

## Adoption and same-sex parenting: Oedipus abandoned?

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### Abstract

Although substantial research has demonstrated that children of lesbian and gay parents develop in ways that are similar to those of heterosexual parents, families with lesbian and gay parents remain controversial. We know that most adopted children have a history of abandonment. In this paper, which is necessarily brief, we reflect on the possibility that children adopted by gay or lesbian couples have to face more difficulties than those adopted by heterosexual couples. The subject is delicate and complex since it involves not only responsible adults, but also children who have to reconstruct their belonging, work out the loss of their biological parents, and establish new attachment relationships. After reading the adoptive theme in the light of Oedipus' myth, which is a myth of abandonment and adoption, we consider the oedipal complex in the light of same-sex parenting. Finally, we ask: "What is in the best interest of the child?"

**Keywords** parenting; homosexuality; adoption; Oedipus

*We have a birth determined by the act of procreation of our parents, but then we have a new birth depending not on the others, but on the moment we tell our story, we redefine it with our writing and establish our style according to which we now demand to be understood by others.*

Free translation of Gargani, A. G. (1992). *Il testo del tempo*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.

*The baby explodes into an unknown world that is only knowable through some kind of a story – of course that is how we all live, it's the narrative of our lives, but adoption drops you into the story after it has started. It's like reading a book with the first few pages missing. It's like arriving after curtain up. The feeling that something is missing never, ever leaves you – and it can't, and it shouldn't, because something is missing. That isn't of its nature negative. The missing part, the missing past, can be an opening, not a void. It can be an entry as well as an exit. It is the fossil record, the imprint of another life, and although you can never have that life, your fingers trace the space where it might have been, and your fingers learn a kind of Braille. There are markings here, raised like welts. Read them. Read the hurt. Rewrite them. Rewrite the hurt.*

J., Winterson, (2011). *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* London: Jonathan Cape.

Although substantial research has demonstrated that children of lesbian and gay parents develop in ways that are similar to those of heterosexual parents – in terms of mental health, cognitive development, psycho-sexual development, peer relationships, and educational attainment (see American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013; American Psychological Association, 2005; Patterson, 2009; Patterson & Wainright, 2011; Perrin, Siegel, & the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013) – families with lesbian and gay parents remain controversial in courtrooms (1), legislatures, the media, and sometimes in the scientific community (see, e.g., Regnerus' debatable study, 2012).

In Italy, the citizenship status of homosexual persons is very backward compared to most other democracies in terms of rights and protections both *individual* (consider, for example, the bill that describes acts as aggravating offense committed “for purposes related to sexual orientation or gender discrimination of the victim” – what the American justice system defines *hate crimes* – repeatedly has been rejected in parliament with the ruling of unconstitutionality) and *familiar* (same-sex couples have neither any kind of regulation nor access to techniques of medically assisted procreation).

But in Italy, where, as Foucault would say, there's no narrative of homosexuality and even less of same-sex parenting, many lesbian women and gay men are parents. Most of them conceived children in previous heterosexual relationships and marriages. Among the younger generation, more gays and lesbians choose to have children within their current relationship. Many of them would like to adopt, but the law does not allow it.

This legal vacuum (2) does not allow for conducting fieldwork easily and re-thinking the possible forms of parenting. Furthermore, the term “parenting” is a very general neologism that includes (in addition to homosexual parents of children born from heterosexual unions) distinct types of family (not all of which are legal in Italy): a child born of a lesbian, single or in pairs, mother who used artificial insemination (with a known or anonymous donor); a child adopted by a homosexual person or a homosexual couple; a child born to a homosexual father and a woman who has offered her gestational maternity; a child born to a gay man and a lesbian woman (co-parenting) who live with their respective homosexual partners.

Both clinical and personal experience and the international literature (Erich et al., 2009; Farr et al., 2010; Goldberg et al., 2011; Hindle & Shulman, 2008) can help us answer the question: Can same-sex parenting harm the baby? And in this case, can being adopted by same-sex parents complicate the development of children who, having been previously abandoned by their biological parents, are now reconstructing a new relational belonging?

Unlike previous contributions (Lingiardi, 2007/2012, 2013; Lingiardi & Caristo, 2011a, 2011b), the subject of parenting (adoptive or not) by gay and lesbian people will be here addressed in the light of oedipal implications and vicissitudes.

## **Theban parents, Corinthian parents**

All of us know the oedipal myth, which is a story of abandonment and adoption. According to Bollas (1993), it reflects our displacements, replacements, symbolizations, and rationalizations, which are results of unconscious thought.

