

PARENTING OF THE FITTEST?
LESBIAN AND GAY FAMILY PLANNING
IN GERMANY

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For a long time parenthood and homosexuality seemed not to go well together even for lesbians and gay men themselves. Today this idea is still reflected in discussions concerning equal rights for homosexual and heterosexual couples. For example, in October 2010 the German Minister of Family Affairs, Kristina Schröder, stated in an interview: “There is only one thing they (lesbian mothers or gay fathers) cannot offer by nature: the opposite gender. We know that it is important for the development of a child to grow up with both genders.”¹ In Germany marriage is still not open to same-sex partners. Since 2001 there is an institution of “registered partnership” for same-sex couples with a lot of duties but lacking in equal rights. Same-sex couples have fewer rights in areas like taxation² and – especially importantly for families – adoption and child custody.

Conservative politicians in Parliament always try to block or at least slow down legal processes which would provide equal rights for same-sex couples by arguing that marriage between a man and a woman is directed towards bringing up children, whereas same-sex couples cannot become parents.³ Such argumentation does not seem to have a lot in common with social reality in Germany, where fewer than 50% of mar-

¹ The European, 20. November 2010, *Moderne Familienpolitik*, Gespräch mit Kristina Schröder, <<http://www.theeuropean.de/kristina-koehler/4626-moderne-familienpolitik>>, author’s translation.

² In Germany registered same-sex partners are responsible for each other and have to support their partner in case of unemployment or disability. This burden, however, cannot be deducted from the income tax. In the area of income tax registered same-sex partners are treated like strangers, which means that the registered same-sex partners have to pay a lot more income tax than heterosexual married couples.

³ In the German constitution “marriage and family” is put under special protection (article 6 paragraph 1, special protection of marriage and family)

ried couples become parents⁴ and, as reported by the “BMJ study”⁵, the first representative study on same sex-parents living in a registered partnership in Germany, at least 7,000 children grow up in LGBT families (Rupp 2009).⁶ In the autumn of 2009 the German Federal Constitutional Court also rejected the well-known conservative argument:

Unequal treatment cannot be justified (...). There are no children in every marriage, and not every marriage is aimed at having children. (...) There are children living in many registered partnerships, especially in those formed by two women. (...) According to the study by the State Research Institute for Family Studies at the University of Bamberg 2,200 children are growing up in the current 13,000 registered partnerships in Germany (...). So the child rate in registered partnerships, although well below those of married couples, is by no means negligible.⁷

The BMJ study played an important role not only in verifying the existence of LGBT families in Germany but also in proving that children grow up well when reared by same-sex couples. Although this has already been shown by mostly Anglo-American research in the past two decades,⁸ the conservatives in political debates in Germany often chal-

⁴ Statistisches Bundesamt, ed. 2006. *Leben in Deutschland. Haushalte, Familien und Gesundheit – Ergebnisse des Mikrozensus 2005*. Wiesbaden.

⁵ The study is referred to as the “BMJ study” because it was commissioned by the “**Bun-**des **M**inisterium der **J**ustiz”, the German Federal Ministry of Justice.

⁶ The study includes data of 1,059 same-sex oriented parents. In some cases both partners were interviewed, so the data represents a total of 767 families and 852 children. 625 of the 866 individuals or couples lived in a registered partnership, and 142 couples or 193 individuals lived together without registration. The sub-sample of couples in a registered partnership should be seen as broadly representative for Germany, since almost all target individuals could be addressed directly—via letter or phone. The researchers contacted a total of 14,000 same-sex couples living in a registered partnership. The contacts were committed to the research institute by appropriate authorities in the German federal states. In contrast, the comparison group of non-registered same-sex parents was recruited by voluntary reporting, that includes a higher level of selectivity. However, the two groups showed neither statistically significant differences nor differences with regard to contents, therefore the respondents were included in the overall analysis without segregation.

⁷ Author’s translation of Line 112-113: BVerfG, 1 BvR 1164/07 vom 07.07.2009, Absatz-Nr. 1 – 127, published 22th of October 2009. <http://www.bverfg.de/entscheidungen/rs20090707_1bvr116407.html> (15.09.2010)

The Federal Constitutional Court published its decision referring to the “Retirement Fund of the Federation and the Provinces (VBL)” and ruling that the Fund must provide the same survivor’s pension to a surviving domestic partner (i.e. same-sex partner) as to a surviving spouse.

⁸ See, for example: Anderssen et al. 2002, Patterson 2006, Perrin 2002, Stacey and Biblarz 2001, Biblarz and Stacey 2010.

lenged the transferability of those results. In this chapter we will present the main findings of the BMJ study concerning child development as well as the political and juridical reactions to the findings of the study.

THE FIRST REPRESENTATIVE STUDY OF LESBIAN AND GAY FAMILY LIFE IN GERMANY

In 2006 the German Minister of Justice, Brigitte Zypries, a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), decided to generate reliable data on LGBT families in Germany. She commissioned the first representative study (BMJ study) on the development and living conditions of children raised in same-sex families in Germany. To resolve all possible doubts about the results of the research, the research was conducted by two state-run research institutes from Bavaria⁹, a province of Germany, which has been governed by the German Conservative Coalition (CDU/CSU) for the past 60 years. Furthermore, Bavaria is one of those German states, which have tried several times to stop legal progress on LGBT rights by filing lawsuits at the German Federal Constitutional Court. The BMJ study's results thus made a real difference in the political and public discussions of same-sex family issues in Germany.

