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**“We wanted a forever family”: Altruistic, Individualistic, and Motivated Reasoning
Motivations for Adoption among LGBTQ Individuals**

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**“We wanted a forever family”: Altruistic, Individualistic, and Motivated Reasoning
Motivations for Adoption among LGBTQ Individuals**

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore motivations for adoption among a diverse sample of LGBTQ adoptive parents and prospective adopters ($n = 366$), who were recruited through a U.K. network of LGBTQ adoptive and foster families to complete an online survey. Quantitative analysis showed that the majority did not think that being LGBTQ would negatively influence their experience of adopting, although they were evenly split regarding the expectation of whether they would be matched with a harder-to-place child. To explore LGBTQ parents' motivations for adoption, a thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted. One overarching theme was identified *Seeking permanency*, together with three often closely related subthemes: *Altruistic/Moral motivation*, *Individualistic/Intrinsic motivation*, and *Motivated reasoning*. The findings reflect important changes in U.K. law since the Adoption and Children Act in 2002 permitted same-gender couples to adopt. We suggest ways to inform the recruitment of potential LGBTQ adoptive parents.

Keywords: gay men and lesbians; transgender parents; bisexual parents; prospective parents; parenthood aspirations.

**“We wanted a forever family”: Altruistic, Individualistic, and Motivated Reasoning
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Introduction

“I’m single and trans. I want permanency. I have always envisaged giving an existing child a home/parent rather than creating yet another human being in an over populated world”
(Trans Man, Gay)

In the United Kingdom, parents can legally adopt children in the social care system through domestic adoption, inter-country adoption, or fostering to adopt. Since the approval of the Adoption and Children Act in 2002 in England and Wales, the eligibility criteria for adoptive parents have been extended to unmarried and single individuals, including but not limited to, single adults, married and unmarried same-gender couples. Thus, the Adoption and Children Act considerably widened the pool of potential adoptive parents by more explicitly including, as potential adopters, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) individuals.

The study of motivations for adoption is extremely important to inform the recruitment of prospective parents for children in the social care system. The number of adoptions in the U.K. has been consistently increasing in recent years, from 3,354 in 2011 to 5,713 in 2015, which represents an 80% increase over a period of four years; however, the number of children in the social care system has also increased from 70,890 in 2011 to 75,157 in 2015. In 2016, the total number of children in children in the social care system waiting for a permanent placement with a family was 5,206 (CoramBAAF, 2016). These numbers highlight what some authors have previously described as “a shortage of suitable applicants coming forward to adopt children in public care” (Cocker & Brown, 2010, p. 23). According to the U.K. network of LGBTQ adoptive and foster families, in 2013 there were over 20,000

children parented by same-gender couples, and the number of families headed by LGBTQ individuals and couples has been slowly but steadily increasing (New Family Social, 2016). Further, research has highlighted that there were many more lesbian carers and adopters than gay men (Hicks, 2006), while little is known about rates of bisexual, transgender and queer carers and adopters. To the extent that this trend still holds true is unknown, although with greater access to assisted reproduction it seems likely that more lesbian, bisexual and queer women may pursue this route to parenthood before, or instead of, pursuing adoption.

In addition, there has been a growing interest in investigating LGBTQ prospective parents' motivations for adoption, as more countries across Europe have passed laws allowing same-gender couples to bring children into their families through adoption. However, there is still a dearth of literature investigating their motives for adoption, especially outside of the United States (Jennings, Mellish, Tasker, Lamb, & Golombok, 2014). In some countries, LGBTQ individuals may be able to successfully adopt a child as a single person, although they are likely to hide their sexual identity during the adoption assessment process, or avoid pursuing adoption as a route to parenthood due to legal uncertainties in family law (e.g. in Portugal where adoption rights were only extended to same-gender couples in 2016; Costa & Bidell, 2017). The decision to become a parent by any LGBTQ individual necessarily requires evaluating different routes to parenthood, informed and intentional decision-making, and careful planning. Adoption provides a unique opportunity for bringing a child into a family by satisfying both a parenting desire and providing a family home for children in the social care system.

Motivations for parenthood and adoptive parenthood

Literature has highlighted different motivations to adopt, and has divided them into two distinct, albeit often interrelated, categories. One of these categories has been labelled as

parent-centred, which is related to the perceived benefits prospective parents anticipate from having children. The second category has been labelled as child-centred, as it is focused around altruistic desires to provide a family for a child in need of one (see, for example, Hollingsworth, 2000).

For some prospective parents then, the motivation driving the decision to pursue adoption may be child-centred. In one study, Tyebjee (2003) found that 94% of adoptive parents decided to pursue adoption because they wanted to make a difference to a child's life, 92% considered that children would greatly benefit from having a family, and 92% were sympathetic to the number of children in care that needed a family. Tyebjee's study (2003) employed a random telephone sampling procedure in the state of California through the Field Research Institute, and did not ask respondents about their sexual identity. While these percentages may not be generalizable to all States, or even to other countries, they provide some sense of the prevalence of child-centred, and specifically altruistic motivations for adoption.

