediting their present life.

For many adopted teenagers, another central issue is connected to the lack of physical resemblance between themselves and the adoptive family. In particular, the inability to look into the faces of their adoptive parents and siblings and see a reflection of themselves is often experienced as disconcerting. As a consequence, adoptees often raise questions about physical and psychological characteristics that differentiate them

from adoptive family members. This element can also increase their wish to have a connection to their birth family (Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992).

Table 3: Family Life Cycle Tasks of Adoptive Parents and their Children (Brodzinsky et al. 1998, p. 23)

Age Period	Adoptive Parents	Adopted Children
Pre-Adoption	Coping with infertility Making an adoption decision Coping with the uncertainty and anxiety related to the placement process Coping with social stigma associated to adoption Developing family and social support for adoption decision	
Infancy	Taking on the identity as adoptive parents Finding appropriate role models and developing realistic expectations regarding adoption Integrating the child into the family and fostering secure attachment Exploring thoughts and feeling about the child's birth family	
Toddlerhood and Pre-schools years	Beginning the telling process Coping with anxiety and uncertainty regarding the telling process Creating a family atmosphere conducive to open adoption communication	Learning one's adoption story Questioning parents about adoption
Middle childhood	Helping children master the meaning of adoption Helping children cope to adoption related loss Validating the child connection to both adoptive and biological family Fostering a positive view of the birth family Maintaining open communication about adoption	Mastering the meaning of adoption Coping with adoption loss Exploring thoughts and feelings about birth parents and the relinquishment Coping with stigma associated with being adopted Maintaining open communication with parents about adoption Validating one's dual connection to two families
Adolescence	Helping the adolescent coping with ongoing adoption related loss Fostering positive view of the birth family Supporting the teenager's search interests and plans Helping the adolescent develop realistic expectations regarding searching Maintaining open communication about adoption	Integrating adoption into a stable and secure identity Coping with adoption loss Exploring thoughts and feelings about birth family and birth heritage Exploring feelings about the search process Maintaining open communication with parents about adoption

2.7 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter was aimed at fulfilling three main purposes: a) contextualising the adoption practice from a sociological and anthropological point of view; b) retracing the principal trends in the adoption research; c) exploring the main issues encountered by adoptive families across the family life cycle.

As regards the first point, it was illustrated that the adoptive practice has always existed, in all places and times, assuming different means and goals according to the culture of reference. In particular it was discussed how culture can convey a positive or a negative representation of the adoptive practice, influencing the degree of stigmatisation of these families. Nowadays, in Western countries, as a consequence of living in a society which attributes great importance to blood ties, the adoption filiation is still considered as “inferior” to the biological one (Neuburger, 2015).

Concerning the second point, by reviewing the main studies focused on the adoptive families, it was observed how the research in the field of adoption has profoundly changed in its goals and purposes over time: while the first trends of studies were conducted in a comparative perspective (by identifying differences between adopted children and non-adopted children), the contemporary research focuses its attention on the specificities of the adoption experience.

Finally, in the third part of this chapter the adoptive family life cycle was analysed, describing the main challenges and tasks encountered by both adopters and adoptees. This theory represents the theoretical framework of this thesis. This theory shows that for both adoptive parents and their children encounter specific stressors which require the development of specific tasks during the family life cycle. Despite these challenges, research and clinical evidence show that several elements connected to parents, children and their relationship's characteristics can moderate the effects of these stressors.

Chapter 3

REVIEW OF STUDIES ON SAME-SEX ADOPTIVE FAMILIES²⁵

Same-sex adoptive families represent a new family form which is growing rapidly, but is still understudied and marginalised (Gates & Ost, 2003; Kreider, 2003).

In fact, despite the considerable number of studies on same-sex families that emerged during the last decades (for a review see: Tasker & Patterson 2007; Manning et al. 2014), very little research focused on sexual minorities families who chose adoption as a pathway to parenthood (Schneider & Vecho, 2015). Especially in the European context, the situation of same-sex adoptive families has hardly been investigated (Messina & D'Amore, 2018).

This scarcity of studies is due to the fact that same-sex adoption is a fairly new phenomenon, as a consequence of the only recent legislation allowing same-sex couples to adopt. Furthermore, the number of same-sex adoptive families is still limited, which makes their recruitment very difficult (Schneider & Vecho, 2015).

This chapter aims to analyse the main studies that focused specifically on same-sex adoptive families. As our study is about the experiences of both adopted children and same-sex parents, the literature will be analysed by grouping the studies in two main fields of interest: studies focused on same-sex adoptive parents and studies focused on adopted children.

²⁵ Parts of this chapter are adapted from:
Messina R. (2018) Same-sex adoption: what we know and what we need to know. A literature review. Manuscript in preparation.

3.1 RESEARCH INTO SAME-SEX ADOPTIVE PARENTS

The studies that focused on same-sex adoptive parents had different objectives. Some studies aimed to assess parental skills and family functioning variables involved in the good development of adopted children. Other studies investigated the reasons related to the choice of adoption as a pathway to parenthood, and the challenges encountered by sexual minorities on the journey to adoption. In this section we will therefore analyse the main results from these studies, with the purpose of drawing some conclusions concerning both family variables and parent experiences in same-sex adoptive families.

3.1.1 Family functioning variables: parenting styles, co-parenting, parenting stress, dyadic adjustment, parent-child bonding

Many studies explored family variables among same-sex adoptive parents, showing no or little difference with regard to adopters' sexual orientation.

Several studies (Leung, Erich & Kanenberg, 2005, Erich Kanenberg, Case, Allen, & Bogdanos, 2009; Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010) showed that adoptive parents' sexual orientation had no negative effects on family functioning. More precisely, in these studies, LG adoptive parents reported similar levels of parenting stress, parenting discipline and relationship adjustment compared to opposite-sex adoptive parents. In a similar line of inquiry, a research conducted by Golombok, Mellish, Jennings, Casey, Tasker and Lamb (2014) indicated even more positive parental well-being and parenting in gay father families compared to heterosexual parent families. An exception emerged from the study conducted by Averet, Nalavany and Ryan (2009) in which gay and lesbian parents demonstrated significantly lower levels of family functioning compared to opposite-sex parents.

A study by Ryan (2007) in a group of 94 gay and lesbian adoptive parents (with children aged between 5 and 9 years) specifically examined one indicator of family functioning: the parenting style. Results revealed that gay and lesbian adoptive parents in this sample were included in the desirable range of the parenting scale.

Another indicator of family functioning is co-parenting, which was specifically assessed in the research by Farr & Patterson (2013). Analysis showed that lesbian and gay couples shared the child's care more equally than heterosexual couples, who, in turn, reported more specialisation (i.e., mothers did more child care than fathers). These findings were confirmed by observations during a family play session, in which lesbian and gay parents participated more equally than heterosexual parents. Furthermore, during family interaction, lesbian couples showed the most supportive and least undermining behaviour, whereas gay couples showed the least supportive behaviour, and heterosexual couples the most undermining behaviour.

A research by Bennet (2003) investigated parent-child bonding. This author studied the parental perceptions of parent-child bonding hierarchies by using semi-structured interviews with a group of 30 lesbian adoptive mothers (with adopted children aged 1,5 to 6 years). According to participants' reports, all children developed attachment to both mothers, but 12 of the 15 children had primary bonds to one mother despite shared parenting and labour between the partners. Analyses also revealed that there was no significant relationship between primary parenting and parental legal status.

Another qualitative study by Goldberg, Moyer and Kinkler (2013) also analysed the perceptions of bonding with the adopted child in a group of 90 lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents. Participants were interviewed two years after adoptive placement, and they were asked to describe their initial post placement bonding, changes in bonding over time, and their current parent- child bond. Analyses allowed to identify three main kinds of bonding described by parents: a strong and stable bond with their child beginning at the time of placement; slow initial bonding with their child followed by a gradual strengthening of the bond over time; and a waning emotional connection to their children over time. One of the most notable findings of this study is that no differences were found in bonding patterns based on adoptive parents' gender and sexual orientation.

In summary, these studies indicate that same-sex couples have high levels in several family functioning variables. In fact, they were found to have good parenting styles and

the capacity to establish warm and strong bonds with their children. A difference identified in these couples is that they tend to share the child's care more equally than opposite-sex couples do.

3.1.2 Reasons why sexual minorities choose adoption

Sexual minorities have been found to choose adoption for reasons some of which are similar to and some of which differ from the reasons of heterosexual people to adopt (Jennings, Mellish, Tasker, Lamb & Golombok, 2014). More specifically, most of heterosexual couples choose adoption as their last resort, after experiencing infertility and in order to end the stress of trying to conceive (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003). On the contrary, for most same-sex parents, and mainly gay parents, adoption is a first choice, without having previously desired a biological child (Jennish et al. 2014).

Reasons for sexual minorities to choose adoption have been investigated in a study of Jennish and colleagues (2014) using a sample consisting of 41 gay, 40 lesbian, and 49 heterosexual adoptive parents. Through the use of semi structured interviews, authors identified several reasons for sexual minorities' choice to adopt. First of all, sexual minorities had a significant number of moral arguments against the alternatives to adoption. More specific, several participants raised ethical concerns about surrogacy and underlined the importance of providing a family to children in need. Secondly, these parents did not assign value to being genetically related to their children and they considered adoption a "natural" way to fulfill their aspirations to become a parent, with which they feel comfortable. Furthermore, if genetic kinship was generally perceived as stabilising among heterosexual couples, for many same-sex adopters the opposite was found to be true. This finding confirms the results of a previous study (Goldberg, Downing & Richardson, 2009) which revealed that many gay and lesbian couples considered adoption as an opportunity to gain equality to non-genetic parent-child relationships and thus greater family stability. According to Rayan and Berkowitz (2009) and to Gianino (2008), the choice of adoption can also be brought about for financial reasons, for those who cannot afford surrogacy, and by discrimination

practices (e.g. sexual minorities who choose domestic over international adoption in order to be open about their homosexuality). In summary, these studies revealed that several factors are involved in the choice of adoption as a modality of parenthood. These reasons are both similar and different to those expressed by heterosexual people.

3.1.3 Pathways to adoption

Another question investigated in literature concerned the choice of sexual minorities for which kind of pathway to adoption. In order to shed light on this aspect, a research by Farr & Patterson (2009) explored pathways to transracial adoption among 106 families headed by lesbian (n = 27), gay (n = 29), and heterosexual (n = 50) couples. Results showed that transracial adoptions occurred more often among lesbian and gay than among heterosexual couples, and they occurred more often among interracial than among same-race couples. Furthermore, lesbian and gay couples were more likely to be interracial than heterosexual couples. Transracial adoptions were also more common among those who had child-centered reasons compared to couples who had adult-centered reasons for adoption. These findings were confirmed by the study of Cody, Farr, McRoy, Ayers-Lopez and Ledesma (2016), in which 75% of the children was part of a transracial adoption, while 25% was part of a same-race adoption. In summary, these studies show that same-sex couples are more likely to choose transracial adoption than heterosexual couples. This is also due to the legal barriers that sexual minorities encounter and which reduce their range of choice.

3.1.4 The transition to same-sex adoptive parenthood: challenges and barriers

Becoming adoptive parents is generally considered a challenging life transition (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003; Mallon, 2004) that requires a great level of adjustment both individually and as a couple (Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988; Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). Even though the transition to adoptive parenthood has mainly been examined among opposite-sex couples, several studies analyzed this critical life transition among same-sex couples, suggesting that it may be even more stressful for the

latter because of the intersection of adoptive and sexual minority statuses (Goldberg, 2012; Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2007; Gross, 2012). More specifically, research evidence suggests that the transition to adoptive parenthood for sexual minorities is often characterized by two kinds of challenges: emotional conflicts and self-incertitude (Gianino, 2008; Goldberg, Downing & Sauck 2007) as well as socio-legal obstacles (Golberg, 2012; Gross, 2012; Matthews & Cramer, 2006). Regarding the first point, the literature shows that LG people who choose to adopt experience a phase of deep reflection in order to overcome introjected negative stereotypes about same-sex parenting (Gianino, 2008). A study by Brown, Smalling, Groza, and Ryan (2009) of 182 LG adoptive parents living in the United States showed that parents in the sample reported that they struggled with multiple personal doubts and had to overcome the belief that their homosexuality prevented them from being parents. Based on their experiences, these parents reported the need to gain confidence to be good parents. The tone of their narratives also suggested internalized homophobia and self-imposed biases. Gianino (2008) showed similar results through his qualitative research with eight gay male couples on the transition to adoptive parenthood. Thematic analyses revealed that in the pre-adoptive period, gay men confronted the task of defeating negative introjected stereotypes concerning same-sex parenting. After adoption placements, gay adoptive parents experienced a shift in identity from being gay and childless to being gay and a parent. Analyses showed that this phase of self-doubts was especially challenging for participants in the sample because, as gay men, they must deal with both negative attitudes toward same-sex parenting and with negative attitudes based on their gender as men and parents (Gianino, 2008). In terms of institutional barriers, data on the experiences of LG adoptive parents living in the United States show that the adoption process for same-sex couples is an obstacle course marked by unique and additional challenges compared with those encountered by opposite-sex couples who choose this route to parenthood (Goldberg, 2012). When living in countries that prohibit same-sex adoption, parents have to face the difficult choice of deciding who will be the legal parent and adopt as a single parent, whereas the non-legal parent hides during the

adoption process (Appel, 2003; Gianino, 2008; Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck 2007). This procedure can cause distress for non-legal parents because of their invisibility, isolation, and lack of legal relationship with their child (Goldberg, 2012). When, in the best cases, the prospective parents live in countries that allow same-sex couples to adopt, the first step in the journey to adoption is to find inclusive and gay-friendly adoption agencies (Goldberg, 2012). Some researchers showed that LG people experience prejudice, discrimination, and stigma associated with their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) status in working with adoption agencies and social workers (Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2012). An additional unique roadblock LG people encountered during the adoption process is the discrimination and resistance of some birth parents to placing their child with same-sex couples (Downs & James, 2006). As pointed out by Goldberg (2012), many gay male adoptive parents in the United States faced negative experiences with adoption agencies on a continuum: from extreme and overt forms of heterosexism (such as rejection of gay men as potential clients) to less direct forms (such as classes and paperwork that ignored the unique experience of same-sex couples together with a lack of knowledge of state laws regarding same-sex adoption). A national survey on adoption agencies' perspectives on LG prospective parents (Brodzinsky, Patterson, & Vaziri, 2002) showed that placement of children with LG people considerably varied depending on the agency's affiliation and the type of adoption program. More precisely, non-religious-affiliated agencies focusing on special needs adoptions were more likely to accept applications from LG candidates than agencies supporting catholic beliefs and focusing on international adoptions (Brodzinsky et al., 2002).

Several American studies have specifically addressed the socio-institutional barriers faced by sexual minorities through the adoption process from the perspective of same-sex couples themselves. Brooks and Goldberg (2001) examined perceived adoption barriers by lesbians and gay men through focus groups with a small group (N=11) of current and prospective adoptive and foster parents. Findings showed that one of the greatest obstacles for sexual minorities was being confronted with negative beliefs and

attitudes from the professionals in charge, who were questioning LG applicants' parenting capacities.

A research by Matthews and Cramer (2006) explored barriers experienced by 16 gay male adoptive parents. Based on their reports, gay men were discouraged by social workers to be open about their sexual orientation at the preplacement stage. They also felt pressured by adoption agencies to adopt children who were older or had special needs. Challenges encountered by lesbian couples seeking to adopt were examined by Goldberg et al. (2007) in a study with 70 women. Results indicated that the transition to adoptive parenthood of lesbians in the sample was marked by great tension between legal barriers and their own desire for openness about sexual orientation. More encouraging findings came from a quantitative study by Ryan and Whitlock (2007) with 96 lesbian adoptive parents. Data from this survey showed that the adoption experience of this sample of lesbians was positive. They particularly reported a high level of satisfaction with social workers' inclusion in the setting of goals. They were also very satisfied with the responsiveness of social workers to their questions and concerns concerning adoption issues.

In summary, the studies conducted in the US suggest that same-sex couples encounter additional roadblocks on their journey to adoption. The intensity of these challenges is variable and highly depends on the approach of adoption agencies. These elements suggest that sexual minorities still encounter discrimination during the adoption process and that these elements can represent strong stress factors for them.

3.2 RESEARCH ON CHILDREN ADOPTED BY SAME-SEX COUPLES

The studies that focused on adopted children were aimed to investigate and verify their healthy development in such households. Concretely, these studies attempted to give some answers to the following questions: do children adopted by same-sex parents grow well? Do same-sex households constitute an appropriate environment in which to place fragile and high-risk children?

According to a literature review conducted by Schneider & Vecho (2015), only 14 studies (and 18 publications) into the development of children adopted by gay and lesbian families have been identified. These studies were completed between 2004 and 2014. An important element to underline is that thirteen studies were conducted in the USA (for a review see: Schneider & Vecho, 2015), while only one was conducted in Europe (Golombok et al. 2014). Most of these studies were carried out using quantitative methods with the purpose of evaluating possible differences in adopted children's adjustment, according to the parents' sexual orientation. In many of these studies child adjustment was assessed by the results from questionnaires filled out by the parents, while little research explored adoptees' points of view. Since the literature review conducted by Schneider and Vecho (2015), few research has been done. The element of novelty in more recent studies is that they have started to explore adoptees' experiences from their own perspective. This kind of research however, remains sparse. In fact, to our knowledge, until today, only three studies included the direct participation of adopted children in the research to explore their life experiences via qualitative methods. In the following section the main studies aimed at the evaluation of children's adjustment in same sex adoptive families will be discussed. In our analysis we will shed light on the methodology of these studies (quantitative vs qualitative), the used source of information (e.g. parents, children, and/or teachers) and the evaluated dimensions.

3.2.1 Internalizing and externalizing behavioural problems

The main and most studied elements of children's adjustment were behavioural problems, which were investigated by comparing adoptive children according to family structure (same-sex vs opposite-sex parent families). In this body of studies, we can identify a first wave of studies, which evaluated children's development only from the parents' perspective, and a second wave of studies, which integrated the evaluation of other sources of information outside the family (e.g. the child's current teacher).

The first quantitative study on children's development in same-sex adoptive families was realised by Erich, Leung, Kindle and Carter (2005). This research compared 68

children (aged 0 to 11 years) adopted by gay or lesbian and heterosexual households via quantitative questionnaires completed by the adoptive parents. Analyses showed no differences in children's behavioural problems, adoptive family functioning and parents' perceptions of helpfulness by family support networks according to parents' sexual orientation. Furthermore, results revealed that higher levels of family functioning were found among adoptive parents who had been foster parents before and whose children had had previous placements prior to the adoption by this family. On the other hand, lower levels of family functioning showed to be associated with children who had mental health diagnoses, learning disorders (or other handicapping conditions) and with children who were in a higher grade in school.

Similar findings came from a quantitative research by Averett and al. (2009) who compared emotional and behavioural problems between children aged 1.5 to 5 years ($n = 380$) and 6 to 18 years ($n = 1,004$) with gay and lesbian or heterosexual adoptive parents. Questionnaires, completed by the parents, were analysed with the purpose of assessing the association between the dependent variables (child internalizing and externalizing behaviour) and the adoptive parents' sexual orientation (gay and lesbian or heterosexual) while controlling for child age, child sex, pre-adoptive maltreatment, co-sibling adoption, adoption preparation, family income, and family functioning. Results from the CBCL showed that child behaviour was not related to adoptive parents' sexual orientation. Results also indicated that, regardless of sexual orientation, adoptive parents are likely to encounter similar challenges in terms of risk factors for child behavioural problems.

Another study (Lavner et al. 2012) compared behavioural problems at 2, 12, and 24 months' post placement of 82 high-risk children adopted from foster care in heterosexual and same-sex households. Results from the CBCL, completed by the parents, showed no significant differences in the scores with regard to parents' sexual orientation. However, detailed analysis of the means revealed that children in same-sex adoptive households demonstrated a higher increase of both internalizing and externalizing problems at 24 months post placement compared to children in opposite-

sex headed families. Some differences according to family structure were also demonstrated in the research by Tan and Baggerly, (2009). These authors compared the behavioural adjustment of 93 Chinese girls adopted by three types of households: single mothers (31 girls), lesbian couples (31 girls) and heterosexual couples (31 girls). The girls in the three types of families were matched by age at the time of adoption, age at the time of assessment, and number of adoptive siblings. Behavioural adjustment (i.e., internalizing problems, externalizing problems, and overall behavioural problems) was measured by using The Child Behavior Checklist. Findings illustrated that children from the three types of families differed statistically in the preschool-aged group's internalizing problems and in the school-aged group's externalizing problems. More specifically, in pre-school years, children of same-sex families showed more internalizing problems; in school years, higher levels of externalizing problems were demonstrated among lesbians' children, compared to the other family groups.

Despite the contribution of this first wave of studies, they did have some limits which makes the generalisability of the results questionable. Firstly, the recruitment of families was done using non-systematic means (e.g., solicitations at lesbian and gay support groups). Secondly, these studies did not include information from sources outside the adoptive families (e.g., no data was collected from teachers). Thirdly, the adopted children recruited for these studies varied widely in age (i.e., from less than a year old to over 10 years old) and represented a variety of adoption experiences (e.g., public versus private adoptions, domestic versus international adoptions, etc.).

The first systematic research into the outcome of children adopted by same-sex parents was conducted by Farr and Patterson (2010). These authors investigated child development by having both the adoptive parents and the child's current teacher fill out the questionnaire. Results from parents and teachers questionnaires demonstrated that, on average, children were developing in typical ways. Furthermore, analysis showed that positive outcomes for parents and children in adoptive families are clearly more related to family process variables than they are to family structure. In comparison, parental sexual orientation proved to be unrelated to children's adjustment.

These results were confirmed by the study of Farr and Patterson (2013) who assessed child outcomes in relation to co-parenting, using a multimethod design among 104 adoptive families headed by lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples. Adopted children's teachers also participated in the study by completing the CBCL - Teacher report form. Findings showed that supportive co-parenting was associated with better child adjustment. More precisely, externalizing problems were found to be associated with couples' satisfaction (parents who reported less satisfaction described their children as having more externalizing behaviour). Moreover, it appeared that aspects of both supportive and undermining co-parenting were relevant to children's externalizing behaviour.

Some differences in favour of same-sex households were moreover revealed in the only study conducted in the European context (Golombok et al., 2014). Authors analysed child adjustment in a group of 130 gay, lesbian and heterosexual parent families (with an adopted child aged 3–9 years), by using standardised interviews with adoptive parents as well as observational measures of parent-child interaction. In order to obtain scores of externalizing and internalizing problems among adopted children, the primary parent and the child's teacher were requested to fill out the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1994, 1997). Analyses showed that family process variables (particularly parenting stress), rather than family type were found to be predictive of children's externalizing problems. Furthermore, findings indicated a better adjustment among children adopted by same-sex parents, while children in heterosexual families reported greater externalizing problems.

This result has been confirmed by a recent research (Goldberg & Smith, 2016) using a sample of 106 lesbian, gay and heterosexual adoptive families. It showed that children of both women and gay parents demonstrated lower levels of externalizing symptoms compared to children in heterosexual households.

In summary, the above mentioned studies enable us to draw the following conclusions: a) there are no or few differences in the behavioural problems manifested by adopted children according to their family structure (same-sex headed families vs heterosexual

families); b) when some differences are noted, children of same-sex parents show a better adjustment compared to children in opposite-sex families; c) family process variables (such as communication, parenting style, dyadic adjustment, couple satisfaction etc.) are more associated with children's externalized and internalized problems than family structure (same-sex households vs opposite-sex households) is.

3.2.2 Gender-typed playing

Gender-typed play has hardly been explored among children adopted by same-sex parents. The first research conducted to this end (Farr et al., 2010) investigated the gender-typed playing behaviour of preschool-aged children (mean age = 3 years) in 27 lesbian, 29 gay, and 50 heterosexual-parent families. Authors used the Preschoolers' Activities Inventory (Golombok & Rust, 1993), a parent-report questionnaire which analyses three main areas: toys (7 items; e.g. "Guns or objects used as guns," "Tea set"), activities (11 items; e.g. "Sports and ball games," "taking care of babies play"), and characteristics (6 items; e.g., "Enjoys rough and tumble play," "Likes pretty things"). Analyses showed no significant differences in gender-typed playing behaviour in relation to family structure: most boys exhibited typical behaviour to other boys their age, and most girls exhibited behaviour typical to other girls their age. Even if no significant differences were found, a detailed inspection of means showed that girls in lesbian households manifested more masculine gender-typed playing behaviour than girls in gay and heterosexual households and that boys raised by gay parents show more masculine gender-typed playing behaviour than girls in gay and heterosexual households. Despite the contribution of this pioneering study, it was limited by the fact that children varied widely in age (1–5) and that some also had siblings, some of which older, which is known to influence child gender development (Rust et al. 2000).

A more systematic research (Goldberg & Smith, 2013) examined whether the gender-typed play of young children varies as a result of family structure, in a sample of 126 couples (44 lesbian couples, 34 gay male couples, and 48 heterosexual couples) with an adopted child between the age of 2 and 4 years (mean = 2.5 years). Results from the

Preschoolers' Activities Inventory (Golombok & Rust 1993), revealed that the playing behaviour demonstrated by boys and girls in same-gender parent families were less gender-stereotyped than the playing behaviour demonstrated by boys and girls in heterosexual-parent families. Findings also showed a difference in gender by family type: boys to lesbian mothers were less masculine in their playing behaviour than boys of gay fathers and of heterosexual parents.

In summary, these two studies revealed some differences in gender-typed playing according to family structure. However, these differences were only significant in one research and not in the other.

3.2.3 Attachment

Attachment among adoptees was studied by Erich, Kanenberg, Case, Allen and Bogdanos (2009) in a group of 154 adoptive families with gay/lesbian and straight adoptive parents (154 parent respondents and 1 randomly chosen adolescent from each family). Attachment was evaluated among early (12–15) and late (16–19) adopted adolescents in order to evaluate differences in attachment to adoptive parents during early adolescence and late adolescence. Findings revealed that early adopted adolescents' attachment to parents was significantly stronger than late adolescents' attachment to parents. No significant differences were found in early and late adopted adolescents' attachment according to the sexual orientation of the parents. Another study by Erich, Hall, Kanenberg, & Case (2009) investigated the factors affecting the attachment of adolescents in a sample composed of 143 adoptive parents (27 gays and lesbians, 106 heterosexuals) and of 206 adoptees (34 adopted by LG parents, 172 adopted by heterosexual parents) aged from 11 to 19 years. Quantitative questionnaires were completed both by adoptive parents and adoptees. Results showed that attachment of adolescents to parents was related to many factors: the adolescents' life satisfaction, the level of relationship satisfaction the parents have with their adopted child, the number of placements prior to adoption, and the adolescent's current age. More precisely, adolescents' life satisfaction was an indicator of youth well-being and was

also found to have a significant relationship with parent level of relationship satisfaction with their adopted child. Moreover, findings indicated that the parents' level of relationship satisfaction with their adopted child was related to parent life satisfaction. The variable child's age at adoption was found to have a significant relationship with parent life satisfaction, parents' level of relationship satisfaction with their adopted child and number of placements prior to adoption. As regards the sexual orientation of parents, it was not found to be a significant predictor of the attachment of adolescents to their parents.

In summary, these studies suggest that there are no differences in adoptee 'attachment style according to family structure.

3.2.4 Cognitive development

Adopted children's cognitive development was measured in a research by Lavner, Waterman and Peplau (2012). This study compared the cognitive development at 2, 12, and 24 months post placement of 82 high-risk children adopted from foster care in heterosexual and same-sex households. Results revealed that children's cognitive development improved significantly in both households' types. Analyses also showed higher gains in cognitive development among children adopted by same-sex parents at 24 months post placement, despite the fact that these children demonstrated higher levels of biological and environmental risks prior to adoptive placement. These findings show that family structure does not impact children's cognitive development negatively.

3.2.5 Disclosure practices

Although the abovementioned quantitative studies have the merit to give a precise measurement of child adjustment, in most cases they have the limitation that child adjustment is only evaluated according to the parents' and teachers' (if any) point of view. As a consequence, we have a significant lack of data on the strengths and issues experienced by adopted children in such households, from the perspective of adoptees themselves. The first study that gave the floor to adoptees directly was conducted by

Gianino, Goldberg and Lewis (2009). By interviewing a group of 14 multicultural adolescents (from 13 to 20 years old) adopted by lesbian and gay parents face to face or by telephone, these authors examined the way in which they disclosed their parents' sexual orientation and their adoptive status, within groups of friends and at school. Findings showed that adoptees in the sample were exposed to a "double visibility" by society connected to being both transracially adopted and raised by same-sex parents. Adolescents showed several disclosure practices: some of them preferred not telling anyone about their parents' sexual orientation; some participants reported that they were "forced" to come out; some others showed a more open disclosure. Despite this variety in disclosure practices, participants have in common that they are more at ease talking about their adoptive status than they are talking about their parents' sexual orientation. Several adolescents in the sample demonstrated anxiety and apprehension when "coming out" about their family structure, even when they received positive reactions from their environment. More specifically, according to participants' narratives, early adolescence years presented the greatest challenges in telling people about their parents' homosexuality. At this stage, several participants experienced the wish to have a "normal family", which is followed by the attempt to hide their family structure. Adoptees also experienced a great fear of being labelled as gay based on their parents' sexual orientation, as well as an intense concern of not being accepted by their peers. By later adolescence these feelings seem less intense, and adoptees were more able to select and maintain a group of supportive friends.

In summary, this study suggests that sharing parents' homosexuality with peers represents a challenging and stressing event for adopted children. Pre-adolescence years, in particular, seems to be the period in which adoptees experience a higher level of stress related to disclosure practices.

3.2.6 Feeling of "difference" and micro-aggressions

Another study (Farr, Crain, Oakley, Cashen & Garber, 2015) examined the experiences of a group of 49 adopted children varying in age from 6 to 11 years (mean age= 8,1)

with sexual minority parents. Themes emerged from semi-structured interviews showed that the majority of children in the sample experienced feelings of difference regardless of their same-sex families. However, these feelings were demonstrated with a neutral mode of emotion and were described as medium as regards intensity. More precisely, feelings of difference were related to several elements: discomfort in telling others about having same-sex parents; the need to feel secure before sharing their family structure with peers; internalized stigma which lead them to have negative feelings about their family on the basis of their parents' sexual orientation, as well as the fear of being rejected. Furthermore, more than half of the children interviewed reported microaggressions related to their parents' sexual orientation. Microaggressions, most commonly on the basis of heterosexism, were manifested as microinvalidations, microinsults, and occasionally more overt microassaults. Children in the sample encountered high levels of intensity of teasing and bullying, as well as of situations in which others questioned the authenticity and legitimacy of the children's family on the basis of having same-sex parents. Participants also talked about the fact that they find themselves being put on the spot about their family and experienced discomfort when details of their family were made public in school or in other social situations.