What we usually disregard and what the dramatic plot is based on is the existence of two sets of parents: Laius and Jocasta (who leave him and are potentially murderers) and Polybus and Merope (who adopt and love him tenderly). Therefore, Thebes and Corinth are Oedipus' two places of origin: the first one, the place of his birth and return; the second one, the place of his adoption and growth.

Danielle Quinodoz (1999) pointed out that this aspect of the story expresses a universal unconscious tendency to dichotomize the parental imago to avoid the anxiety generated by the conflict of oedipal ambivalence and escape the sense of solitude vis-à-vis the parental couple.

Due to this dichotomization, Oedipus could realize his unconscious desires: to kill his father and to marry his mother, since he did not know they were his biological parents (De Simone, 2007).

As is well known, Oedipus is unaware of either his adoption or his abandonment (3), until one day a guest of Polybus' royal palace confronts him and questions his resemblance to his parents.

Struck by this insult, Oedipus turns the oracle of Delphi to know the truth. In reference to the episode, Luzzatto (2011) focused on Oedipus' question: not "Who am I and where am I going?", but "What is my destiny?". According to him, this shift is the characteristic operation of many adopted people, who reverse the past into the future.

Oedipus' destiny is tragic: it represents the ambivalence of the human condition and synthesizes the mythical idea of a *second birth*.

Perseus, the Greek hero descended from parents both human and divine; Paris, presented to his biological parents and raised by humble parents; the "double birth" of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt; Moses, abandoned and then adopted; Buddha; Gilgamesh; Cyrus; Siegfried...all these historical and mythological references remind us of what Freud (1908) called *family romance* to describe the universal feeling of having been born to parents of exalted status.

Since it appears when children realize their parents are not the only good and loving ones, family romance could express the attempt to give a source to a part of the emerging self that is nobler than that given by fate.

In the case of adoption, in which the child is already uncertain about both biological and adoptive parents, family romance can reinforce the dichotomization of the parental imago and leave the child alone facing a vacuum of knowledge about his or her origins and a multitude of phantasies and imaginings (see also Baldisserotto, 2013).

In the case of same-sex parenting in which the child is not abandoned but his conception went beyond heterosexual coitus, he has to reckon with a set of phantasies

related to the “father” who provided his semen or the “mother” who offered the gestational maternity (4).

The film *The Kids Are All Right* directed by Lisa Cholodenko tells the story of two lesbian women (acted by Julianne Moore and Annette Bening) who decide to meet the sperm donor who is the biological father of their children.

How to make sense of these plots? The concept of *family rêverie* proposed by Ken Corbett (2001) can help us understand the way in which the parental imago is integrated.

Even if the phantasies about a child’s biological parents could suspend the adopted child in a story of the *unobservable*—of what he or she knows but also what he or she does not know yet—at the same time, the opportunity to share them with his new parents could make the resolution of the origin phantasies easier and could contain their *uncanny* significance.

As psychologists, it is very important that we reflect on the different experiences and phantasies accompanying the many forms of conception and parenthood.

In a letter, a lesbian mother says: <<*Even adopted children have “more than two parents” – those who are biological and those who are “affective”, but they are also “effective”! The adoptive mother will one day tell her son or daughter that he or she has biological parents who are “absent”. That mother will help the son or daughter understand that the biological parents were unable or unwilling to raise him or her. Likewise, I will tell my daughter that she has an “absent” parent, who is her “biological father”. I will help her understand that he did not abandoned her, but that he helped her two mothers give birth – it is appropriate to say – to a desire and a plan full of love*>> (Lingiardi & Nardelli, 2013).

In the case of adoption, the narrative elaboration will concern the themes of rejection and of a bodily (and often geographic) “elsewhere”, which is more absolute than that of the adoptive parents, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual.

In families with two female parents, one of which used medically assisted procreation – if the law permits – or two men who used surrogacy – if the law permits – the reconstruction of the biological contribution to parenting is articulated in different ways, as more or less close, knowable, thinkable, or absent.

An adopted child has been refused origin; a child born by means of biotechnology has been desired, thought about, and sought for a long time. This is true both when parents are heterosexual and when they are homosexual. In fact, family geometries are not limited to the heterosexual reproductive size. Each family has its own story to tell. All families, even those with homosexual parents, have specific themes that it is wrong to underestimate (there is no White Mill, just as there is no Rainbow Mill) and demonize as relational aberrations.