Personal experiences with adoption, and awareness of others' adopting and/or fostering children, also have been linked to a willingness to adopt. According to a survey conducted in the U.S. by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (2007), having a friend or family member who had adopted or had been adopted, significantly increased the likelihood of prospective parents pursuing adoption themselves. Furthermore, having a previous relationship with a child also increased the likelihood of becoming an adoptive parent (Berry, Barth, & Needell, 1996). Some parents also had perhaps considered fostering to adopt, or may have developed bonds with their foster children and applied to adopt them (Malm & Welti, 2010). Thus, altruistic motivations can be seen to influence the decision to adopt among different-gender couples, albeit mostly as secondary influences compared to reproductive limitations (Cole, 2005; Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006).

Specific to LGBTQ individuals, studies conducted in the U.S. and across Europe (e.g. in Portugal and Italy) have shown that while the desire to parent seems to be more prevalent among heterosexual than LGBTQ individuals, this difference can be at least partially explained by the internalization of stigma (around non-normative gender and sexuality), which is associated with a lower desire to parent (Baiocco, Argalia, & Laghi, 2014). Nonetheless, different studies have consistently situated the prevalence of gay and lesbian individuals who keenly desire to parent at around 50% (Baiocco & Laghi, 2013; Costa & Bidell, 2017; Riskind & Patterson, 2010; Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007).

The decision to become a parent among LGBTQ individuals is arguably a more time-consuming and complex process than it is for heterosexuals, given that they have to not only evaluate and decide on a route to parenting but also consider having a family with children who may encounter resistance from society. Qualitative in-depth studies conducted in the U.S. have reported that for some gay men the decision to adopt a child was rooted in a strong desire to have children (Gianino, 2008; Mallon, 2004). However, gay men who desire parenthood through adoption may face mistrust and suspicion regarding their motivations (Hicks, 2006), or face rejection from both within and outside their community (Mallon, 2004). For example, Hicks (2000; 2006) has found that due to certain perceived archetypes of lesbians and gay men, they are very likely to be rejected by social workers as suitable prospective adopters because they fail to reproduce the heteronormative and highly gendered expectations of what a “good parent” is.

Some studies have indicated that decisions to adopt among LGBTQ individuals may be facilitated by the difficulties encountered in pursuing biological parenthood. For men, surrogacy can be financially, legally and emotionally insurmountable, and they may face greater reproductive barriers in pursuing biological parenthood than do women (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007; Mallon, 2004; Patterson, 2009; Riskind, Patterson, & Nosek, 2013). These

difficulties may at least partially contribute to prospective gay fathers' motivations to adopt (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). Women may be reluctant to pursue adoption because they prioritize biogenetic kinship (Goldberg, Downing, & Richardson, 2009) and may value pregnancy and child birth experiences in a similar way to many heterosexual women.

Failure to achieve biological parenthood preceding the decision to adopt is apparently less prevalent among lesbian and gay individuals and same-gender couples than among heterosexuals and different-gender couples. In fact, infertility is one of the main parent-centred factors preceding a decision to adopt among different-gender couples (Bachrach, London, & Maza, 1991; Hollingsworth, 2000). On the one hand, for couples who were not able to conceive a child after fertility treatments, the decision to adopt might satisfy a strong parenting desire. But on the other hand, adoption after failed fertility treatments might also suggest that adoption is perceived as a second-best route to parenting (Park & Hill, 2014; Parry, 2005).

Riggs and colleagues (Riggs, Delfabbro, & Augoustinos, 2008) reported that the Australian long-term foster carers ($n = 15$) they interviewed initially framed accounts of parenting in biological parent-centred terms: participants all reported not being able to have the biological children they had initially desired before deciding to become foster carers. However, as their narratives developed foster carers further emphasized that their foster children had a right to a family home, which they as foster carers were pleased to welcome their children into. These findings suggest a conceptual distinction between "having children" versus "bringing children into their family", which we explored in the current U.K. based study on LGBTQ adoptive parents and prospective adopters in relation to motives for adoption.

Fictive kin, i.e. forms of kinship that are not based on genetic ties, are more common among LGBTQ individuals than among heterosexual individuals (Goldberg et al., 2009). This

may mean that biological parenthood is less prized by LGBTQ individuals, who in turn are more willing to consider adoption: “Research indicates that sexual minorities tend to value relational ties over biological ties in defining who they consider to be *family*, perhaps in part because they are vulnerable to rejection by their own (biological) families of origin” (Goldberg, Downing, & Moyer, 2012, p. 160). This defining and valuing of relational ties constitutes a redefinition of family, to feature the inclusion of family of choice (e.g. more-than-friends) who complete and sometimes substitute the support from the family of origin (Oswald, 2002; Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001). It may, however, present a particular challenge during the adoption assessment process as some adoption workers in the U.K. hold rigid ideas of gender, sexuality, and forms of kinship (Hicks, 2006).