Within the BMJ research 1,059 homosexual parents were interviewed by the State Institute for Family Research of the University of Bamberg (IFB), including 93% of lesbian mothers and 7% of gay fathers.¹⁰ They participated in the so called "parental study". 866 parents lived in a registered partnership and provided information about 693 children (Rupp and Dürnberger 2009).¹¹ The parent interviews focussed on many themes, including family development, division of housework, parental care, second parent adoptions and contacts with parents living outside of the LGBT family, family outing, social discrimination and how the children

⁹ State Institute for Family Research at the University of Bamberg (IFB) and State Institute of Early Childhood Research (IFPI) in Munich.

¹⁰ The interviews were conducted via CATI (computer assisted phone interviewing). The low percentage of gay fathers is due to the fact that most children of gay fathers in Germany today originate from a former heterosexual context, and usually live with their mothers. In the study, however, only those LGBT-families were included, which share daily life together.

¹¹ 32% of the actual 2,200 children being raised in registered partnerships in Germany were "included" through their parents in the parental survey. The number of male and female children living in registered partnerships are nearly equal: 52% daughters and 45% sons. 43% of the children were less than 6 years old and 57% were between 6 and 18 years old (Rupp and Bergold 2009, 282).

deal with it, etc. Parents were also asked to assess their children's development using a standardised behaviour-related questionnaire (Dürnberger et al. 2009).

Additionally 95 children, aged 10–18, were also interviewed within a developmental children study.¹² Using standardised questionnaires these children were assessed according to their psychological adjustment and well-being (e.g. self-esteem, depression or psychosomatic complaints), dealing with developmental tasks of adolescents, their relationship to their parents (e.g. concerning autonomy, closeness and conflicts), as well as the appearance of social discrimination and how they dealt with it (Dürnberger, Rupp and Bergold 2009).¹³ The results were compared with available data on heterosexual nuclear families, single mother families and reconstituted or patchwork families. The data from the developmental children study proved to be of high quality, as children's answers showed high scores on the overall consistency of linguistic representation and low idealising tendencies (Becker-Stoll and Beckh 2009).

The results from both parental and children development studies show that children who grow up with lesbian or gay parents develop as well in emotional and social functioning as children whose parents are heterosexual (Jansen 2010; Rupp 2010; Rupp et al. 2009). There were no signs of "increased vulnerability", such as a higher tendency to depression or psychosomatic complaints. They are successful in individuation and most of them share a warm and supportive relationship with their parents in and outside the LGBT family. They deal very well with the key challenges of adolescence, the developmental tasks like adjusting to a new physical sense of self, building up first intimate relationships, developing stable and productive peer relationships as well as achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults – and in some as-

¹² Just like the interviews conducted with parents, the interviews with children were also conducted via CATI (computer assisted phone interview). In order to be able to participate in the research children had to be at least 10 years old. In Germany only a few children born or adopted into a LGBT family are of that age. Consequently 78% of children in the children's study were born in former heterosexual relationships, while 44% of the children in the parental study were of such origin (Dürnberger, Rupp and Bergold 2009, 31).

¹³ According to the age of children two different interview manuals were used: For children younger than 13 years the IFP worked with the BISK, the attachment interview for late childhood ("Bindungsinterview für die späte Kindheit" in German). With children older than 13 the EAI, the developmental task interview was used ("Entwicklungsaufgaben-Interviews" in German). For children of all ages the AAI, the adult attachment interview was used to measure elements of attachment. See more details on the interviewing in Rupp 2009 and Dürnberger, Rupp and Bergold 2009.

pects they do even better than their peers growing up in heterosexual nuclear families, single mother families or patchwork families: for example, they plan and organise school and their professional career more in advance and take it much more seriously (Becker-Stoll and Beckh 2009). This is partly the result of the generally higher average education level and professional qualifications among the LGBT families compared to the general population. The BMJ study showed that 60% of the homosexual parents had medium (“Gymnasium”) level education, compared to 30% of general population; and nearly every second (45%) had a university degree, compared to 19% in the general population (Rupp 2009). The parents’ higher educational background was also reflected in their children’s school career: while in Germany on average 17% of children attend a high school (secondary school), among LGBT families it is more than twice as much (38%).

The most outstanding results from the survey concerned children’s self development. Children from LGBT families showed a significantly higher level of self-esteem and autonomy in the relationship with their parents than children living in heterosexual nuclear families, single mother families or patchwork families (Rupp 2009). From a health and especially resilience research point of view they can be assumed to be better off and less vulnerable to stressful environmental conditions than other peers (van Gelderen et al. 2009; Greve and Staudinger 2006; Elle 2009).