Despite the numerous challenges encountered by adoptees in the sample, they were found to be capable of navigating through the feelings of difference with great resilience and positive conceptualisation of the family. More precisely, older children reported higher levels of resilience and positive feelings regarding their family than younger children did.

The findings of this study were confirmed by a more recent research (Cody et al., 2016). This research analysed the experiences of a group of 24 adoptees between 13 to 28 years of age (mean age= 16.13) through focus-groups. Results revealed that the hardest aspect of being adopted by same-sex parents was to be teased and bullied by peers and the experience of feeling "different" because of their parents' sexual orientation. Many participants demonstrated several strategies for sharing or not sharing their family structure with others. Some participants also indicated the difficulty to talk about

gender-specific concerns without having a same gender role model in the family. According to adoptees, the positive aspects of being adopted by same-sex parents consisted in being more compassionate, accepting and tolerant toward people.

In summary, these studies suggest that some of the toughest challenges encountered by children adopted by same-sex parents consist in dealing with microaggressions, bullying and teasing. These elements are often connected with feeling different due to both their own adoptive identity and to their family's sexual minority status. These adoptees are however capable of addressing resources in order to face these unpleasant events with resilience.

3.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter had the purpose of providing a literature review on same-sex adoptive families. We illustrated and discussed the main studies focusing on same-sex parents and adopted children, in order to have an idea of what we know and what we need to know about this topic on the basis of existing literature.

As regards the parents, the above mentioned studies allowed to draw the following conclusions:

- a) Lesbian and gay adults are capable adoptive parents;
- b) Same-sex households have solid and healthy family functioning, demonstrating an appropriate environment in which to place an adopted child;
- c) Same-sex parents encounter additional challenges connected with heterosexism and discrimination on the road to adoption;
- d) Sexual minorities' reasons for choosing adoption are quite different from those indicated by heterosexual adopters. More specifically, among same-sex couples, adoption is often the first choice, while among opposite-sex adopters it often represents the last resort, after experiencing infertility.

As regards the children, the literature review bore out two main messages:

a) Results from quantitative studies show a clearly positive balance, revealing no negative effects of parents' sexual orientation on adopted children's well-being. These studies emphasised a "no-difference approach" (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001), in adoptees' adjustment according to family structure and sometimes highlighted an even better adjustment in children adopted in same-sex households than in those adopted by heterosexual families.

b) On the other hand, qualitative studies suggest that children adopted by same-sex parents are confronted with specific issues and additional challenges related to the overlap of both adoptive and minority statuses. More precisely, these children deal with the challenges of being teased and bullied, which lead them to feel different and the desire to hide their family structure.

According to our literature review, several elements remain unexplored and need to be investigated further in future research.

Firstly, it is necessary to improve the research on same-sex adoptive families living in Europe. Most of the existing studies have in fact been done in the US, while very few literature exists about these new families on the European continent. More precisely, until today we do not know how European same-sex parents experience their transition to parenthood, what challenges they encounter during the adoption procedure and what their experiences and needs are after adoption.

Secondly, is it crucial to increase the scientific knowledge of the experiences of adoptees being adopted in a same-sex family from their perspectives.

As detailed in this chapter, very few studies exist giving the floor directly to adopted children. It is particularly important, to investigate the extent of the challenges related to growing up in a same-sex family, the way in which adoptees deal with these challenges, and how they integrate these elements in their emerging identity.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 OBJECTIVES

As detailed in chapter 3, despite the growing literature on same-sex families, research focusing specifically on families choosing adoption as a modality of filiation is still sparse (Shneider & Vecchio 2015). More precisely, the literature review underlined two main points: a) while there is a growing body of studies in US, there is only little data on same-sex adoptive families living in Europe; b) there is a dearth of studies exploring the perspectives of youngsters, after being adopted by same-sex parents.

In order to fill these gaps in literature, this study was devised with the purpose of increasing the scientific knowledge on this new family form in Europe, taking both the parents' and adoptees' point of view into account. More specifically, the present research had 3 main goals:

- 1) Exploring the experiences of gay and lesbian parents before, during and after adoption (study 1);
- 2) Studying the identity construction process of children adopted by same-sex parents during 4 stages of their development: early childhood, middle childhood, pre-adolescence, adolescence (study 2);
- 3) Investigating the family communication concerning the child's double family connection (birth family and adoptive family) and the role that the past has in the current family dynamics (study 3).

These goals led to the production of three scientific articles which will be partially presented in the section of results. In each article the specific goals, hypotheses and research questions will be illustrated in detail. In this chapter, we will however provide a general description of the methodology of our research and the details of the used measures in each study.

4.2 THE SAMPLE

The whole sample consisted of 31 LG adoptive families (N=62 same-sex parents, 44 adopted children) (table 3): 13 from France (12 gay families, 1 lesbian family), 7 from Belgium (7 gay families), 22 from Spain (4 gay families and 7 lesbian families). Parents' age ranged from 33 to 56 (mean age= 43,2), adoptees' age ranged from 3 to 18 years old (mean age= 7.5). Even if the sample is the same in all three studies, we focused our analysis only on a part of the whole sample in each of them (for more details see table 4). The inclusion criteria for participation consisted in being a same-sex adoptive family with the following characteristics: married or cohabitant adoptive parents with one or more adopted children in a stable placement, and that the children did not have any type of contact with their birth family.

For the participants in this research, the road to form an adopted family were variegated and different according to the legal barriers imposed on them by each country of residence (Table 4).

All Belgian couples were married and adopted their children through national, full-joint adoption. All French participants were involved in a relationship, but they had to adopt internationally as "single parents" due to the fact that the law prohibited adoption procedures for the LG community before 2013. Most French couples participating in this study sealed their union by a contractual form of civil union (1 couple) or by marriage (8 couples) after the approval of the law that allowed marriage and adoption for LG people in 2013. In these cases, the "social parent" became the second "legal parent" of the children through a step-child adoption. The remaining 4 couples continued to live together without legal recognition of their union.

Among the Spanish participants, 8 couples were married, and 3 lived together without legal recognitions of their union. Two couples adopted their child jointly through national adoption after an initial phase as a foster family, 2 couples were permanent foster families waiting to adopt their children officially. We included two permanent foster families in the sample because their situation was equivalent to that of adoptive ones: children did not have contact with their birth families and their permanence in the

foster family was irrevocable as the parents were awaiting the legal endorsement to officially adopt the child. Finally the remaining 7 couples chose to adopt their children via international adoption as single parents. Among these couples, only 3 couples completed the adoption by recognising the social parent as a legal parent, while the other 4 preferred to not legalise the situation of the social parent in order to avoid possible legal repercussions with the child's country of origin.

Table 4 : Socio-demographic characteristics

	Parents' gender and age	Relational status	N adopted children	Child's gender and age	Child's age (at adoption)	Type of adoption	Child's country of origin	Country of residence
FAM 1	M+M (38 and 37)	A*	2 (siblings)	M (3.6 y) M (3.6 y)	1.5 y	1*	Belgium	Belgium
FAM 2	M+M (40 and 38)	A	1	M (3.3 y)	3 mo	1	Belgium	Belgium
FAM 3	M+M (33 and 38)	A	1	M (4.5 y)	3 mo	1	Belgium	Belgium
FAM 4	M+M (34 and 38)	A	1	M (3.6 y)	5 mo	1	Belgium	Belgium
FAM 5	M+M (40 and 45)	A	1	M (3 y)	4 mo	1	Belgium	Belgium
FAM 6	M+M (50 and 38)	A	1	F (7 y)	2 mo	1	Belgium	Belgium
FAM 7	M+M (39 and 41)	A	1	M (5 y)	2 mo	1	Belgium	Belgium
FAM 8	M+M (44 and 40)	B*	1	M (10.6 y)	4y	2*	Haiti	France
FAM 9	M+M (41 and 48)	B	2	M (7.6 y) F (3 y)	6 mo 1.5 y	2	Ivory Coast	France
FAM 10	M+M (41 and 43)	C*	2	M (3. 6 y) M (4. 6 y)	2. 6 y 11 mo	2	South Africa Haiti	France
FAM 11	M+M (43 and 45)	B	2	M (8 y) F (3.6 y)	3 y 3 y	2	Central African Republic	France
FAM 12	M+M (38 and 36)	A	2	M (6.6 y) M (3 y)	1.6 y 3 mo	2	Guinée Haiti	France
FAM 13	F+F (48 and 44)	A	2	M (8 y) M (5. 6 y)	2 y 2 y	2	Guinea	France
FAM 14	M+M (39 and 35 years)	A	1	M (8 y)	5. 6 y	2	South Africa	France
FAM 15	M+M (48 and 39)	B	1	F (7 y)	3. 1 y	2	Haitii	France
FAM 16	M+M (45 and 47)	A	3 (siblings)	F (11 y) F (12.11 y)	7 y 9 y	2	Brasil	France

				M (14 y)	10 y			
FAM 17	M+M (41 and 39)	A	1	M (10. 4y)	3. 6 y	2	Haiti	France
FAM 18	M+M (56 and 54)	A	1	M (18 y)	2mo	2	Ivory Coast	France
FAM 19	M+M (45 and 37)	A	1	M (5,1 y)	2 y	2	Guinea	France
FAM 20	M+M (42 and 47)	A	1	M (8. 6 y)	2.6 y	2	Haiti	France
FAM 21	M+M (51 and 52)	A	1	M (13,4y)	4 y	3 *	Spain	Spain
FAM 22	M+M (33 and 44)	A	2	M (3 y) M (5,2 y)	1 y 3 y	4*	Spain	Spain
FAM 23	F+F (49 and 41)	B	1	F (9 y)	1.5 y	2	Ethiopia	Spain
FAM 24	F+F (54 and 44)	A	1	M (8)	1.4 y	3	Spain	Spain
FAM 25	M+M (43 and 43)	A	2	M (11 y) M (5.5y)	4 y 4.6 y	4	Spain	Spain
FAM 26	F+F (48 and 53)	A	1	M (8 y)	4 y	2	Honduras	Spain
FAM 27	F+F (47 and 47)	A	2	M (18 y) M (12 y)	6 y 4.6 y	2	Brazil Ethiopia	Spain
FAM 28	F+F (46 and 39)	B	2	M (4 y) M (3 y)	1 y 4 mo	2	Mali Spain	Spain
29	F+F (47 and 44)	B	2	M (6 y) M (3 y)	2.4 y 5 mo	2	Spain	Spain
FAM 30	F+F (47 and 48)	A	1	F (16 y)	11 y	2	Brazil	Spain
FAM 31	M+M (43 and 44)	A	1	M (13,4 y)	2 y	2	Russia	Spain

Notes

*Types of adoption: 1= National full joint adoption; 2= International single parent adoption (being in couple); 3= National full joint adoption (after a period as foster family); 4=Permanent Foster family waiting to adopt officially their child.
Relational status : A= Married ; B= Living together ; C= Civil union.*

4.3 RECRUITMENT

The participants were recruited via adoption agencies (ONE adoption in Belgium, Vivre en Famille in France, CORA Coordinadora de Asociaciones en Defensa de la Adopción y el Acogimiento in Spain) and LGBT associations (Homoparentalité in Belgium, APGL- Association des Parents et Futurs Parents Gays et lesbiennes in France, Galehi and Fundacion Triangulo in Spain) who sent an invitation letter to all families with the description of the study. Participants were sent to the Survey Monkey website that

contained a pre- enrollment form. Parents who completed the pre-enrollment form were contacted in a few days by the researcher in order to fix an appointment.

4.4 PROCEDURE

This research was conducted with qualitative methods (interviews and graphic-projective test). The researcher visited the families at home. For each family, two interviews were conducted: one with parents and one with the adoptees. The participation of both parents was required at the same time. If there was more than 1 child in a family, we had an interview with each child. The interviews were conducted in two separate moments, thus the children were not allowed to be present during the interview with the parents and vice-versa. Such a procedure was chosen in order to allow participants to feel completely free to talk about their own feelings and experiences. The interviews were recorded on video. The interviews with the parents lasted approximately 2,5 hours, the interviews with the children lasted on average 50 minutes, depending on the amount of information provided by the participants. Participation was voluntarily, and no compensation was offered for it.

4.4.1 Semi-structured interview with the parents

The interview with parents had three main purposes: exploring the adoption experience as a gay or lesbian couple (study 1); studying the identity construction process of adopted children, according to the perspective of the parents (study 2); shedding light on the parents' feelings related to the child's birth family (study 3). To this end, a non-directive interview guide was drafted, composed of main questions and sub-questions. According to inductive approach methods, the initial questions were refined on the basis of the themes that emerged during the interviews. Since the first interviews a predominant, central theme appeared in the parents' reports: the challenges encountered during the transition to parenthood. For several participants, the interview seemed to be an opportunity to denounce the numerous barriers and stressors with which sexual minorities have to deal in order to realise their aspirations for parenthood. Thus, by

following the participants' narratives, we focused on the identification of the challenges experienced by participants as LG adoptive parents. To this end, we specifically probed for the difficulties experienced by them. For example if not mentioned spontaneously by the participants, we inquired specifically about episodes of discrimination and sexual stigma, encountered throughout their adoptive experience. Given our interest in the adoptive family life cycle theory, we explored the challenges encountered by parents in a chronological way. Participants were in fact asked to retrace the issues of the early phases of their family life cycle in a retrospective way, up until the experiences of their current life.

More precisely, the interview grid investigated the following areas:

1. The adoption project

a. *What was the decision-making process to adopt a child like? (Probe: Why did you choose adoption as a route to parenthood? What were the main challenges encountered during the decision making? What were your feelings and thoughts on that given moment?).*

2. The adoption procedure

a. *What was the adoption procedure like? (Probe: What aspects of the process have been the most difficult ones? How did you feel about social workers? Did you experience any form of discrimination because of your sexual orientation?).*

3. Daily life experiences as a same-sex adoptive family

a. *How would you describe your current experience as a same-sex adoptive family? (Probe: What are the main challenges in parenting an adopted child as LG parents?).*

b. *How would you characterise your daily environment? (Probe: Do you or your child experience any form of barriers and/or discrimination because of your family structure? What about the school environment of your child?).*

c. *How would you describe your relationships with your extended family? (Probe: Do you feel supported? Do you think that your relationship with*

your extended family changed after adoption? Did you experience any form of discrimination or homophobia within your extended family?).

4. Children's feelings about growing up in a same-sex family
 - a. What are your child's feelings about growing up in a same sex family? (Probe: What are the main questions asked by your child about this topic? Does she²⁶ ever express these themes in her drawings or play? If so, how? When your child expresses feelings and/or questions connected to your sexual minority status, how does that make you feel? And how do you respond to her?).
5. Children's relationships with peers
 - a. What about your child's relationships with friends and schoolmates? (Probe: Has your child experienced any episodes of teasing or bullying related to having sexual minority parents?).
6. Children's feelings about adoption
 - b. *What are your child's feelings about adoption? (Probe: What are her questions about being adopted? Does she ever express these themes in her drawings or play? If so, how?).*
7. Children's feelings and questions about the loss of the birth family
 - a. *Does your child ask questions about her birth family? (Probe: If so, what are her primary questions and feelings about it? Does she ever express this theme in her drawings or play? If so, how?)*
8. Adoptive parents' feelings and communication style about child's past
 - a. *When your child expresses feelings and/or questions connected to her adoption and birth family, how does that make you feel? And how do you respond to her?*

²⁶ Note, for the sake of simplicity, unless we are referring to a specific child, we will use the feminine pronoun when referring to the children.

4.4.2 Semi-structured interview with the adoptees

The interview with the adoptees had two main objectives: studying their identity construction process (study 2); exploring their feelings related to their double family connection (study 3).

More precisely, the questions that guided the interviews with children were the following:

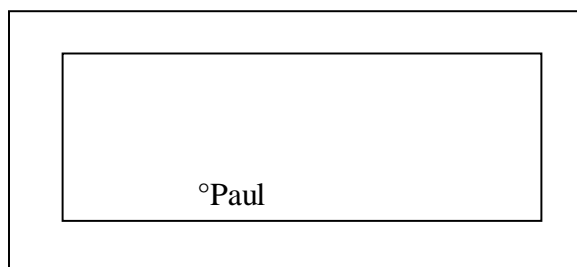
1. The family today
 - a. *What about your family? (Probe: How do you feel today about being part of your family? How would you describe your relationships with your adoptive parents and brothers/sisters (if any)?).*
2. Relationships with friends and schoolmates
 - a. *Tell me about your friends (Probe: How is school going for you? What do you like to do with friends and schoolmates? And what don't you like doing? Do they ever make comments about your adoption or about having two dads/two moms? Have you ever been bullied or treated unfairly because you are adopted or because your parents' sexual orientation?).*
3. Feelings about growing up in a same-sex family
 - a. *How do you feel about having two dads/moms? (Probe: How does having same sex parents affect you? What are the most positive and the most negative aspects of having two same-sex parents? What would you like to say to the other children adopted by same-sex parents?).*
4. Feelings and memories about adoption
 - a. *Do you remember the first time you met your adoptive parents?*
 - b. *How do you feel about being adopted? (Probe: What are the most positive and the most negative aspects of your experience?)*
5. Feelings and memories of birth family

- a. *Do you sometimes think of your life before you joined your adoptive family? (Probe: If so, what do you remember about it? Who do you think of the most and what are your feelings about him/her?).*

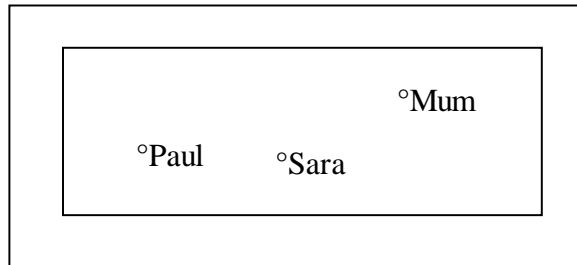
4.4.3 The Double Moon Test (Greco, 1999)

In order to complete the information gathered from the interview, we had the participants respond to the “Double Moon test” (Greco, 1999). This graphic projective instrument is designed to study “complex” family situations. In the case of an adoptive family, this test is particularly useful to explore the role of the absent or distant family member(s) (e.g. family of origin) in the present family’s interactions. The Double Moon test in particular, enables the investigation of both adopters and adoptees’ feelings related to the child’s past, and allows to shed light on the way they deal with the dimension of loss. The test material consists of a sheet of paper (presented horizontally) in which a rectangular shape is drawn. This instrument is provided with the following instructions:

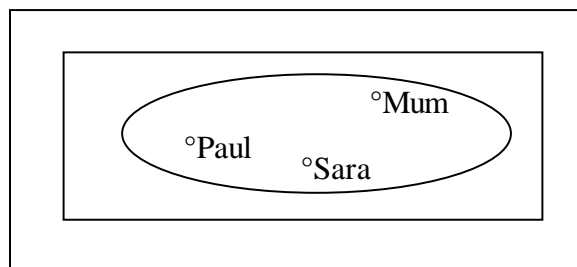
1. *“Within this rectangular field that represents your own world, the people that are important to you, the things that interest you the most – in opposition to what lies outside and represents everything else – draw a symbol representing yourself and locate your symbol wherever you wish”.*



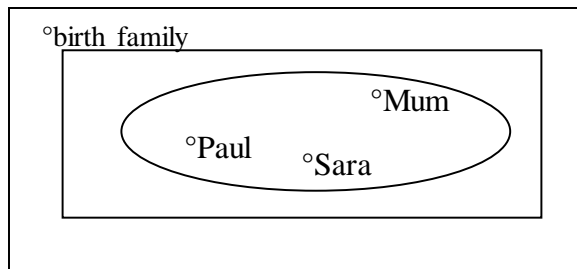
2. *“Now, still using a symbol, draw the people who are important to you and place them wherever you wish, no matter how close to you or distant from you these important people might seem at this moment”. This premise is aimed at authorising the individuals – if they so wish and are able to – to name and place those who are absent —(but still present in the imagination) in the drawing.*



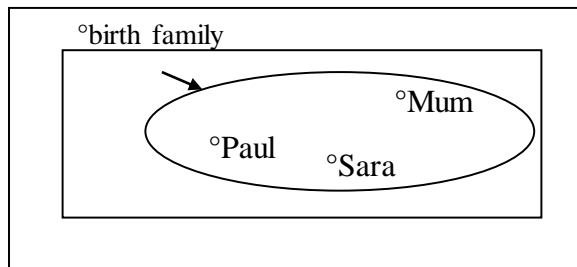
3. *“Now enclose within one circle the people who, in your opinion, belong to the same family. You can use one or more circles, the way you believe is most corresponding to you own feelings”.*



4. *“Is there anything you remember, you have heard or you have imagined about your past, that you would like to add to this drawing?” (If not reported spontaneously by the participant, the following is asked: where do you think (he/she) could be placed (child's birth family)?*



5. *“If you had a magic wand, would you change anything in your drawing? (Is there anyone you would like to add? Is there anyone you would like to move in another position? Who? Where would you like to locate him/her?)”.*



4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

4.5.1 Analyses of the interviews

Given the scarcity of literature on the experiences of LG adoptive families, participants' reports were analysed using an inductive thematic approach which enables to elicit key themes from the data and the emergence of new theories. Data analyses consisted of three phases: 1) a first analysis conducted by the author; 2) a reliability test performed by a group of independent judges; 3) a final phase of discussion and review in order to reach consensus between the other judges involved in the analysis and the author. During the first step, data were analysed by following Braun and Clarke (2006)'s model

which consists of six phases: (a) Data Familiarisation; (b) Generating Initial Codes; (c) Searching for Themes; (d) Reviewing Themes; (e) Defining and Naming Themes; (f) Producing a Report. First of all, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and then read multiple times in order to familiarize with the research material. Secondly a line-by-line analysis of each participant's transcript was conducted which allowed an initial identification of main emergent themes and relationships between them. In this phase, a first data coding system was created via a paper-pencil analysis, taking notes next to the text, and by following the "induction principle" (Guillemette & Luckerhoff, 2009), which means that the coding system emerged from the data and was not created on the basis of the existing literature. Thirdly, the codes were sorted and collected in order to create a list of the main themes and sub-themes. Then, the themes were reviewed, checking whether each of them constituted a coherent thematic pattern. This review process involved a phase of "cutting" and reorganization of the emerged themes, until a coherent map of themes and sub-themes was obtained. This phase of the research and the revision of themes was guided by the "saturation principle" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which comprises of proceeding with the creation of themes until the exhaustion of information which could constitute new themes and subsequently enrich the emerging theory. All themes and sub-themes were identified with simple, concise and effective names which gave a complete description of the research material. This first major phase of the analysis ended with the production of a research report in which the coding scheme with the main themes emerged from data analysis was illustrated through verbatim examples.

Subsequently, the second phase of the analysis consisted of a reliability test, which was performed to ensure the accuracy of the analysis. In this phase a research group composed of 7 trained coders categorised a random selection of interviews according to the coding scheme created by the author. Each coder was involved in a process of independent analysis of the same data, in order to verify the effectiveness and the accuracy of the coding scheme. In a third step, all codes and themes were reviewed and discussed for the sake of reaching consensus among coders. This last discussion allowed

the refinement, naming and specification of the final themes emerged from the analyses. Finally, the percentage of participants who reported each of the themes was calculated.

4.5.2 Analysis of the Double Moon Test

The analysis of the Double Moon Test focused on three main aspects: the graphic elements in the drawings, the verbal report and the feelings that emerged during the test. The code instruction provided by the author of this test (Greco, 1999, 2006) allows to code both parents and children's reports in two main categories: integrative and non-integrative positions.

The integrative position designates a situation in which there is an open attitude towards the past. In this case, both adoptive parents and adopted children are able to talk about birth parents and are able to give them a place in their drawing. On the contrary, in the "non-integrative" one, adoptive parents and adoptees cannot represent their birth family: parents feel anxious and threatened when talking about it, children do not feel legitimate in their curiosity about their past. As a consequence, the communication about the adoption related-losses is blocked. Although this categorisation provided by Greco (2006) proved to be useful to guide our analysis, it did not seem to describe the whole range of feelings expressed by participants during this study. Thus, based on the themes emerged from the participants' reports, we proposed a new coding scheme with new categories. For the parents, we distinguished three main positions on a continuum: 1) negation-minimisation; 2) precaution-incertitude; 3) openness-valorisation. From the children's reports four categories emerged: 1) closure-unmentionable; 2) removal-minimisation; 3) idealisation-fantasy; 4) integration-balance. All these categories, with specific examples will be illustrated in chapter 8 (study 3).

4.6 CONCLUSIONS: SAMPLE AND MEASURES USED IN EACH STUDY

In conclusion, data obtained in this research led to the production of three articles (study 1, 2, 3) which will be presented in the following chapters. Each of these studies focuses on specific objectives and uses only part of the measures and population involved in the

research. More specifically, the results of study 1 are derived from questions 1-3 of the interview grid proposed to parents. The results of study 2 are derived from questions 4-5-6-7 of the interview grid proposed to parents and from questions 1-2-3-4 of the interview with children. Furthermore, in this study we also report some examples of the Double Moon Test. Finally the results of study 3 are derived from questions 7-8 and from the Double Moon Test with both parents and children. The different samples and measures that have been used in the present thesis are summarised in the table below (table 5).

Table 5: Goal, measures and sample used in each study

	Goal	Used Measures	Population
STUDY 1	Exploring the experiences of gay and lesbian parents before, during and after adoption	-Semi- structured interviews with parents (questions 1-2-3 of the interview grid)	N=62 same-sex adoptive parents (16 L and 46 G); Mean age =43.2
STUDY 2	Studying the identity construction process of children adopted by same-sex parents during 4 stages of their development: early childhood, middle childhood, pre-adolescence, adolescence	-Interviews with parents (questions 4-5-6); -Interviews with children (questions 1-2-3-4); -Some examples of the Double Moon Test with children	N=62 same-sex adoptive parents (16 L and 46 G); Mean age =43.2 N=44 adoptees (8 girls, 36 boys); Mean age =7.5
STUDY 3	Investigating the family communication concerning the child's double family connection (birth family and adoptive family) and the role that the past has in the current family dynamics	-Interviews with parents (questions 7-8) -Interviews with children (questions 4-5) -Double Moon Test with parents -Double Moon Test with children	62 same-sex adoptive parents (16 L and 46 G); mean age =43.2 33 adoptees (5 girls, 28 boys); Mean age= 8.9

Chapter 5

SAME-SEX PARENTS EXPERIENCES BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER ADOPTION (STUDY 1)²⁷

ABSTRACT No psychological research has been done investigating the experiences of adoption by sexual minorities living in Europe. This qualitative study is the first cross-national research within the European context giving the floor to LG (lesbian and gay) adopters in order to explore their experiences before, during and after the adoption process. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 62 LG adoptive parents (16 lesbians and 46 gay men) living in Belgium (n=14), France (n=26) and Spain (n= 22). Thematic analysis revealed that while choosing to adopt, LG adoptive parents experienced numerous self-doubts and emotional conflicts driven by introjected sexual stigma. During the adoption procedure, they were confronted with a large number of barriers and legal roadblocks connected to heteronormativity. After adoption, they experienced new and specific parental tasks due to the overlap of both the adoptive and minority statuses. Analysis provides insight on the specific challenges and parental tasks experienced by LG adopters across the family life, shedding light on the great impact that the socio-legal context has on their lives. Findings underline the necessity of fighting discrimination and of improving the adoption practice in order to provide better support for LG adopters in their adoptive experience.

Keywords: *same-sex adoption, gay and lesbian parents, challenges, parental tasks, experiences*

5.1 OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

While psychological studies on the experiences of same-sex adoptive families are increasing in the United States, there are no available data in the European context at the present time. Such a lack of European studies is problematic considering that, by virtue

²⁷ Parts of this chapter have been published as:

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of living in a heterosexist society, the nature of LG adoption -including procedures, criteria, and timing- frequently varies across cultures and socio-legal contexts (Goldberg, 2012). Thus, in light of the studies conducted in the United States (for a review see chapter 3), the purpose of this research is to increase the scientific knowledge concerning the experiences of the first generation of LG parents able to adopt children in Europe. Specifically, through the use of semi-structured interviews, this work sheds light on the main challenges faced by LG adoptive parents living in Belgium, France, and Spain throughout the transition to adoptive parenthood (for more details on the socio-legal context of same sex adoption in these countries see chapter1).

From a theoretical perspective, we take the contribution of two theories into account: the adoptive family life cycle and the minority stress theory.

According to the adoptive family life cycle (Brodzinsky et al., 1998; Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Hajal & Rosenberg, 1991), we postulated that adoptive parents encounter specific challenges and parental tasks related to their adoptive status, and that these elements evolve as a consequence of the developmental stage in which the family is. Furthermore, we argue that bidirectional relations among individuals, family, and the wider social world (including historical time and place) may directly influence one's psychological experience. We hypothesized then, that legal, social, and relational context, including the way in which the adoption procedure is carried out, may play an important role in the well-being of LG adoptive parents.

Based on the minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), we postulated that stress factors—including the experience of prejudice, expectations of rejection, hiding and concealing, and internalized homophobia—are unique (not experienced by non-stigmatized populations), chronic (related to sociocultural structures), and socially based (depending on social processes, institutions, and structures).

5.2 INTERVIEWS

The interviews were constructed to study the challenges encountered by same-sex couples in a retrospective way. We focused on three key moments of the adoption experience: the decision making, the adoption process and the daily life after adoption. More specifically, the results presented in this article derived from the open-ended questions 1-2-3 of the interview grid which explore the following areas: 1) the adoption project; 2) the adoption procedure; 3) the daily life experiences as a same sex adoptive family (for more details on the question asked, see chapter 4).

5.3 RESULTS

Given our interest in identifying the main issues experienced by these families across the family life cycle, themes emerged from the interviews have been grouped in three macro areas which correspond to three crucial phases of the family experience (for more details on data analysis see chapter 4). These three areas form the headings of this section: 1) Pre-adoption: themes related to the adoption project; 2) During the adoption process: themes related to the adoption procedure; 3) Post adoption: themes related to the experience of LG adopters in daily life. Each theme and subtheme is described and illustrated with specific examples, and the issues are discussed.

5.4 PRE-ADOPTION: THEMES RELATED TO THE ADOPTION PROJECT

5.4.1 Factors associated with the choice for adoption

Gay and lesbian couples who wish to become parents, explore the various roads to parenthood in order to identify with which type of project they feel more comfortable. Reflecting on the different types of parenthood often goes through an optic of exclusion of other parenting forms until the specific factors that motivate couples to adopt are identified. This decision-making process involves an in-depth reflection about their desire to parent, the importance of biological relations, heteronormative assumptions

about parenting, as well as the practical barriers encountered in their countries. The main factors associated with the choice for adoption (figure 2) are discussed below.