A central benefit perceived by LGBTQ couples is that adoption presents parents with an egalitarian relationship with a child to whom they are biologically unrelated. In contrast to a child born through assisted reproduction (e.g. donor insemination or surrogacy), adopting a child could facilitate couples in developing a simultaneous and symmetric relationship to their child. There are, however, barriers to adopting children which have been identified among heterosexuals, and which may also apply to LGBTQ individuals. For example, among heterosexual individuals, particularly those who had faced reproductive limitations, adoption may not be acceptable to both partners (Langdrige, Connolly, & Sheeran, 2000). Furthermore, prospective adoptive parents also may fear that their children will show emotional and behaviour problems, or develop unexpected hereditary characteristics (Park & Hill, 2014). Specifically for LGBTQ prospective parents, legal barriers to adoption and discriminatory practices by adoption agencies have been suggested to play a part in putting off prospective adopters. For example, some agencies might blatantly reject LGBTQ-identified applicants, whereas others might show covert prejudiced practices such as delaying placing a child, or placing “the most damaged kids” with LGBTQ parents (Brooks &

Goldberg, 2001; Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2007; Riggs, 2011), thus effectively stacking the odds against successful placements.

Considering the above reviewed literature, the aims of the present study were to explore the experiences and expectations associated with adoption, to assess perceived barriers to adoption, and to explore the motivations for adoption among a large and diverse sample of LGBTQ adoptive parents and prospective adopters from across the U.K. Although scientific interest in adoption by LGBTQ individuals has been growing, there is still a dearth of studies documenting the experiences of LGBTQ adopters, as well as their motivations for adoption. In the U.K. in particular, very few studies have explored the experiences of LGBTQ adopters after the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act in spite of evidence indicating how adoption practices and assessment of prospective parents have changed in recent years (Brown & Cocker, 2008; Cocker & Brown, 2010).

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 366 adoptive parents and prospective adopters in different stages of the adoption process; 231 (63%) had adopted at least one child, 83 (23%) were in different stages of the adoption assessment process, and 52 (14%) were considering adoption as a path for parenthood. In terms of sexual/gender identify, 216 (59.0%) identified as gay men, 117 (32.0%) as lesbians, 3 (0.8%) as bisexual men, 12 (3.3%) as bisexual women, 2 (0.5%) as other non-heterosexual men, 6 (1.6%) as other non-heterosexual women, 7 (1.9%) as gender queer, 2 (0.5%) as trans men, and 1 (0.3%) as a trans woman. The sample was recruited throughout the UK, 332 (90%) from England, 3 (1%) from Northern Ireland, 14 (4%) from Scotland, and 17 (5%) from Wales.

Data Collection

Data were collected via New Family Social (NFS) network of LGBTQ adoptive and foster families in the United Kingdom in 2014. At the time of this survey, NFS had 1,811 members in 1,072 households, who were considering adoption or fostering, who were in the process of adopting or fostering, or who had already adopted or fostered a child. As a community organization, NFS aims to provide support to LGBTQ adopters and foster carers as well to advise adoption and fostering agencies across the U.K. This large cross-sectional community-based study was advertised through the NFS newsletter, the NFS website and over social media, and a total of 366 adoptive parents and prospective adopters completed the annual online survey. Because parents were not contacted directly, the number of parents that accessed the questionnaire but did not complete it cannot be calculated. Ethical approval for secondary data analysis of the anonymous survey responses was granted by Birkbeck University of London, UK.

In the survey parents responded to a set of questions about their experiences and their perceptions of the adoption process, which were developed for this study. The following questions required a 'yes or no' answer: (Q1) "Did you think that being LGBT would be a barrier to becoming an adoptive parent?", (Q2) "Did you think that being LGBT meant you would only be considered for harder-to-place children?", (Q3) "Did anyone ever tell you, you shouldn't be a parent because you are LGBT?", (Q4) "Do you think that the assessment and matching process would have been easier if you were not LGBT?", (Q5) "Do you think the process would have been different if you were not LGBT?", (Q6) "How long did you think about adopting before taking the first steps?". The remaining questions were open-ended, designed to elicit further clarifications to their 'yes or no' answers (e.g. Q6b - "What advice/information would have made you apply to adopt sooner?"). The qualitative data

analyzed for this study was collected through the following open-ended question: “What made you choose adoption over other routes to parenthood such as fostering, fertility treatment, or surrogacy?”

Data Analysis

This study utilized a mixed-methods and pluralistic research design. The quantitative data was described using percentages, and was analyzed through non-parametric statistics to examine differences on the adoption experiences and expectations between gay men and lesbians, and between stages of adoption (finalized adoption, in the process of adoption, and considering adoption). Considering the very small number of bisexual, non-heterosexual, trans, and genderqueer individuals, only self-identified gay men and lesbians were included in the statistical analyses; however, all (LGBTQ) participants were included in the qualitative analyses. The responses to the open-ended question Q6b - “What advice/information would have made you apply to adopt sooner?” were analyzed through Content Analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) to assess any perceived barriers to adoption that prospective parents may have faced. Coding units were constituted by written phrases and sentences, and coded based on the raw data using a deductive category application.