One of the most often recurring concerns about gay and lesbian parenthood is the idea that children in LGBT families are discriminated and therefore sustain serious damages concerning their development (Rauchfleisch 2005). The BMJ study showed that less than 50% of the respondents in the children developmental study reported discriminatory incidents (Dürnberger et al. 2009; Rupp and Bergold 2009). Those children, who reported on having experienced discrimination, were asked via open ended questions in which way and by whom they have been discriminated. In the majority of these cases children reported on verbal discrimination coming from their peers. For example, nearly 13% of the children surveyed reported that they have been verbally attacked, teased, had to listen to “stupid comments” or were laughed at (17% rarely experienced such attacks and 67% never). Children who had personal experiences of discrimination did not suffer any harm, not even in the few isolated cases of multiple discriminatory incidents. However, children who had suffered discrimination did not rate as splendid in self-esteem as the other kids in the study, but they still showed values comparable to peers

raised up in heterosexual nuclear families. The researchers assume that the trusting relationship between the children and their parents works against any negative impact. A regression analysis showed that adjustments in terms of depression, self-esteem, psychosomatic complaints or aggression, are only negatively affected by experiences of discrimination when the relationship with parents is simultaneously characterised by high uncertainty (Becker-Stoll and Beckh 2009).

During the press conference, where the study's results were presented, the former German Minister of Justice, Brigitte Zypries, said:

Today is a good day for those who focus on facts rather than rely on stereotypes – especially in ideologically charged topics. The investigation confirmed: where kids are loved, they will grow up well. The parent's sexual orientation is not essential for a good relationship between children and parents ... Children living together with two mothers or two fathers develop as well as those in other family structures.¹⁴

One of the immediate practical consequences of presenting these study results was that the conservative Bavarian government decided to withdraw a complaint of unconstitutionality against the second parent's adoption law that was introduced for same-sex couples in 2005. One month after the study presentation the German Federal Constitutional Court ruled that homosexual couples should have the right to adopt their partner's biological children and that this right is not unconstitutional.¹⁵ The court overturned a lower court ruling. They argued that social parenthood¹⁶ has to be treated like biological parenthood and that this ruling had to be applied to same-sex couples as well. The court used this opportunity to point out that parenthood – as it is specifically protected by the German state – does not only stand for biological but also for so-

¹⁴ Bundesministerium der Justiz (23 July 2009). Pressemitteilung "Familie ist dort, wo Kinder sind. Zypries stellt Forschungsprojekt". <http://www.bmj.de/enid/a5ded0b59548eb36f450aa531efeb774,803e69706d635f6964092d0936313035093a0979656172092d0932303039093a096d6f6e7468092d093037093a095f7472636964092d0936313035/Pressestelle/Pressemitteilungen_58.html> (15 September 2010), author's translation.

¹⁵ BVerfG, 1 BvL 15/09 vom 10.08.2009, Absatz-Nr. (1 - 16), <http://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/entscheidungen/lk20090810_1bvl001509.html> (15 September 2010).

¹⁶ Beyond "legal" or "judicial parenthood", where parents and children are bound by law, two types of parenting can be distinguished: biological and social parenthood. While "biological parenthood" is founded on procreation and birth (principle of filiation), "social parenthood" is based on the de facto taking of parental duties. Social mothers and fathers give care to non-biological children and take long-term responsibility for them. Social parenthood is specific to adoptive families as well as to blended families and to families in which children were conceived by donor insemination.

cial or legal parenthood. It is not a matter of being a biological mother or father but rather of parental care that makes a person a parent.

Minister Zypries was obviously right when she assessed the study as an “important step on the path to full social and legal recognition of gay couples”. She closed the press conference with the following demand: “We should therefore not stop half-way and should now set up the legal requirement for a ‘joint adoption’ by same-sex partners”.¹⁷ The idea of joint adoption was not perceived without controversy even within the Social Democratic Party (SPD) itself. In September 2009 a new government was elected in Germany. The Social Democratic Party failed to be a coalition party, and thus the first definite step to facilitate lesbian and gay family planning in Germany does seem to have stopped half-way.

Although the liberal party (FDP – Free Democratic Party) had argued for a joint adoption right for registered partners for many years it did not find its way into the coalition agreement of the Liberal and Conservative party. In November 2010 the Justice Ministers of all German States argued for a joint adoption right for same-sex couples.¹⁸ They appealed to the Federal Government to allow registered partners to adopt children. This initiative had no political impact, but what was remarkable was the unanimity of the appeal. It was the first time that ministers from the Conservatives Party had advocated for equality of same-sex couples and heterosexual couples concerning family planning.

LESBIAN AND GAY FAMILY PLANNING: HOW TO BECOME A PARENT AFTER COMING OUT?

Increasing social acceptance of diversity in sexual orientation allows more gay men and lesbians to come out before forming intimate relationships or becoming parents.¹⁹ According to the result of a survey conducted in 1998 with 955 gay, lesbian and bisexual respondents in Ger-

¹⁷ Bundesministerium der Justiz (23 July 2009). Pressemitteilung “Familie ist dort, wo Kinder sind. Zypries stellt Forschungsprojekt”. <http://www.bmj.de/enid/a5ded0b59548eb36f450aa531efeb774,803e69706d635f6964092d0936313035093a0979656172092d0932303039093a096d6f6e7468092d093037093a095f7472636964092d0936313035/Pressestelle/Pressemitteilungen_58.html> (15 September 2010), author’s translation.