Increasingly, psychologists and psychotherapists can relate to lesbian and gay patients who are or want to become parents (5). It seems useful to list (we cannot do more for reasons of space) some of the emerging content when we talk with them: a sense of powerlessness about the difficulties related to having children; anger about discrimination; fear of not receiving support from the gay community because

sometimes it see the role of parent as a way to conform to “heterosexual lifestyle”; a sense of inadequacy as homosexual parents; in the case of gay men, fear of being less able to raise a child as men and as homosexual; fear of not being able to give to the child a “normal” family environment; a sense of guilt for having given birth to a baby “with another problem: having two gay parents”; in the case (now only hypothetical) of adoption, a sense of guilt for adding a problem (gay parents) to a trauma (the abandonment); competition and/or rivalry with the partner about who is the most important parent; jealousy, envy, and/or insecurity toward the partner because of his biological bond (Lingiardi & Nardelli, 2013).

*<<I need – a young mother writes – a therapeutic dialogue about my case that I will briefly expose below. I am a lesbian woman and I have a little girl – Paola, who is seven months – born with a donor insemination. My partner Antonella was very happy to share the experience of motherhood with me... However, we have doubts and problems that sometimes we think we are not able to solve... For example, how to reconcile the children’s need for truth and transparency with the protection from social (and sometimes our) discrimination and fears?>>.*

The psychiatrist Robert Stoller said *<<the more advanced the evolutionary development, the less absolute is the effect of somatic factors and the more we are dealing with a psychology into which the concept of choice enters>>* (quoted in Lingiardi, 2012, p. 139). This is one of the topics that we are dealing with: unlike many heterosexual people, for homosexual couples, paternity or maternity is always a choice. Lesbians and gay men in particular should think about it: it is not just about leading a battle for the right to have a family (which must follow the duty), but also starting a process for the conversion of self-image.

New worlds are waiting for us, and whether we like it or not, we have to deal with the fact that “culture” changes our relationship with “nature,” admittedly, and not at all given, that the two dimensions can be separated. The new family narratives must be studied as well as the attachments with different types of caregivers, whether biological and not.

Therefore, it is not surprising that psychoanalysis continues to apply to the Oedipus myth, which is still able to generate new and continuous images of psychic life.

*Why Oedipus?* Because Oedipus is an enigma, a complex of insoluble contradictions. He always presents himself as a double, as the bearer of two opposing truths: the decoder of puzzles is himself an enigma to be deciphered, the executioner is a criminal, the clairvoyant is blind, the savior of the city is the one who leads us to perdition (Romano, 2008).

Who is the “real parent”? The one who provides his or her biology or the one who raises the baby, providing him or her with care and safety? In fact, either can be true because many biological parents are not able to provide security and proper care, or because non-biological parents (or a biological parent with a partner who is not the biological parent of the child) are capable of it. The two things do not always coincide.

A child can be conceived without being thought of, can be sought at all costs, or can be born in one of many possibilities between these two extremes. Every conception, birth, adoption, has a story to tell, more or less conscious, more or less fortunate.

It is true that the careful planning of maternity or paternity can reveal a narcissistic desire, the desire for a self-sufficient completeness that turns the child into a complement of the self (Pozzi & Thanopoulos, 2006), as Thanopoulos rightly explained, warning gay people to avoid this risk. But we all know that the narcissistic search for the child, and the denial of his or her otherness, can be true of any parent, as we often find in clinical work with “normal” families.

As Kohut (1987) wrote, there are highly narcissistic heterosexual relationships as well as mature homosexual relationships in which the partner is recognized and loved as a separate and independent person. The maturity and level of the differentiation of a loving relationship depend substantially on characteristics of partners’ personalities, not on their sexual orientation. This is one of the reasons why the American Academy of Pediatrics stated that, as long as they are “conscientious and able to provide care”, homosexuals can be “good parents.”

### **(De)generated parents?**

When we turn to the oedipal complex as a model of reading the relationships in families with same-sex parents, we cannot forget the embarrassment of many psychoanalysts when they have to deal with the desire for parenthood that many gay people feel (Roudinesco 2002).

In this time of “cultural renaissance” of bodies and sexualities, in which the techniques of assisted reproduction have eliminated the necessity of the sexual act for reproduction and adoption granted to same-sex couples has enhanced the social and not necessarily heterosexual dimension of parenting, we ask whether and how Oedipus survives these new family geometries.

What happens if we conceive the oedipal complex outside of the heterosexual scene? We know that the primal scene is the origin of the subject, the conjunction between the biological fact of the birth and the symbolic fact of the filiation or – as it appears to the child – between the “wild” act of the parents-in-intercourse and the existence of the triad of father, mother, and child.

