

Parents' sexuality influences adoption choices

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A couple's sexual orientation determines whether or not they prefer to adopt a boy or a girl. Gay men are more likely to have a gender preference for their adopted child whereas heterosexual men are the least likely. What's more, couples in heterosexual relationships are more likely to prefer girls than people in same-gender relationships, according to Dr. Abbie Goldberg from Clark University in the US. These couples also have very different reasons for their preferences, depending on their sexuality. These findings¹, from the first study to compare the child gender preferences of prospective adoptive parents according to their sexuality, are published online in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*.

Unlike biological parents, adoptive parents can choose the [gender](#) of their child. Heterosexual, lesbian and gay male couples approach adoption with very different experiences and expectations as those of expectant biological parents. Dr. Goldberg looked at whether the unique contexts of adoption and [sexual orientation](#) have distinct implications for men's and women's child gender preferences.

She explored adoptive parents' child gender preferences in a geographically diverse American sample of 93 heterosexual, 61 lesbian and 48 gay male couples waiting to adopt their first child. The participants were recruited through adoption agencies in the US as well as national gay and lesbian organizations. They were interviewed between 2005 and 2008.

Dr. Goldberg found that many couples, irrespective of sexuality, had no

preference for the gender of their adopted child. They were simply grateful to finally have a child and gender was insignificant in the context of their larger goal of becoming parents.

Among those who expressed a preference, gay men were the most likely to have a preference and heterosexual men were the least likely. Couples in heterosexual relationships were less likely to prefer boys than couples in same-gender relationships.

The study participants provided a range of reasons for their preferences for girls. The most common reason among heterosexual women was their inexplicable desire for a daughter, whereas heterosexual men most frequently listed a combination of their inexplicable desire to have a girl, their ideas about father-daughter relationships and their perceived characteristics of girls. Men felt girls would be easier to bring up, and more interesting and complex than boys, and less physically challenging than boys. Lesbians tended to focus on their perceived inability to socialize a child of the opposite gender, and gay men most frequently cited concerns about boys being more likely to encounter harassment than girls.

The most common reason for preferring boys among heterosexual women was an inexplicable desire for a son, whereas heterosexual men's preference for a son reflected patriarchal norms, including keeping the family name going and gender identity considerations i.e. their own masculine interests. When explaining their preference for a boy, lesbians most frequently mentioned their own atypical gender identities, including the fact that their own interests tended to be more masculine and tomboyish, whereas gay men most often highlighted that they felt more confident about their ability to raise and socialize boys.

Dr Goldberg concludes: "This study represents the first investigation known to date that explores the child gender preferences of both

heterosexual and sexual minority preadoptive parents. The data suggest that both the adoption context and the sexual orientation context may have implications for how men and women think about the gender of their future children."

More information: Goldberg AE (2009). Heterosexual, lesbian, and gay preadoptive parents' preferences about child gender. *Sex Roles*; DOI 10.1007/s11199-009-9598-4

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