¹⁸ See: <http://www.jurablogs.com/de/justizminister-fordern-adoptionsrecht-schwule-lesben>

¹⁹ According to the “Eurobarometer 66” 42% of the German population agreed in 2006 that “adoption of children should be authorized for homosexual couples throughout Europe”. In a representative on-line survey in 2010 61% of people surveyed agreed with the “common adoption right” for registered partners in Germany (Mingle-Trend-Repondi 2010).

many, every second young lesbian and third young gay man would like to live with children later on in their lives (Anhamm 1998).²⁰ Over the years an increasing number of lesbians and gay men are choosing to start families after coming out.

This dynamic is already reflected in the BMJ study. Out of the 2,200 children growing up in registered partnerships, only half were born in previous heterosexual relationships of their parents (Rupp 2009). After their coming-out lesbian women and gay men in Germany currently have four ways to build a “rainbow family”.²¹ Most lesbians become mothers by donor insemination (Rupp 2009) or – in the last years more often – they start “queer families” together with gay men.²² Some lesbian women and gay men offer foster children a new home, and very few are choosing to adopt children mostly from foreign countries formally as a single person because joint adoption is not a legal option for same-sex couples. There are only a few known cases where gay men became biological fathers via surrogacy – mostly through surrogacy agencies in the US (cf. Katzorke 2010).²³ If lesbians and gays choose one of these ways to start a family, they will generally have to face many more constraints and challenges than heterosexual couples in Germany or even same-sex couples in some other European countries such as the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries or Spain, where same-sex couples have been able to marry since 2005.

²⁰ The adjusted data base included 955 respondents (77.3% homosexual men, 15.8% homosexual women and 6.9% bisexual people). See also Haag 2010.

²¹ In Germany a LGBT-family is called “Regenbogenfamilie” (rainbow family). The term is used both in scientific as well as in media and everyday life language. “Rainbow family” means a lesbian- or gay-headed family with a single mother or father or two fathers or mothers; the same-sex parents may live in a registered partnership or not. According to the BMJ study at least 7,000 children are growing up in rainbow families in Germany.

²² The term “queer family” is used here for families where lesbian women and gay men start a family together: a lesbian woman gives birth to the child and a gay man donates the sperm. In contrast to a lesbian-headed family created by donor insemination, the gay man is not just seen as a sperm donor but rather as a father. He takes part in family life after the child is born. The counselling experiences of last 10 years in the German “Rainbow family project” show that the children in queer families mostly live with the lesbian mother/mothers. Sometimes the gay and lesbian couples create a living arrangement with two flats next door to each other or in two semi-detached houses. The child rarely grows up primarily in the gay household.

²³ In Germany surrogacy is not illegal – it is neither actionable to act as a surrogate mother nor to appoint a surrogate mother – but all kind of mediation is illegal. As a consequence there is a lack of laws and provisions or agencies to make surrogacy agreements safe for all involved parties.

LESBIAN MOTHERS BY DONOR INSEMINATION

During the last few years an increasing number of lesbian women in Germany have opted for donor insemination.²⁴ The resulting children are usually born and raised in same-sex relationships, which means that most often lesbians who opt for donor insemination are in a same-sex relationship. The BMJ study showed that 48% of the children in registered partnerships are born in a same-sex partnership and most of the LGBT families, who wish for more children (54%), are looking forward to accomplish it by donor insemination.²⁵ Lesbian women will have to overcome three main difficulties, if they chose to go to a domestic or foreign fertility centre or look for a private donor. These include problems deriving from a lack of legal support for using fertility treatment, the German alimony law, and the regulations of the Federal Medical Association.

There is no legal support for using fertility treatments for non-married couples or singles in Germany. All legal regulations concerning fertility treatment focus on marriage. Only married heterosexual women have the guaranty to get a fertility treatment, while registered partners cannot be sure, if a fertility centre will cooperate with them – it is neither prohibited nor legally regulated. In some European countries the legal situation is much better for female singles, including lesbians: since 2007 medically assisted insemination is available to every woman in Belgium, as well as to lesbian couples in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Dethloff 2010).

Alimony and filiation law in Germany makes donor insemination a lot more difficult for lesbians. Lesbian mothers cannot exempt a donor from child support. If a lesbian mother, for example, finds herself in financial difficulties and asks for special financial support for the child, provided by the state,²⁶ the sperm donor would theoretically be liable for this mon-

²⁴ This assumption is based on the author's counselling experience in the LSVD project Rainbow family (www.family.lsvd.de). Furthermore it is reflected in BMJ study's age structure of children in registered partnerships: the children in the developmental subsample interviewed by the IFB had to be at least 10 years old according to the survey method. 78% of these children came from previous heterosexual relationships of their lesbian mothers or gay fathers. In the IFB parent survey, however, 50% of the children are younger than 6 years, and 49% of the sons and daughters were born in the same-sex partnership.

²⁵ 70% of the gay men and 80% of the lesbian mothers in the study think about enlarging the family by getting more biological children (see: Rupp 2009, 105–107).