Qualitative data regarding motivations for adoption were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, through an inductive or ‘bottom up’ approach, which meant that themes were identified based on the raw data, without a prior coding system or theoretical frame, and followed a constructionist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although a theoretical or ‘top down’ approach informed by previous theory or research could have been utilized, we decided to use an inductive approach because it allows a freer and richer description of the data as well as the possibility of capturing more nuanced relationships between different meanings that a more rigid approach could miss. The first author read, analyzed and

performed the initial coding of all transcripts, and these codes and the main themes identified within the data were discussed with the second author. During the development of the thematic map, the first and second authors again actively engaged in a discussion about the identified themes in order to clarify the specificities and relations between them. Through a constant iterative process, the first author reviewed the initial codes and themes including through the use of thematic maps. This was followed by a discussion with the second author about the naming and defining of the final themes presented in this analysis.

Results

Experiences and Expectations associated with Adoption

To the question “Did you think that being LGBT would be a barrier to becoming an adoptive parent?” almost three quarters of the sample (63%) responded that they were not expecting to be discriminated against based upon their gender or sexual identity. Log-linear analysis revealed that both gay men and lesbians who were considering adoption, or who were part way through the process of adoption, were more likely not to expect any barriers because they were LGBTQ, $\chi^2_L(7) = 15.806, p = .027$. Similarly, during the assessment and matching process 61% of the sample did not anticipate being treated differently by adoption workers and 64% did not expect that the process would be harder for LGBTQ applicants. Log-linear analyses revealed that gay men who had not yet adopted were more likely to expect being treated differently, $\chi^2_L(7) = 15.861, p = .026$, and to expect the adoption process to be harder, $\chi^2_L(7) = 21.622, p = .003$, than lesbians.

Direct discrimination in relation to parenting had not been experienced by the majority of this sample - 74% had never been told they should not be a parent because of their minority identity. However, a closer look at the experiences of those who had experienced this type

of discrimination uncovered some relevant findings; Among those who were told they should not be parents, 29% were told this by their parents and/or siblings, 13% by other family members, 18% said that society at large (media, political discourses, etc.) conveyed this message, and 10% said that their social worker or adoption professional had told them this. Log-linear analysis did not show significant differences between gay men and lesbians, or between respondents at different stages of the adoption process, $\chi^2_L(7) = 9.233, p = .236$.

The sample was almost evenly split when asked whether they thought that being LGBT would mean they would only be able to adopt harder-to-place children, with 48% saying they had expected this. Log-linear analysis showed that gay men who had not yet adopted were more likely to not expect harder-to-place children. However, lesbians who had completed the adoption process were more likely to report they had been matched with harder-to-place children, $\chi^2_L(7) = 15.193, p = .034$.

Nearly 30% of adoptive parents took between one and two years to consider whether to adopt a child before they actually initiated the process. A further 20% of adoptive parents took over four years to decide, while only a small percentage took between three and four years (5%). Most parents (45%) stated that the amount of time they took to decide on adopting was for personal reasons, namely feeling ready for a family life with children, and/or taking practical steps toward accommodating a child in the family (e.g. moving into a bigger house), or because they had tried other routes to parenthood before deciding to adopt. Only a minority of parents stated that they would have applied sooner if they had been given more information about the process of adoption, and about the children in children in the social care system (15%). A further 4% said they would have made a quicker application if they had found the “right organization” sooner.

Over a third of the adoptive parents perceived some barriers to adoption associated with their sexual/gender minority identity. A small percentage of parents (6%) stated that they had

waited longer to adopt after feeling ready because they had been expecting legislature change in favor of LGBTQ applicants. Other parents (3%) feared that their adopted child would face rejection or victimization. A significant percentage of parents stated that they would have adopted sooner if they had been given more information specifically for LGBTQ applicants (13%), or if they had known other LGBTQ individuals who had adopted (7%), or had been reassured that they could apply for adoption and would not be rejected by social workers (7%). A Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test revealed significant differences between gay men and lesbians, $U = 9598.500$, $W = 16153.500$, $p < .05$, indicating that gay men had tended to take more time than lesbians in deciding to start the adoption process.