- ***Ethical, economical and legal concerns about surrogacy***

Before choosing adoption as a way to become parents, many gay men had considered surrogacy which option they however did not pursue for several reasons. Many gay parents (57%) rejected surrogacy because of the high costs involved. Some others (33%) were concerned about the illegality of this practice. The main reason why most fathers (85%) excluded this option were the ethical and moral matters that this form of parenthood brings about. More precisely, many participants identified a "mercantile aspect" in this parental route. For example Didier²⁸, 40 years old, from Belgium, said:

"I was really opposed to surrogacy [...] There is a mercantile side, I don't know...a mercantile aspect of parenting...I don't judge people who choose this road, but for me...it's a strange thing to spend money to create a child, it's a little bit selfish and wrong because there are a lot of children who need a family and who don't have one".

Furthermore, for some gay participants (39%), choosing surrogacy might cause guilt due to having provoked an abandonment in the child's life. Vincent, a 45-year-old French father reported, after briefly considering surrogacy:

"We came to think that we would have felt guilty for creating an abandonment in the child's life...in the adoption it was different, because the child has already lost his birth family. But in surrogacy we would have to decide to separate the child from his mother...we felt worried that one day our child could have claimed this mother...and we would have felt guilty".

- ***Complexity of co-parenting***

Most parents (87% of the gay men, 75 % of the lesbians) rejected the possibility of becoming parents on the basis of a co-parenting project, because they found it too

²⁸ Whenever case examples are used, all identifying information has been altered to protect the confidentiality of the individual.

complex, emotionally and logistically speaking, and because it determines the feeling of being a "part-time parent". Pierre, a Belgian participant, explained:

"We didn't want to share our kid ... we wanted a child who is only our child...we didn't like the idea of having our child spend a certain amount of time with us to then leave and go home to other parents...it seemed complicated for us ..it was like being part-time parents, while we wanted to be full time parents...and furthermore we thought: imagine if one of the couples separates and the parents respectively start a new relationship...with the child in the middle...it could increase the number of parental figures in the child's life from 4 to 6 or more ... it is a complex situation ... too complex".

- ***Little importance attached to the biological connection with the child***

The most important factor influencing the choice for adoption is the lack of importance given to the biologic ties with the children. More specifically, 85% of the gay men and 81% of the lesbians explained that they never felt a strong need to be genetically related to their child, considering that a parent is not the person who gives birth, but the person who raises, loves and takes care of the child. For example, Gaël, a 43 year old French father, reported:

"From my experience and my family history, I knew that we can create strong emotional ties without being genetically related...blood and biological ties are not so important".

- ***Having an equal role in parenthood***

Many participants (89% of the gay men, 94 % of the lesbians) chose to adopt because this type of parenthood permits both partners to have an equal role in parenthood. In this regard, Javier, a 46-year-old Spanish participant reported:

"We liked the fact that by adopting a child, we would have been on an equal footing and thus equal in our relationship with the kid....In this way, neither of us would be genetically related to him, so there would not be a parent "more parent" than the other one".

As shown by the verbatim, for these parents, the possibility of being on the same level from a legal point of view, was an important balancing factor in the family relationships.

On the contrary, the exclusive biological tie of one partner with the child would have been experienced as a negative factor in the family dynamics.

- *The story about the origins*

Some parents (22% of gay men) also explained that they chose adoption because they felt more comfortable with the explanation to give their child concerning his/her arrival in their family. In their opinion, the story about the child's origins is based on a reciprocal meeting, in which the child needed a family and the parents needed a child. For these parents, such a story seemed more coherent and understandable for the child compared to the story of origin they should have had to tell in case of surrogacy. Ferdinando, a 42 year old Spanish participant, explained:

"We felt more comfortable with this narration...it was more "natural": his parents conceived him, but they couldn't take care of him...and at the same time we loved each other very much and we wanted a child, but we can't have children given that we are two men. So it's like if our need and his need met in this adoption project".

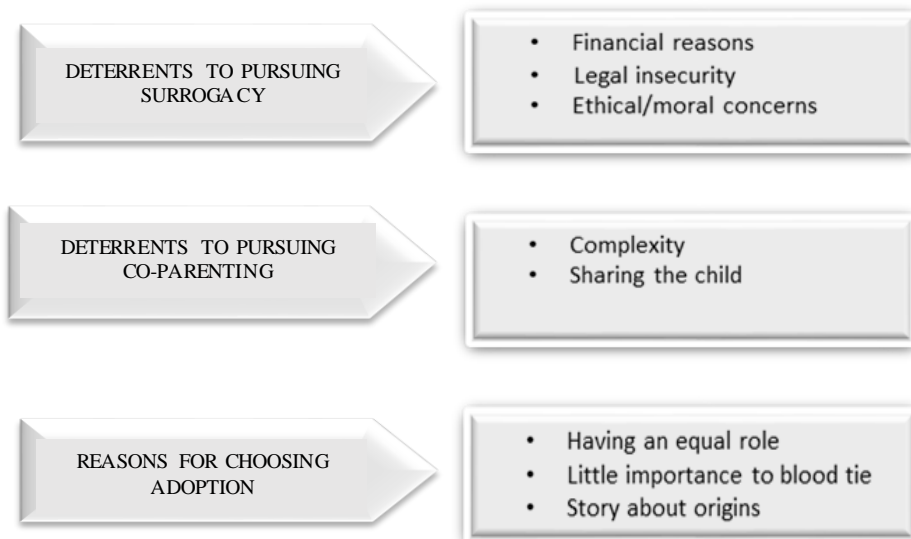


Figure 2: Factors associated with the choice of adoption

5.4.2 Deciding To Adopt: Self-Doubts and Emotional Conflicts

Almost all of the participants in this research reported that when they took their first steps towards their parenthood project, they were confronted with many concerns and doubts related to introjected heteronormative assumptions about parenting. Parents explained that before deciding to adopt their child, they discussed the topic at great length and they deeply questioned themselves about the implications of their choice. Three main self-doubts and emotional conflicts emerged from the interviews (figure 3): concerns about the child's well-being, feelings of guilt, and the need to overcome the impossibility of being parents as LG people. These three set of results will be analysed below, by underlying the differences between the experiences reported by participants according to their gender (lesbians or gay men).

- ***Concerns about the child's well-being in a same-sex headed family***

Many participants (89% of the gay men and 63% of the lesbians) reported that one of the first questions they asked themselves was whether their family structure could have a negative impact on the child's well-being. For example, Guy, a 41-year-old Frenchman, described the concerns he had before he adopted his child:

"We wondered if it would be good for a child to have two dads...deep down, I kept believing that it would be better for him/her to grow in a traditional family with a mother and a father".

Furthermore, the majority of the participants (98% of the gay men and 94% of the lesbians), reported that their biggest concern was the possibility of their children to be discriminated by their schoolmates due to their family structure. Such participants explained that if the doubts about the children's well-being in a same-sex family progressively faded away, society's gaze and the fear of discrimination continued to float around their minds and influence their project. As stated by Christophe, a 45-year-old French father:

"We were wondering if our child would be discriminated against at school...we knew that it would be an unusual situation: an adopted child, with two fathers and also

black....we didn't know how he would have been perceived, we worried a lot about possible forms of racism and homophobia”.

Many parents (91% of the gay men and 75% of the lesbians) also reported that they feared that their child could be affected or influenced by the negative stereotypes towards homosexuality and same-sex parenting, experiencing a feeling of being "different" and part of a non-legitimate family. Laura, a 48-year-old Spanish lesbian mother, explained:

“What worried us the most was the idea that our child could feel strange, different (...) we told ourselves that even if we had been attentive, we never know what could happen outside, we are not there with him at all times...”.

For many participants (46% of the gay men and 31% of the lesbians) such issues were also accompanied by some concerns directly linked to the child's perception; in particular, whether the child would feel shocked discovering that he/she was adopted by LG parents. These participants explained that they worried that their children could obtain a negative perception of same-sex parenting and, consequently, reject them as parents. As stated by Pablo, a 43-year-old Spanish father:

“A part of me kept thinking that having two gay parents would have been shocking for an adopted child... I was afraid he would not accept our family”.

- ***Feelings of guilt: “do we cause a lack in the child's life?”***

An important theme, inextricably linked to the previous one, regarded feelings of guilt due to the lack of a maternal or a paternal parental figure in a same-sex context. When deciding to adopt a child, many gay parents (87%) and some lesbians (31%) experienced feelings of guilt due to the impossibility to offer a mother or a father to their child, thus causing a lack in their life indirectly. These parents wondered about the impact of such an absence in their child's life.

For example Vincent, a 41-year-old French participant, outlined the main points of the debate he had with his husband Anthony, 39 years old, on this topic:

“We discussed a lot about the absence of a mum in our family ...we thought that our kid would have felt sad about not having a mother in his adoptive family... we were

wondering if it was fair for the child, if we had the right to do it or if it was a selfish act on our part(...). We asked what effect this maternal absence would have on our child...we felt guilty, responsible for causing this lack in his life...".

Here Vincent and Anthony identified feelings of guilt connected to a low level of legitimacy as same-sex parents, as well as to gender-role traditionalism (Borrillo, 2000; Davies, 2004). The emotional pitch of their narration suggests that this kind of questioning has been a key issue in their decision to perform the adoption.

Some lesbian participants expressed similar reflections concerning the absence of a paternal figure. Anna, a 47- year-old Spanish mother, explained:

"We were worried that if we had a boy, maybe it could have been important for him to have a dad...but finally we thought that we could figure out a solution, we told ourselves that we have a lot of male friends who are available to participate in the kid's education".

As shown by the tone used by the participants, the concerns about the "absent parental figure" seemed deeply ingrained as well as a source of pain among gay men, whereas they seemed to be less important to lesbians.

- ***Overcoming the impossibility to be parents as LG people: a grieving process***

According to narratives, one of the greatest challenges for same-sex adoptive parents consisted in overcoming stereotypes about the incompatibility between homosexuality and parenthood. 96% of the gay fathers and 63% of the lesbian mothers in the sample reported to have been confronted with a "grieving process" of heterosexual parenthood aspirations because they perceived themselves as obliged to make a choice between being homosexual and being parents (figure 5). Ricardo, a 43-year-old Spanish father, explained:

"For me being gay meant giving up the possibility of having children. When I came out, I, directly thought that I would not become a parent in my future because I was gay and it was incompatible with the project of having children....it was like a grieving process to me".

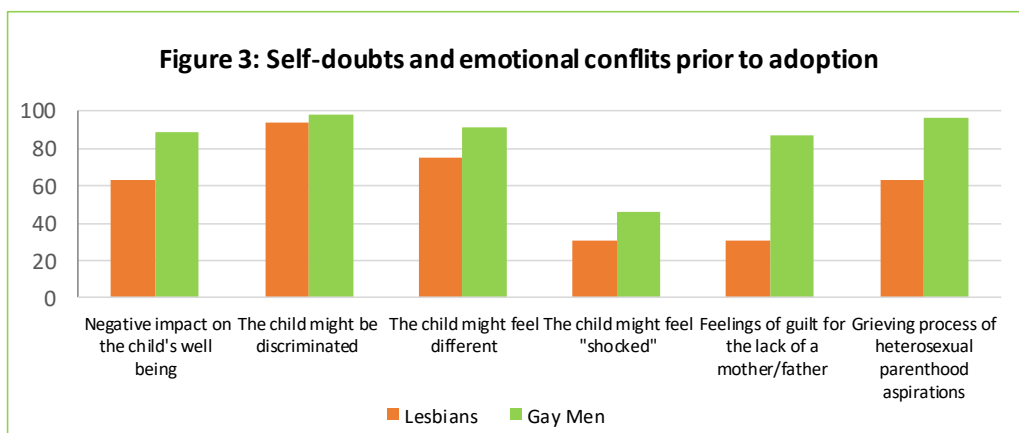
Beatrice, 44 years old from France, also described her difficulty to reconcile her lesbian identity with her desire to have children.

“For me, I was lesbian and it meant that I would never have children...it just didn't seem possible (...).It was hard to authorise myself, to think that it would have been actually possible. I feared society's point of view, the reactions of those close to me”.

Here Beatrice experienced a great tension between her spontaneous and deep desire to have a child and the moral weight imposed by society. Several participants reported that overcoming such introjected ideas is the necessary condition to embark on the adoption journey and to feel legitimate as LG parents. For instance Victor, 33 years old from Belgium, talked about his long path to overcome the struggles he faced to feel comfortable in his parenting project:

“Deep down, I was still not sure that it was an acceptable thing to be gay and to adopt a child...There was like a little voice inside me telling that it was a too ambitious project. I had to induct myself into a huge psychological pattern. I told myself: ok, you are gay, but it does not mean that you can't be a good father...I needed to accept, to be legitimate from the others, but also and mainly, to legitimise myself as a future gay father (...). I think that if you want to have some chances to adopt, it is necessary to take a step forward...to say: ok I can and I will do it...because the road is very long and complicated and you need to be confident”.

Here Victor described the effects of the internalized social stigma (Herek et al. 2009) which can be seen as a kind of “internal saboteur” that must be fought in order to realise the parenting aspiration.



5.5 DURING THE ADOPTION PROCESS: BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

In addition to the challenges and the emotional uncertainties experienced at a personal level as prospective adoptive parents, participants were also confronted with many institutional obstacles in the adoption procedure. The extent of the stressors and challenges encountered during the adoption process by the participants in this study were context-specific. Indeed, the adoption process experience has been very different for participants according to the legal barriers imposed by their country of residence. Therefore, we will analyse the main challenges and barriers encountered by adopters during the adoption procedure (table 6), differentiating them according to the adoption procedure type (full joint adoption vs adoption as pretended single parent).

5.5.1 Main challenges in the full -joint adoption procedure

- ***Established “gay quota”***

Most of Belgian adopters (93%), who accomplished a joint adoption procedure, claimed that social workers tried to discourage them by showing statistics portraying a limited number of successful same-sex adoption processes. Based on participants' reports, these agencies seemed to have “a gay quota”, declaring only to allow a certain number of same-sex couples per year. Such a criterion negatively impacted the motivation and the self-confidence of the participants, who felt powerless and impotent by facing a poor chance of success. For example, Jacob, 37 years old from Belgium, considered giving up the adoption procedure because it seemed too complex and almost impossible.

He pointed out:

“At that time, there was a kind of official quota, which was 25 adoptions per year. No more than 4 out of 25 were same-sex couples...and there were 3 couples who had already started before us. They made it very clear: don't delude yourself! The percentage of LG adoptions is very low...so you must be aware that this is a long and difficult route, and there are very little chances of success”.

According to the participants, the “official” reason why agencies showed such statistics was to give truthful information and avoid arousing unrealistic expectations among

candidates. However, behind such argumentation all participants were able to identify a homophobic tendency, which meant to control the number of same-sex adoptions. Jilles, a 38 year-old father living in Belgium, talked about his experience in which deception met with bitterness:

“They justified this choice by indicating that it was intended to ensure the transparency, to better prepare us for what was coming, but I think there is something unwholesome in this discourse. This is equivalent to saying: we accept the 20% of black people, the 80 % of white ones... it's a great form of discrimination...to me it was disgusting...”.

- ***The discrimination at the discretion of the child's birth families***

The decision-making power of the birth families was perceived by participants as one of the most discriminating aspects in the process. Many Belgian adopters (93%) reported to have been warned by adoption agencies that birth families have the right to choose what kind of family will adopt their child and that they could consider the sexual orientation of adoptive candidates. Based on the reports of the participants, this discretion on the choice of the prospective adoptive parents often generated discrimination by the birth families of the children, who, in most cases, were less likely to choose non-heterosexual couples. Two main reasons were given by adoption agencies as justifications of this legal disposition.

Firstly, according to agencies, it was essential to ensure a continuity among the birth and the adoptive family in order to help the child develop an integrate sense of self. Secondly, in their opinion, communicating such information to candidates had the positive purpose of adjusting their expectations and developing a realistic timeline. Despite these explanations, many participants (93%) denounced an excessive and undue influence of the biological parents. The risk of being rejected on the basis of their sexual orientation was unfair in the eyes of these parents who expressed feelings of hopelessness and impotent rage. Vincent, a 38-year-old father from Belgium, said:

“We don't understand why...if we are married and we are a family... Why are birth parents allowed to discriminate us because of our sexual orientation? This is very discriminating”.

Some participants also complained about this form of discrimination, which made them feel undesirable and illegitimate in their parental aspirations.

Charles, a 40 year-old Belgian father, voiced his feelings of discrimination and hopelessness connected to this topic:

“We felt hopeless in that moment, we knew that our profile would not have been accepted in most of the cases...it was so hard, it conveyed a very negative image of ourselves...as undesirable, deviant”.

5.5.2 Main challenges during the adoption procedure as pretended single parents

- ***The weight of lies: hiding themselves in order to adopt***

Most of the French adopters (96%) and most of the Spanish ones (91%) reported a high level of stress due to the fact that they could not complete the adoption process as an official couple. Living in a country which has yet to allow same-sex couple adoption, means that the above mentioned parents were faced with a choice: starting the adoption process by lying about their homosexuality and their relationship or giving up their parental project. Being obliged to lie, to hide their homosexuality, their marital life, and to live in constant fear of being unmasked have been found to be the greatest challenges during the adoption procedure for the majority of the participants who adopted as legal parents. For example, Charles, 48 years old from France, adopted a child from Haiti as a single parent. Here he expressed how such a procedure proved to be stressful for him:

“I had to hide an essential part of myself...being suspected like a criminal...for me, it was very hard telling nonsenses, saying that I was a single man, acting like an heterosexual man...and almost being suspected of pedophilia...”.

- ***Contact with social workers : suspicion and hypocrisy***

Many parents (73% of French participants, 68% of Spanish), reported negative experiences in the interaction with social workers. More precisely, although the status of “single parents” was supposed to protect them, participants reported to having

suffered from discrimination and homophobia by social workers. These latter, were described by participants as highly suspicious, digging out the detail which would unmask their homosexuality. For instance Jenny, a 41 year old mother from Spain, explained:

“It was very complicated, she asked me a lot of questions. Why don't you have a partner? When is the last time you were involved in a relationship? How do you imagine your future with a partner? And I had to answer, being careful not to reveal any details about my sexual orientation”.

On the other hand, many parents (27 % of French participants, 32% of Spanish ones) encountered gay-friendly social workers. Thus they decided to confide in them about their homosexuality. In this case, social workers, far from being menacing, gave precious advice to prospective adopters and helped them. Even if parents reported positive experiences, they expressed significant frustration because they felt social workers were obliged to work in a hypocrite mood, trapped by the barriers imposed by the law. Guillaume, a 43 year old French father, expressed his disappointment concerning this situation:

“There was a tacit agreement in which “everyone known but everyone pretended not to know...and it was very hypocrite”.

- ***Being forced to involve their child in the lies***

Some participants (23% of the French and 18% of the Spaniards) who had already adopted at least one child and were on route for another adoption, were confronted to a supplementary challenge. During the home study, not only did they have to lie about their sexual orientation, but they also had to involve their child in the “strategy of filtration” regarding the family identity. For example, Natasha, 46 years old from Spain, adopted two children (Antonio and Lucas) with her partner Jenny by going through the international adoptive procedure as a single mother. Although Jenny did not legally exist, she was completely involved in the children's life. When Natasha was on the way for the second adoption, Antonio was 3 years old. Thus, during the second home study, the main challenging aspect for this couple was to prevent Antonio from

revealing the truth to social workers. Here Natasha told of her uncomfortable feelings in such a difficult situation:

“When social workers came to our house, Antonio was already here and I didn't know how to handle such a situation. I couldn't tell him to lie, I couldn't explain to him: we are a normal family, but those people don't understand it and so we have to lie.... and there was always great tension! I only hoped that Antonio didn't say anything to the social workers: “I have two mums!”.

Although it was only a means to an end, Natasha reported a high level of stress because of her child's involvement in lying, and she feared to convey a negative or non-legitimate image of their family to him.

- ***Worrying that the child may feel betrayed***

Several parents (19% of the French participants and 36% of the Spanish ones) also spoke about an intense worry that their child may feel betrayed when discovering the existence of two same-sex parents instead of one. These parents were wondering how their children would react to the news of being adopted by a same-sex couple when they expected and were prepared by social workers in their country to join a single parent family. Stephan, 41 years old from France, was very concerned about this aspect. Before the official adoption of his 8 year-old child from Haiti, he did not mention the existence of his partner when he talked with the child. In such circumstances, Stephan experienced considerable tension between his desire for transparency and loyalty and the necessity to lie imposed by the socio-legal context. He stated:

“I was afraid that he would feel betrayed, that he would consider us liars given that he was not prepared for this... We didn't want to start our family story with a lie”.

- ***Having to lie to the child's birth family***

Another issue emerged from the interviews regarded the necessity to lie to the children's birth families. Some French (15%) and Spanish participants (14%) met the biological family of the child in-person in their country. They had to pose as single parents and felt guilty about lying. In addition, these parents feared the possibility that the child might

want to visit his/her country of origin. In this case, the biological parents could find out the truth and create legal problems. For example Remon, a 39 year-old French parent, met his son's birth family in Africa. During their meeting, he had to omit information about his sexual orientation and his marital life in Europe. He stated:

"I felt guilty because I met them, I saw their faces ... I talked to them... and it was very hard for me, because they gave me the precious gift of being a parent, but I had to lie... and I am afraid of what could happen if one day they found out the truth".

Here Remon identified tension between the gratitude towards his son's birth parents and the necessity to lie in order to accomplish their project of parenthood. His feelings were a mix of guilt and fear.

- ***Social parents: invisibility, legal incertitude, conflicts***

Many participants (85% of the French and 68% of the Spaniards), underlined the difficult situation of "invisibility" experienced by social parents during the adoption process. Forced to stay out of sight, they lived with a sense of loneliness by being "under the radar" throughout the process, obliged to watch and follow their partner's progress from a distance. These parents had to hide themselves during the adoption procedure in order to avoid any suspicions and they could not actively participate in the preparation process. Jenny, a 41-year-old Spanish "social mother", reported to feel overshadowed and invisible during the homestudy:

"When social workers come to our house, I had to disappear or appear as the housekeeper or the babysitter... at home, we didn't keep photos of ourselves together, we only had Nadia's photos because she is the legal mother and sometimes I felt a little bit invisible".

Additionally, many participants (88% of the French and 77% of the Spanish) explained that the lack of legal bond between the social parent and the child engendered not only insecurity, but also a feeling of being a "second-class parent".

For example, Julia, a 47-year-old mother from Spain, was the “social” mother of two boys aged 6 and 3. Even if she shared the same desire to adopt a child with her partner Natasha, she was not legally involved in the adoption procedure. She stated:

“As I don't have legal ties with them, I always think: Can I do this? Or that(...)? I pick up the kids after school or I take them to the gym, but... I don't know, I don't really feel to be their mum like Natasha”.

Here Julia expressed her feelings of “illegitimacy” as a social adoptive parent. Her experience shows how the lack of legal ties could impact her relationship with the children.

Many participants (69 % of the French and 41% of the Spaniards) reported also that such procedure had a negative impact on their conjugal life. Antoine, a 48-year-old French “social father”, stated:

“It was very difficult, because in that moment we didn't share the same experience, the same reality: he was completely involved in the adoption project, while I was in the shadow...and this caused conflicts and put distance between us”.

Table 6: Challenges in the adoption procedure according to country

	Belgium N=14	France N=26	Spain N=22
Gay quota	93% *	-	-
Decision-making power of birth family	93%	-	-
Lying during the homestudy	-	96%	91%
Suspicion of social workers	-	73%	68%
Social workers pretend “not to know”	-	27%	32%
Involving the child in the lies	-	23%	18%
Worrying that the child could feel betrayed	-	19%	36%
Lying to the child's birth family	-	15%	14%
Invisibility (social parent)	-	85%	68%
Legal insecurity (social parent)	-	88%	77%

* the most reported challenges are circled

5.6 POST- ADOPTION: THEMES RELATED TO THE EVERYDAY LIFE EXPERIENCES

According to the participants, once the adoption process is completed, many of the fears and concerns experienced before adoption tend to disappear. The joy of becoming parents, and the instinctive, unconditional love for the child make it possible to cope with the difficulties and enables parents to find solutions. Most of the participants in this research (91 % of the gays and 88% of the lesbians) declared to be satisfied with their experience as same-sex parents. However, they reported that after adoption new challenges appear for same-sex parents and their children. In this section we will explore the experiences reported by same-sex parents concerning their everyday life. In particular, we will focus on two elements: the specific tasks they experience as same-sex parents, and the stressors encountered in the social context.

5.6.1 Stressors linked to the context: how is the family legitimacy questioned?

- *Micro-aggressions and homophobia*

Most of the participants in this research affirmed that they and their children have generally favourable experiences in their social context. However, they described some elements that can steadily question the legitimacy of the family. In their everyday life, many participants (96% of the gays, 56% of the lesbians) reported that they had been directly subjected to micro-aggressions, which were manifested by questions and comments about their family structure (Figure 4). According to the parents, despite the fact that such episodes are often the result of benevolent curiosity, they provoke feelings of awkwardness and discomfort.

Julien for example, a 38-year-old Belgian father, reported his experience:

“People ask us: are you his educators? And we answer: no, we are his parents! Or: how did you have a child?! Oh, it is fantastic!!!...Sometimes, we feel like an attraction, but we just would like to feel like a normal family”.

One of the most reported examples of micro-aggressions concerned the school context, which has been described as a breeding ground for negative experiences connected to discrimination and heterosexism. In our sample, many parents (89% of gays, 75% of lesbians) reported that at school their children had been confronted with microaggressions, consisting of questions, comments and curiosity of their peers about their family. In most cases, according to the parents, such episodes were roused by simple, harmless curiosity and were described as low or medium on intensity. For instance, Sebastien, a 47-year-old, French father of a 8-year-old boy, explained his son's experiences in the school environment:

“When he started going to school it has happened that his schoolmates asked him questions such as: ‘Why do you have two dads? So don’t you have a mum!?’ . But they didn’t want to hurt him, it was just “children’s natural curiosity...(…) and when he came back home, he was a little upset... he said to me: I don’t like it when they talk about it’...and for us, as parents, it was very hard to realise that he had such feelings”.

In more rare cases (15% of the gay men), parents reported that their children experienced homophobic teasing and bullying described as high in intensity. It is important to note that these parents were all gay men, whereas no lesbian mothers reported such episodes. For instance, Pablo, 51-year-old father of a 13 year-old-boy, stated:

“There were two or three comrades who made violent and homophobic comments, such as: you have two dads, it's disgusting! So you are gay too! We don't like gays!(...).Once we went to pick up him from school and they said: Ah, well, look, the two poofs are coming! "(...). Since that moment he did not want us to come to school together... and in those moments I felt very sad, powerless and also guilty...because I couldn't stop thinking that if he didn't live in a same-sex family he wouldn't be exposed to such unpleasant situations”.

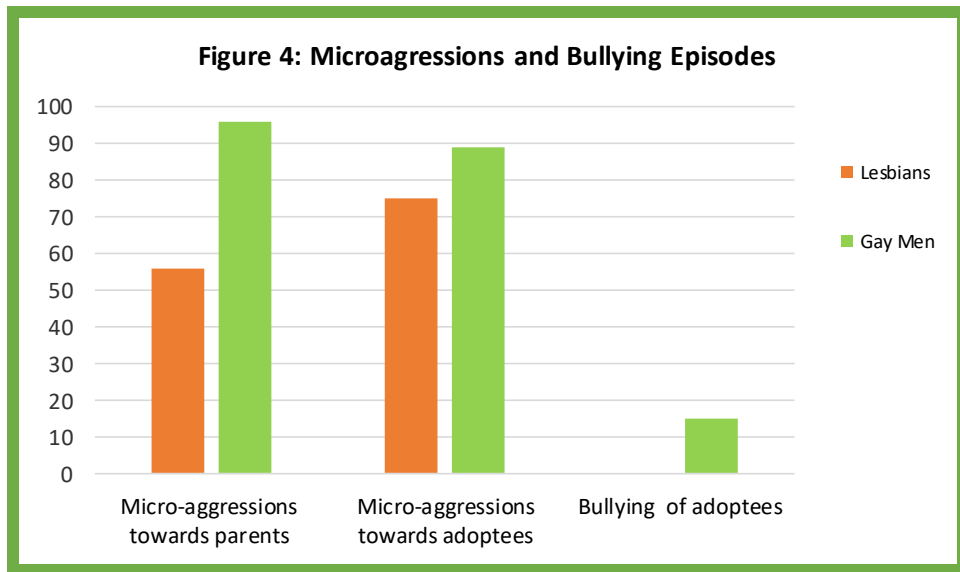
During the interviews, participants emphasised how the school context maintains and reinforces a traditional family model, undermining all the family configurations differing from this one. For instance, many parents shared reflections of occasions such as Mother's Day or Father's Day. They explained how these celebrations can constitute delicate moments for their children, who are confronted with the absence of one parental figure in their family. Parents describe such events as some sort of reminder that their

family legitimacy is recurrently and persistently called into question. Vincent, for example, 48 years old from France, talked about the feelings of his 7-year-old daughter on the occasion of Mother's Day. He stated:

"On Mother's Day, teachers had asked the children to make a drawing. We proposed to her to offer the drawing to her aunt. But she was sad and upset...she began saying that she wanted a mum like the others...and this happens every year, when she is repeatedly confronted with the lack of a mother... and we feel angry with such an educational system that doesn't respect our families...at the same time we feel responsible for such events...because, indirectly, she has to deal with such uncomfortable situations because of our homosexuality".

This verbatim shows how all these elements lead children to be confronted with their "minority status", reinforcing feelings of difference. On the other hand, parents can experience feelings of guilt, in that they consider their homosexuality as the source for additional challenges their children have to face. In reference to these unpleasant events, participants explained the absolute necessity to teach their children to protect and defend themselves with the necessary "weapons". They emphasised the importance of educating children to family diversity particularly, which allows them to transform their minority status into a source of pride. For some parents, exchanging contact information with other LG adoptive families turned out to be a useful resource. Such connections allows children to share similar life experiences and prevents them from experiencing feelings of difference. Claudine, 44 years old from France, stated:

"We explain to our child that there are different kinds of families: with one mother and one father, two fathers, two mothers, or a single parent...and also with different skin tones ...we are all different but everyone is special in his diversity, being different is a reason for pride because you have something that others don't have...and when I explain this he says: oh yes, I am special, because I have two mums...he is proud of our family".



- ***Administrative problems***

Another central challenge reported by many participants (86% of the Belgian, 85% of the French, 64 % of the Spanish parents) concerned a bureaucratic system that does not take family diversity into account. For instance, Charles, a 38-year-old Belgian Father, stated:

« In the nursery, on the registration form, it was required to mark the name of the mother and the name of the father...sometimes we receive letters clumsily addressed to the mother and father of the child.... It is very discriminatory....It is like we didn't exist! ».