²⁶ The Germany state provides a financial support for single parents - usually single mothers - to "replace" the second biological parent or the one who caused the pregnancy (usually the father). It is considered as an "in advance" child support, in cases where

ey (*ibid.*). Even a physician of a sperm bank could legally be seen as the one who “caused” a pregnancy by donor insemination and be held to account for alimony, if the mother were to take him to court. For married heterosexual couples the alimony law does not cause any trouble concerning donor insemination: A husband is recognised as the child’s legal father from birth on, even if donor sperm was used.²⁷

German law does not address similar situations (donor insemination) for lesbian couples living in a registered partnership. These lesbian-headed families where the child was born via donor insemination are treated like “blended families”, in which one or both women are understood to have children from a previous relationship, and not like parents, who realise a shared desire to have a child. The non-biological mother has to take a detour via a second parent adoption in order to become the child’s legal parent, which is a long and sometimes problematic procedure.

A second parent adoption (or the step-child adoption) is a complex process which generally takes at least six months to one year to be completed. Then there are 12 further months, the so-called “adoption care period”,²⁸ which means that the adoption process usually takes at least 1.5 to 2 years, during which time the child is legally protected only by a biological parent. During this process, the mothers will be “assessed” by youth welfare officers as well as judges. If these people have positive views on adoption by same-sex couples in general, all might run without problems, even if it takes a while for the adoption to be completed, but if at least one professional is opposed to it, the mothers may have to face delays, discriminatory treatment or even unsustainable refusals, which make opposition proceedings necessary (*ibid.*)²⁹ All these would be rendered unnecessary, if registered partners were treated like married couples con-

the father is not yet known or is not yet able to pay. The German state expects to get this money back from the second parent, when he is made known or is able to pay.

²⁷ In Germany children conceived by donor insemination, who are born into a marriage, are legally considered as the husband’s children (§ 1592 sec 1 No 1 BGB – BGB means Civil Code), even if they were conceived with the sperm of another man (heterologous insemination). The husband is not even allowed to contest the paternity, once he agreed to the heterologous insemination (§ 1600 sec 5 BGB). See also Dethloff 2010.

²⁸ The “adoption care time” originates from step-child adoption in heterosexual blended families. It is the period of time when the potential step-parent has to live together with the child, who will be adopted, to assess whether a viable social relationship between them has developed and to establish that the adoption serves the best interests of the child.

²⁹ In the last years the LSVD project “Rainbow family” counselled and supported various complaints, administrative appeals and opposition proceedings against discriminatory treatment of lesbian mothers in the context of step-child adoptions.

cerning filiation law. The non-biological mother would be the child's legal parent right from the moment of birth. Unfortunately the claim for equal treatment of social mothers with married couples was rejected by the German Federal Constitutional Court in the summer of 2010.³⁰

Although the detour via second-parent adoption for lesbian-headed families created by donor insemination has its drawbacks explained above, the legislation itself meant a tremendous step forward for the recognition of lesbian and gay parenthood when it was provided in January 2005. For the first time in Germany a child legally could have two fathers or two mothers. Furthermore the co-mothers and co-fathers were allowed by law to adopt the biological child of their registered partners and became legal mothers or fathers of the child including all rights – e.g. the right of custody – and duties – e.g. the duty to pay alimony for the child. This also means that lesbian headed families created by donor insemination receive bigger support for private donors as well as fertility centres: when a mother co-adopts the child of her registered partner, no one else can be forced to pay alimony. The second parent adoption therefore seemed to be a suitable answer to the problems caused by German alimony and filiation law. Whereas until 2005 lesbians, who wanted to have a baby, mostly had to choose foreign fertility centres, for example in the Netherlands, Belgium or Denmark, from 2005 on a lot of German fertility centres began to cooperate with lesbian couples – if they were living in a registered partnership and had signed a paper which said that the co-mother will adopt the child as soon as possible.³¹

All went well until the German Federal Medical Association (the “Bundesärztekammer”) hindered this progress by professional regula-

³⁰ BVerfG, 1 BvR 666/10 vom 2.7.2010, http://www.bverfg.de/entscheidungen/rk20100702_1bvr066610.html (15.09.2010).

Reasoning: A woman – living together with a child's biological mother in a registered partnership – cannot be the child's father purely for biological reasons provided she has not applied to be a woman under § 10 transgender law. Accordingly the statutory presumption on biological parenthood as it is set in 1592 sec. 1 BGB (see footnote 15) cannot take effect.

This regulation is based on the assumption, that the husband is usually the biological father of any child born during a marriage.

³¹ In the LSVD project “Rainbow family” 70% of the counselling requests by phone or via emails focus on family planning issues and 80% of these family planning requests deal with biological parenthood. The project does not only give advice and share information. It also collects information, experiences and best or worst practice examples. ILSE (Initiative Lesbischer und Schwuler Eltern im LSVD), the lesbian and gay family network within the LSVD, is one of the main sources concerning this “information exchange”. After January 2005 the field reports about fertility centres in Germany increased immediately.

tions. In 2006 the Association prohibited the medical support concerning donor insemination for lesbian couples in their “guidelines for assisted reproduction”. The prohibition did not occur because of the “ethical concerns” or the “best interest of the child”, as formally claimed by the Association. The actual guidelines prohibit the medical support in order to protect the doctors from potentially paying alimony. Due to the fact that the second parent adoption process usually takes at least one year to be completed, in the meantime there is still a “remaining risk” for a doctor to be held to account for alimony as the one who “caused” the pregnancy by donor insemination, if a lesbian couple were to take him/her to court. It should be noted, however, that the Federal Medical Association has confirmed that such a law suit has never occurred.