Motivations for Adoption

From our total sample of 366 LGBTQ participants, those who were still considering adoption or who had not yet initiated the adoption process were excluded from further analysis of motivations for adoption. Thus, only those who had already adopted or who had been approved to adopt ($n = 314$) were asked “What made you choose adoption over other routes to parenthood?”. One over-arching theme was identified: *Seeking permanency*: “*We wanted a forever family*”. Across the qualitative data, the desire for a permanent family was frequently indicated as an overarching theme guiding the decision to become a parent through adoption. Further, this theme encompassed three often closely related subthemes: (1) *Altruistic/Moral motivation*, in which parents referred to being able to provide a permanent home for a child in need; (2) *Individualistic/Intrinsic motivation*, in which parents stressed their personal or couple-led desire to become a parent; and (3) *Motivated reasoning*, in which parents had either tried other options for parenthood, or had considered and had abandoned other options before deciding to apply for adoption (see Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 around here]

Seeking Permanency: “We wanted a forever family”. The different motivations for adopting a child in care were for the most part rooted in the desire to have a permanent family. Regardless of considering or even seeking other routes to parenthood, parents often highlighted how adoption would provide them and their children with a sense of security and permanency as a family. Seeking permanency was found to be the overarching theme: this desire for a forever family could pull together several different sub-themes into a single complex argument. As one parent put it:

“Fostering: I wanted the sense of permanent belonging / parenting, rather than an arrangement that did not bring the child into my family forever. Fertility treatment: not an option for two men. Surrogacy: Because two men or women cannot biologically have a child together, any means of having a child is therefore ‘artificial’ and, I think, LGBT people have a moral duty to think carefully about such artificiality. For me, I do not think it is desirable to bring a child into the world through surrogacy for two major reasons: first, in the absence of other factors, I do think it is preferable for a child to be raised by its biological mother and father; I could not deliberately engineer circumstances otherwise. Secondly, exactly because of those factors, there are many children who need new parents, and I thought it the more correct choice to parent one/some of those children” (Man, Gay).

We now move to discuss each of the three subthemes in depth. In the first we demonstrate how participants provided *Altruistic/Moral motivations*, in the second we explore other explanations which were *Individualistic/Intrinsic motivations*, and in the final subtheme we report on participants’ *Motivated reasoning*.

Altruistic / Moral Motivation. The two ways in which parents talked about their motives consisted of helping children in need and/or moral motivations which were often circumstantial. In terms of moral motives, some parents came to their decision to adopt because they had already developed a strong bond as a foster carer with that particular child or children: “We came to adoption via fostering – i.e. are adopting a child already in our care” (Woman, Lesbian). Alternatively, they may have had positive experiences of being a foster carer for other children: “We were supported lodgings carers for some time for LGBT teens

and this led us to want to adopt. It felt like a natural progression” (Man, Gay). Others stressed a feeling of giving back their own debt of adoption as one form of altruistic motivation: “I’m adopted so we wanted to pay it forward in a way” (Woman, Lesbian). Other parents came to this decision from personally knowing others who had adopted children: “We have friends who had successfully adopted” (Man, Gay). Alternatively, some parents indicated that they had professional experience with children in the social care system who needed a family: “I work as a social worker so have a clear idea of the needs of looked after children, and the route that they can take if staying in care” (Woman, Lesbian). Some of these motivations were closely related, as parents’ first-hand experiences with adoption were usually accompanied by an awareness of children in care who needed a permanent home and the altruistic role that they saw themselves as capable of playing.

While discussing their reasons for adopting a child in the social care system, some parents stressed how adoption would provide children with a “permanent” and “stable” home, thus positioning themselves as altruistic: “There are so many children out there waiting for that forever family. I knew I could offer that. The others [*other routes to parenthood*] were never an option for me” (Man, Bisexual). Parents also contrasted adoption with fostering, the two available options for providing a home for a child in the social care system. These participants stressed the permanency of adoption since fostering would only be provisional, and could further negatively affect children: “We wanted to give a chance to a child who’d had a difficult past, but didn’t consider fostering because we wanted a forever family” (Man, Gay).

Individualistic / Intrinsic Motivation. Whilst the previous theme focused on the needs of children in the social care system and parents’ altruistic and moral desires to look after them, the theme individualistic and intrinsic motivations highlights adoptive parents’ own desire to create their family. The two ways in which parents discussed their motives for

wanting a family were in terms of their desire for equal parenthood status and/or the absence of a biological imperative for them to parent a child.

For some parents, adoption presented a unique opportunity to form a family in which both parents would have equal parenthood in terms of the kinship relationship with the child. Given the biological impossibility of shared procreation within a same-gender relationship, adoption meant that no one parent would have a ‘privileged’ link with the child: “I wanted both my partner and I to have a level playing field as in not having a biological link” (Man, Gay). Other parents wrote statements that directly mentioned equality: “I thought that sharing the adoptive experience with my trans partner would be more equitable than being the biological parent in a partnership” (Woman, Lesbian). This route was perceived as protective of each partner’s parent-child relationship because it did not impose a hierarchy of biological-social kinship:

“Our children would never have been the biological children of both my partner and myself – at the most they would have been the biological children of one of us, which would have left the other “left-aside” in some ways” (Man, Gay).

In addition, unequal biological linkage was seen sometimes as having the potential to raise undesired family conflicts: “Also wanted to avoid the fight between me and my partner over whose birth child it was if we went through with fertility treatment” (Woman, Lesbian).