Similar experiences were reported by Gregory, 33 years old from Belgium:

“The first time we wanted to buy an insurance policy, it was very complicated. They told us that the computer system was not configured to encode same-sex headed families and it took a lot of time to fix this problem...we were shocked: if we are legally a family, why do we have to deal with so many barriers?”.

As shown by the examples, these parents experienced feelings of invisibility and injustice, being that their familial configuration is often not represented in official documents. These elements constitute indirect types of discrimination which contribute to the increase of minority stress among same-sex parents.

- ***Socio-political climate***

Many French families participating in this study (85%), reported to have been confronted with a rise in discrimination, heterosexism and homophobia in their country after the passage of the Taubira Bill, the law that allowed same-sex couples civil marriage rights and adoption. The disapproval of “marriage pour tous” (marriage for all) was a very strong incident in France. In that situation, same-sex families felt very hurt and they felt they were being called into question about their right to create a family. Some parents also had to face their children’s questions about mass demonstrations against their family composition. For instance, Didier, a 48-year-old French participant, spoke at length during the interview about the impact of these demonstrations on their everyday life. He stated:

« It was very insulting to us... Having to see the number of people who participated in the demonstrations on tv and on a daily basis ...in Lyon there were 20.000 opponents...and I knew it was a big number....and their speech about the fact that we shouldn't be parents, that it is heresy to allow gay people to be parents...and I remember that our son was shocked too, he asked me: dad why do they do it? Why do they hate our families? We really felt bad, betrayed by our neighbours, our fellow citizens (...) ».

The example clearly shows how living in a socio political context characterised by rejection and stigma can be extremely stressful for these families. More specifically, being exposed to homophobic events can profoundly undermine the feeling of legitimacy, causing pain among same-sex parents and their children.

- ***Lack of support from the extended family***

Another challenging element reported by many participants concerned the lack of support from extended families on the basis of homophobia. More precisely, 83% of gay men and 69% of lesbians in the sample reported to have experienced a range of difficulties in the interaction with their extended family, going from cold and distant relationships to direct episodes of discrimination and homophobia. In this regard, many participants described their family ties as “compartmentalised relationships”,

characterised by a great openness with some family members and by very cold and distant relationships with some others (as a result of their sexual orientation). For instance Christophe, 48 years old from France, said:

“There has always been a separation between his family life with his parents and sisters and me ...his family has always ignored or pretended to ignore our relationship...they acted as though I didn't exist, as if we weren't a couple! I regret not having contact with his family... it's a shame ... I would like to show them that I am a good person”.

During the interviews, many parents identified the lack of legal recognition as one of the causes of such relational difficulties. More specifically, many participants who adopted their child while pretending to be single parents reported that the invisibility at a legal level was reflected in the relationships with extended families. These participants often did not feel considered as “parents” by their in-laws at the same level as their partner. Xavier for example, a 39-year-old social parent from France, experienced feelings of anonymity in the eyes of his husband's family of origin:

“They don't consider me as a father, at the same level as they do him... (...) and they consider themselves as the real grandparents, whereas my parents aren't...there is a great disparity between our families, and I think it depends a lot on this ambiguous legal status during the adoption procedure”.

Here, Xavier voiced the relational ambiguity (Green & Mitchell, 2008) linked to his lack of legal rights of the child and the challenge of maintaining family ties in such a context.

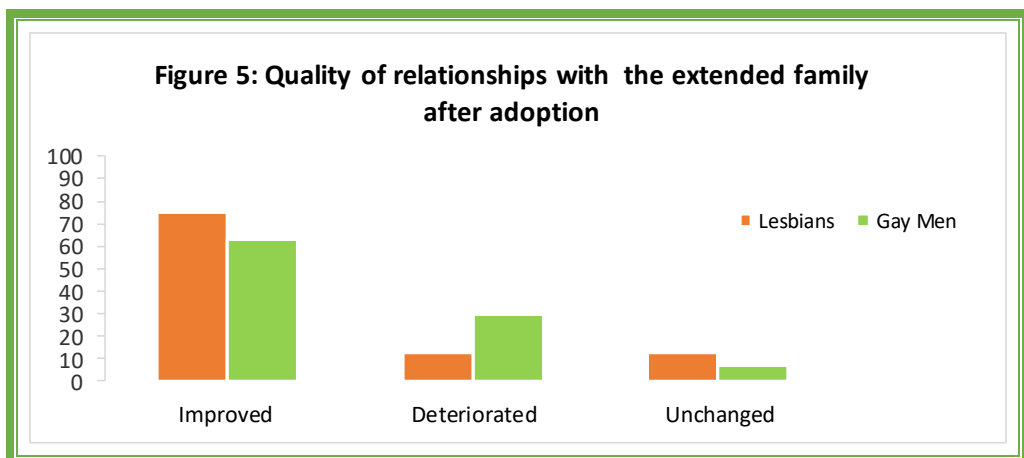
Despite such issues, according to participants, relationships with extended family can greatly change after the transition to parenthood. In particular, analysis showed three main cases (Figure 5): a large number of parents (63% of the gays and 75% of the lesbians), reported that the arrival of the child in the family had the effect of “mitigating” negative stereotypes towards homosexuality and, consequently, improving the quality of the relationships with extended family members; some parents (7% of the gays and 13% of the lesbians) found no differences in their connections with extended families once the child had joined the family; the remaining 30% of the gays and 13 % of the lesbians described a deterioration of relationships once the child joined the

family. The latter identified that these interpersonal difficulties are caused by the social stigma to which same-sex adoption is exposed, not only for the couple but for the whole extended family. This “visibility” can represent a negative experience, which can trigger evasive or rejecting reactions of the extended family members.

In this regard, Antoine, a 38-year-old Belgian father, reported with great bitterness an act of homophobia committed by his brother-in-law. The latter, having a negative image of homosexuality, did not allow his son to meet Sacha, the 3-year-old child adopted by the couple:

"He has never accepted our homosexuality... So suddenly, he imposed on us that our children would not play together anymore...he doesn't want his son to meet with Sacha, because he is afraid that he might have to explain to his son that we are a gay couple... he acted like homosexuality was a contagious disease!"

As shown by the participants' reports, in such situations, the extended family, far from being a source of support, becomes a “cradle” of discrimination. By conveying a negative image of the homosexuality to the child, such episodes can exacerbate the stigmatisation of both the same-sex parents and their children. To face such situations, many participants underlined the importance of finding strategies to protect their family from unsupportive and malevolent family members.



5.6.2 Specific parental tasks as LG parents

- *Communication about the homosexuality and the minority status*

When gay and lesbian people adopt a child, like all adopters, they have to fulfil specific parental tasks connected with the adoptive status. As discussed in the previous chapter, the most important adoptive parental tasks consist of discussing their adoptive status with the children, helping them to understand the implications of being adopted, managing the double connection of the child to both the birth and the adoptive family, and coping with adoption related losses. In addition to these challenges, gay and lesbian adoptive parents are confronted with new parental tasks. One of these, concerns helping the child to understand the meaning and the implications of their parents' homosexuality. Many gay (72%) and lesbian (56%) parents in our sample reported that they had wondered what would be the best way to explain homosexuality to their children. For these participants, the challenge lay in finding the most adequate way to communicate about homosexuality with their children, by respecting their feelings, their degree of openness about this topic, as well as their capacity of understanding. According to the participants, the communication about homosexuality is an ongoing process, which changes and evolves according to the children's age.

As explained by Alexandre, a 43-year-old French father, the quality of the communication also depends on one's degree of resolution of the homosexuality related-issues:

"I think that it is important to feel at ease with our own identity as gay parents...if you feel comfortable in your homosexuality, it will be easier to discuss this topic with your child".

As regards the specific moment in which parents announced their homosexuality to their children, in our sample, we found two main situations: the parents who adopted young children described the communication about homosexuality as something quite natural, spontaneous and "implicit"; those who adopted older children found such communication more difficult and sometimes embarrassing. In particular, several couples who adopted older children via an international single parent adoption reported

a delicate situation. In their country of origin, the children had been prepared by social workers to join a single-parent family. Furthermore, during the waiting period before adoption they sometimes stayed in touch with the parent who they expected to be their only parent. Then, the discovery of another parent of the same-sex after adoption has often been a source of disbelief and lack of understanding for these adoptees.

In this regard, David, 45 years old from France, explained the reaction of his 10 year old daughter, adopted in Brasil:

“She was completely shocked and suspicious...she exclaimed: two dads? It is not possible a family with two dads! (...). She asked us if we would be arrested, she thought that it was not legally allowed....she didn't accept this, because in her culture homosexuality is something wrong (...).It took a great deal of time before she accept our family structure”.

As showed by verbatim, the intensity of these negative feelings is connected to several factors: the age of the children at adoption, the social representations about homosexuality in the country of origin, as well as the idea of family introjected by the adoptees before adoption.

- ***Helping children deal with the loss of the birth family and accept that they do not have a mum/dad***

By understanding the homosexuality of the parents, children also come to realise the implications of their family's sexual minority status. Same-sex adoption, like all adoptions, implicates gains and losses. For these children, gaining a same-sex family implicates not only losing the birth one (like all adoptees), but also understanding and accepting that they will not have a mother or a father in the adoptive family. According to the participants (87% of the gays and 69% of the lesbians), the fact of living in a heterosexist society, such an awareness can prove to be difficult for their children. As it will be detailed in chapter 6, some adoptees define the absence of a parental figure as a lack (“I miss having a mum/dad”), others children speak about it in terms of curiosity (“I would like to know what it is like to have a mum/dad”), others as a need of being like their peers (“How come I can't have a mum/dad like the others?"). The interest in

the missing parental figure is inextricably linked to the curiosity about the birth parents and with the pain of their loss. In particular, adoptees often express a strong curiosity about the birth parent whose gender is absent in the adoptive family (thus children adopted by gays show great interest in their birth mother, those adopted by lesbians in their birth father).

For instance, Amanda, 44 years old from Spain, described her 8 year old boy's feelings on this topic:

"He always speaks about his birth father, he fantasises about him a lot...He says that he would like to meet him, that he would like to have a dad... However, he never, or very rarely, asked questions about his birth mother...I think it is because he already has two mums, so he is not curious to know what it's like to have a mum".

As shown in the previous example, the psychodynamics of children adopted by same sex parents include issues of loss, curiosity, and idealisation of the parental figure that they do not have, but they would like to have. This parental figure, absent physically, can be extremely present in the adoptees' imagination. Thus, same-sex adoptive parents have the role of establishing open communication about this "missing parental figure", helping their children in that way to express feelings, curiosity and questions related to their minority status. Almost all gay (91%) and lesbian (75%) participants in this research described their children's desire to have a mother and/or a father as one of the most stressing and uncomfortable feelings connected to their parenthood. In particular, parents explained that such experiences made them question themselves about the appropriateness of their parental context for the happy and healthy development of the children. Concretely, some parents tend to interpret their children's questions as an expression of uneasiness about being adopted by same-sex parents.

Abel for example, 43 years old from Spain, explained the questions asked by his 11-year-old boy on this topic:

"For a while, he used to ask us: why don't I have a mum? I'd like to have a mum! All my friends have a mum...He repeated this with great insistence! Such questions tugged at our heartstrings...we asked ourselves if he felt good in our family, if it was a good thing for a child to grow up without a mother...it was very hard for us".

5.7 DISCUSSIONS

This study has been the first cross-national research using qualitative methods as a way to explore the experiences of same-sex adoptive families living in Europe. This study contributes to our knowledge and understanding of the specific issues encountered by same-sex parents before, during and after adoption (table 7). Our analysis was focused, in particular, on three main aspects. Firstly, it examined the reasons, as well as the personal feelings connected with the choice of adoption; secondly, it shed light on the specific socio-legal barriers that LG people have to deal with during the adoption process, depending on their country of residence; thirdly, it explored the experiences of same-sex adopters after adoption, providing insight on the contextual stressors as well as on the specific parental tasks experienced by participants in everyday life.

Concerning the first point, our research showed that four main reasons were connected to the choice of adoption: a) ethical and moral concerns about surrogacy; b) the complexity of co-parenting; 3) the limited importance attached to the blood tie; 4) the need for an equal role in parenthood. These findings confirm those of previous studies (Jennish et al., 2014; Goldberg et al. 2009; Gianino, 2008; Gross, 2012) showing that the reasons why same-sex couples choose adoption are quite different from those expressed by opposite-sex couples. More specifically, our research corroborates that sexual minorities often choose adoption as a first option, while opposite-sex couple choose this pathway to parenthood after having experienced infertility (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003).

Furthermore, in line with previous research (Gianino, 2008) analysis revealed that LG people in this sample decided to adopt after taking a long journey characterised by self-doubt and emotional conflicts. Participants' reports provide compelling evidence that heteronormative assumptions about family (D'Amore et al., 2013) could negatively impact same-sex couples during the decision making. Indeed, as shown by the reports of participants, such introjected ideas could represent a deterrent in pursuing the adoption procedure, slowing down the participants' parenting project. Consistent with previous research (Goldberg, 2012; Gross, 2012), many parents experienced a kind of

“grieving process” of their parenting aspirations because they were unable to reconcile their wish to become parents with their homosexual identity. We can conclude that this grieving process of the heterosexual generativity is one of the most important tasks that sexual minorities have to accomplish while taking the road to parenthood. Specifically, our analysis showed that this element is strictly connected with the capacity of overcoming the impossibility of being parents as LG people and building a feeling of legitimacy as prospective same-sex family. As shown by narratives, most participants have been confronted with a long and deep reflection on the impact of their family structure on their prospective children. For many parents, such reflections were also characterised by feelings of guilt connected with the idea of adding a supplementary loss and complicating the life of a child already marked by abandonment and difficulties. Our analyses showed that gay men in the sample were more affected by heteronormative ideas of family than lesbians and that they dealt with more challenges in forming a “procreative consciousness” (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). More precisely, a high percentage of gay fathers voiced guilty feelings and concerns related to the lack of the maternal figure in their prospective child’s life, whereas only a low percentage of lesbian participants reported similar feelings towards the absence of a paternal figure. In line with previous studies, these findings suggest that gay men experience more self-doubt and self-questioning during the decision-making on the route to parenthood compared to lesbian women (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007, Gianino, 2008). Gay fathers in the sample seemed to feel less legitimate than lesbians in their parental project, and this reflects the general social attitude considering male homosexuality as less acceptable than female homosexuality (Costa & Davies, 2012; Steffens, 2005; Steffens et al., 2014). In particular, men in the sample seemed to be influenced greatly by gender role traditionalism (Borrillo, 2000; Davies, 2004) in which they consider the maternal figure indispensable for the development of children and consequently their family structure as deficient. This finding confirms the evidence that gay men are more likely to be influenced by traditional views of gender roles than

women (Costa & Davies, 2012) as well as the fact that anti-gay attitudes are constitutive elements of the masculine identity (Borrillo, 2000).

One of the most important concerns reported both by lesbians and gay men in the sample concerned the social attitudes about same-sex parenting and the negative image society could convey to their children. The majority of participants, regardless of their gender, were deeply worried about the fact that their prospective child could be discriminated in the social context. It suggests that these parents, in consequence of the minority stress (Green, 2008; Meyer, 2003) and the internalized heterosexism (Herek, 2009), conceive their sexual minority status as problematic for the development of the children. According to the developmental systems approach (Lerner et al., 2011), we hypothesised that the social context in which families live played an important role in structuring such ideas and feelings. We can, therefore, conclude that our results confirmed this hypothesis. Indeed, data was collected between 2014 and 2016, a little after the massive wave of demonstrations in response to the French Bill for the “Marriage for all”. In the socio-politic climate of that historic moment, the rights of LGBT people attracted big media interest, prompting controversial debates among public opinion in many European countries. It is easy to imagine that these families have been affected by the events in question, which have contributed to weaken them, increasing their feelings of internalized homophobia.

Concerning the second goal of our analysis, our study sheds light on the specific institutional roadblocks that LG parents, as a part of a sexual minority, encounter during the adoption procedure. As participants' reports illustrated, the experiences of LG adopters were very varied. It was observed, in particular, that the intensity of the stressors faced during the adoption procedure is context-specific and largely depends on the legal barriers imposed by the countries in which these families live. In fact, all Belgian couples adopted their children through national full joint adoption, while all the French participants and most of the Spanish ones adopted their children via international adoption as pretended single parents. In line with previous studies (Goldberg, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2007), our research showed that having the possibility to adopt as a

couple, through a legal procedure which includes and recognizes both partners as prospective adopters has been found to determine not only a greater level of well-being, but also a better implication and preparation of the parents. Conversely, going through the adoption process as a single parent by lying about the family identity, revealed to have negative impacts on a personal level, on the married life, on the relationship with the child and with the extended family. Considering the long lead times of the adoption process, the repercussions of such a procedure can last for a long period of time and continue to influence the family's relationship and well-being even after the adoption procedure has been completed. All these elements indicate that the main tasks that same-sex adopters have to accomplish during the adoption process are about preserving a good quality of the couple's relationship, managing relational ambiguity and preserving a feeling of legitimacy as prospective parents (table 7).

As regards as the third goal of this study, the analysis of the daily experiences as same-sex parents allows us to conclude that same sex-parents, as part of a sexual minority, have to deal with several social context stressors. Consistent with existing literature (Green & Mitchel, 2008), this study shows that LG adopters encounter homophobia, micro-aggressions, institutional invisibility and a lack of support from the extended family. However, it is important to underline that these negative experiences are rarely described as high in intensity. In fact, according to the participants, the questions and comments encountered in their social context are in most of cases induced by curiosity and lack of knowledge concerning same-sex parenting, rather than overt homophobic motives. Furthermore, our analysis revealed that, despite many parents encountered discrimination and heterosexism in their extended families, the quality of the relationships with the extended family tends to ameliorate upon the child's arrival in the family. In line with previous studies (Gross, 2009; Gross 2010) these elements suggest that for same-sex couples access to parenthood can reduce the degree of heteronormativity and discrimination among extended family members.

Our research provides also insight on the specific parental tasks that LG adopters must develop while parenting adopted children. Two main parental tasks, in particular,

emerged from thematic analysis. Firstly, sexual minorities have to promote an open communication with their children about the meaning and the implications of their homosexuality. Secondly, they have to guide their children's process of understanding, accepting and integrating both their adoptive and minority status. This process passes through a long and repeated communication phase concerning both the adoption-related losses and their family minority status. During this communication process, same-sex parents have to understand, legitimate and answer empathically to their children's questions in order to help them to deal, in a healthy and balanced way, with the challenges connected to their family situation. These findings confirm the results of previous studies (Vinjamuri, 2015; Cody et al., 2016) underlying the importance to help children adopted by same-sex parents to deal with heteronormativity.

Table 7 : Family life cycle issues in gay and lesbian adoptive families

	Stressors, challenges	Feelings, Thoughts, Behaviours	Parental tasks
PRE -ADOPTION	-Self-doubts	-Considering homosexuality and parenting as incompatible -Fears and feelings of guilt concerning the impact of social stigma on their prospective child -Reflection and feelings of guilt because of the impact of the lack of parental figures on their prospective child	Grieving process of the heterosexual parenthood aspirations Overcoming the impossibility to be parents as homosexuals Building a feeling of legitimacy as prospective gay or lesbian parents
DURING THE ADOPTION PROCEDURE	-Legal barriers, prejudice, discrimination, homophobia, and sexual stigma	-Joint adoption: feeling discriminated, insecure, with only a little chance of success. Pretended Single Parent adoption: -Social Parent: invisibility, being in an unequal role -Legal parent: having to lie and hide their identity and their marital life	Preserving a good quality of the couple's relationship Managing relational ambiguity Preserving and increasing a feeling of legitimacy as prospective gay or lesbian parents
POST- ADOPTION	-Microaggressions, homophobia, administrative problems	-Feelings of guilt due to adding a "supplementary problem" in the child's life -Feelings of guilt due to their impossibility to offer the child a	-Explaining homosexuality to the child -Arming the child against heterosexism -Educating the child about diversity

-Children questioning	mother (for gay couples) or a father (for lesbian couples)	-Helping the child deal with adoption-related loss
-Lack of support by extended family	-Threatening representations of the biological parents associated with unresolved grieving process of the heterosexual parenthood aspirations and with a lack of legitimacy. -Living "compartmentalised" relationships with the extended family: being open with some members, very distant to others	-Promoting open communication about the challenges related to adoption and minority status -Preserving a feeling of legitimacy as same-sex adoptive family -Keeping the right distance from unsupportive people

5.8 STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research makes a significant contribution to studies on same-sex adoption, as it explores the experiences of the first generation of same-sex adoptive couples living in Europe; it includes both gay men and lesbians, comparing their experiences; and it also examines the impact of the specific socio-political context of three different European countries in which the participants lived.

Despite the contribution of this study, it has several limitations.

First of all, we have to point out that the use of qualitative interviewing can lead to self-report bias as well as interpretive bias. Second, our study did not include single lesbians and gay men. Future research should investigate the similarities and differences between the experiences of single LG adoptive parents and those of LG couples who adopt as single parents because of legal barriers. Third, our study did not include a comparison group to compare the experiences of LG adoptive parents with those of heterosexual adoptive parents. Thus, the relationship between sexual orientation and adoption challenges only reflects the perception of the participants in this study and limits our ability to establish causal links between such variables.

Besides, as all the participants in this study were Caucasian, this research did not address how race issues may influence LG adoptive parents' experiences throughout the

adoption journey. Black LG adoptive parents may experience additional -stressors due to homophobia and racism. Furthermore, we decided to begin our investigation in three European countries (Belgium, France, and Spain), which could represent a strength of our research but also a limitation because of the large number of variables implicated (culture, legal barriers, etc.). Finally, it would be very important to distinguish the specific challenges faced by the parents who experience a period as a foster family before adopting their child, with particular reference to the double family belonging of the children.

5.9 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the findings of this study have borne a fairly consistent message: despite the more and more open legislative measures on our continent, same-sex couples who want to adopt still have to face unique stressors and roadblocks connected to their minority status. This may involve important negative consequences on their psychological well-being, on their preparation to adoption and on their perceived parental competence. These findings suggest that much remains to be accomplished in order to fight discrimination and ensure equal treatment and opportunities for LG people who want to adopt. Promoting transparency in the adoption practice and increasing awareness, formation and training among social actors could be the first steps in this direction. Policymakers, adoption agencies, social workers and clinicians could learn valuable lessons from the experiences of LG adopters presented in this article. Thus, this research has a great social impact because it has the potential to stimulate discussion and pave the way for improvements in the adoption experience of these new families whose number is increasing in our continent.

Chapter 6

THE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION PROCESS OF CHILDREN ADOPTED BY SAME-SEX PARENTS (STUDY 2)²⁹

ABSTRACT Very little research has investigated the experience of same-sex adoption from the children's perspective. What does it feel like to be adopted by two dads or by two mums? How do the challenges related to being adopted and the challenges related to growing up in a same-sex family overlap in the identity construction of these children? The purpose of this exploratory study was to analyse the main identity-related issues raised by adopted children of same-sex couples across four developmental stages: early childhood, middle childhood, pre-adolescence and adolescence. To this end, in-depth interviews were conducted with a sample of 31 same-sex adoptive families composed by 44 adopted children (36 boys, 8 girls, aged from 3 to 18 years) and with 62 (16 lesbians and 46 gay men) sexual-minority adoptive parents. Thematic analyses revealed that children adopted by LG parents deal with unique identity-related issues connected to the intersection of both their adoptive and familial minority statuses. More specifically, adoptees' questions, feelings and experiences connected with their unique family arrangement change over time, ranging from negative to positive. Analysis shed light on the importance of warmth and open family communication to facilitate the integration of such complex elements in the adoptees' emerging identity. The findings of this study result in important implications: they can guide adoption professionals involved in clinical practice with these new families, help same-sex adoptive parents in their parental tasks and, consequently, improve the experience of the adoptees in such households.

Key words: *same-sex adoption, adopted children, identity construction*

6.1 OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As detailed in chapter 3, literature examining child development in same-sex adoptive families has emerged only recently. Findings from a growing number of quantitative studies indicate that same-sex families represent an appropriate placement option for

²⁹ Parts of this chapter have been adapted from:

Messina R. & Brodzinsky D. (2018). *Why don't I have a mum? Why don't I have a dad? Identity-related issues in children adopted by same-sex parents*. Manuscript in preparation.

children in need of adoption and that there are no differences in adoptees' adjustment according to parents' sexual orientation (Shneider & Vecho, 2015). More precisely, no family type differences have been found in several areas: internalizing and externalizing behavioural problems (Erich et al., 2005; Farr & Patterson 2010; Farr & Patterson 2013; Golombok et al., 2014) gender-typed playing (Farr et al., 2010; Goldberg and Smith, 2013), attachment (Erich et al, 2009 a; Erich et al, 2009 b) and cognitive development (Lavner et al., 2012).

Although these quantitative studies have the merit to provide a precise measurement of the above mentioned variables, in most cases they have the limitation that child adjustment is only evaluated according to the parents' point of view. In contrast, there are limited data on how placement with same-sex couples is experienced by the children themselves. Some qualitative studies suggest that children adopted by same-sex parents can encounter negative feelings and additional challenges connected to occasional teasing and bullying (Farr et al. 2015; Cody et al., 2016). These elements can increase feelings of difference among adoptees and led them to hide their family structure to the peers (Gianino et al. 2009).

Despite the contribution of these emerging studies, there is still a dearth of research exploring the perspectives of adoptees with regard to what it is like for them to grow up with sexual minority parents. Such a lack of studies is problematic considering that more and more countries are opening adoption to same-sex couples, which implies that adoption agencies, psychologists and social workers need to acquire a know-how on this subject in order to support these new families in their developmental tasks. More specifically, while identity formation has been widely explored in children adopted by opposite-sex families, no research has explored this theme in children adopted by same-sex parents.

In order to fill this gap in literature, this study investigated the following research questions: How does being adopted by same-sex parents impact the child's identity construction? What are the feelings of children connected with being adopted in a

same-sex household? What type of questions do they ask themselves and their parents while growing up?

Giving the floor directly to adoptees and to their same-sex parents, this study aims to shed light on the identity related issues experienced by these adoptees during growing years.

6.2 HYPHOTHESES

From a theoretical perspective, this research has been guided by several theories. First of all, in line with the adoptive family life theory (Brodzinsky et al., Brodzinsky, Lang & Smith, 1995; Hajal & Rosenberg 1991), we hypothesised that adopted children of same-sex couples encounter stressors and tasks similar to those experienced by children adopted by heterosexual couples. However, we also expected to find that these adoptees are confronted with unique and specific issues related to their family being part of a sexual minority group (Green & Mitchell, 2008). Indeed, in line with the minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), we postulated that these adoptees, as part of a sexual minority family, deal with prejudice, rejection, and hiding in their social context and that all these elements can play an important role in their psychological experience. More precisely, based on the existing research into children adopted by same-sex parents (Farr et al. 2015; Cody et al., 2016), we expected to find that micro aggressions and feelings of differences can represent some of the main issues in their emerging identities.

Based on the developmental model proposed by Brodzinsky and colleagues (Brodzinsky 2011, Brodzinsky, Singer & Braff, 1984), we assumed that the identity formation process is an ongoing process, composed of developmental stages during which adoptees progressively increase an understanding of both their adoptive and minority status and of its implications. We were interested particularly in the exploration of the change of children's awareness and feelings towards both their adoptive and minority status during developmental stages, until it is integrated in a coherent sense of self.

6.3 PARTICIPANTS

The participants were a sample of 31 same-sex families (62 gay and lesbian parents and 44 adoptees), living in France (13 families), Belgium (6 families) and Spain (11 families). Parents (46 gays and 16 lesbians) were aged between 33 and 56 (mean age= 43,2; Sd= 5,3). The adoptees ranged from 3 to 18 years (with an average age of 7,5 years; Sd= 4,2)³⁰. As regards the distribution of adoptees by age period, the 36% of the adoptees was in early childhood, 36 % in middle childhood, 14 % in pre-adolescence and 14% in adolescence (table 8).

TABLE 8: Descriptive statistics by adoptees' age period

	Early childhood (3-5 years)	Middle childhood (5-9 years)	Pre- adolescence (9-13 years)	Adolescence (13-18 years)
Adoptees (n=44)	36 % (n=16)	36% (n=16)	14% (n=6)	14% (n=6)
Age at visit (mean in years)	3,6 (sd= 0.6)	7,1 (1.3)	11,2 (0.7)	15,5 (2.2)
Age at adoption (mean in years)	0,11 (0.10)	2,5 (1.4)	5,4 (2.2)	5,5 (4.3)
Gender (% female) n=8	12 %	19 %	33 %	17 %
Gender (% male) n=36	88 %	81%	67 %	83 %
Type of adoption (% National)	56%	31%	17%	17%
Type of adoption (% international)	44%	69%	83%	83%
Parents (n= 62)				
Lesbians= 26% (n=16)	29% (n=8)	33% (n=10)	40% (n=4)	33% (n=4)
Gays= 74% (n=46)	71% (n=20)	67% (n=20)	60% (n=6)	67% (n=8)
Age at visit (mean)	40,3(sd=4.1)	43,5 (sd= 5.1)	43,6 (sd= 2.7)	48,4 (sd=4.1)
Relational status (% married)	64 %	77%	80%	100%
Relational status (% cohabitant)	27 %	15%	/	/
Relational status (% civil union)	9 %	8%	20%	/

³⁰ For more details on the socio-demographic characteristics of our sample see chapter 4

6.4 PROCEDURE

By referring to a narrative approach (McAdams, 2001; McAdams, Joosselson & Lieblich, 2006), we considered the adoptive identity formation to be a process of co-construction of coherent stories which can create a sense of meaning, linking one's past, present, and future. For this reason, we conducted two interviews with each family, one with the parents and one with the child, in order to explore this process of co-construction of the adoptive identity from each side. The semi structured interviews were carried out to obtain data on the identity formation in children adopted by same sex parents from both the parents' and the adoptees' perspectives. The interviews were guided by a series of questions that were used to introduce discussion about different topics; once the discussion started off, additional probing questions were put forward, based on the participants' initial responses, and, in the case of the children, on their ability to understand different topics, their emotional reactions to initial questions, and their willingness to continue the interview. The results presented in this article specifically, were derived from questions 4-5-6-7 of the interview grid proposed to parents and from questions 1-2-3-4 of the interview with children presented in chapter 4. These questions explore the following areas: a) Adoptees' current life; b) Adoptees' relationships with peers; c) Adoptees' feelings about growing up in a same-sex family; d) Adoptees' feelings about adoption; e) Adoptees' feelings and questions about birth family (for more details on the interview grid, see chapter 4).