The “guidelines for assisted reproduction” are binding only for gynaecologists in those states of Germany, where the guidelines were adopted by the corresponding State Medical Boards, which is in all German states except from Berlin and Hamburg.³² Consequently during the last four years a lot of physicians as well as fertility centres stopped supporting lesbians again and very few sustained the cooperation – maybe because of the State Medical Boards they belong to, perhaps because of “courage” and also because of economic interests. Nevertheless it is not surprising that a lot of lesbians in Germany, who opt for donor insemination, still choose foreign fertility centres or look for a private donor (Jansen 2007).

QUEER FAMILIES – LESBIAN MOTHERS AND GAY FATHERS TOGETHER

Since 2002 the Lesbian and Gay Federation in Germany (LSVD) runs a project named “Rainbow Family”, which provides among others a counselling service for LGBT families, lesbians and gay men, who want to build up a family, as well as for professionals.³³ During the last nine years

³² In October 2011 the research conducted by the LSVD, showed that – contrary to the common conviction – none of the State Medical Boards included the restriction in the binding “guidelines for assisted reproduction”. At the most the restriction was assumed only in the non-binding comments to the guidelines. Information in detail (in German): www.lsvd.de/1677.0.html.

³³ The project “Rainbow Family” aims at enhancing the personal, social and legal status of LGBT-families in Germany via counselling and networking. The project activities focus on family planning as well as difficulties of everyday life in LGBT-families. The range of the services includes a counselling hotline, online and personal counselling for rainbow families and specialists, publishing, lectures, seminars and conferences.

the counselling team gave information and advice to about 5,000 clients via the “family hotline” or by email. This counselling experience shows that since the millennium more and more lesbians and gay men have chosen to build up a family together and create a so called “queer family” (cf. Rupp, Bergold and Dürnberger 2009). In contrast to the lesbian-headed families created by donor insemination, the gay men in queer families are not seen as sperm donors but rather as fathers. Consequently in queer families the “parental dyad” extends to a “multi-parent model”. Children from queer families mostly live together with their mothers. The father participation can range from playing a “role” only in case of emergency, e.g. if something happens to both mothers, to arrangements known from separated families with father-child-days each week and every second weekend up to living arrangements with two flats up- and downstairs or adjoining semi-detached houses.

Queer families are faced with one major legal obstacle concerning their family arrangements: German law allows only two persons for child custody. It fails to support the needs of multi-parent models, which are not typical only for queer families but also for most blended or patchwork families (cf. Dethloff 2004).³⁴ Accordingly it is difficult to find a legal agreement, which supports the needs of all biological and social parents as well as the child’s needs. For example, if the co-mother adopts the child, the gay father has no parental rights any more. In that case the parents usually make a private contract concerning visiting rights and in addition give a “written authority” on special custody issues. However such private contracts can be cancelled at any time. Often queer families choose this model, when the child primarily lives with her or his lesbian mothers. On the other hand, if the biological parents decide to remain legal parents, the co-parents have no parental rights. Under the present German legal conditions there is no ideal way to solve the prob-

Concerning the counselling requests one out of ten comes from a professional, e.g. staff members of family information centres or youth welfare offices, medical staff, family counsellors or therapists, teachers, politicians and journalists. See: www.family.lsvd.de

³⁴ A blended family, also known as a patchwork or reconstituted family, is a family in which one or both members of the couple have children from a previous relationship. The member of the couple to whom the child is not biologically related is a social parent until the child is co-adopted by him/her. Usually there is a biological mother or father of this child, who does not belong to this new family. In the case of a second-parent-adoption, the legal bond between the child and this parent will be cut. Mostly this solution is neither in the interest of all parents nor the children. The most appreciated solution would allow more than two parents to take official and equal care of the children.

lem – there will always be at least one social or biological parent who will have to give up his/her rights.

While building a queer family includes great psychological challenges it also offers a lot of innovation potential. In these families fathers and mothers usually do not share sexual or “partnership” intimacy, the biological father and mother have not even been a couple before. Mostly that makes the (co-)parents more aware of the fact that they might not know each other “well enough” to start the “family project” – which is something heterosexual couples who share intimacy might not consider. Furthermore queer parents cannot assume the constellation of their family will last for life. The counselling experiences in the project “rainbow family” show that women and men who are starting a queer family usually need to talk about a lot of relevant issues concerning their parenthood, such as values, education ideas, personal limits and strengths, conceptions of family life and visiting arrangements. It is not only the content of the communication which is important, but also the process: how they can talk to each other, especially when things are not so comfortable. In the counselling process at the “rainbow family” project the “parents in progress” are invited to exchange their views open-mindedly – i.e. to talk about their fears, hopes and ideas as well as uncertainties in order to see if they can find an arrangement that seems to be suitable for all.

BUILDING A “RAINBOW FAMILY” BY ADOPTING CHILDREN

In Germany only very few lesbians and gay men choose to build up a family by adopting children as adoption is often not available for same-sex couples. The BMJ study showed that only 2% of the children in LGBT families in Germany have been adopted. Furthermore only 5% of the mothers and more than 30% of the fathers in LGBT families, who wish for more children, consider adoption as the way to enlarge their family (Rupp 2009). This is certainly due to the fact that it is still very difficult for gay men in Germany to become biological fathers.