Although André Green (1991) argued that the causality of origins can only be a phantasy of the body, on the body, and on the bodies – including those of our parents, who are our origin – we believe that the child’s questions go beyond curiosity about the parents’ bodies or their relationship (De Simone, 2007).

The structuring force of the oedipal complex, in fact, consists of the possibility of finding *one’s place* in the family scene rather than the possibility of sexual identifications with specific gendered bodies. More than anything else, Oedipus calls into question a play of positions – think of the transition from the dyadic to the triadic relationship – in which the child is interested in solving a mystery, getting hold of a secret, since he or she believes his or her parents possess and exchange secrets, leaving him or her out.

From Meltzer (1973), although in different contexts and theoretical models, many psychoanalytic observations have expanded the available identifications for the boy and the girl.

Lewis Aron (2006, p. 121) disengaged Klein's concept of the *combined parent figure* from its original sense of pathogenic phantasy and used it to illuminate the contributions of aspects of psychic development to our experience of multiplicity, with an emphasis on the development of bisexual awareness.

According to him, the notion of the combined parent figure *<<is useful precisely because it does not privilege heterosexual intercourse but rather allows for, and even suggests, all sorts of sexual and aggressive arrangements: heterosexual and homosexual combinations and also non-genital sexuality. Within the metaphor of the combined parent figure, the child has not yet sorted out the idea that fathers are men and have penises and mothers are women and have vaginas, and therefore the phantasies that constitute the combined parent figure are not exclusively heterosexual or genital>>* (p. 133).

Moreover, one of the most significant aspects of the Kleinian notion of the combined parent figure is the implication that the child internalizes not just the father or the mother, but also a representation of the perceived relationship between them. In this way, the focus is on the field of forces rather than on objects per se.

Aron stressed that to continue to use the primal scene as a core metaphor in psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice, psychoanalysis needs to benefit from the advances made in social and critical theory, feminist thought, and gender studies (Dimen & Goldner, 2005), broadening *<<the primal scene concept beyond the privileging of normative heterosexual genitality....This revisioning of the primal scene evokes not so much stable heterosexuality as an unstable, chaotic process and flux, sameness, difference, and multiplicity>>* (Aron, 2002, pp. 133-134).

Irene Fast (1984) suggested that children, initially bisexual, use cross-sex identifications to formulate important parts of their self-representations as well as to imaginatively elaborate their phantasies about erotic relationships between the sexes. Thus, this process makes the deconstruction of the oedipal model and the identifications between the child and his parent complicated and hardly schematized. Gender difference and sexual orientation are no longer seen as being triggered by the discovery of anatomical facts; on the contrary, *<<to move beyond a discourse of opposites requires the notion of something more plural, decentered, than is implied by the simple axis of sameness-difference, the idea of the one Difference>>* (Benjamin, 2002, p. 182).

Psychoanalysis needs a more open reflection on the meanings and the different positions of the desire, since the universalization and the attempt to bring the phenomena to a supposedly natural and objective order distance us from the infinite nuances of which reality is made up.

According to Schafer (1995), Freud fell into this methodological bias when he naturalized the idea that a normal development should reach a heterosexual genital and reproductive climax. Actually, he mistook the standard suggested by the

dominant Darwinism for a natural event. As consequence of this model of reproductive heterosexuality, non-normative sexual practices were defined as immature and incomplete (Lingiardi & Luci, 2006).

Also Silvia Vegetti Finzi fell into this bias when she proposed the Freudian refrain of <<*children need both sexual figures*>> (in *Corriere della Sera*, 2 gennaio 2013) to explain how the construction of sexual identity is not abstract, but involves, bodily and mentally, both the roles and the functions of the male and the female parent. However, if we focus on fact that a child has a male body and a female body for self-definition and comparison with the theme of sexual difference, we not only contend that the acquisition of gender identity is a linear and uniform process but also belie psychoanalytic notions of phantasy, sexuality, and the unconscious.

No thoughts are possible without objections. Some psychoanalysts says, “to make and raise a child takes a woman and a man”; “children need a mother and a father”; “if we give children to homosexuals we make the impossible possible”; “a homosexual couple who wants a child does not accept the limitations of their its condition”; “children with same-sex parents have more psychological problems than those of heterosexual parents”; “growing up with homosexual parents means growing up in an environment that denies the sexual differentiation”.

Other psychoanalysts says: “the processes of identification of the child are very articulated and not limited to the figures of the father and mother”; “as is in single-parent families, gay parents’ child can experiences the difference between the sexes in other family members, beginning with the grandparents, as well as outside, in school and in society”; “in a family, what matters to ensure a safe development is the quality of relationships, the ability to love and be loved”.