In this article, we will not discuss the details of the data obtained by the Double Moon test, which will be analysed in more detail in chapter 7. However, we will, at some points, report some examples of the children's drawings to support and better explain the themes emerged from interviews. In fact, the use of this graphic projective test was of great utility to gather additional information about the themes investigated in the interview, especially with the adoptees who did not feel comfortable talking about their feelings explicitly.

6.5 RESULTS

The themes identified from the interviews and from the drawings (for more details on data analysis see chapter 4), have been analysed taking adopted childrens' age, sex, and family structure into account. The themes have been regrouped in 4 developmental stages (early childhood, childhood, pre-adolescence and adolescence) which form the headings in the next section. A detailed description of the main issues of each developmental stage is illustrated by means of specific verbatim examples drawn from parents and adoptees' discourse.

6.5.1 Early Childhood (2,5 -5 years)

- ***Understanding the difference between the biological and the affective function of parenting***

The analysis of parents' and children's reports during early childhood highlighted several themes related to a central issue: the mystery of origins (figure 7). Most of the parents with children in pre-school years (63 % of the lesbians and 80% of the gay men) indicated that children expressed considerable curiosity and interest in exploring their birth, origins and arrival in the adoptive family. This curiosity is likely the result of the communication process about adoption which begins in this developmental phase (Brodzinsky, 2006). The story about origins construed by same-sex parents in particular includes two main elements: an explication of the impossibility for them, as a same-sex couple, to biologically procreate, together with the revelation of the existence of two opposite-sex parents who gave birth to the child. According to parents, this information leads children to ask questions related to understanding the difference between the biological and affective sides of parenting, such as: "*Was I in your belly? Can I stay in your belly? Why are babies in the womb of a woman? Was she/he my mum? Do I have a mum?*". Through these repeated questions, adoptees progressively explore and integrate the lack of a biological connection with their adoptive parents in their emerging sense of

self. At the same time, they start to develop a great curiosity for the mystery of being born from their birth mother's womb.

During the interviews with the adopted children, the theme of the belly appeared as a central and recurring one. In particular, many children drew swollen bellies in different ways: as the belly of their birth mother, as their own belly, as the belly of their adoptive parents, or as the belly of other people. This element, even though not always clearly understandable, can be interpreted as a means for adoptees to symbolize the integration of the theme of origins in their emerging identity. To deepen our understanding of this theme, it seems useful to provide some examples.

For instance consider Nicolas, a 3,5 year old boy, adopted domestically by a gay male couple when he was 1,5 years. Nicolas spent a few months with his birth family (of which he did not have memories), and was placed in an institution before he was to be adopted. During the interview, his parents explained that they were in the middle of the narration process of his story. They stated:

“Ever since the first days we explained to him: it takes a woman and a man to have a child...a woman's belly and a seed that is brought by a man. As we are two men, we can't have babies together, but we really wanted to have one. You were in the belly of a woman who carried you for 9 months, but after that, she couldn't take care of you. So, as we wanted a child but we couldn't have one together, we asked if we could adopt you, because we wanted to love you and take care of you”.

As we can observe in the parents' report, their telling process about Nicolas' origins pointed out two main elements: the biological conception and the adoption. According to the parents, Nicolas asked a lot of questions about his story and used to make a lot of drawings in which he depicted scenes of his past, mixed with his present situation and with elements of fantasy.

During the interview with Nicolas, after a brief exchange in which he had difficulties with answering the questions, we proposed him the Double Moon Test. By following the instructions, he drew in the following order: his birth mother and father in two separated beds, and himself in the orphanage. Afterwards, he added a big belly on each person (figure 6). In order to understand his drawing, we asked to him several questions.

R. (Researcher): *"Nicolas, what are these bellies?"*.
N. *"This is to stay inside"*.
R.: *"To stay inside?"*
N. *Yes... when you born"*.
R.: *"So, this is the belly of your birth mother?"*.
N.: *"Yes it is...and of my daddies too."*
R.: *"Ok... But I can't see them in this sheet. Where are they (the adoptive parents)?"*
N.: *"They are not here... because I can't stay in daddy's belly"*.
R.: *"Why?"*.
N.: *"I don't know"*.

This excerpt shows that N. was putting together several elements of his story: his birth family, the transition period in the orphanage and his new reality of being adopted by same-sex parents. More specifically, he was exploring the theme of origins and integrating the information of his conception and his adoption. He did not have a complete understanding of this matter, but he was acquiring a progressive awareness of the difference between the biological and affective functions of the parentage (fulfilled by respectively the birth family and the adoptive one). He was also beginning to understand the impossibility for his adoptive parents, as a gay couple, to have conceived him biologically. This rudimentary awareness, lays the foundations for understanding the meaning and the implications of being adopted by same-sex parents in the following stages of his development.

The theme of the belly was also raised by several parents during the interviews. Many of them (65% of gay men, 38% of lesbians) reported that their children used to play a symbolic game, simulating their birth from their adoptive parents' belly. For instance, Ricardo, 45 years old, reported that Ulrick, his 5-year old son (adopted when he was 2 years of age), took great pleasure in staging such a ritual with him. He stated:

"This theme of the origins, of the pregnancy is very present in his imagination...for instance, he uses to ask me: was I in your belly? I explain to him that it is not possible because I am a man (...).He loves so much to pretend to be born from my womb. So every day, we stage his birth from my womb. It is like a ritual... he says: it is a pity that babies can't born from daddies' belly, I would like to stay in your belly...it is very funny!".

In this example we observe the coexistence of two elements: the progressive understanding of gay fathers' impossibility to conceive a child, together with the desire

to have a biological connection with them. In this sense the fantasies and games connected to being born from an adoptive parent's belly could be interpreted as a sign of the "mythical graft" (Neuberger, 2005) in the adoptive family. In other words, these rituals could represent a way, for the children, to develop a feeling of belonging to the adoptive family, by simulating a "second, symbolical birth" into a new life: the one with their adoptive parents.



Figure 6 : Nicolas's drawing

- ***Curiosity about the maternal body and functions***

During the interviews with gay men, another theme, strongly connected with the previous one, emerged: their children were extremely curious about the feminine body and maternal functions. Most of the gay parents interviewed (80%) reported that during this developmental phase, their children were both fascinated and attracted by a woman's body, as well as by the idea of pregnancy.

With regard to the above, Frederick, 38 years old, told of his experience with Cedric, his 4,5 year-old son, adopted when he was 3 months of age. Frederick explained that in the early period of the telling process about adoption (at around 3 years old), his son manifested an intense curiosity about the women around him. He stated:

"I remember that the first time we went to the sea, he was fascinated by a friend who was pregnant, he touched her belly and he asked her: was I here, in your belly?" And

after he crouched on her body and put his head on her chest for a long time...we were very surprised and we didn't really understand the meaning of this act (...). After this event, he began doing similar acts whenever he met a woman (...). When he encountered a woman in the street, no matter what woman, even a stranger, he would call her "mom", we didn't understand why...we thought that maybe he was looking for his mother, I don't know...".

According to Frederick, this issue was a central one in the imagination of his child, who also used to stage it in his play. For instance, Frederick explained that his son loved to play with stuffed animals that resembled maternal bodies. He said:

"In that period he used to play with a cow, with big and visible teats. It seemed to be very important to him. He looked at this cow like it was something precious (...). He was fascinated by the maternal function of this cow, he asked me if he could drink her milk (...). I was very touched by this".

Through such behaviour, Cedric was acquiring a progressive awareness of the biological functions connected to the feminine body (pregnancy, nurturing). At the same time, he was integrating another, painful, reality: the loss of his birth mother. In fact, even if he was not capable of completely understanding the implications of being adopted, he started to develop a curiosity about this lost maternal figure, showing a vague hope to reconcile with her again.

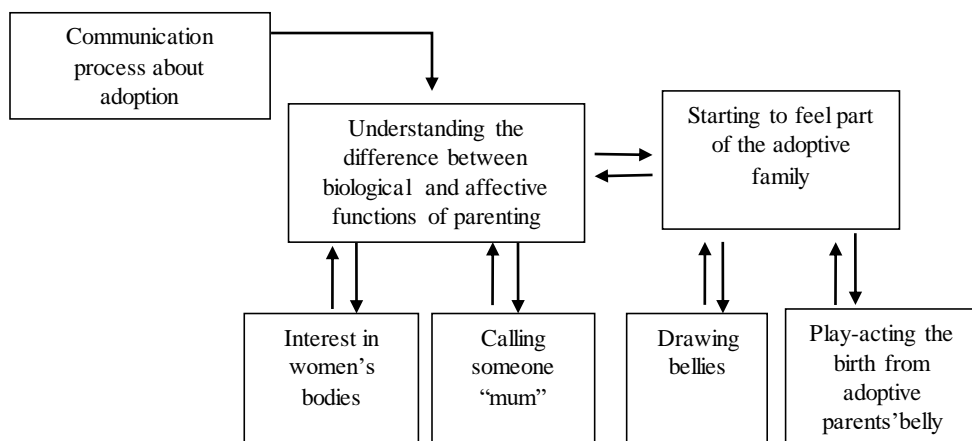


Figure 7: Themes during early childhood

6.5.2 Middle Childhood (5-9 years)

- ***Beginning to be confronted to the minority status***

During the middle childhood years, when going to school and doing activities beyond the family environment, adoptees are confronted with new challenges. Indeed, the comparison with peers leads them to be progressively awareness of both their adoptive and minority status. Cecile, a 7-year-old girl adopted by two gay fathers, was able to give a detailed explication of the meaning and implications of being adopted by same-sex parents. She stated:

C. (Cecile): "A same-sex family is when you have two dads...we are a little bit different ...because my dads don't love women... so I can't have a mum, but I have two dads. (...).Because there are a lot of different families, with one mom, one dad, two dads, or a mom and a dad..."

As illustrated by the example, Cecile clearly understood the concept of "family diversity". In our sample, many children in this developmental stage (81%) were capable of identifying such a concept, describing to be "different" from others for having two same-sex parents. The feelings connected to their family diversity were described in three main ways: as negative, as positive, or as both positive and negative. More specifically, according to these adoptees, the most challenging aspect of being adopted by same-sex parents was being a target of questions, curiosity and negative comments in relation to their parents' sexual minority status. The positive aspects of being adopted by same sex parents included the good quality of relationship with the adoptive parents, together with the sensation of being "a new", "original" or "special" family. For instance, Lyns, a 8 year- old boy, told with sadness and frustration that he was the object of questions and teasing by some of his schoolmates. On the other hand, he was able to identify the positive aspects of his family experience. He stated:

L. (Lyns): "They (some schoolmates) are mean to me...they say that it is strange that I don't have a mum...they laugh at me..."

R. : "How do you feel about this?"

L: "I don't like it when they do this..."

R.: "And what do you like the most about having two dads?"

L: Well... that I like to spend my time with them...we have fun...and that there are not a lot of families like us”.

During the Double Moon test (figure 8), Lyns drew his “bad schoolmates” outside the frame and expressed the wish to make them disappear with a magic wand.

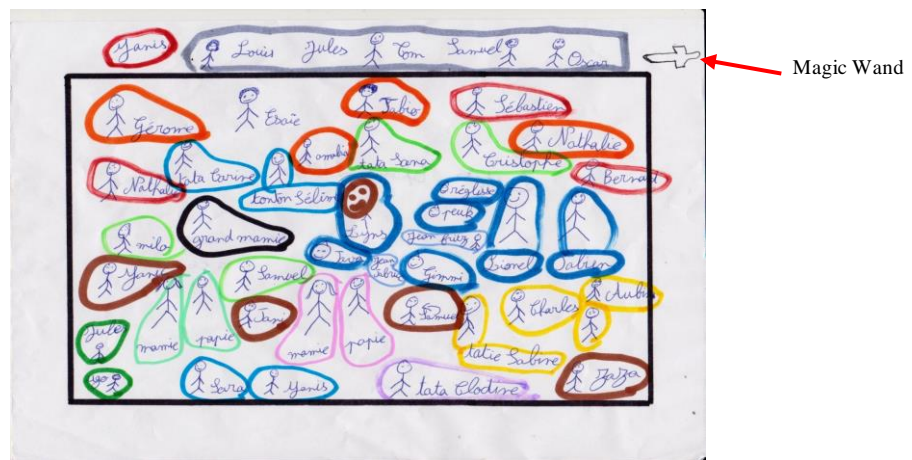


Figure 8: Lyns's drawing

- ***Being adopted and not having a mum/dad: a double grieving process?***

Another issue that emerged from the interviews, strongly interconnected with the previous one, is the feeling children have about not having a mother/father in their adoptive family. “Why don't I have a mum? Why don't I have a dad? Will I have a mum/ dad in the future?” According to many parents (95% of gays, 70% of lesbians) these are some of the most commonly asked questions by children during this developmental stage. In fact, by living in a heterosexist society, children are often confronted with the traditional idea of the family, which includes both the maternal and paternal figure. In this regard, it was detailed how the school environment often conveys an idea of “lack” to children of same-sex parents in chapter 5. For instance, celebrations like Mother's or Father's Day can lead children to raise questions about the legitimacy of their same-sex family and to see the absence of maternal or a parental figure as an

element of deficiency in their family structure. Furthermore, according to the parents, being confronted with such an idea of shortcoming, can increase children's fantasies about the loss of their birth family, which causes pain. In this regard, Vincent, a 39-year-old father, explained the experiences of German, his 8-year-old son. He stated:

"On Mother's Day at school he was asked to draw a picture for his mother and we proposed him to offer it to his aunt...but he was very sad and finally he asked us if he could make the drawing for his mother in Haiti, because he missed her so much...we said yes...he made it, coloured and did not stop adding flowers...then we put it on the fridge. He was happy and he said that he was relieved because he had had the possibility to make a drawing for his mother like everyone else (...) and he asked us: so, do I have a mum too? "

As shown by this report, a school environment which does not take the family diversity into account can negatively impact a child's well-being. German in particular, was dealing with two difficult experiences: understanding not only that he had lost his birth mother, but also that he would never have a mum in his adoptive family, being, in this way, "different" from the others. Similar experiences were reported by David, 38 years old, who illustrated the feelings of his 7 year- old daughter on this topic:

"These two things are interconnected in her discourse. She asks: why don't I have a mum? But also: where is my birth mum? Will I see her again?...I can't say if what she is missing now is her birth mother or a mother in general, I think both... These two things are strongly interconnected in her discourse".

As observed in the previous examples, in the adoptees' imagination, these two themes, the loss of the birth parents and the absence of a maternal/ paternal figure are often interrelated. Many parents reported that their children idealize this "absent parental figure" and that this issue is a central one during this developmental phase. In this regard, David additionally reported:

"She has a lot of fantasies of her birth mother, but also general ones of what it would be like to have a mum... I clearly explained to her that we are two dads, she has understood that we like men and not women, but I think that in her heart she continues to hope. Sometimes she asks me: "but daddy, if one day you meet a woman, maybe she will agree to become my mom?!(...).I think she needs time to come to term with this, to accept...to understand that she will not have a mum anymore...it is painful for her, it is like she has to deal with two losses".

As detailed in this example, children can be confronted with a kind of double grieving process: of the loss of their birth parents; and of this “fantasised” or idealised mother/father they do not have but they would like to have. These two elements are connected to feelings of loss and separation, which begin to become integrated in children’s psychodynamics during this developmental stage (figure 9).

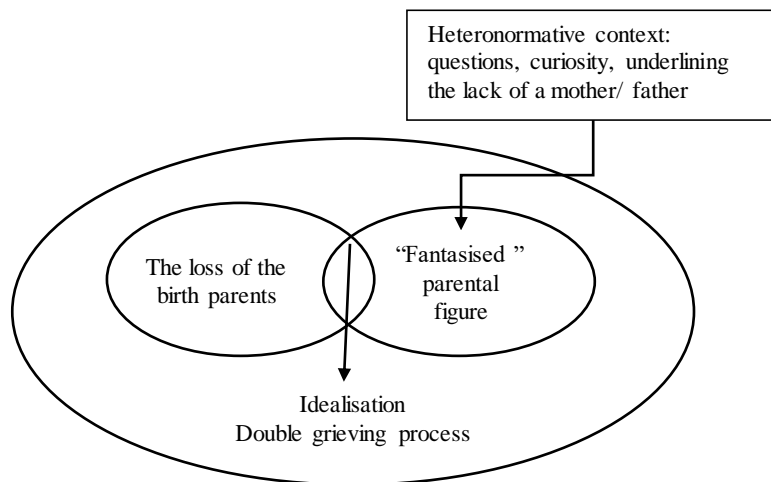


Figure 9: Adoptees' psychodynamics during middle childhood

6.5.3 Pre-Adolescence (9-13 years)

- *Increased curiosity about birth parents and the need to find gender role models*

Preadolescence is the transitional period between childhood and adolescence and it is characterised by numerous changes in one’s body, identity, experiences and emotions (P.J Pantone 1995). Such changes lead to new issues, often connected with the acquisition of gender social roles, the relationships with the peers and the search of self. During the interviews, several parents (75% of lesbians, 67% of gays), reported that in this period their children’s interest in their birth parents increased and they needed to

have a “surrogate” paternal or “maternal” figure to whom they could identify. In this period the main questions asked by adoptees are related to both their birth parents (“What was she/he like? Do I look like him/ her?”) and to their curiosity about paternal and maternal roles (How does it feel to have a mother or a father?).

For instance, Sandrine, mother of Lucas, a 12 year old boy, explained:

“He always asks to do certain activities with a friend of us. He is a sort of “godfather” to him. He loves to go fishing, play sports, or go out for a football match with him. This is sort of a weekly date which he waits anxiously. He doesn’t want to do it with me or my wife, he says that these are guys’ affairs...”

As shown by Sandrine’s report, this godfather represented a gender role model for Lucas who allowed him to experience feelings of connection and belonging to the “group of men”. Sandrine and her wife also underlined that Lucas manifested a strong curiosity about his birth father, and that the relationship with his godfather helped him to cope with this loss. Sandrine stated:

“He asks a lot of questions about his birth father...He would like to know what his father is like, to know if he resembles him physically, but also to know what it is like to have a father...and spending time with his godfather can fill this void a little bit ...”

Sandrine’s report shed light on the important role of the godfather: he represents some sort of a “mirror” in which Lucas can reflect his feelings about his birth-father, but also experience a new, positive relationship.

- ***Opposition towards adoptive parents: an expression of invisible loyalty?***

Pre-adolescence is the period in which parents reported high levels of conflict in the relationship with their children. More specifically, many parents (75% of lesbians, 67% of gays) reported that during this stage, their children manifested oppositional behaviour towards them. For example, Carla and Sara, mothers of Alex, a 9 year-old-boy adopted from Honduras when he was 4 years old, reported during the interview, with a mix of sadness and worry, that their son was often offensive against them and seemed unhappy in their family. Carla and Sara were considerably hurt by their son’s attitude and

reported feelings of powerlessness. At the same time, they felt called into question about their parental role and about the legitimacy of their family. Carla stated:

"It's very hard in this period...he never misses an opportunity to argue with us, he is very insulting (...) for instance he says: I didn't choose to have two mothers, I don't like it! I want a dad! Or things like these...and this is very difficult for us (...) we don't know how to handle such a situation...we ask ourselves if it was a good choice..."

During the interview, Alex, on a number of occasions expressed the desire to have a dad, with an attitude of opposition and defiance. He loudly stated:

Alex (A): "I want a dad because it's better, because I miss having a dad (...).I don't like having two mothers!"

R: "What do you mean you don't like it?"

A.: "Because I want a daaaaad! I don't like two mothers!"

During the Double Moon Test (figure 10), at first, he did not want to represent his mothers and he drew himself surrounded by a group of boys (some friends and some members of his birth family such as his birth brother and his cousins). During a second try, he accepted representing his adoptive mothers but only outside the frame. Furthermore, he used a magic wand to delete one of them and turn her into a father. He stated:

A.: "With my magic wand I want to delete her and add a dad, because I want a mum and a dad...it is better!"

R: "What do you mean that "it is better"?"

A: "Because it is better (...).

Alex did not represent his birth parents in his drawing. However, at the end of the interview he stated:

A: I would like to stay in Honduras (...).I imagine how it would be to stay there with them, with a true family".

R.: "A true family?"

A: "I want to say...with a mother, a father, my brothers...(..."

This example enable us to hypothesise that Alex, while expressing a strong opposition towards his mothers, was manifesting an "invisible loyalty" (Ducommun-Nagy, 2008) towards his birth family and towards his birth country. Indeed, Alex was rejecting his

adoptive mothers because they were lesbians, identifying himself in this way, with the system of values of his birth country (which does not consider homosexuality as legitimate). An important element to underline is that Alex was adopted through a single-parent adoption procedure, in which his legal mother pretended to be heterosexual. Thus at the time of the interview his mothers were worried about the legal consequences in case Alex would decide to visit his birth relatives and they tried to discourage him from having contact with them. Therefore, it is possible to hypothesize that all these elements increased Alex's fantasies about his birth family, which was idealized and considered as "a true family", in opposition to the adoptive one.

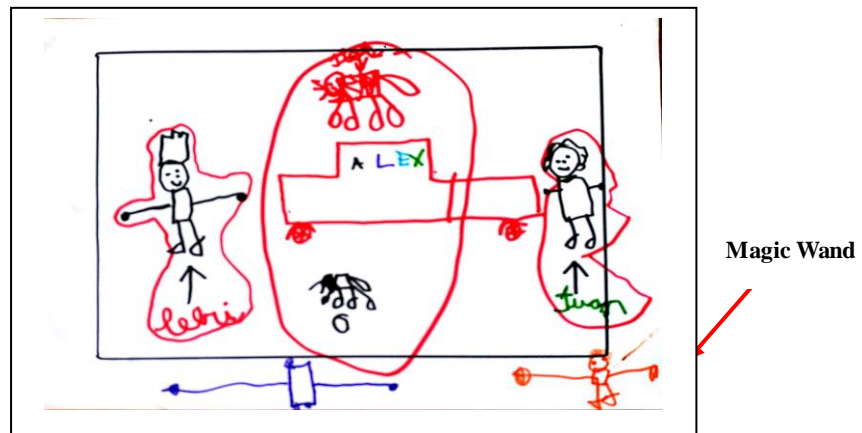


Figure 10: Alex's drawing

- ***To tell or not to tell? Revealing the family structure to peers***

Another key aspect of this life period entails the fact that preadolescents become more and more involved in relationships with their peers and they gradually become independent of their parents. While acquiring a progressive independence, preadolescents need to feel accepted by their peers. Unfortunately, the transitional period between the end of pre-adolescence and the beginning of adolescence, is a moment in which many adoptees experienced micro aggressions, and episodes of teasing or bullying. In this developmental phase, many preadolescents (83%) reported

negative feelings related to their family diversity, together with the desire to hide and change their family structure. A typical challenge of preadolescence and early adolescence years involves finding the appropriate balance between openness and reticence when talking about their status of being an adoptee with homosexual parents. All the pre-adolescents participating in this study (100%) reported that sharing their parents' sexual orientation was a source of anxiety, because of the fear of being teased and bullied. Pre-adolescents showed two main strategies to deal with such negative feelings: in some cases, preadolescents preferred not to share their family structure at all; in other cases they made a careful selection of who to inform about their family background. For instance, Jeremy, 11 years old, adopted by two fathers, stated:

“Some people reacted badly.... So now I prefer not to talk about my family because people don't understand”.

On the same subject, Lucas, 12 years old, reported:

Lucas (L): “It depends, sometimes I talk about my fathers, sometimes I don't...because it is not something to share with everyone”

R.: and how do you decide if you tell or do not tell someone about your family?

L.: I reflect: Is it better to tell or not to tell? If I trust a person, if I am sure that he/she will not judge me...then, I talk about my family....if not, I don't talk about it at all”.

The issues of the pre-adolescence years are summarised in figure 11.

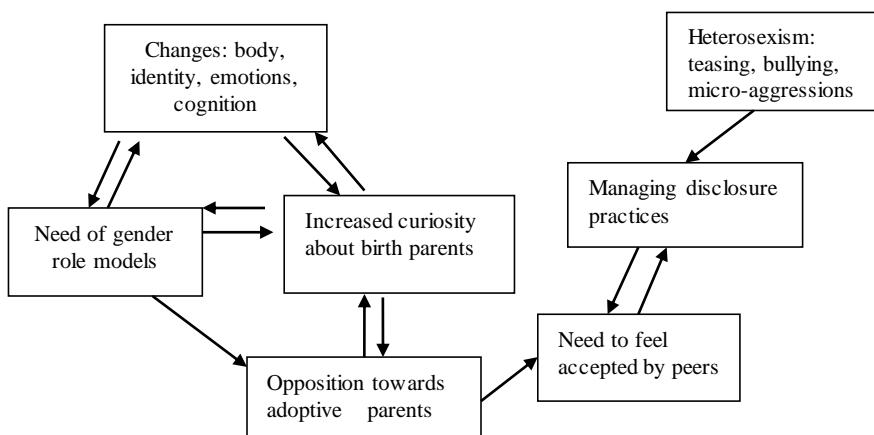


Figure 11 : Pre-adolescence issues

6.5.4 Adolescence (13-18 years)

- *Showing gratitude towards same-sex parents*

The analyses of the interviews with both parents and adoptees showed that during adolescence, the degree of opposition and conflict between them was lower than in the previous stage. This is related to the fact that throughout adolescence teenagers have a deeper understanding of their adoptive status and begin to recognise the humanitarian value of adoption (Brodzinsky, 2011). This awareness leads them to develop a feeling of “debt” (Rosenfeld, 2006), which implicates gratitude and loyalty towards their adoptive parents, for having raised them. These positive feelings help adoptees to deal with the challenges connected to their minority status.

Vini for example, 18 years old and adopted by lesbian mothers, reported:

V (Vini): “It is hard to hide yourself, your family (...) because I knew what it means to be abandoned, and I feared to be abandoned by my friends too if I told them about the homosexuality of my mothers. (...). But there comes a time when you get tired of lying and you need to be yourself (...).”

R.: What would you like to say to the other children adopted by two same-sex parents?

V.: “I would say to them not to lie about what they are... Even if it can be difficult growing up in a same-sex family, they are lucky because they have a family. In Brasil, where I was adopted, there were a lot of children who would have spent the rest of their life in the orphanage (...). So, anyway, it is fortunate to have a family”.

As shown in this example, Vini was able to identify both the positive and the negative aspects of his adoptive experience. More specifically, on one hand he described the difficulty with regard to living in an heterosexist context in which he felt obliged to hide his family identity, on the other hand, he was able to underline the value of being adopted, because, despite such difficulties, it allowed him to find himself surrounded by love.

- ***“I am proud of them”! Integrating family diversity as a positive aspect of identity***

Another central aspect, strongly connected with the previous one, is that the adolescents are able to recognise the many challenges that their parents, as same-sex couples, have faced in order to adopt them. This awareness makes adolescents value their family experience as something to be proud of. Mikael, for example, 18 years old, stated:

“I am proud of my parents, (...) they are an emblem of courage to make changes in society (...). They have faced many barriers to build a same-sex family (...). We are an example for all minorities... the world can change!”.

As shown in this example, same-sex parents can become a kind of “heroes” in the eyes of adoptees, an example of societal evolution. In this regard, many adolescents in the sample started to become militant for LG rights and got involved in the activities of LGBT associations. Furthermore, many adolescents explained the importance of sharing their experiences with other children raised by same-sex parents. They wanted to become a role model for these children and help them deal with the challenges they will have to face. For instance, Vini, 18 year old, reported his experience:

“For a long time I was hiding myself, I didn't want to talk about my family (...). Today I realise that it is not good to hide yourself, you have to accept yourself and your family (...). This is why it is important for me to talk to other kids, to tell them that they are not the only ones in such a situation, that they should not feel “different” (...). It is important to give them a reference frame because I didn't have it and it was very hard for me”.

Vini's report shows that, for him, assuming a “guiding role” to younger children represented a kind of “compensation” for the difficulties he faced while growing up in a heterosexist society.

- ***“Everything is fine!” : risks connected to feelings of loyalty***

As shown in the previous paragraphs, the gratitude and the pride towards adoptive parents are related to both the concept of “debt” and “loyalty” (Ducommun Nagy, 2012). Despite the positive aspects connected to such elements, they are not without

risks. More specifically, feelings of loyalty can determine a hyper-protective attitude towards adoptive parents with a tendency to deny all the challenges connected with growing up in a same-sex family. Jesus, for instance, 13 years old and adopted by two men, manifested a certain reticence in identifying the challenges of his experience during the interview. With a defensive attitude, he tried to minimise all the feelings related to his family's minority status. He stated:

J. (Jesus): "Honestly, everything is fine! There are no problems. Besides the fact that people ask me a lot of questions, besides this, I am fine, for me there are no differences in being adopted by same-sex parents...it is the same, it is like having a mother and a father, exactly the same..."

Further along the interview, Jesus shared more and more details of his experience, saying:

J.: "Sometimes I think of my mother...I ask myself what it would have been like to have a mother"

R.: "To have a mother in general or to have your birth mother?"

J.: "Mmm both... of course, I would have liked to have known my birth mother... but also...in general I'd like to know what it feels like to have a mom"

R.: "Tell me, in what sense?"

J.: "Because...I suppose that having a mum is different because she's a woman, she takes care of you like a mother...I think so...I don't know"

R.: "Did you ever speak about this with your dads?"

J.: "No...a little bit about my birth mother... I don't want them to think that I am not happy (...) that I necessarily need a mother...In the end, it is the same, having a mother, or a father, or two fathers. Practically it's the same"

In the narrative of Jesus we can see a great hesitation in expressing his curiosity about having a mother, because he feared he might hurt his adoptive parents and transmit a message of not being happy with them. For Jesus, sharing such curiosity meant not only that he was not being grateful towards his parents, but it would also indirectly confirm the heterosexist stereotype according to which "every child needs a mother and a father", calling the appropriateness of the same-sex context into question. Indeed, after having shared his curiosity about this maternal figure, he suddenly went back to a defensive attitude, by minimising his feelings.

Several adolescents in the sample manifested certain difficulties in communicating openly about their feelings on this topic, which seemed a kind of a “taboo” during interviews. In such situations, the familial communication on these aspects is blocked, with the result that they continue to float silently in familial dynamics, hidden behind the appearance that "everything is fine".

The issues of the adolescence years are summarised in figure 12.