Parents sometimes stressed how biological kinship with their children was not a necessary part of being a parent to them: “We wanted to be parents, not necessarily to a child that was biologically ours” (Man, Gay). This motive often linked to other motives as parents contrasted their lack of a biological imperative with their desire to provide a permanent home for a child who did not have one. In fact, for some this stance presented a “win-win” situation: “Adoption was our route of choice, wanting to give a child a second chance in life while also fulfilling our own wish for a family” (Man, Gay).

Motivated Reasoning. Some adoptive parents had tried to achieve biogenetic parenthood, namely via surrogacy or donor insemination, before making a decision to adopt, whereas others, including those who stated that adoption was their first choice as a route to parenthood, had reflected upon other ways to have children but considered that these would not be adequate for them. These two motivated reasoning motivations – pragmatic and ethical – are in sharp contrast: those who based their decision on their experiences mentioned their own limitations or failed attempts at conceiving a child preceding their decision to adopt while those who had decided to adopt based upon an ideological pro-adoption stance underscored their moral and ethical objections to any form of assisted reproduction.

For some parents, adoption was perceived as the alternative route to pursue after failed attempts to conceive a child. Particularly for parents who valued biogenetic parenthood, assisted reproduction (e.g. donor insemination, in vitro fertilization [IVF], or surrogacy) were their first choice to constitute a family with children:

“There was something appealing initially about a biological connection with one’s child. However, I could not reconcile the idea of creating a child to inevitably force a separation from their mother (...) It was a painful decision involving mourning [of the] idea of becoming a father ‘naturally’” (Man, Gay).

For some fathers, surrogacy presented a myriad of legal and/or financial challenges: “We looked into surrogacy as two men. The cost [...] was quite off putting, especially when you factor in the other risks like miscarriage, the other mother refusing to give up the baby” (Man, Gay). As in other countries, British law does not provide enough legal safety for commissioning parents to enforce the agreement made between the parents and the gestational surrogate, who is under British law recognized as the legal mother. Pursuing surrogacy in other countries that offer more legal protection to commissioning parents can nonetheless be more challenging: “We considered surrogacy in the US, but the travel, high cost and immigration issues made it a non-starter” (Man, Gay).

Some women had tried fertility treatment unsuccessfully themselves, or described their partner as being keen to persist with trying for biogenetic kinship: “I would have adopted without trying IVF but my partner wanted to try for a biological child first” (Woman, Lesbian). For others, there were health and reproductive limitations that prevented them from having a biological child such as having a hysterectomy, or simply the decline in fertility associated with aging. Nevertheless, these considerations of the likely chances of success through assisted reproduction often prompted altruistic thoughts of achieving parenthood through adoption: “Infertility issues means we couldn’t have our own ‘biological’ children but we always felt that it wouldn’t be right to create a child when there are so many children who need a loving family” (Woman, Lesbian)

Despite the fact that adoption may not have been the first choice to achieve parenthood for these parents, their motivations reflected pragmatism in the sense that adoption would not only fulfil their desire for parenthood, but also provide a family to children in care. It is also noteworthy that some mothers in this study had tried assisted reproduction before deciding to adopt, however the fathers had only been able to *contemplate* biogenetic parenthood, because of the legal and financial obstacles associated with surrogacy.

For some adoptive parents and prospective adopters, adoption was their first option for parenthood due to ethical or moral objections to other routes. These parents’ reasoning was based on the beliefs that other routes to parenthood were morally objectionable, which Ditto, Pizarro, & Tannenbaum (2009) have referred to as *motivated moral reasoning*; their reasoning was motivated by a moral judgement of the alternatives to parenthood. Respondents referred to assisted reproduction as a “selfish choice”, or as “shopping for a sperm donor”, with a strong rejection of what they sometimes referred to as “artificial” ways to parenthood: “We are not sure if surrogacy or IVF are morally right for anyone regardless of sexual orientation” (Man, Gay).

For others, the added complexity of biogenetic connections through assisted reproduction were seen as discouraging, namely the involvement of a donor or a surrogate: “We considered insemination but did not like the thought that the father’s/sperm donor may never be known” (Woman, Lesbian). These participants also often anticipated difficulties associated when discussing with their children how they were born:

“Adoption was our first choice of how to have a family. We started considering ways to have a birth child (e.g. sperm donation), but as soon as we went to an adoption information night we felt really strongly that adoption was the best way for us to have children. For us as an LGBT couple there would always be the issue that if we had a birth child they wouldn’t be biologically related to one of us, and they would have questions in the future about where they came from. So seen as we would be dealing with these issues anyway, it felt like adoption was the most positive way to do this” (Woman, Queer)

This reasoning also was accompanied by an acknowledgement of the needs of children in children in the social care system:

“There is also the consideration of personal ethics – to create a child as a same-sex couple via surrogacy was less preferable to offering a home and family to a child who already existed and required what we had to offer” (Man, Gay).