In Europe in Belgium and the Netherlands, Iceland, Norway and Sweden as well as in Andorra, Spain and the United Kingdom same-sex couples are not only eligible to adopt each other’s biological children but also to jointly apply for a child adoption (Dethloff 2011).³⁵ However in

³⁵ The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled for the second time in January 2008 against discrimination in adoption because of sexual orientation. They stated that all relevant laws and regulations that exclude people from adoption because of their sexual orientation violate articles 14 and 8 of the European Human Rights Convention.

Germany lesbian women and gay men are entitled to adopt children only individually, but joined adoption is not permitted for registered partners. In Germany – like in many other European countries – there are many more people who are interested in adopting, than children who are available for adoption. As the child gets two parents only in the case of joint adoption and both parents are legally required to take care of this child, the German youth welfare offices usually prefer married couples as adoptive parents.

Being allowed to adopt a child (only) individually, German gay and lesbians, who are going for adoption, appear to be singles. Looking like a single provides pros as well as cons. If LGBT parents want to adopt a child, they usually have to turn to foreign countries, where single parent adoption by foreigners is allowed, and – because they adopt as a single parent – their homosexual orientation might not necessarily be obvious. Unlike a joined adoption, only one of the two partners appears in the institution as well as on the papers. Therefore they do not need to adopt in foreign countries, which formally allow lesbians and gays to adopt children. On the other hand, countries which allow lesbians and gays to adopt children – like South Africa, Uruguay or Brazil, usually prefer joint adoption because of the child’s “safety benefits”.

There are only few countries in the world, which allow single parent adoptions by foreigners. For example, some years ago a few German lesbians and gays adopted children in Vietnam and – until 2009 – in the USA as well. That stopped, because Vietnam as well as the USA signed the “Hague Adoption Convention”.³⁶ The countries, which signed it, obligate themselves to look first for a suitable adoptive family in the child’s

See: E.B. v. France, Court’s Judgment, 22 January 2008 and Philippe FRETTE v. France, Court’s Judgment, 26 February 2002, http://www.ilga-europe.org/home/what_we_do/litigation/european_court_of_human_rights_and_lgbt (15.09.2010). ILGA-Europe, the European region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), provides information about parental rights of LGBTI in each European country on their homepage. See: http://www.ilga-europe.org/home/guide/country_by_country

See also: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. Rechtliche Stellung von gleichgeschlechtlichen Eltern. <http://www.bpb.de/themen/BXH32F,0,0,Rechtliche_Stellung_von_gleichgeschlechtlichen_Eltern.html> (15 September 2010).

³⁶ The Hague Adoption Convention (“Hague convention on protection of children and cooperation in respect of inter-country adoption”) is an international convention dealing with international adoption, child laundering, and child trafficking. The convention is important even though it causes some trouble for lesbians and gays going for adoptions, because it establishes safeguards to ensure that inter-country adoptions take place in the best interests of the child. It was concluded on 29 May 1993, <http://hcch.e-vision.nl/index_en.php?act=text.display&tid=45> (15 September 2010).

state of origin. There are some Eastern European countries, for example, Bulgaria and Romania, where adoption by single people is allowed, but they only cooperate with women and not with single men (Riedle and Gilig-Riedle 2006). Single men, who want to adopt a child, easily raise the suspicion of “paedophilia”.³⁷

Additionally, if a same-sex couple lives in a registered partnership, it makes it more difficult for one of them to go for adoption, because most of the few adoption agencies in Germany do not support registered partners according to their own information. Often they are afraid that the information on registration will find its way into the “home story”,³⁸ which has to be handed to the relevant authorities in the child’s country of origin and that this will cause problems. For example, in 2010 a German agency answered an email request from a lesbian couple as follows: “... the adoption of a Bulgarian child is carried out in Bulgaria. There it is not possible for same-sex couples to adopt a child. Do you live in a registered partnership? For an adoption, you need a positive social report. If you live in a registered partnership the social report, which would present you as a single, will not be possible.”³⁹

LESBIAN WOMEN AND GAY MEN PROVIDING FOSTER CARE

While “joint adoption” is not permitted for registered partners, same-sex couples are increasingly welcome as foster parents at the same time. That might be because of the fact that gay or lesbian parents are legally treated as a couple in the context of fostering, or because of the actual lack of foster parents in Germany in general (Greib 2007). The BMJ

³⁷ A social worker of the Vienna Counselling Centre “Courage” stated in a newspaper interview in 2009 that men still fall out of the socially acceptable “role models”, when they take an active father role. “While a pair of women’s ‘double role’ as mothers would be rather assessed positively, gay fathers often have to face the stigma of paedophilia in the minds.” See: *Die presse.com* (21 November 2009) “Adoption: Zwei Mütter für Janis”, <http://diepresse.com/home/politik/innenpolitik/523317/Adoption_Zwei-Muetter-fuer-Janis> (21 November 2009)

³⁸ The “home story” is a social report, which is written by the German welfare workers, who assess an adoption request.