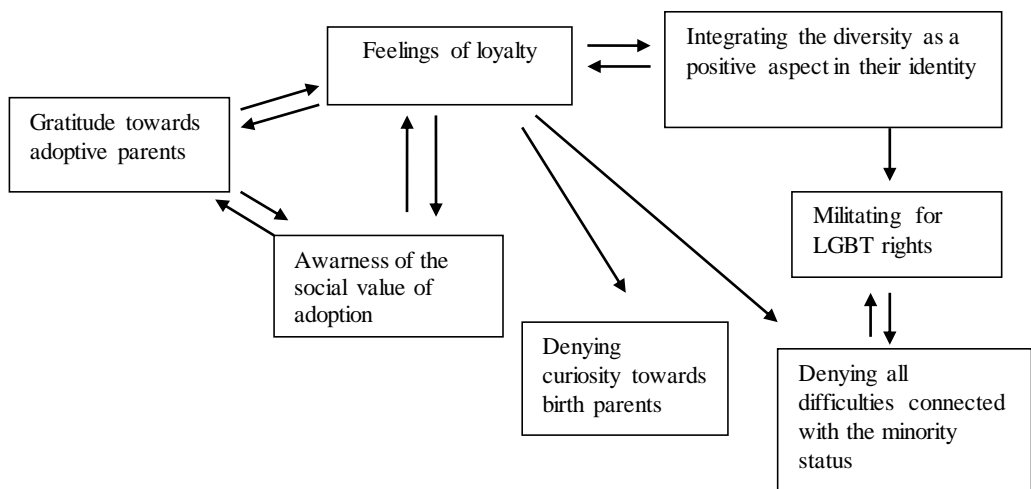


Figure 12: Issues during adolescent years

6.6 DISCUSSIONS

This research is one of the first studies giving the floor to same-sex adoptive families in order to explore the identity construction process of children adopted by such households. The results of this qualitative research contribute to the increase of the scientific knowledge of identity-related issues of children adopted by same sex parents. Our study sheds light, in particular, on the main questions, issues and developmental tasks of adoptees across four age periods: early childhood, childhood, preadolescence and adolescence (table 9). Results showed that the identity construction process of children adopted by same-sex parents is the result of the intersection of two main

elements: their adoptive condition and their family's sexual minority status. The combination of these two aspects give rise to unique questions and issues at each stage of the development, which will be discussed below.

During early childhood, children start to integrate the perceived information about their story and they are fascinated by the mystery of their origins. In this period, they deal with two main developmental tasks: understanding the differences between the biological and the affective sides of parenting and progressively feeling part of their new family. The most frequent questions asked by children at this stage are the following: "*Was I in your belly? Can I stay in your belly?*". More specifically, our analysis revealed that the theme of origins was a very relevant one and was manifested by children in several ways: by playing, by drawing or by daily rituals. These elements allow children to symbolize their "mythical graft (Neuburger, 2015) in the adoptive family, and to acquire a rudimental understanding of their status of being adopted by same-sex parents.

During middle childhood, children have a better awareness of the meaning and implications of being adopted, as well as of their adoptive family's minority status. At this stage they also develop a realistic understanding of the irreversibility of adoption (Brodzinsky, 2011). This realisation implicates gains and losses for them. In fact, being adopted by same-sex parents allow children to gain a lovely family who will take care of them. On the other hand, it implicates not only the definitive loss of their birth parents, but also the impossibility, for them, of having a mother or a father in their adoptive family. In the context of living in a heterosexist society, this awareness can be difficult for children when they compare themselves to their peers. As a consequence, a recurring, central question asked by these children is: "*Why don't I have a mum? Why don't I have a dad?*". Our results show that this "mum" or "dad", absent physically, can be very present in the adopted children's imaginary life. In particular, children often idealize this "fantasised" parental figure, as someone they do not have, but want to have at all cost. In parallel, like all adoptees, they start to develop a progressive curiosity about the birth parents, which causes them to confront painful feelings of loss and

abandonment (Vadilonga, 2012). These two elements -the loss of the birth parents and the absence of a mother/father in the adoptive family- coexist in children's psychodynamics, resulting in the emergence of new and specific identity-related issues (James, 2009).

The results also suggested that the pre-adolescence period was especially critical for both adoptees and parents. Consistent with previous research (Farr et al., 2015), our findings show that preadolescents face episodes of teasing and bullying, which are deeply painful. More specifically and in line with other studies (Gianino, 2008; Cody et al., 2016), adoptees in our sample reported that revealing their family structure to peers was a difficult task. For this reason, they often preferred to hide their parents' sexual minority status from their peers until they felt confident of their reactions. Thematic analyses also revealed that in this period adoptees often manifest opposition attitudes and behaviour towards their parents. Confirming the results of previous research (Gianino, 2008), some preadolescents in our sample manifested the desire to change or hide their family structure in order to be "like the others".

During adolescence this attitude of defiance gradually gives way to a more mature reflection. In particular, at this stage adolescents reported gratitude and loyalty towards their adoptive parents. They also manifested feelings of pride towards them, showing that they are able to integrate their family "diversity" as a positive and distinctive element in their identity. All these elements suggest that despite the challenges encountered, adoptees draw upon their own difficult life experiences, developing high levels of resilience and positive conceptualisation of family (Farr et al., 2015). Furthermore, adolescents seemed very sensitive to social causes and emphasized the importance of defending minority rights. These findings are consistent with the results of previous studies in which tolerance and openness to diversity are emphasised as strengths of children raised by same sex parents. (Patterson, 2009; Farr et al. 2015).

Table 9: The identity construction process in children adopted by same sex parents

	Questions	Behaviours, feelings	Developmental tasks
EARLY CHILDHOOD (0-5 years)	Was I in your belly?	-Play-acting to be born from adoptive parent's body	-Understanding the difference between the biological and the affective side of parenting
	Can I stay in your belly?	-Drawing bellies	
	Was she my mum?	-Curiosity about woman's bodies	-Starting to feel part of the adoptive family
	Do I have a mum?		
MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (5-9 years old)	Why don't I have a mum/dad?	-Idealisation of the imaginary mother or father	-Understanding the family diversity
	Might I have a mom/dad one day?	-Idealisation of birth mother/ father	-Double grieving process: of birth parents and of a "imagined" mum or dad
	Will I see her/him (birth parents) again?		
PRE-ADOLESCENCE (9-13 years old)	What does it feel like to have a mom/dad?	-Idealisation of the birth parents	-Dealing with adoption-related losses
	What was he/she (birth parent) like?	-Need to have social gender role models	-Building social gender role
	Do I look like him/her (birth parent)?	-Opposition to adoptive parents and desire to change the family structure	-Dealing with heterosexism, bullying and teasing
		-Need to fit in	-Managing disclosure practices
ADOLESCENCE (13-18 years old)	What does it feel like to have a mom/dad?	-Gratitude towards adoptive parents	-Integrating the diversity in their identity as a positive element
	What was he/she (birth parent) like?	-Interest in and curiosity about birth parents	-Dealing with heterosexism, bullying and teasing
	Do I look like him/her (birth parent)?	- Feelings of loyalty towards adoptive parents	
		-Proud of being part of LG community and wish to support other children raised by same-sex parents	-Managing disclosure practices

6.7 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

This research has several strengths: it highlights the voices of adopted children and their parents in relation to the integration of adoption and sexual minority status into the identity construction process; it includes children adopted both by lesbians and gay men; it examines adoptees' experiences during four developmental stages, from early childhood to late adolescence.

Despite the contribution of this research, this study is not free from some limitations. Firstly, the choice of qualitative methods implicates the possibility of self-report and interpretive bias. Secondly, the small size of our sample and the cross-sectional design of this study limit our ability to establish if the patterns observed would be confirmed if studied longitudinally and when using a bigger sample of participants.

Thirdly, our sample was not homogenous in terms of adoptees' age, gender and family structure. More specifically, there was a prevalence of male children with gay fathers in pre-school years. For this reason, further research on children adopted by lesbians is needed. Future research should look more closely at the impact of both the adoptees' and their parents' gender (e. g. exploring if there is a difference in the experiences of girls and boys in being adopted in gay or lesbian households).

Fourthly, this study neither analyses the differences between the experiences of children transracially adopted and children adopted via national adoption, nor considers the impact of the institutionalisation on their development. For this reason, future studies should offer more insight in these elements.

A theme that should be analysed, in particular, is whether the children transracially adopted experience more challenges because of the overlap of adoption, racial and sexual minority issues.

Last but not least, focusing our research on children adopted by same sex parents represents a point of strength because it allows the immersion in the unicity of these families' experiences, getting away from a heteronormative perspective. However, a control group composed of heterosexual adoptive families would have allowed the

identification whether some themes emerged from the interviews are common to all adopted children or specific to those adopted by same sex parents.

6.8 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this qualitative research was to study the identity construction process of children adopted by same-sex households, by giving the floor to adoptees and to their LG parents. The findings of this study carry a fairly consistent message: children adopted by same-sex couples are confronted with new developmental tasks related to the intersection of both their adoptive and minority statuses. More specifically, these children, like their same-sex parents, confront the challenge of living in a heterosexist context which does not take their family reality into account, negatively impacting their well-being. A challenging element for them concerns the integration of such elements as positive aspects in their emerging identities. This gives rise to new and specific identity-related issues which must be taken into account by the professionals when interacting with these new families. Considering that same-sex adoption is a rapidly growing phenomenon around the world, psychologists, therapists, social workers and teachers should be educated on the specific developmental challenges of this adoption situation.

In conclusion, we hope that this study will pave the way for future research and clinical work that will further investigate the identity related issues in children adopted by same-sex parents. Increasing knowledge of this topic is necessary to help sexual minorities in their parental tasks and, consequently, to encourage a healthy development of the adoptees in such households.

Chapter 7

THE ROLE OF THE PAST IN THE PRESENT: RESULTS OF THE DOUBLE MOON TEST (STUDY 3)³¹

Abstract It is well known that one of the most important challenges experienced by adoptive families consists in managing the double connection of the child with both the birth and the adoptive families. While this topic has been widely explored among opposite-sex adoptive families, no research has investigated this critical task among same-sex adoptive families. This qualitative study aims to fill this gap in literature. To this end, 31 same-sex adoptive families (62 parents and 33 adoptees) were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview and complete a graphic projective test. Analysis revealed that same-sex parents' feelings and attitudes towards their children's birth families ranged in three positions: a) negation-minimisation; b) precaution-incertitude; c) openness-valorisation. On the other hand, children's feelings and attitudes were classified in the following positions: 1) closure-unmentionable; 2) removal-minimisation-, 3) idealisation-fantasy; 4) integration-balance. The findings of this study have important implications for the clinical work with these new families and underline the importance of promoting a positive representation and open communication about adopted children's pasts.

Keywords: *same-sex adoption; double-family connection; birth family, adopted children*

7.1 AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As detailed in chapter 2, the adoptive family can be described as a “metafamily” (Hajal & Rosenberg 1991; Greco, 2006), meaning that it involves both the new members (adoptive family) and the original ones (birth family). Research and clinical work suggest that even if the child's biological relatives are not physically present, they continue to occupy an important place in the adoptive family's representation,

³¹ Parts of this chapter have been adapted from:

Messina R. (2018). “A mother and a father or a belly and a seed?”. Discourse upon origins among same-sex adoptive families. Manuscript in preparation.

influencing the quality of the current relationships (Greco, 1999; Rosenfeld et al., 2006). According to several authors, one of the most difficult challenges for adoptive parents consists in managing their children's double connection (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). In fact, many adopters feel menaced by the presence of the birth family in their children's imagination (Colbère, 2001; Greco 2006), while others are grateful and accord them excessive importance (Tendron and Vallée, 2007; Noël, 1994). Literature shows that the loss of the birth family represents one of the fundamental element in the adoptees' identity, with which they have to deal throughout their life. Adoptive parents have the role of helping their children navigate through the painful feelings related to their adoption. The communication style about adoption-related losses in particular, is considered to be one of the most important predictors of the adoptees' capacity to develop a positive identity as adopted persons (Brodzinsky, 2005). The existing research on this topic has been conducted mainly among opposite-sex families (for more details see chapter 2). No research however, has investigated the feelings and representations towards birth family in same-sex adoptive families. This study aims to increase the scientific knowledge on this crucial topic. Several research questions guided this study: a) What are sexual minority adopters' attitudes towards their children's birth parents? b) What feelings do adoptees have toward their birth parents? c) Which place does the child's past take up in his/her current life? d) How does this topic's communication style impact the feelings of the adopted children towards their birth family?

The procedure of our study has been co-created and inspired by a research conducted by Greco (2006). This author conducted semi-structured interviews and the Double Moon Test with a sample of 20 heterosexual (10 national adoptions, 10 international adoptions) adoptive families. Greco categorised participants' reports in two main positions: integrative and non-integrative. In the first position participants were able to give the child's birth family a place in their symbolical family space, in the second one they were not (for the details of these two positions see chapter 2 and chapter 4). More specifically, results revealed that in 8 families (40%) both parents and adoptees presented an integrative position; in 2 families (10%) parents had an integrative

position, while adoptees did not; whereas in 3 families (15%), parents were in a non-integrative position, while adoptees were in an integrative one; finally, in 4 families (20%), both parents and children showed non-integrative positions. Analysis underlined an important element: families who adopted by means of an international and transracial adoption procedure were more likely to present an integrative position than families who adopted via a national adoption procedure. This element suggests that ethnic and racial differences make it more difficult to deny the origins of the child and can influence the family's capacity to include the birth family in the symbolic family space. Given that our study is an extension the research conducted by Greco (2006), we will pay particular attention in our discussion to the comparison of our results to the results of this study.

7.2 PARTICIPANTS

The sample was composed of 31 same-sex adoptive families (N=23 gay men headed families, N=8 lesbian headed families) with children (N=33, 5 girls and 22 boys) aged between 4 and 18 years old (mean age= 8,9; Sd=3,9). The families are the same as in studies 1 and 2. The only difference is that, in this study, we focused on a sample composed of 33 adoptees (instead of the whole sample of 44 adoptees). This choice was motivated by the fact that several adoptees (mainly young children) were not able to completely understand and respond to the instructions of the Double Moon Test. For this reason, only the tests that could be coded according to the coding scheme shown in this chapter were included in our analysis.

7.3 PROCEDURE

Parents and children were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview (see chapter 4) and were thereafter asked to complete the Double Moon Test (Greco 2006). Parents and children were assessed in two separate moments.

Before completing the test, participants were asked to retrace the main steps of their family experience. More precisely, during the interview with parents the following areas were investigated (for more details on the questions asked during interviews, see chapter 4.: a) The adoption process; b) The arrival of the child in the family; c) Their current life d) The way they talk to the child about his/her adoption-related losses e) The questions and feelings of the child f) Their own feelings connected with the child's birth family.

The interviews with adoptees investigated the following areas: a) their current life; b) their memories of their adoption; c) their memories connected with the period before joining the adoptive family; d) their feelings towards their birth parents.

The questions asked during the interview aimed to stimulate the projective process during the Double Moon Test. This graphic projective instrument is designed to explore the role of the absent or distant family member(s) (e.g. family of origin) in the present family's interactions. This instrument in particular, enables the investigation of both adopters and adoptees' feelings related to the child's past, and allows to shed light on the way they deal with the dimension of loss (for more details on the instructions see chapter 4).

7.4 RESULTS

Data was coded based on the following elements: the graphic elements in the drawings, the verbal report and the feelings that emerged during the test (for more details on the data analysis see chapter 4). For the parents, we distinguished three main positions on a continuum (figure 13): 1) negation-minimisation; 2) precaution-incertitude; 3) openness-valorisation. From the children's reports four categories emerged: 1) closure-unmentionable; 2) removal-minimisation; 3) idealisation-fantasy; 4) integration-balance. All these positions are detailed in the following section. Furthermore, three case studies will be presented to illustrate our findings.

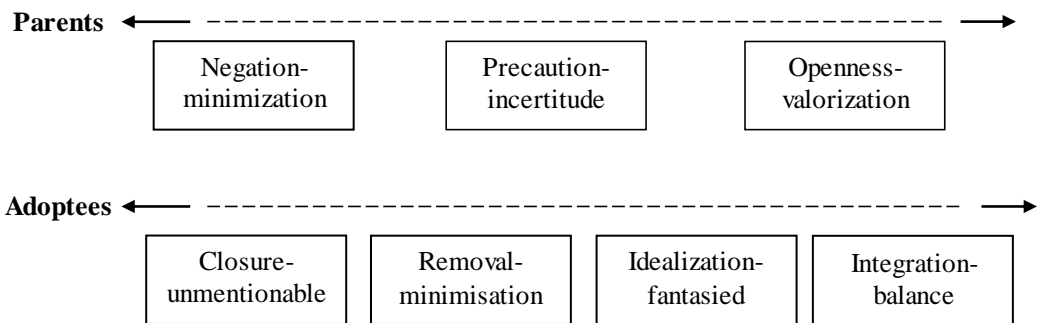


Figure 13: Parents and adoptees' positions towards origins

7.4.1 Same-sex adoptive parents' attitudes towards their child's birth family

- *Negation/ minimization*

This position is characterised by the fact that parents try to deny the existence of the child's birth parents. In such a situation, the researcher felt uncomfortable in addressing this issue and hesitated in asking adopters where they would place their child's birth parents. When the discussion about this topic was introduced, the atmosphere became tense and parents manifested reticence and defiance. They were ill at ease when dealing with this subject, which was exorcised, by minimising and almost scotomising the child's origins. The adoptive parents in this position tended to talk about the child's birth parents as mere "procreative means", depriving them of every human and emotional connotation. For instance, they were described in terms of a "belly" and a "seed", or as the "woman who brought the child" and the "man who planted the seed". During the Double Moon Test, the parents in this position did not want to represent the birth parents on the sheet or they represented them using pictographic symbols connected with the biological conception. For example, some participants represented the birth parents by using stylised sperms and ova, or depicting the masculine and feminine symbol. Some participants described both birth parents in these terms, some

others talked about the birth mother with human connotations, whereas they described the birth father only as a seed. Adopters in this position often underlined that the birth parents cannot be considered as "parents". To them, the birth parents are just people who gave birth to their child, but who have no importance in their current life. These parents strenuously defended the difference between the biological function of the procreation and the love and nurture which make adults worthy of being considered "parents". Some adopters in this position also passed a negative judgement towards the birth family for having abandoned the child.

Examples:

"To me they don't exist...if I could choose, I would choose to put them 5000 km away from us...I don't want to represent them in this drawing" (Charles, 38 years old).

"They are not parents, they are just a seed and a belly who gave birth" (Beatrice, 44 years old).

"They chose to abandon him...this was their choice...a true parent doesn't abandon his child. On the contrary we decided to adopt him" (Jilles, 33 years old).

- ***Precaution/ incertitude***

This situation represents an "intermediate" position: the parents did not have an attitude of total closure as in the previously analysed position, but they were nonetheless not completely at ease with the theme of origins. In such a circumstance, the researcher needed to be cautious and introduce the conversation about the past gradually, in order to prevent defensive reactions. The theme of the birth family was not a taboo topic and they can put their feelings connected to their child's double familial connection into words. However, they showed some uncertainty about which place to assign to the birth parents. More precisely, they showed significant resistance to letting them enter their symbolic family space. Compared to the previous position, these adopters spoke about the parents of origin in more "humanised" terms, calling them "birth mother" and "birth father". An interesting aspect is that they often took verbal precautions, underlining the distinction between the terms mother/ father and mum /dad. In fact, according to them, the biological parents could be called "father" and "mother", whereas they were the "dads" and / or the "mums" of their children. In other words, they attributed a more

affective connotation to the parenting function associated with the words "mum" and "dad", even if they acknowledged the role of the original figures. During the Double Moon Test, these parents generally represented the birth parents with human stylized figures that were placed outside of the rectangle, or near the edge. When the question about the birth family was asked, they showed an uncertainty or a disagreement on where to place the birth parents. This incertitude often became an opportunity to stimulate an exchange between the partners and analyse their feelings about this topic. Furthermore, these adopters showed mixed feelings regarding the abandonment: even if they do not condemn the birth parents openly, their words can suggest a veiled form of dissent.

Examples:

« I don't know if we can call them « parents »... we are his parents now... »
(Gregory, 38 years old).

« She is her biological mother, yes, but she is not her mum » (Didier, 45 years old).

« I know that they are important to him, because this is his personal story, but not our story I mean...I don't know where to put them » (Anna, 47 years old).

- ***Openness/ valorisation***

This position is characterised by the way adoptive parents talked about their child's birth family in an atmosphere of openness and transparency. They often started talking about this theme spontaneously, with a fluid and honest communication style. These parents attached importance to their child's birth parents, considering them as a part of their family story. They talked about them in positive terms, without passing a negative judgment on the abandonment. They were able to put themselves in the birth parents' shoes, able to imagine their suffering related to the painful choice of putting their child up for adoption. These adopters were grateful to the birth parents for allowing them to realise their dream of adopting a child.

In the Double Moon Test, they often represented the birth parents within the rectangle, near the child or close to the entire family, demonstrating their willingness to welcome them into their symbolic family space. These participants understood and legitimised the

curiosity experienced by their children towards the original figures. They discuss this topic with their children using a clear and empathetic communicative style, showing respect for their feelings of pain.

Examples:

"They are inside the rectangle, of course...they are a part of our story" (Maria, 46 years old).

Without them, our family didn't exist now... He (the adopted child) couldn't be in our life" (Paul, 39 years old).

7.4.2 Children's attitudes towards their birth family

- ***Closure/ unmentionable***

Adoptees in this position seemed to avoid any reference to their past. They were shy and they offered no room for a dialogue about their family of origin. During the Double Moon Test, it was almost impossible for the researcher to ask questions about the past: when certain questions were asked about this topic, they did not answer, they pretended not to understand or they talked about something else, crawling into their shells.

By showing an attitude of closure and discomfort, these children indirectly communicated that it was not possible to touch this painful aspect. It was therefore difficult for the researcher to address this issue, out of fear of hurting their feelings. With the adoptees in this position, the researcher often stopped after the third instruction of the Double Moon Test, feeling that it was not possible to ask them question number 4 (about the birth family). Sometimes these children also drew themselves in the corner or far away from their adoptive family, symbolising that no sense of belonging was possible to them.

Examples:

"No...I don't remember"... (Raul, 8 years old).

"I don't know...I don't know about this (Richard, 10 years).

- ***Removal-Minimisation***

With the adoptees in this position, commencing a dialogue about their family of origin was difficult, but not impossible, as it was in the previous position. Usually they tended to only talk about this topic on the researcher's request. They had a defensive attitude, almost as if they wanted to keep such painful thoughts at bay. There was often a discrepancy between their discourse and the emotion manifested during the Double Moon Test. Verbally they tended to minimise their feelings with respect to their family of origin: they appear distant and detached, underlining that their past was not important to them. During the Double Moon Test, on the contrary, it emerged that the family of origin was very present in their imaginary, despite the attempt to remove it. For example, they said that they never think about the birth parents, but in their drawing they represented themselves close to them. In other words, the graphic test often offered an opportunity to let out feelings that they tried to keep under control. To use a metaphor, we could say that the birth family was like an iceberg which remained out of sight but could appear suddenly in all its eminence. This position is often linked to a conflict of loyalty due to which the adoptees do not feel free to express their curiosity about the family of birth, out of fear of hurting their adoptive parents. In fact, during the Double Moon Test, they either depicted the family of origin outside of the rectangle with a neutral symbol, or they preferred not to represent them at all. The atmosphere was tense and the researcher hesitated to ask the question about the birth parents, perceiving the adoptees' reticence to talk about this aspect.

Examples:

"No I don't know if I can place them here...they are not present so...". (Gabriel, 13 years old).

"No, I never thought in this...(a little bit later) I ask myself how she is, or why she decided to give me up for adoption...I can put her outside, she is distant" . (German, 14 years old).

- ***Idealisation –fantasy***

This position is characterised by the way the family of origin occupies an excessive place in the adoptees' imagination and discourse. These children seemed to use the interview as an opportunity to talk about their birth family. It seemed that they were talking about elements of their present rather than their past. In fact, even if the children had no or few memories of the birth family, they attached a lot of importance to this topic, thinking constantly about it in everyday life. They talked about their past spontaneously and with many details. In their verbatim there were mixed elements of nostalgia, curiosity, sadness and regret. The children gave the impression of talking about some sort of legend, mythologising the birth parents.

In the Double Moon Test, the family of origin was represented inside the rectangle, and often there was a strong resemblance between the adopted child and the birth parents in the drawing. Moreover, the adoptees in this position often drew itself in a circle with the family of origin, while they did not represent themselves in the circle with the adoptive one. The researcher often felt that it was necessary to “contain” the child and to help him/her to reduce the idealisation and to have a more realistic image of the story.

Examples:

“I would like to stay in a family with them (birth family)...” (Xavier, 8 years old).

“I think a lot about her...what she is doing...when I will meet her again...”(Katiana, 7 years old).

- ***Integration- balance***

The adoptees in this position were able to talk about their past, without it taking hold of their present life. They recognised the value of the birth parents for the gift of life, and the value of the adoptive ones for having taken care of them with love. They talked about the two families in a balanced way, even if they were aware of the feelings of pain related to their adoptive condition. In the Double Moon Test they represented the two families on the sheet, without feeling conflicted. They felt part of the adoptive family, but they also acknowledged a connection with the birth one. These children felt

legitimised in their curiosity and desire to meet their birth parents and talked about this aspect naturally and spontaneously. During the test, the communication atmosphere was open and fluid: the researcher felt at ease when asking questions about the adoptees' story, perceiving their willingness to communicate about such elements.

Examples:

"They are a part of my story, they gave me life...so they are near my family even if they are far away" (Mickael, 18 years old).

"I would put her (the birth mother) near me, because she is important to me" (Natasha, 16 years old).

7.4.3 Participants' distribution by position type

As shown in table 7, most of the adoptive parents (45%) were in the negation-minimisation position; 29 % was in the openness-valorisation position and 16% was in the precaution-incertitude one. Moreover, several participants (10%) showed a mixed stance: they were in the negation-minimisation position concerning their children's birth father and in the precaution-incertitude one concerning the birth mother.

Parents' positions were analysed according to two variables: their gender and the adoption type. Analysis by participants' gender showed that most of the gay men (52%) were in the negation-minimisation position, while most of the lesbians (50%) were in the openness-valorisation one. Analysis by type of adoption showed that the negation-minimisation position was more frequent among parents who adopted via a national adoption (50%) as opposed to those who adopted abroad (42%). The latter, on the contrary, were more likely to have a openness-valorisation attitude towards their children's origins.

As regards the adoptees (Table 8), most of them (36%) were in the idealisation-fantasy position and in the removal-minimisation one (33%). Some adoptees were in the integration-balance position (15%), and some others (15%) were in the closure-unmentionable one. Adoptees' positions were analysed according to their age. Results indicate that children in pre-school years are more likely to be in the minimisation/negation position, whereas they move towards the precaution/ incertitude

position in the following phase of the family life cycle. Results indicate that children in early childhood are more likely to be in the minimisation/negation position and in the removal-minimisation position. During middle childhood and pre-adolescence there was a clear predominance of the idealisation-fantasy position (which was shown respectively by 53% and 50% of the adoptees). Finally, during adolescence, adoptees ranged in removal-minimisation (67%) and integration balance (33%).

Table 10: Parents' positions towards child's birth family by gender and adoption type

	Negation-minimization	Precaution-incertitude	Openness-valorization	4*
N Tot= 31 same-sex couples	45% (N=14)	16 % (N=5)	29% (n=9)	10% (N=3)
N Gay Couples = 25	52 % (N=13)	12% (N=3)	24% (n=6)	12% (N=3)
N Lesbian Couples= 6	17% (N=1)	33% (N=2)	50% (N=3)	/
N National Adoption=12	50% (N=6)	17% (N=2)	25% (N=3)	8% (N=1)
N International Adoption= 19	42% (N=8)	16% (N=3)	32% (N=6)	11% (N=2)

*4= negation-minimisation towards the birth father; precaution-incertitude toward the birth mother

Table 11: Adoptees' positions towards birth family by age's period

	Closure-unmentionable	Removal-minimisation	Idealization-fantasied	Integration-balance
N Tot= 33	15% (N=5)	33% (N=11)	36 % (N=12)	15 % (N=5)
N Early childhood= 6	33% (N=2)	33% (N=2)	17% (N=1)	17 % (N=1)
N Middle Childhood= 15	13% (N=2)	20 % (N=3)	53 % (N=8)	13 % (N=2)
N Pre-adolescence=6	17% (N=1)	33% (N=2)	50% (N=3)	/
N Adolescence= 6	/	67% (N=4)	/	33% (N=2)

7.5 CASE STUDY 1

David (43 years old) and Jesùs (44 years old) are a couple of gay men. They are together for 17 years and they live in Spain. They have a son, Gabriel, who is 13 years old and who has been adopted from Russia when he was 2 (figure 14).

David and Jesùs have little information about Gabriel's birth family: they know that his mother was ill and lived in difficult social conditions. Nothing is known about his birth father, who did not acknowledge Gabriel as his son.

After his birth, Gabriel was taken to a Russian orphanage, where he resided for two years, until his adoption. At that time, same-sex adoption was not legal in Spain. Thus, Gabriel was adopted by Jesùs via a single parent procedure.

In the first years David had no legal ties to Gabriel, but he was completely involved in his paternal role. Today David and Jesùs are married and they both have legal recognition of their parenthood.

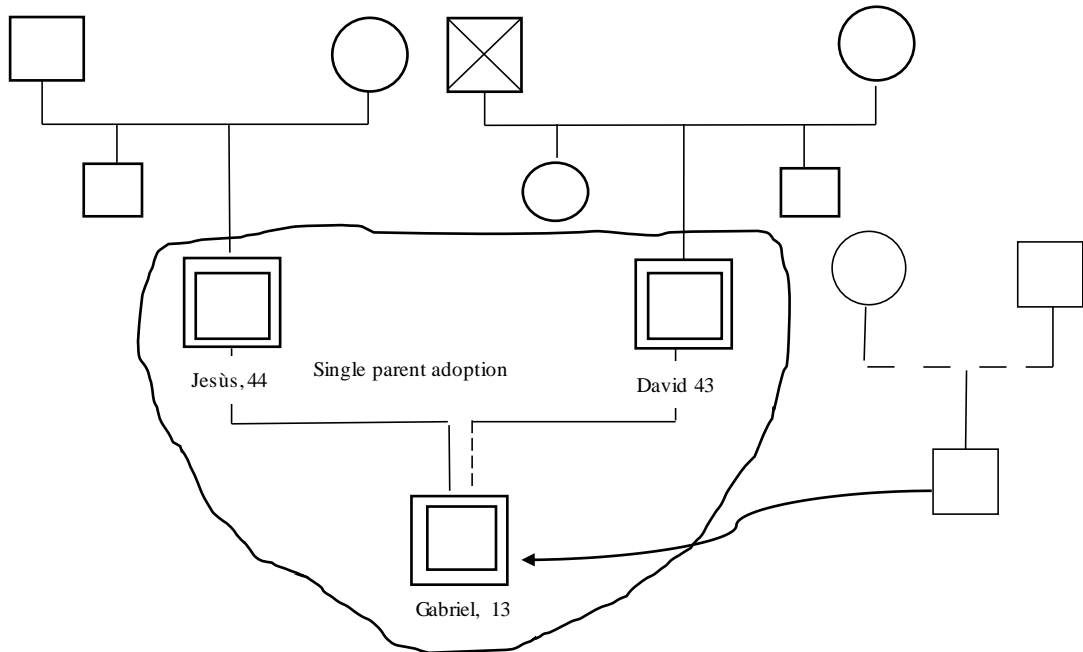


Figure 14: Genogram of David, Jesùs and Gabriel

7.5.1 Interview and Double Moon Test with David and Jesùs

During the interview, David and Jesùs retrace the main steps of their family story. They talk a lot of the challenges they had to face in order to adopt as a pretended single headed family, in a society which was strongly discriminatory of sexual minorities. David and Jesùs are one of the first Spanish gay couples to have adopted a child by overcoming the barriers imposed by the law. They are very proud of their family and consider their experience as an example for all gay and lesbian people who want to adopt a child. Throughout the interview, they show an attitude that is a mix of defensiveness, need of being recognised and social desirability. They underlined several times that their child is fine, and that he has, neither had, any problems. When the issue of Gabriel's birth parents is addressed, they cut this short, saying that he does not have memories of his past and that he never asks questions about it.