Discussion

This study provided an in-depth insight into motivations for adoption among a large sample of LGBTQ individuals from across the United Kingdom through data gathered after legislative change in the UK to allow joint adoption of a child by a same-gender couple. Although the literature in this field has been growing, studies that examine LGBTQ individuals’ motivations and aspirations for parenthood are still somewhat scarce (Mezey, 2013). Considering the large number of children in children in the social care system waiting to be placed with a permanent family, the findings from this study have the potential to inform adoption policies and practices by examining not only LGBTQ parents’ motivations

but also the barriers and fears that may deter them from seeking adoption in planning to bring a child into their family.

Previous studies have suggested that LGBTQ and heterosexual prospective parents are treated differently in the adoption system because priority is given to different-gender couples when deciding child placements (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Hicks, 2006). Even when there is no clear intention or action to negatively discriminate LGBTQ prospective adopters, the assessment of prospective parents is often embedded in heteronormative assumptions that hinder the placement of children with them (Hicks, 2005). It is noteworthy that the majority of adoptive parents and prospective adopters in the current study did not expect to be discriminated against, or to find the adoption assessment process harder, due to their identifying as LGBTQ. Likewise, most adoptive parents and prospective adopters surveyed reported that they have not felt any discrimination. We hypothesize that these positive experiences reflect the approval of the Adoption and Children Act in 2002 and its successful implementation from 2005 onwards, and the consequent changes in the assessment of prospective adopters (Brown & Cocker, 2008).

Notwithstanding the majority of participants who did not report any discrimination experience, a sizeable minority of adoptive parents and prospective adopters (10%) reported that adoption workers had told them they should not adopt a child because of their minority status. Further, while gay men who were prospective adopters stated that they thought they were more likely than others to be matched with harder-to-place children, lesbian adoptive parents reported they had indeed adopted harder-to-place children, thus concurring with Brooks and Goldberg's (2001) earlier report of professional practices in the U.S. Hence, the question of whether LGBTQ individuals do in fact adopt harder-to-place children in comparison to heterosexuals remains open to investigate, and future studies should aim to assess this further.

Some parents surveyed stated that they had been told not to adopt a child by their own family, namely by their parents and siblings. Previous studies have found that family rejection may have serious negative consequences for the LGBTQ individuals' physical and mental health (Meyer, 2003). Furthermore, rejection of LGBTQ parenthood plans by their own family of origin may be even more damaging for their mental health and well-being, considering how family of origin members are often an important source of support for new parents (see, for example, Cowan & Cowan, 2000). LGBTQ individuals who felt rejected by from their families may also harbor higher levels of internalized stigma (Baiocco et al., 2014). Nonetheless, gender and sexual minority individuals tend to be resilient in the face of discrimination and rejection, in part because new supportive relational networks that do not rely on biological ties are cultivated (Goldberg et al., 2012; Oswald, 2002). The literature on LGBTQ adoptive parents' motivations and experiences would greatly benefit from studies concerned with how prospective adopters manage prior experiences of rejection and whether new relational support networks are relevant to this (Oswald, 2002).

Regarding adoptive parents and prospective adopters' motivations for adoption, our findings have corroborated and expanded previous findings reported in Jennings et al. (2014) on a more limited sample of lesbian and gay adoptive parents, which had suggested that lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents selected adoptive parenthood because of normative considerations, views about biogenetic relatedness, facility of access, and moral values. Congruent with the findings of Jennings et al. (2014) and also of Goldberg et al. (2009), we found that many of the LGBTQ participants sought to adopt because they either did not value a biogenetic connection with their child, or thought an unequal biogenetic connection between two same-gender partners with the child might potentially be a problem. However, many also made a choice based on a pragmatic reasoning or a motivated moral reasoning, having explored the available options for bringing a child into a family. This study also extended

previous findings by surveying a relatively large sample of LGBTQ parents who had adopted children between 2005 and 2014, as well as prospective adopters who were undergoing the adoption assessment process at the time of the survey. This heterogeneity of adoptive parents and prospective adopters' experiences enabled us to capture a wider array of experiences, expectations, and motivations for adoption among LGBTQ individuals.

In the current study, LGBTQ adoptive parents and prospective adopters framed their reasons for deciding to adopt in both parent-centered and child-centered terms. Many parents discussed their motivations in light of being aware of how many children needed a permanent family and this awareness came in different forms. For some of our participants their own personal or professional encounters with adoption, fostering, or meeting children in the social care system, made them aware of the needs of these children. As such these *Altruistic/Moral motivations* focused on how prospective adopters could offer a family to a child with a difficult past. In contrast, parent-centered reasons for adoption, which we labeled as *Individualistic/Intrinsic motivations* were generally focused on adoptive parents' desire to become parents. Notwithstanding the clear distinction between these two themes, they were often closely related in parents' accounts. Some parents stressed how adoption could provide a permanent home to a child while simultaneously fulfilling their own desire to constitute a forever family, named as a "win-win" situation by the parents themselves. The connection between the desire to be a parent and the desire to provide a family to a child has been documented in previous studies. In Riggs et al.'s (2008) study, Australian foster carers stressed their own parenting desire: "We don't have kids, I did it for me. And it just happened that it is good for him as well" (p. 800). As such, it is noteworthy that many LGBTQ adoptive parents and prospective adopters in this study have made the connection between these two motivations themselves, underscoring a non-hierarchical and symmetrical connection between the two.