³⁹ In the spring of 2010 a lesbian couple asked adoption agencies in Germany if they were willing to support them in the process of adoption. 14 agencies answered, only two sent a positive answer - but only if the couple would not live in a registered partnership. Most argued that the countries they work with do not accept applications from same-sex couples. Some even said that they will not support such an application, because their “experiences” show, that “adopted children grow up better with a mother and a father”. Author’s translation.

study showed that in LGBT families there are about 6% of foster children (140 children nationwide). There are 8% of the mothers and again many more fathers (about 40%), who wish to enlarge their families by fostering (Rupp 2009).

There is only one, but fairly important obstacle in the way: not all child-welfare workers in Germany, who deal with foster children, are “yet” open to or familiar with the idea of same-sex foster parenting. They may, for example, remain of the conviction that children need a mother and a father to grow up well (e.g. to learn adequate gender roles), or maybe they are afraid that the parents of origin will have a problem with the idea of giving their child to two fathers or two mothers.⁴⁰ It means that more awareness should be raised of the *benefit of same-sex parenthood* especially among the staff of German youth welfare offices. As some youth welfare offices report, parents of origin often react very positively. For example, mothers appreciate that they continue to be the “only mother”, if their child will be fostered by two gay fathers. Alternatively if it is a “foster girl” especially the mothers often think that two lesbian women will be more able to make their daughters strong and self-confident and protect them against, for example, sexual abuse (Greib 2007).

There are well researched psychological benefits associated with foster parenting provided by gays and lesbians (Greib 2007; Brooks and Goldberg 2001; Mallon 2006). Lesbians and gays have their own experiences in dealing with challenging circumstances such as being different from others and coming out of the closet. It might be easier for them to empathise with foster children and explain the specifics of the “unusual” life circumstances. Lesbian and gay couples are mostly highly motivated to give the child a new home, because same-sex couples do not decide “easily” to share their life with children – it is not a short term decision, as it includes issues such as coming out as a rainbow family, possible negative reactions in society and similar – something heterosexual couples do not have to consider as their parenthood is socially acceptable and expected.⁴¹

⁴⁰ In April 2010 the youth welfare offices in Cologne received a training concerning LGBT families. During the lecture and discussions on possible concerns about the inclusion of same-sex couples as foster parents such arguments appeared.

⁴¹ In 2006 the city of Vienna (Austria) set a really good example with a campaign to gain new foster parents. They posted adverts and posters with same-sex couples and children themed “we bring it together.” See: <http://wien.orf.at/stories/148030/>.

CONCLUSION

The results of the first representative study about LGBT families in Germany could suggest that gay and lesbian parents are better parents compared to others. However such a conclusion would be very biased. Previous family research findings indicate that structural elements, like family size or the parents' sexual orientation, do not matter too much for the children's development. What is important are the processes within the family, such as the quality of relationships and the continuity of close caregivers (Farr et al. 2010; Golombok 2000; Jansen and Steffens 2006; Jungbauer and Göttingen 2009; Kershaw 2000).

Strictly speaking it is not a "bias" but, as I assume, it might be a positive selection effect not concerning the sample but the gay and lesbian parents in general: only gays and lesbians with the strongest will are able to form their families. In Germany lesbians and gays who want to start a family after their coming out, have to face many more constraints and challenges than heterosexuals. My own counselling experience also shows that the gay and lesbian would-be parents have to be very well organised, quite intelligent and determined to find a way through the jungle of lesbian and gay family planning, which was previously described in this chapter. It is not really a surprise that the BMJ study showed an above-average education level and professional qualifications among LGBT families. Maybe it is a kind of "parenting of the fittest" that takes place in Germany at the moment, caused by the lack of parental rights for lesbians and gays. This lack of rights does not actually prevent lesbians and gays from starting a family, if they really want to, but it might act as a kind of selection process promoting only the "best" same-sex parent candidates.

If conservatives in Germany do not want to help a myth to be born about the "gifted gay fathers and lesbian mothers", they might ease lesbian and gay family planning in the way to be in line with at least no. 24 of the Yogyakarta Principles:⁴² The right to found a family.⁴³

⁴² In Yogyakarta in 2006 a group of well known international human rights experts developed the "Yogyakarta Principles". It is a set of 29 principles that reflect the application of international human rights law to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, <http://www.yogyakartaprinciples.org/> (15 September 2010).

⁴³ "Everyone has the right to found a family, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Families exist in diverse forms. No family may be subjected to discrimination on the basis of the sexual orientation or gender identity of any of its members." Principle 24: "The Yogyakarta Principles. Principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity". 2007, Page 28, <http://www.yogyakartaprinciples.org/principles_en.pdf> (15 September 2010).

Until then we cannot repeat these findings frequently enough: Children who grow up with lesbian or gay parents develop as well in emotional and social functioning as children within heterosexual families. They are successful in individuation and share a warm and supportive relationship with most of their gay and lesbian parents in and outside the LGBT family. They deal very well with the key challenges of adolescence, while they are even better off in contexts such as school and professional career. Additionally, children in German “rainbow families” show significantly higher self-esteem and more autonomy in the relationship with their parents than children who grow up in any other family type. Accordingly we can assume them to be well appointed and less vulnerable to daily hassles as well as critical life events.

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