J. (Jesùs): *“Gabriel has always known that he was adopted, we never hid the truth from him. But he was very young, he was two years old, so he is not aware that he was somewhere else before... he has no memory of any family apart from us...he never had questions...He never asked about his birth mother, or about his country, nothing”.*

D.(David): *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.*

During the Double Moon Test (figure 15), they draw their nuclear family first. David and Jesùs are not in agreement about where to draw Gabriel: Jesùs depicts Gabriel near him on his left; David prefers to place Gabriel in the middle between them. Subsequently they represent several groups of persons in different circles: their respective extended families, work colleagues and friends. They add some members of the extended family in the corner. As expected, they do not represent the birth parents of Gabriel spontaneously. When the researcher asks them where they would like to place them, they show a defensive attitude. Jesùs answers promptly:

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

D.: (after a pause)...*We can say that they are just a belly and a seed...nothing more, they don't exist* (he rapidly adds two small symbols outside of the rectangle, immediately deletes them again and nervously returns the sheet to the researcher).

As illustrated in this example, Jesús and David are not willing to talk about this topic. They are in the so called “minimisation-negation” position: they almost deny the existence of their son's past and are not capable to give them a place in their family representation at all.

7.5.2 Interview and Double Moon Test with Gabriel

At the beginning of the interview Gabriel smiles and he says that he is happy to participate in this research. He shows an attitude which is very similar to that of his fathers: he underlines several times that he is happy and that his experience is positive. He seems very reluctant to explore his feelings and he keeps a certain distance when talking about his adoption. When he talks about his birth family, he does not give room for questions: he explains that he has no memories and that he never thinks of his past.

G. (Gabriel) *“I don't remember anything about it , I was very young when I was adopted I was 2 years old....I don't have memories, I never think about it...sometimes I thought why did I come here? Why didn't I stay there? But very rarely...I don't have such thoughts constantly...just sometimes, like when you think: tomorrow I will play football...something like this”.*

A little bit later during the interview, he adds:

“I don't have much to think about, no country to mourn, I do not even remember my parents, so... Anyway, thinking about them will not give me back my parents so...”.

As shown in these examples, Gabriel has a very defensive attitude and minimises his feelings connected with his adoption. The second extract suggests that this a rationalising strategy. The impression is that he trivialises his thoughts in order to keep a distance from the pain connected with the loss of his birth family.

During the Double Moon Test (Figure 16), he draws himself (near the edge of the rectangle), his adoptive fathers and his extended family. Furthermore he adds a group of friends and teachers. Gabriel does not draw his birth family spontaneously. Considering his reticence in talking about this topic, the researcher hesitates to ask him the question

about his birth family. Eventually, the question is asked. A silence descends and something unexpected happens: Gabriel draws his birth family outside of the rectangle, but very near to him.

R. (Researcher): "Where would you like to draw your birth family?"

G.: "Here outside, because I don't remember a lot about them (He writes: past, family of my birth country).

R.: "And when you say "family", to who do you refer?"

G.: "To my mother and my father, because they gave me life...when I think of my past, I mainly think of them" (he seems very touched and his voice shakes).

Finally, Gabriel adds a circle including himself and his birth family and states: *"In a certain way I am in a family with them, even if they are far away"*.

Observing his final drawing, there is an element which stands out: Gabriel represents himself both in the circle of his adoptive and of his birth family, but he is much closer to the second one. His drawing seems to indicate that he tends more towards his past than to his present. As shown in this example, there is a strong discrepancy between the verbal communication and the emotions emerged during the test. In fact, while Gabriel minimises his thoughts about the birth family during the interview, the projective test shows a completely different picture. All these elements suggest that Gabriel was in the so called "removal-minimisation position": he keeps his distance from the pain connected with the loss of his birth family, trying to suppress it; however, the element removed emerges in all its eminence in the drawing, showing that these parental figures occupy an important place in his imagination. This position is related to the attitude manifested by David and Jesús. To them, Gabriel's birth parents were only "procreative means". By minimising the role of past, these fathers indirectly convey to Gabriel that his feelings towards his birth parents are not legitimate nor understandable. This causes a reverse effect: while Gabriel tries to remove such feelings, they become more painful and intense.

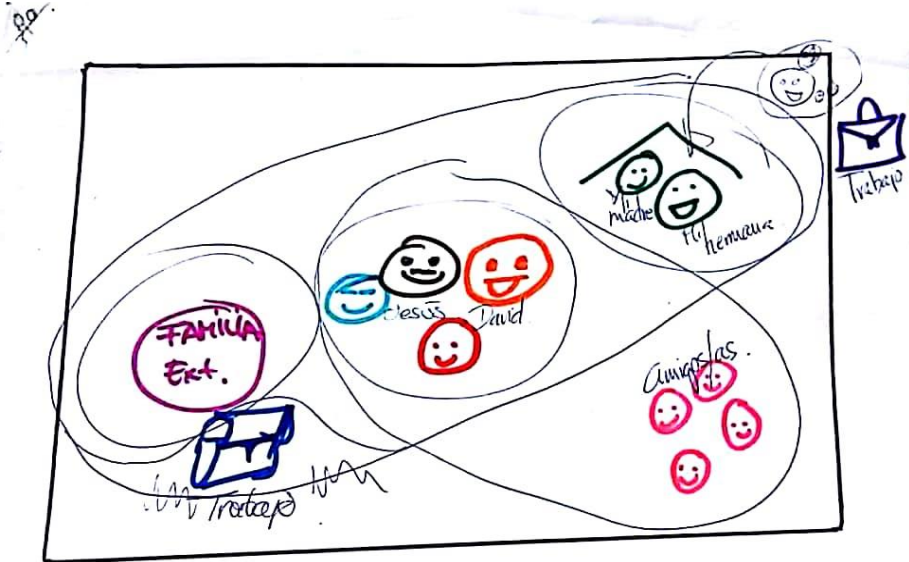


Figure 15: David and Jesús (the Double Moon Test)

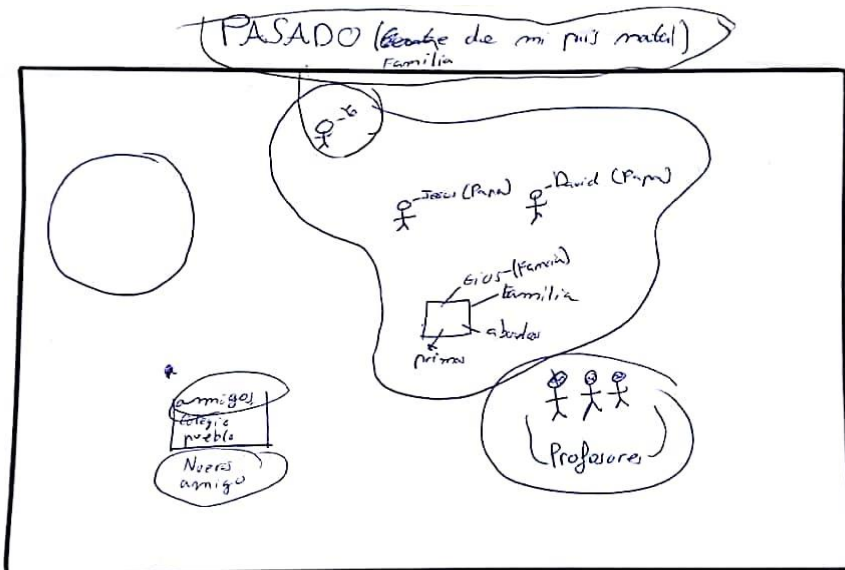


Figure 16: Gabriel (the Double Moon Test)

7.6 CASE STUDY 2

Cristophe (46 years old) and Antaar (39 years old) are a couple for 18 years, they live in France. They are the adoptive fathers of Katiana, 7 years old, who was adopted from Haiti when she was 3 (figure 17). Katiana lived with her birth mother for two years and after that she lived at the orphanage, and she did not have contact with her birth father. Her birth mother lived in difficult social conditions and this is why she decided to put Katiana up for adoption. According to Cristophe and Antaar, Katiana has no conscious memories of the period before adoption. The adoption procedure has been realised by Cristophe as a pretended single parent, because at that time in France the full joint adoption was not allowed for gay and lesbian couples. Antaar is involved in Katiana's education, but he has no legal link to her. In parallel to the adoption procedure completed individually by Cristophe, the couple starts a co-parenting project with a lesbian couple. Thus, a few months after the adoption of Katiana, Arsenne, Antaar's biological son, was born.

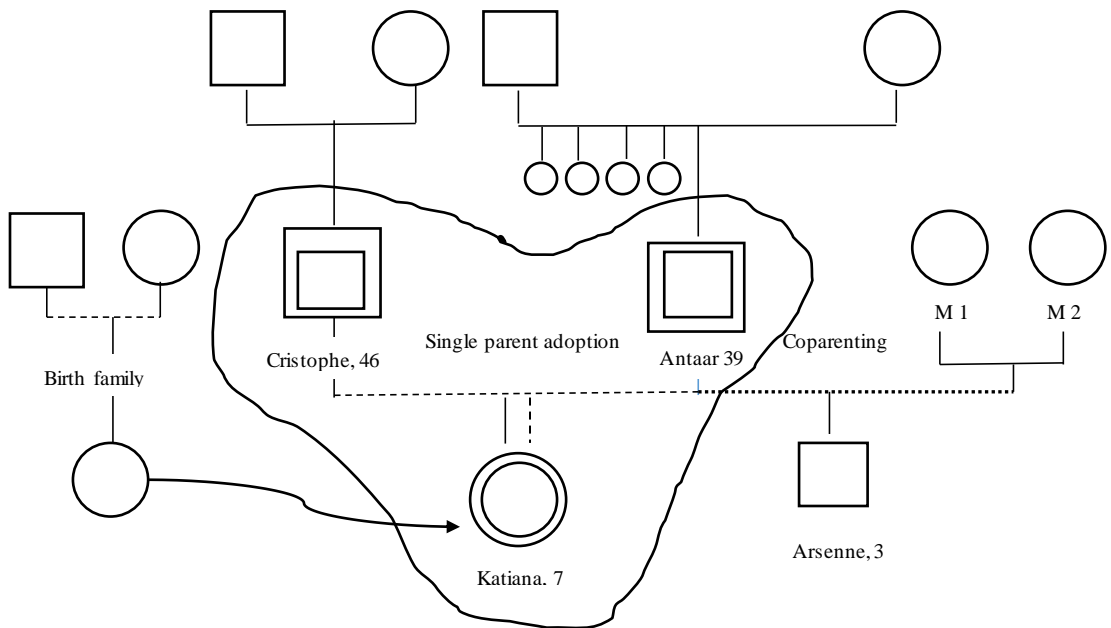


Figure 17: Genogram of Cristophe, Antaar and Katiana

7.6.1 Interview and Double Moon Test with Cristophe and Antaar

During the interview, Cristophe and Antaar explain that Katiana shows a strong curiosity about her birth mother and the desire to meet her again. Cristophe also explains that he personally met Katiana's birth mother when he was in Haiti and that he took some pictures of her (which he intends to show Katiana when she is older). The fathers report that Katiana asks a lot of questions about her birth mother. According to them, this theme is a recurrent one in their daughter's imagination. They report that even if Katiana does not have conscious memories of her mother, she thinks about her a lot. On the contrary, she never asks questions about her birth father. According to the parents, this curiosity about the birth mother is increased by the fact that most of her friends have a mother, which makes her fantasise a lot about this "absent" parental figure.

C. (Cristophe): *« She always talks about her mother...for instance she asks: shall I meet her again? How 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 mum, so she is curious...on the contrary, she never asks questions about her birth father... I think that this is because she already has two dads, so she doesn't fantasise about it ».*

During the interview, Christophe and Antaar return to the issue of Katiana's birth mother several times, explaining that for them it is a difficult aspect to manage. More precisely, they ask themselves what would be the best way to talk about this topic and what place to accord this figure. On one hand, they understand the curiosity of their daughter about her mother; on the other hand, they would like to diminish the place accorded to this element in Katiana's imagination, in order to focus on their present life family.

C.: *“We don't know how to call her and we wondered a lot about it... Should we call her mom? Mother? The woman who gave birth? This is the problem. I think she is only the mother from Haiti, there is a stronger emotional sense in the word "mom".(...) When Katiana calls her "mom" I say: she was your mother because you were in her belly, but now you have two dads, we are your family, not she...she hopes to meet her again... but she is no longer her mother...and she has to understand it”.*

When Christophe and Antaar talk about this topic, they seem ill at ease: the interest shown by Katiana in her birth mother makes them feel threatened and questioned in their parental role. For this reason, they try to minimise the importance of this absent maternal figure. They emphasise the difference between the biological and affective functions of parenting, explaining to Katiana that she is no longer a “mother” to her. On the contrary, they underline that they are and will remain her fathers forever.

During the Double Moon Test (Figure 18), Christophe and Antaar represent their nuclear family, the extended family, the school, friends, work colleagues and LGBT associations. They draw a circle for each of these groups. They do not represent neither the mother of their son Arsenne, nor Katiana's birth family spontaneously. The researcher asks them where they would like to place Arsenne's mothers and they decide to draw them between the family and the friends, explaining they have “a particular status”. On the contrary, when they are asked where they would like to place Katiana's birth family, they explain that they do not want to represent them on their sheet. The atmosphere turns tense: Christophe seems bothered and shows a defensive attitude; Antaar remains silent and does not dare to intervene in the matter.

R. (Researcher): Where would you place the biological parents of K. in this drawing?

C.: No...they are not in the frame...they are outside the frame.

R.: And would you place them somewhere here on the sheet?

C.: No... She is just someone who gave birth, but she would be far away...we don't want to represent her...we wouldn't place her...she is related to Katiana, but...she is no part of the family...

In order to unblock the situation, the researcher introduces an additional question: “Where do you think that Katiana would put her in this drawing?”. This intervention encourages Antaar to react and express his opinion: according to him, Katiana would represent her mother near her, in the same circle of the adoptive family. This statement raises a heated debate between the partners:

A. (Antaar): I think that Katiana would place her here too (indicating the centre of the sheet).

C. (Disappointed and nervous): Here? In the centre? The biological family??

A. (He seems hesitant, and does not dare to contradict Christophe): Yes..beh...ehm...no...

C.: She is a part of her history, yes, but...we could...we could put the biological mother there, outside the frame maybe...but not....

R.: Cristophe, where do you think that Katiana would put her mother?

C. (Disappointed): She could maybe put her there (he adds dotted arrows to connect the mother to the centre where the nuclear family is)... Her biological mother might be in her imagination, but, but she will never have contact with her, she will never see her ... she will remain in her imagination ... but...that's why she will stay outside of the frame.

R.: And her birth father??

A.: To me he is outside the framework, he is out... for me he is not in this sheet

C.: He is a only a seed.

As shown by the participants' report, Antaar and Cristophe have two different attitudes towards Katiana's birth mother. Antaar shows more openness in talking about the birth mother and seems willing to welcome her in their familial symbolic space; Cristophe is more preoccupied about the role played by this parental figure and prefers to keep her at a distance. Finally, the couple find a compromise: they represent Katiana's birth mother outside the rectangle with dotted arrows. This suggests that this couple is in the "precaution/ incertitude" position towards the birth mother. In fact, the dialogue on such a topic is possible and they find a way to manage her presence in the symbolic family space. As regards the birth father, both partners are in the "minimisation/negation" position: they consider him to be a "seed" and they do not want to represent him in their drawing.

7.6.2 Interview and Double Moon Test with Katiana

Before the start, Katiana seems impatient and curious. During the interview with her fathers, she enters the room several times asking when it is her turn to talk. When the interview starts, Katiana brings a book with her and proposes the researcher to look at it together: this is the book of her story. Katiana guards this book as a precious possession and she cannot wait to show it to the researcher. The book contains pictures and descriptions of the crucial moments in her life: the period when she was in Haiti, the first time she met her fathers, and her arrival in France. By flipping through this book, Katiana takes the researcher with her into her past, which seems very present in her eyes. After having shared the contents of the book with her, the researcher proposes the

Double Moon Test (figure 19). Katiana is interested and motivated: she was waiting for an opportunity to talk about her story. Following the first and second instruction, she draws in the following order: herself, her brother Arsenne, Cristophe, Antaar and three cousins. After a while, she stops and looks at the researcher, as if she was waiting for a confirmation. With a hesitant attitude she states:

K. (Katiana): Can I draw what I want?

R.(Researcher): Of course, this is your drawing and you can represent whatever you want...is there someone who is far from you but is important to you?

K. (with a cathartic tone): Muuum! (She draws her mother and asks the researcher to write near her: "I love you mum!")

Subsequently, following the third instruction, she regroups the people by family. She represents Cristophe and Antaar in a circle, her brother in another one, and another circle with her cousins. After she represents herself in a circle with her birth mother and she asks: "*do I have the right to do it?*" In drawing herself in the circle with her mother, Katiana seems happy and excited, as if her most beautiful dream came true. Finally, the last question is asked to Katiana:

R.: "If you had a magic wand would you like to change something in your drawing?"

K.: "If I had a magic wand, I would like to open a door, another one, another one...so I could go in a room with my dads, my brother, or in another room if I want to see my mom...and my dad can also see my mum.. I'd like to see all these people in the same house".

By drawing these doors, Katiana symbolically expresses her need to "open" the communication about her past with her fathers. This is confirmed by the emotional atmosphere perceived in the interaction: during the interview, Cristophe enters the room two times, and with a worried tone he asks how things are going. In response, Katiana hides her drawing, fearing his reaction. The researcher was touched by the emotions manifested by this girl during the Double Moon Test, and felt that it was important for her to have the opportunity to freely express her feelings. In fact, on several occasions, Katiana seemed to seek confirmation that her emotions are understandable and legitimate. Katiana was undoubtedly in an "idealisation" position, which was reinforced by Christophe's closed attitude towards his daughter's past.

Concretely, the more her father tried to minimise the importance of the birth mother, the more it roused Katiana's curiosity and she idealised this absent figure. This case clearly shows the importance of the open family communication about the adoptees' past, in order to help them integrate the adoption-related losses in a balanced way.

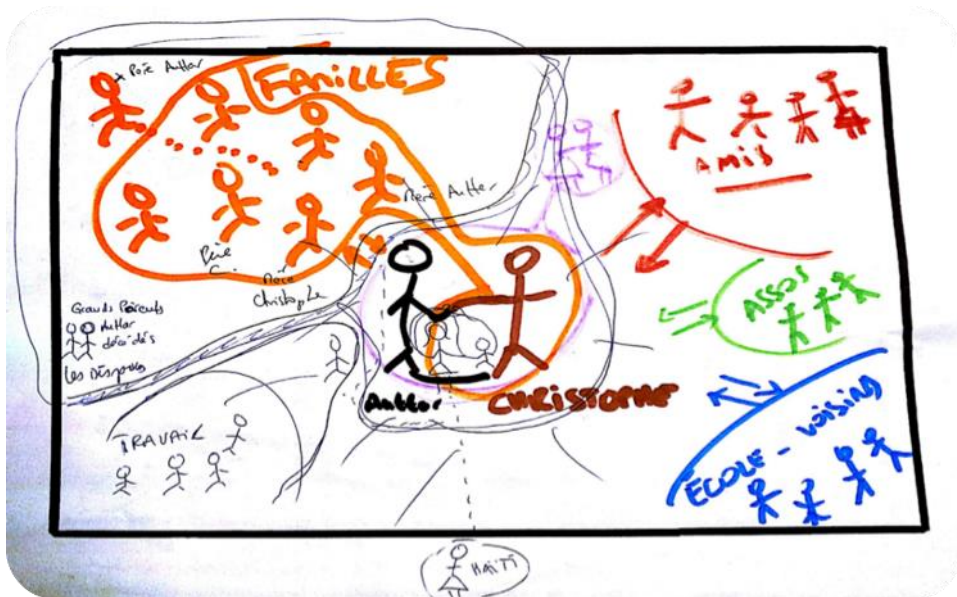


Figure 18: Cristophe and Antaar (the Double Moon Test)

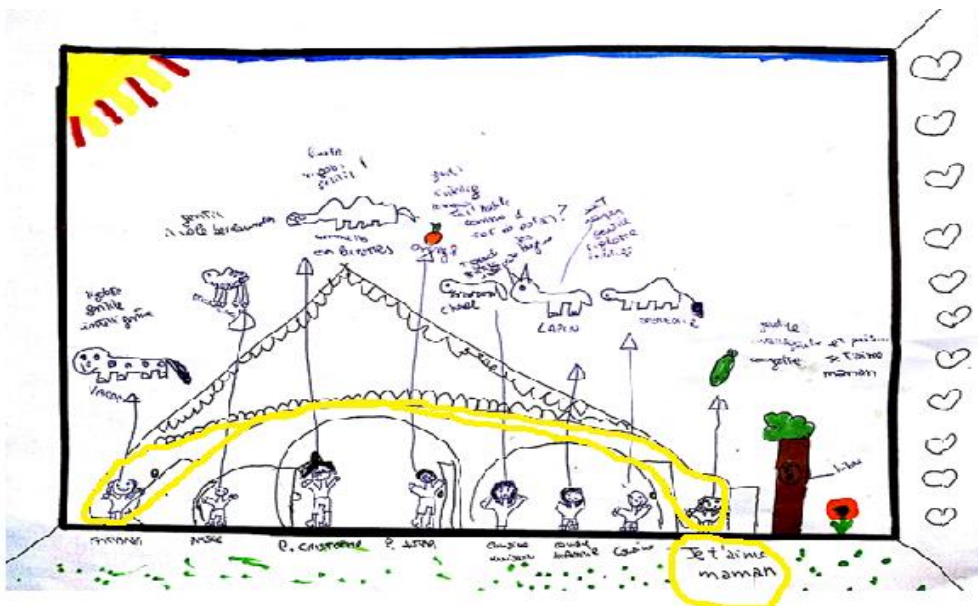


Figure 19: Katiana (the Double Moon Test)

7.7 CASE STUDY 3

Nuria (44 years old) and Yeni (44 years old) are a Spanish lesbian couple. They are together for 5 years. They have two children: Ariel, 6 years old, adopted when he was 2, and Lucas, 3 years old, adopted when he was 5 months. Ariel and Lucas are brothers and have been adopted by Nuria and Yeni via a national adoption procedure after a period as a foster family. Ariel and Lucas have three other brothers (Olga, Noemi and Alex), who have been adopted by another family (figure 20). Olga, Noemi and Alex live in the same region and sometimes they are in touch. Ariel and Lucas have been adopted by Nuria, who completed the adoption process as a single parent, because of the legal constraints forbidding same-sex couples to adopt jointly. Yeni accompanied her, but she remained hidden during the whole procedure in order to increase the chance of success. Currently Nuria and Yeni are both involved in the children's education and consider themselves as "mothers". However, Yeni acknowledges that she feels a little bit illegitimate in her parental role, as a result of the lack of legal ties to the children. During the interview we first met the mothers and afterwards the children. In our analysis, we will focus our attention on the case of Ariel.

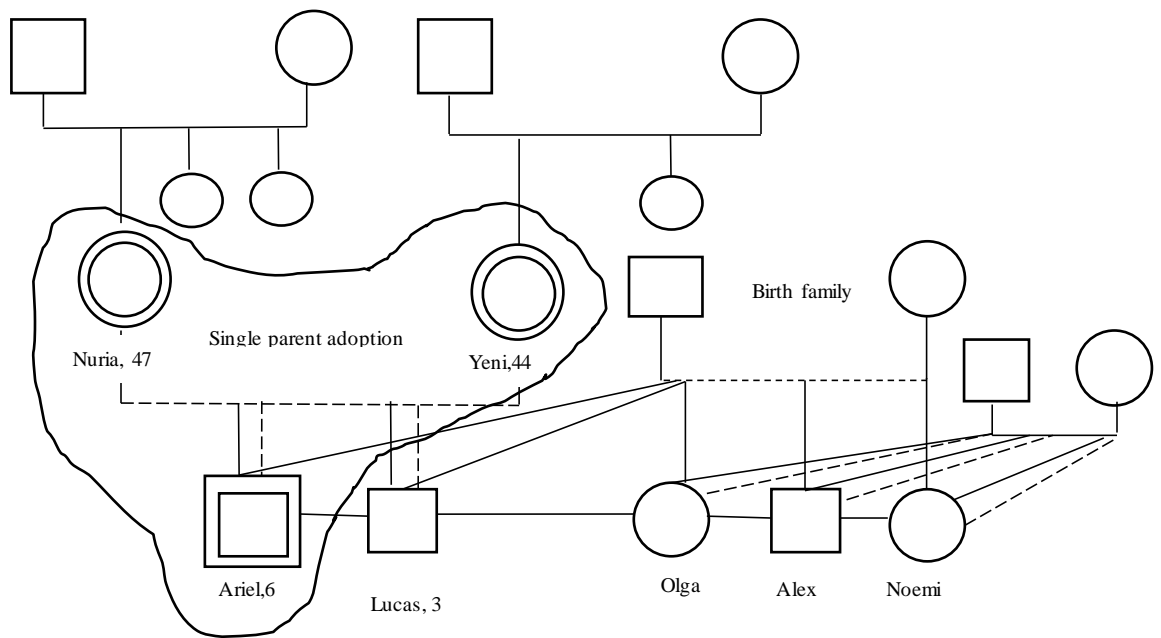


Figure 20: Genogram of Nuria, Jeny and Ariel

7.7.1 Interview and Double Moon Test with Nuria and Jeny

During the interview Nuria and Jeny seem relaxed and very willing to talk about their family story. After retracing the main steps of their adoption experience, they share some information about Ariel. They explain that he is a child with special needs: he is blind in one eye and he has a congenital heart condition. According to Nuria and Jeny, despite his physical problems, Ariel is developing healthy and happy. Ariel is described as a lovely child, smart and very communicative. Nuria and Jeny have partial information about their son's birth family: they know that his birth father died before his birth and that his birth mother gave Ariel up for adoption because she was in a difficult socio-economic situation and she was not able to ensure the medical care he needed. They also know that Ariel's birth mother's name was Belen. The mothers report that Ariel is currently acquiring an awareness of his adoptive condition: he often asks questions about his birth family, putting the pieces of his "life puzzle" together in this

way. According to Nuria and Yeni, Ariel seems sad and touched when exploring such themes. They stated:

N. (Nuria): *“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: Mum, why couldn't she take care of me? Therefore I explain to him what it takes to take care of a child: food, clothes... And I say to him that unfortunately his mother Belen could not do it, because she didn't have the possibility... this is why she decided to give him up for adoption”.*

Y. (Yeni): *“Sometimes he feels sorry for his mother because she could not take care of him... And well, his father...His father died before his birth and he knows it...He also feel sorry for his father that he is in heaven.... He is very touched when he talks of his mother and his father”.*

As shown in this verbatim, when talking about Ariel's past, the couple seems very empathetic and respectful. They comprehend the painful feelings experienced by Ariel in relation to the loss of his birth family and they communicate spontaneously with their son about such aspects. Nuria and Yeni talk about the birth parents in terms of “real persons”, giving them human qualities. Furthermore, they do not judge his birth mother for the choice to give Ariel up for adoption. These mothers have an open attitude towards their son's birth family, they understand the importance of linking the past to the present in order to help Ariel develop his identity in a balanced way.

N.: *“I think 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...I always think that we can't know what we would be like if we were in their situation... that is why we can't judge them...we have to respect them in order to help our child have a positive image of himself”.*

During the Double Moon Test (figure 21), Nuria and Yeni make two independent drawings, occupying respectively two halves of the sheet, one on the left (Nuria), one on the right (Yeni). The two representations seem very similar, almost specular. The impression is that there are two separate worlds but inextricably linked. Both represent several circles depicting themselves with the children, the friends and the extended family. In the middle they represent their children's brothers and sisters (Noemi, Alex and Olga), explaining that they are important to them. Nuria and Yeni do not

spontaneously represent the birth parents of their children. However, when the question on this topic is asked, they agree that they should take a place in their sheet.

R. (Researcher): "Where would you place the biological parents of Ariel in this drawing?"

N.: "Well...Here (indicating the centre of the sheet). It is certain that they are not outside the frame. Really we can't leave them out because his birth family is not like the rest, is a unique relationship, we can't delete it".

R.: "And for you Yeni?"

Y: "I agree with Nuria, because they are and they will be present for ever (...).But I would also propose to put them near the edge, because they are not in our everyday life".

N.: "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, Ariel wouldn't be here with us".

As illustrated by the report, Nuria and Yeni accord an important place to their children's birth family and are willing to welcome them in their symbolic family space. All these elements confirm that they were in the so called "openness-valorisation" position. When they are asked if they would like to change anything with a magic wand, they answer that they would like to take away the suffering of their children and make them happy.

N.: "I would like to take away his pain, that he feels happy...If I could, I'd bear his pain...take his place".

7.7.2 Interview and Double Moon Test with Ariel

Ariel welcomes the researcher with a big smile: he seems curious and enthusiastic to participate in the interview. He answers to the researcher's questions in a clear and precise manner. He seems at ease when talking about his story, which is told in a detailed and structured way. Ariel retraces his life experiences chronologically, explaining that his birth mother could not take care of him and that for this reason he was adopted. He talks about his brothers and sisters and about his birth father. Ariel also explains that sometimes he is sad when he thinks about this birth parents, which suggests that he can communicate freely about the painful elements of his experience. At the same time, he emphasises that he is very happy with Nuria and Yeni, stating: *"In this family I live very well. I love my mums!"*.