The third identified subtheme related to parents and prospective parents' motivations for adoption divided their motives in two groups. In describing their *Motivated reasoning*, parents either described having tried other routes to parenthood before seeking adoption, or they sought adoption because they had ethical objections to other routes to achieving parenthood. Parents who had tried assisted reproduction valued a biogenetic connection to the child, and some mentioned the "mourning" of the idea of biogenetic paternity, which has been extensively documented among heterosexual parents who had faced reproductive challenges (Swanson, Connor, Jolley, Pettinato, & Wang, 2007; Thorn, 2010), and only more recently among LGBTQ parents or prospective parents (Craven & Peel, 2012; Peel, 2010).

In contrast, LGBTQ individuals are more likely than heterosexual individuals to choose adoption as their preferred route to parenthood (Goldberg et al., 2009) and we found in the present study that one of the reasons that support choosing adoption was an ethical or moral objection to assisted reproduction. This was made evident in adoptive parents' moral reasoning against creating a biological child in light of the large number of children who need a family. Further, assisted reproduction required the involvement of a third person in the family (a donor or a surrogate), which discouraged some parents from pursuing these routes to parenthood. Regardless of the importance attributed by LGBTQ parents to a biogenetic connection with their children, some of the parents in this study stressed how adoption could resolve a potential dispute and asymmetry between the biological parent and the social parent in their relationship with the children.

What united participants in the current study was the desire for a permanent family, both for parents themselves and for the children they adopted. In highlighting their desire for a permanent family, participants drew an important distinction between adoption and fostering, arguing that while both routes to parenthood would enable them to provide care to a child in their family, fostering at least in the U.K. was often thought of as impermanent.

While some foster care placements may be long-term, and some adoptive parents may have previously fostered the child they later adopted, it seems that at least in the U.K. the pool of potential LGBTQ adopters would likely have different motivations from potential LGBTQ foster carers.

Limitations

There have been some important limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. The first limitation regards the data collection procedure. While this study used a large sample of LGBTQ adoptive parents and prospective adopters from throughout the U.K., this was a community-based study collected through non-probabilistic sampling from within a single network of LGBTQ adopters. Thus, to the extent that results from this study could be generalized to LGBTQ adoptive parents elsewhere cannot be determined. A second limitation regards the lack of sociodemographic information collected about survey participants, therefore it had not been possible to even gauge the representativeness of the sample. Another limitation regards bisexual, queer and trans adopters and prospective adopters who could not be included in the quantitative analyses; future studies should purposively recruit often underrepresented sexual and gender minorities so that the particular experiences of these different groups can be fully understood. Lastly, the questions used to examine the experiences and expectations among LGBTQ adoptive parents and prospective adopters were somewhat elementary which did not allow for testing hypotheses within the data. As such, the quantitative part of this study provides only a descriptive account of adopters' experiences during the adoption assessment process, although it suggests new research questions that future studies may examine through more sophisticated quantitative measures.

Implications for Practice

Notwithstanding the above mentioned limitations, the findings from this study suggest ways to inform family and adoption policies in designing information catered to prospective LGBTQ adopters. It was suggested that the majority of adoptive parents and prospective adopters valued the permanency offered by adoption over the short-term aspect of most U.K. based foster care placements. While in other countries fostering may be a long-term placement similar to adoption, short-term fostering does not seem to fulfill gender and sexual minority individuals' aspirations for parenthood.

Particularly for LGBTQ parents who do not value biogenetic kinship in defining their families, adoption was perceived as uniquely advantageous by promoting an equal and symmetrical relationship between parents to their children. In addition, it has been documented elsewhere that same-gender parents are more likely to divide family tasks and childcare more equally than different-gender parents (Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2007; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002). It remains to be seen whether adoption as a route to parenthood further support equality in parenting practices by giving couples an equal parenting relationship under U.K. law.

Lastly, an important aspect uncovered in the present study was the barriers to adoption perceived by LGBTQ individuals. A significant number of LGBTQ adoptive parents and prospective adopters stated that they would have decided to adopt sooner if they had been given more detailed information about the adoption process and about the children in the social care system who were waiting for a family. Further, some LGBTQ adoptive parents and prospective adopters stated that reassurance that they would not be discriminated against as candidates for adoption would have encouraged them to apply sooner. Reassurance could be achieved by developing affirmative information specifically for LGBTQ prospective parents about adoption, particularly featuring successful adoptions by LGBTQ parents.

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Figure 1
Thematic Map Depicting the
Overarching Theme and Subthemes of
Motivation for Adoption