The Double Moon Test (figure 22) confirms his capacity to openly talk about both his past and his present. First of all, he draws himself with (in the following order): Lucas, Nuria (“Mama”) and Yeni. Nuria is the bigger person in his drawing. After he adds a frame with his uncles and cousins (“primo Adrien, Manolo, Naeira”) and another one with his brothers and sisters (“hermanos”). Ariel explains that “*all these people form part of my family*” and he makes a circle enclosing all the people in his drawing. Subsequently, the question about the place of his birth family is asked by the researcher.

R.: During our interview we talked about your birth family. Would you like to represent them in this drawing?

A.(Ariel): Here (indicating the interior of the rectangle, near his brothers and sisters)...because before I was in the belly of my biological mother... her name was Bélen, and there were my brothers Alex and Noemi and my sister...and I want to draw my biological mother, with a face like my mother But smaller...One eye, the other eye, nose and teeth and lips...To make her beautiful, I'll make the perfect makeup... Here I want to make pink cheeks... Look how pretty she is!!

R.: Very pretty!! And your biological father?

A.: I don't remember very well because he died before I was born...Can you help me in drawing his face?!

R.: Of course. What would you like me to do?

A.: I want to put him here, near my mother Belen. And I want to make him beautiful too...with dark hair like mine...(The researcher helps him in drawing and colouring his father's face).

Ariel's narration impresses for its clarity and fluency: he has a very good level of integration of his past, which is rare at his age. His discourse shows that there are no gaps or grey areas in history, everything is clear and understandable. He can add a face on these absent parental figures, which confirms that he can imagine and talk about them. An interesting element is that Ariel is capable of asking for help in drawing his father: this suggests that he already experienced support from adults in making sense of his story. Finally, when Ariel is asked to use a magic wand in his drawing, he answers:

A.: If I had a magic wand I would like to make my mother prettier and my father more beautiful...I would like to put them here, where I drew my cousins....And I would to make Yeni's face bigger, like my mother's face.

This last answer confirms his capacity to integrate his past into his present. In fact, Ariel would like to make the loss of his birth parents less painful, keeping them in his present

life. At the same time he would like to award more room to Yeni in his life. This suggests that Ariel values both his past and his present with his adoptive mothers. All these elements indicate that Ariel was in the so called “integration-balanced” position.



Figure 21: Nuria and Yeni (The double Moon Test)

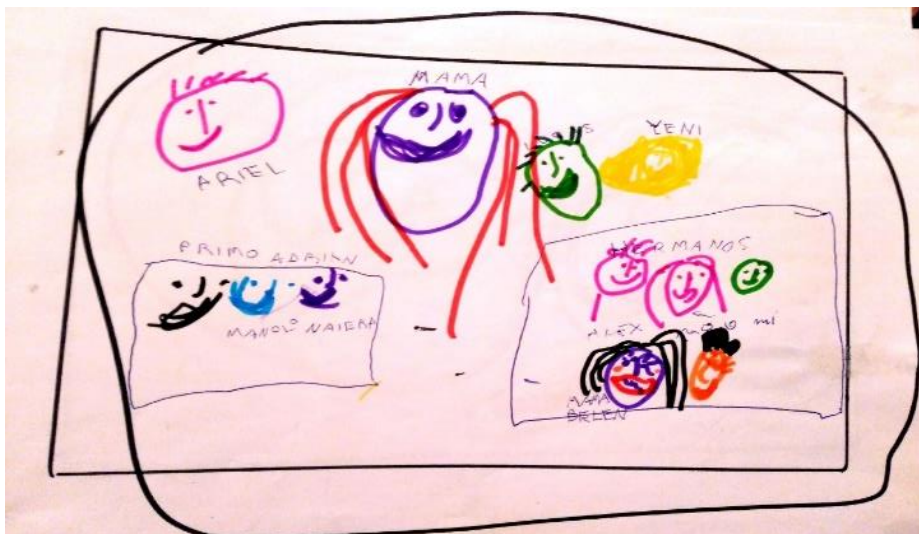


Figure 22: Ariel (The double Moon Test)

7.8 DISCUSSIONS

This research is the first study investigating the way in which same-sex adoptive families manage their children's double family connection (family of origin-adoptive family). Our results show that same-sex parents present a range of three positions towards their children's past: negation-minimisation, precaution-incertitude; openness-valorisation. Adopted children ranged in four main positions: closure-unmentionable, minimization-removal, idealization-fantasied, integration-balance.

According to our analysis, the stance of negation-minimisation in parents and that of closure-unmentionable in adoptees are related to the highest risk of closed family communication and difficult integration of the adoption-related losses. In such situations the clinical work is difficult being that the family is not ready to "cross this bridge" and remain entrenched in defensive attitudes.

The position of precaution-incertitude in parents and the positions of removal-minimisation and idealisation-fantasy in adoptees, represent a middle ground: the communication on the adoption-related loss remains difficult, but there is, however, a margin of intervention. In this case, the clinical work can make room for reflection, helping the family to progress towards more integrative attitudes.

Finally, the positions of openness-valorisation in parents and of integration-balance in children are found to be the situations in which there was the best quality of family communication, empathy and warmth. The adoptees in this position were capable to navigate through the painful feelings of their adoptive condition with balance and resilience. These findings confirm the results of a previous research into opposite-sex adoptive families (Greco, 2006), showing that the integrative position is connected with higher levels of family functioning than the non-integrative one.

Analysis showed that among parents the most common position was the negation-minimisation, followed by the openness-valorisation one. These results show a slight difference to the sample of heterosexual adopters used by Greco (2006), in which the most common position was the integrative one. In our sample, differences were observed according to parents' gender: most of the gay men were in the negation-

minimisation position, while most of the lesbians were in the openness-valorisation one. This finding in particular, can be interpreted as a consequence of the social attitudes towards gay and lesbian parenting. Considering that gay men face more challenges and negative stereotypes in the route to parenthood compared to lesbians (Messina & D'Amore 2018), this attitude could represent an attempt to defend their legitimacy in society's eyes. In other words, by keeping the ghost of the biological conception (represented by their children's birth parents) at distance, they also indirectly keep a distance from the heterosexist idea of the family. Thus, by minimising the birth family they can affirm the superiority of the "heart ties" as to the "biological ties" (Messina & D'Amore, in press). On the other hand, given that lesbian mothers enjoy a better acceptance in society (Costa & Davies, 2012; Steffens, 2005; Steffens et al. 2014), they do not feel the need to defend themselves and their family as gay men do. By feeling more legitimate in their parental role, they consequently feel less threatened by the birth family's representation.

Another factor which was found to play a role in parents' attitudes toward their children's past is the adoption type. Analysis revealed that the negation-minimisation position was more frequent among parents who adopted via a national adoption, rather than among those who adopted abroad. Confirming the results of the study conducted by Greco (2006), these findings indicate that racial and ethnic differences between adoptees and adopters reduce the risks of non-integrative positions. Is it also possible to hypothesise that the geographic distance is a reassuring factor for adoptive parents, whereas, on the contrary, the geographical proximity can increase threatening images of the children's birth family.

As regards the adoptees, analysis revealed that the majority of them was in the idealisation-fantasy position and in the removal-minimisation one. These findings show a difference to the study conducted by Greco (2006) in which most of the adoptees were in the integrative position.

In our sample, an important factor determining the adoptees position is their age: we observed that children in early childhood were more likely to be in the closure/

unmentionable position and in the removal-minimisation, whereas during middle childhood and pre-adolescence adoptees moved towards the idealisation-fantasy position. Finally, during adolescence, adoptees ranged in removal-minimisation and in the integration balance positions. These elements suggest that children's attitudes towards their birth family are not static but evolve as a result of two elements: their capacity to understand the meaning and the implications of being adopted (Brodzinsky, 2011) and the family life cycle (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002; Rosenberg 1991). Our analysis also revealed an inextricable interconnection between parents and adoptees' positions (figure 23).

More precisely, we observed that parents' negation- minimisation and precaution-incertitude positions are connected to closure-unmentionable, removal-minimisation and idealisation-fantasy positions among adoptees, while an openness-valorisation position in parents is connected to the integration-balance position in adoptees.

These findings underline that the way parents communicate with their children about their birth family impacts the feelings experienced by adoptees significantly (Brodzinsky, 2005). Both the case of Gabriel and the case of Katiana in fact showed that the more parents minimise their children's past, the more the past embeds in their imagination, influencing their current life. On the contrary, as illustrated in the case of Ariel, when parents understand their children's curiosity and questions, legitimating and acknowledging their pain, the adoptees can manage the adoption related losses.

ADOPTIVE PARENTS' POSITIONS

MINIMISATION-NEGATION

Parents deny the past of the child, they feel threatened and have a closed attitude. Birth parents are considered as "biological means".

INCERTITUDE-PRECAUTION

Parents feel menaced and are hesitant about the place the past of child should take up. They do not know how to nominate the birth parents, they show resistance in talking about the child's past and try to inhibit their children's questions

OPENESS-VALORISATION

Parents give the child's past a place in the new family story, they understand the importance of linking the past with the present in order to help the child develop his/her identity. They valorise and answer their children's questions empathetically.

ADOPTEEES' POSITIONS

CLOSURE-UNMENTIONABLE

Talking about the past is impossible: this is a taboo subject

REMOVAL-MINIMISATION

The past occupies an important place in their imaginary, however the adoptees remove and minimise the feelings connected with it because they do not feel free to talk about it.

IDEALISATION-FANTASY

Adoptees are focused on their past: Birth parents are idealised and an object of intense curiosity and fantasy. Children seem focused on their past rather than on their present.

INTEGRATION-BALANCE

The adoptees have a realistic view of their past: the past and the present can coexist. They feel free to ask questions and talk about their birth parents, without fear of hurting their adoptive parents.

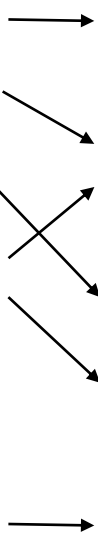


Figure 23: Interconnections between parents and children's positions

7.9 CONCLUSIONS

This research sheds light on a formerly unexplored but crucial subject: the way in which same-sex adoptive families deal with their double family connection. In line with the previous research (Greco 2006, Brodzinsky, 2005, Greco, 2013), our study confirms that adoptive parents play a pivotal role in helping their children integrate their double connection in their emerging identity. By acting as a mirror, the parents reflect an image of their past to the adoptees: the more this image is clear, understandable and positive, the more they will be able to connect their past with their present, creating an integrated

sense of self. These findings suggest that in the clinical practice particular attention should be paid to the exploration of same-sex adoptive parents' feelings towards their child's birth parents. Both the case of Gabriel and the case of Katiana in fact showed that the more parents minimise their children's past, the more the past embeds in their imagination, influencing their current life. On the contrary, as illustrated in the case of Ariel, when parents understand their children's curiosity and questions, legitimating and acknowledging their pain, the adoptees can manage the adoption related losses in a healthier way. These examples suggest that the clinical work should support same-sex families in the encouragement of an open family communication about the children's past, helping them to assign it a balanced place in their symbolic family space.

Chapter 8

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 SUMMARY OF THIS THESIS

This thesis was conceived with the purpose of shedding light on a new and understudied family form: the same-sex adoptive family.

This work has been realised between 2013 and 2018, in a socio-political context in which the rights of sexual minorities are becoming more and more visible (Paternotte, 2010; Ilga, 2017). Same-sex adoption, in particular, is being legalised progressively in many countries around the world, arousing intense and controversial debates over the last years (Farr, Forssell & Patterson, 2010; Herbrand, 2006).

This research aimed at the exploration of this new adoption situation, giving the floor directly to the principal protagonists: same-sex parents and their adopted children. This investigation was conducted in three European countries: Belgium, France and Spain. Belgium and Spain were among the first countries to allow sexual minorities to adopt, while France legalised same-sex adoption only in 2013. Despite these differences, in all of these three countries the right of sexual minorities to adopt strongly divided the public opinion. We also observed that the adoption path of the participants was different in these three countries: all the Belgian families adopted young children through a full-joint national adoption; all the French families adopted their children abroad through a single-parent adoption procedure; most of the Spaniards chose the same procedure as French couples, while a few others preferred to initially start a procedure as a foster family in Spain, waiting to officially adopt their children in a second instance.

The results of this research have been grouped and analysed in three studies, each focusing on specific aspects and pursuing specific research questions.

Study 1 had the purpose of analysing the experiences of the first generation of gay and lesbian adoptive parents living in Europe. To this end, we gave a voice to a sample of 62

same-sex adoptive parents (16 lesbians and 46 gay men), exploring their experiences before, during and after adoption.

More precisely, the research questions that guided this study were the following: a) what does it currently mean in Europe, being a same-sex couple and choosing to adopt a child? b) What is the personal and mutual journey experienced by same-sex couples on the road to adoption? c) What are the challenges and the parental tasks experienced by sexual minorities after adoption?

As explained in chapter 3, until today, most of the psychological research pertaining the adoptive experiences of sexual minorities was conducted in the US. This study subsequently fills an important gap in literature, providing information on sample same-sex adoptive families living in the European context. This study made a precious contribution to the understanding of the challenges experienced by gay and lesbian people during the transition to parenthood and in their current life as same-sex parents. Results of this study underlined, in particular, that these parents still encounter a large number of institutional barriers and stressors related to their sexual minority status and that this negatively impacts their adoptive experience.

Study 2 was aimed at studying the identity construction process of children adopted by same-sex parents during four developmental stages: early childhood, middle childhood, pre-adolescence and adolescence. To this end, we interviewed a sample of 31 same-sex families, totalling 62 same-sex parents and 44 adopted children. With each family we conducted two interviews: one with the adopted children, one with the adoptive parents. Several research questions supported this study: a) what does it mean to be adopted by two same-sex parents? b) What are the main questions that children adopted by same-sex parents ask themselves and their parents during growing up? c) What are the main challenges and identity-related issues they experience and how do they handle these elements?

This study has the merit of being one of the first studies giving the floor directly to adopted children in order to explore their experience of being adopted by same-sex parents. Results showed that, while growing up, children encounter challenges that are

both similar to and different from those encountered by children adopted by opposite-sex parents. In fact, these adoptees experienced identity-related issues connected not only with their adoptive status, but also with their family minority status. According to our study, being exposed to micro aggressions, bullying and teasing episodes, as well as being exposed to an heterosexist context which does not take their family reality into account can represent risks factors for their emotional well-being.

In line with previous research (Gianino, 2009; Farr et al., 2015), our study illustrated that pre-adolescent years is the most critical phase, in which adoptees experienced the highest level of negative feelings with regard to their family's sexual minority situation. At this stage, in particular, many adoptees reported feelings of fear of revealing their family structure to peers and used to hide their family identity. Analysis also revealed however, that adoptees in our sample developed different strategies to cope with the negative experiences related to heterosexism and homophobia, by means of a positive conceptualisation of their family and by building a solid bond with their same-sex parents (Cody et al., 2016).

Finally, study 3 explored the parents' and children's feelings related to the adoptees' birth family, and the family communication on this topic. This study involved a sample of 62 same-sex parents and 36 adopted children. The results of this study were derived from the administration of the Double Moon Test (Greco, 1999), a graphic projective test created to study the way in which adoptive families handle the theme of the double family connection (family of origin versus adoptive family).

More specifically, the research questions that guided this study were the following: a) what are sexual minority adopters' feelings and attitudes towards their children's birth parents? b) What feelings do adoptees have toward their birth parents? c) How do parents and children communicate about this topic?

The results of this study showed that many parents in our sample were ill at ease when talking about their children's family of origin and tried to minimise their role and their existence. On the contrary, the birth parents were very present in the imagination of adopted children, who often idealised and fantasised a lot about these lost parental

figures. The cases analysed in this study showed in particular that adoptees tend to idealise the birth parental figure whose gender is absent in the adoptive family (children adopted by gay men often have a great curiosity about the birth mother, whereas children adopted by lesbian women tend to be more interested in their birth father). This suggests that the theme of the “absent parental figure” should be explored with attention. Furthermore, in line with previous literature (Brodzinsky, 2006), this study highlighted the absolute importance of promoting open family communication on adoption-related losses.

The results of these three studies have strong and important implications in several fields: the social and scientific debates concerning the well-being of children raised by same-sex families, the clinical practice with these new families, the adoption practice and public politics. In the following paragraphs we will discuss the main impact of the studies presented in this thesis.

8.2 ANSWERS TO SCIENTIFIC AND SOCIAL DEBATES

The right of sexual minorities to create a family and moreover, to raise children, is a subject which has raised intense debates both among the public opinion and in the scientific community (Patterson, Fulcher & Wainright, 2002; Patterson, 2009; Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

The American Psychology Association which was called upon to give an opinion on this burning issue, stated: “*there is no scientific evidence that parenting effectiveness is related to parental sexual orientation: lesbian and gay parents are as likely as heterosexual parents to provide supportive and healthy environments for their children* (APA, 2004)”. Thus, on the basis of the existing research, APA continues to oppose any discrimination based on sexual orientation in matters of adoption, child custody and visitation, foster care, and reproductive health services.

Despite such a precise indication from the APA, we have witnessed heated debates on the subject in the past years between psychologists, psychiatrics, doctors and specialists

in the field of the child care (Lingiardi & Carone 2016). The scientific community is still divided on this topic: on the one hand there are those who “defend” the right of these new families, emphasising their strengths on the basis of the existing research (Goldberg, 2016; Baiocco & Ioverno, 2016); on the other hand, there are those who oppose these new family geometries, underlining the difference of sexes between parents as a necessary element for the healthy development of children (Cigoli, 2016).

At the beginning of this thesis we explained in particular, that it is possible to identify two main arguments against same-sex adoption: 1) the idea that same-sex families do not represent an appropriate context in which to place child already marked by difficult life circumstances (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Wilchins, 2004); 2) the idea that growing up in a same sex family could negatively impact a child's well-being (Clarke, 2001; Pennington & Knight, 2011; Hollekin et al., 2012).

In light of our results and with reference to the questions at the centre of scientific and social debates what conclusions can be drawn?

With regard to the first question, we can conclude that yes, same-sex families constitute an appropriate context to place children. However, like all adoptive families, only under certain conditions.

As explained by Brodzinsky et al. (2011, p. 241): “*adoption is not a right, but a privilege*”. And this is true for all applicants, independently of their sexual orientation. According to the results of study 2 and 3, we can conclude that the parents' sexual orientation itself does not pose a problem. What could create difficulties is an incapacity to establish an open communication with adopted children and a difficulty to manage the stressors related to the sexual minority status in a balanced way.

And then, from the adoptees' perspectives, are there additional challenges in being adopted by same-sex parents?

Study 2 demonstrated that yes, there are some additional challenges related to the interrelationship of both adoptive and minority statuses. However, the existence of such challenges does not in itself mean that children cannot develop in a healthy way. As shown by our research, as a result of living in a heterosexist society, the experience of

being adopted by two same-sex parents is socially and psychologically different from being adopted by two opposite-sex parents and children are inevitably confronted with specific and previously unknown issues during their development. This is not a limitation, but an element of uniqueness that characterises their family experience and their adoptive identity. As underlined by Heenen-Wolff and Moget (2011), the notion of "*difference*" should not be confused with the notion of "*deficit*". In other words, what matters is to find a way to transform the challenges related to this adoption situation into an element of richness.

This thesis, in particular, sheds light on two main elements which could influence the extent of the negative feelings encountered by adoptees while growing up. Firstly, we observed that for these adoptees, attending a heterosexist school contexts represents a risk factor which can increase their minority stress (Green 2008, Meyer 2003) and their feeling of being different (Gianino, Goldberg, & Lewis, 2009; Farr et al. 2015, Cody et al., 2016). For these reasons, it appears important to embed the promotion of an open, accepting and inclusive school environment in the formation of educators. The school context, in particular, should play a pivotal role in conveying a positive image of their family to children, helping and guiding them during their developmental challenges.

Secondly, this study underlined the importance of open familial communication Brodzinsky (2005), in which children feel free to discuss the contrasting feelings connected with both their adoptive and minority statuses (Vinjamuri, 2015). Same-sex parents in particular, have the important role of understanding, legitimatizing, and validating childrens' questions in order to help them manage the complexities of such a condition as well as to help them deal with heteronormativity.

It appears to be important, in concluding this thesis, to share a reflection concerning the epistemology of most of the existing literature on same-sex parenting.

We think that the debates raised by this topic entail a risk: the production of many scientific studies with the purpose of demonstrating how well these families function. As if these studies would justify the legitimacy of these new families in the eyes of society and research community. Such an epistemology, however, does not allow the

exploration of the complexity and the richness of these new family configurations. More specifically the “no-difference approach” (Bilblarz, Stacey 2001), on which most of the research on the development of children raised by same-sex parents is based, determines and reinforces a kind of “reticence” in exploring children’s difficulties: as if talking about the challenges children encounter in such households could call the appropriacy of same-sex families’ family into question.

With this study, we hope to reverse this trend. We believe, in fact, that the “normality” and the “equality” of same-sex parenting will be socially and scientifically sanctioned when speaking about the challenges encountered by their children will no longer be a “taboo”. Same-sex adoptive families are “simply” families like any other and they are (fortunately) far from being “perfect”: like all families they can encounter joy and successes, but also challenges and difficult tasks in their parental journey. This is why, staying away from any militant approach as well as from any opposite perspective, we should continue to shed light on both their strengths and their limitations, the way we would with any other type of population.

In summary, we think that, as of today, the research goal should not be saying that children adopted by same sex couple are at least just as fine as those adopted by heterosexuals, but rather understand *how* they build their identity in light of all these complex aspects. In the same way, research should not try to demonstrate that same-sex parents are good enough or better than heterosexual parents, but rather explore *how* they manage the developmental challenges they encounter during their family life cycle.

8.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR CLINICAL PRACTICE

Results of this research also allow us to do some suggestions for the clinical practice with same-sex adoptive families.

As observed in this thesis, these new families are at the intersection of two elements of complexity: their sexual minority status and their adoptive status. The overlapping of these two elements may determine the emergence of new clinical

issues which must be taken into account by professionals interacting with these new family configurations. On the basis of our results, we can indicate some clinical goals which may be useful to pursue with these new families.

First of all, an important clinical goal with same-sex adoptive parents consists in working on legitimacy. In fact, as observed in study 1, sexual minorities became adoptive parents after a long process during which they experience legal barriers and discrimination (Messina & D'Amore, 2018). These elements can negatively affect their self-esteem and undermine their feelings of legitimacy as same-sex parents. For this reason it is important to empathically acknowledge the challenges they encountered before they were able to realise their aspirations for parenthood. To this end, it is important to reassure and valorise same-sex parents in their parental role, to support them in dealing with challenges connected with minority stress (Green & Mitchell, 2008), and to prepare them for adoption-related challenges.

The results of study 3 suggest in particular, the necessity of supporting same-sex parents in managing the threatening images related to the child's birth family. With this purpose, it is important to help them empathise and understand the painful feelings experienced by their children with regard to the loss of the birth family, encouraging an open and warm communication concerning these elements. As demonstrated by study 3, the Double Moon Test (Greco, 1999) is an instrument which can prove particularly useful to guide families in the exploration of their representations of the child's birth family. This test can be an opportunity to stimulate the communication on this sensitive issue, promoting a change in interactive familial dynamics.

As regards the children, this thesis led to the identification of two key elements to explore in the clinical practice: their feelings connected with the adoption-related losses; and their feelings connected with their family's minority status.

As regards the first point, it seems particularly important to acknowledge adoptees' curiosity about the birth family, being attentive in helping them in giving an

equilibrate place to the birth family in their imagination. In fact, as shown by study 3, according excessive importance to the past can negatively impact the feeling of belonging to the adoptive family (Colbère, 2001; Noël, 1994). At the same time, removing the feelings related to the past can negatively affect the family functioning and the identity construction process, increasing the risk of idealisation of the lost parental figures (Colbère, 2001; Greco, 2006). Is it therefore crucial to find an equilibrium point. To this end, the use of the Double Moon Test can prove particularly useful.

As regards the second point, psychologists and therapists should explore the way in which children navigate through the challenges related to growing up in a same sex family. As shown in study 2 these adoptees can experience negative feelings concerning their family structure: in particular, they can fear the reaction of their environment, encounter direct or indirect forms of homophobia and microaggressions and, consequently, hide their family identity in order to protect themselves. Furthermore, as observed in studies 2 and 3, one of the challenges experienced by these adoptees concerns the authorisation to communicate openly about such elements with their parents. For this reason, the clinical setting should represent a secure environment in which they can freely share their experiences in this regard. Thus psychologists and therapists in interaction with these adoptees have the role of empathetically accepting and acknowledging their contrasting feelings connected with their family minority status. At the same time, they have to help children to individuate and appreciate the positive aspects of growing up in a same-sex family, guiding them in considering their family structure as an enriching element of their identity.

In summary, the clinical work with these new families should aim at acknowledging the challenges experienced across their family life cycle, stimulating and underlining the resources and the strengths which could help them face these challenges.

8.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR ADOPTION PRACTICE AND PUBLIC POLITICS

This thesis conveys two messages that have a great impact on adoption practice and public politics. Firstly, as we saw in study 1, despite the increasingly open legislative measures in our continent, same-sex couples who want to adopt still encounter many socio-legal barriers, which makes access to adoption very difficult for them.

Secondly, as observed in studies 2 and 3, adopted children, like their same-sex parents, confront the challenge of living in a heterosexist context that does not acknowledge their family reality, negatively impacting their well-being. These elements suggest that legislation alone, is not enough to fight discrimination.

As explained by Brodzinky et al. (2011, p. 241): *“It is not that lesbians and gays should have a right to adopt, but rather a right to be assessed in the same way as heterosexual applicants”*. For this purpose, it is crucial to promote a change in adoption practice, in order to allow same-sex couples to actually enjoy the same rights as heterosexual couples do.

This thesis enable us to make some practical suggestions, on the basis of the specificities of the adoption practice in Belgium, France and Spain.

One element is common to all three countries analysed in this thesis: the absolutely necessity to increase the formation and the awareness of adoption professionals involved in practice with these new families. In fact, according to the participants in study 1, the adoption professionals still have negative representations about homosexuality and often do not have a theoretic knowledge of their family situation. Considering that the applications of gay and lesbian candidates are increasing (Striges, 2017), it is very important to intervene on this point.

In Belgium, one element in particular deserves attention: the legal possibility of a birth family to choose what kind of family is allowed to adopt their children. As shown by the participants' reports, this is one of the most discriminating elements of the adoption procedure. In fact, statistics demonstrate that 80% of birth mothers does not accept giving their children to same-sex couples (Striges, 2017). On the basis of the birth families' rate of refusal, the institution establishes a « gay quota »: concretely only 20%

of the adoptable children will be given to gay and lesbian couples (ibidem). The high rate of refusal by birth parents suggests that social representations are still imbued with negative stereotypes surrounding same-sex parenthood: despite these families being equal in the eyes of the law, they are not equal in the eyes of society.

This element has given rise to some reflections: to what extent is it right to take the will of the birth family into account? How to guarantee a continuity between the past and the future of the child without provoking discrimination?

We think that one possibility is to work on birth families' representations during their decision making about adoption. This work should educate them about same-sex parenting, exploring their stereotypes and enabling a reflection on the positive elements of such a family situation. This appears important in order to reduce the rate of refusal on the basis of sexual orientation and to promote, subsequently, equal opportunities for prospective adopters.

As regards France and Spain, we detailed the negative impact that the adoption procedure as pretended single parents has on family dynamics in this thesis. We discussed in particular, that such a procedure can result in many negative consequences and risks on personal, relational, legal and ethical levels. Adopters could experience intense anxiety related to having to hide their identity and having to lie in the child's country of birth, feelings of loneliness, distance and marital conflicts. This situation can also result in difficulties in the relationship with the adopted child: the latter could feel betrayed by the discovery of having been adopted on the basis of lying to the birth country's government or, even worse, to the birth family. Furthermore, this situation could create legal problems: if the birth country does not accept same-sex couples as adoption candidates and they discover, at a later time, the actual family structure, they can revoke the adoption procedure (*Adopción y homosexualidad*, n.d.). All these elements underline the absolute importance of promoting transparency in the adoption practice. Same-sex couples should not be obliged to resort to lying, but they should be evaluated for their human and family qualities, rather than their family structure. We acknowledge however, that this utopian proposal does not correspond with the reality

and that unfortunately, in practice, adopting abroad as single parents is often the only possibility for same-sex couples. We suggest in this case, that even if they adopt legally as single parents, they could attend adoption preparation courses together (apart from the adoption agency they choose), in order to enable them to both feel involved and prepared to face the adoption experience. It appears important to promote the acknowledgement of adoption-related challenges, to help them mature in their parental project as a couple and to reduce the risk of relational ambiguity (Green, & Mitchell, 2008, Gross 2012) connected with the lack of legal recognition of one of the two partners. Adoption professionals, from their side, should be aware of these difficulties and help same-sex couples to manage these complex elements in the best way possible. Another element to reflect on as a result of this research concerns the challenges they encounter after adoption. Parents' and children's reports analysed in studies 1 and 2 demonstrate that a lot needs to be done to improve their everyday life experiences. Concretely, measures must be taken so that society does not constantly ascribe them an image of deficiency in comparison with the traditional family model. The administrative system, for example, has to be careful not to forget these families. The education system may be particularly attentive in presenting family differences as a positive element, as a resource, and not as a stigma. The post-adoption path, on its part, should play an important role by offering support and room for the elaboration of these experiences. In summary, it is crucial to increase formation and continue to combat homophobia, heterosexism and discrimination in all social contexts, and at all levels. Social workers, psychologists, adoption agencies, teachers and all people implicated in this new adoption situation, should take these scientific results into consideration in order to contribute to a more just and inclusive world.

8.5 CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, this thesis has two-fold implications: theoretical and practical.

In theoretical terms, this work has contributed significantly to the advancement of knowledge about the same-sex family which, until today, has been understudied in scientific literature. More specifically, this work has two main merits: giving voice to the first generation of gay and lesbian adoptive families living in Europe and providing insight into the identity construction process of children adopted in such households.

In practical terms, this thesis has an important impact on public politics, on adoption and clinical practice, and on social attitudes concerning sexual minorities.

In fact, this work can be a source of inspiration for politics, adoption agencies, professionals, teachers, and also for sexual minorities who want to familiarise themselves with this topic before starting the journey to adoption.

In conclusion, we hope that this study will pave the way for future research and clinical work that will provide further insight on the themes analysed in this thesis. We in particular hope, that future research will be an extension to our results by examining the experience of same-sex adoptive families living in the other European countries and by continuing to give voice to the adopted children in such households. In fact, despite the significant contribution of this pioneer study, further research is necessary in order to enrich and consolidate scientific knowledge on same-sex adoptive families.

Increasing knowledge on this topic is necessary not only in the interest of the adopters, but also in the best interest of the adopted children (Brooks & Goldberg 2001), who will increasingly be placed in such households.

As shown in this thesis, a lot remains to be done to support these new families across their family life cycle: we are glad to to have made a contribution towards it.

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