People who refuse the right to homosexual parents impose a rule that stigmatizes not only same-sex couples, but also single-parent and blended families in all their forms.

No research has proved that a child with same-sex parents grows up denying the difference between the sexes. Do not forget that it is present in every family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.), at school, in society and in mental categories with which the child begins to operate. The reality, including the sexual one, is not a prefabricated object falling from the sky, but rather a complex and personal acquisition. The conception of a child cannot be reduced to a purely biological fact. First of all, conceiving a child means desiring and welcoming him or her into the world, and also saving him or her from the disorientation of an orphanage or from the trauma of an abusive environment (for an interesting review, see Institut Lacan, Groupe-Éclair MPT, 2013).

As noted by Antonino Ferro (in *Corriere della Sera*, 6 gennaio 2013), “the mental” will shift more and more into the background of “the biologic,” disengaging the exercise of parental functions from a biological coherence. As a first response, we are shocked by all that is new because it upsets the structures of thought stratified by common sense and requires us to contend with new thoughts and new emotional realities. If it is true that the “functioning of the mind” is the distinctive of our species, it implies a series of cascading consequences of which we are not aware in a



clear way. The more “the mental” imposes itself, the more we will have to do with functions: maternal and paternal functions can be exercised in a manner that is not necessarily consistent with the biological connection. Children of couples who love each other and who are capable of good mental matching are welcomed. It is not the biological sex of one or the other parents that is more important, but the mental attitudes of both. Those who want to take care of children have children. To the end, what matters is that every child has his or her crib, his or her feast day, and accepted and loved as a prodigy.

To make the prodigy possible, we are forced to re-think the way we think about the origins and the Self. Psychoanalysis must open the curtains, disorder mannerisms, promote a culture of mental link, legitimate knowledge, and not evade the fatigue – often the pain – of thought.

Sexuality does not always coincide with procreation, just as the sexual reproductive act does not always coincide with parenting. The transformations of techniques and cultures have implied a redefinition of the concept of parenting. Now there are genetic mothers, adoptive mothers, “gestational” mothers. For example, who is the “real mother” in the case in which a woman gives her eggs to another woman who becomes pregnant via in vitro fertilization? If then this “gestational” mother gives the child up for adoption or she raises him with the woman who donated the oocytes, who would be the “real mother”? And more generally, who is the “real parent”? The one makes available his or her biology or who raises the child with care and safety?

It is clear that these questions take us away from the traditional idea (considering the not “orthodox” features of the Holy Family, we could perhaps say “not the archetypal Christian” idea) of heterosexual family we grew up with and bring us closer to the real problem: the psychosocial acceptance of multiple family constructions (adoptive, same-sex, single, recombined, enlarged, reconstructed) and their potential, as necessary, elaborative capabilities.

Sexual intercourse, conception, filiation, and parenthood as well as affectivity and marriage are not necessarily related; family is not a natural product, but is a social and cultural construction. All this has led to a revision of the “traditional” concept of “family.” Consequently, referring to “family,” we should think about a connection of stories, emotions, ties, bodies, and projects, and opt for the term in the plural: the families. However, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists tell us that throughout history, the concept of “family” has continually changed (Remotti, 2008; Saraceno, 2012).

There are many systems of psychoanalysis, and they do not speak with one voice (Vegetti Finzi, in *Corriere della Sera*, 2 gennaio 2013). Those that do not want to be confused with the hetero-normative moral and formulate commandments and curses now take on a multiple and relational perspective. As a consequence, they are becoming increasingly aware of the need to disengage the oedipal complex from its descriptive cartoon of father-mother-child to redeem it from any implicit normalizing. According to this theoretical frame, each of us constructs our own gender identity and recognizes the two big differences of human life – adults/children and males/females

– with their transition from dual to triangular relationships, following highly variable combinations (Argentieri, 2010).

If we accept the idea that gender is not a “thing per se” but a “compromise formation” intersubjectively constructed (Goldner, 2003; Harris, 2005), the step toward its deconstruction is short. This is not to deny the initial reference to the male/female anatomical and biological category; rather, the work is to “re-assemble” (Harris, 2005) – being careful, however, not to re-essentialize it – according to those references to gender that our cultural, family, and biographical passages make available.

Certainly, <<*anatomy is a given, and each sex has to grapple with the particular significance it has in their case. What is not given is what each individual makes of his anatomy*>> (Breen, 1993, p. 4).

The more or less favorable results of this personal “idiomatic construction” (Bollas, 1989) depend not only on the connection between a child’s pre-oedipal and oedipal levels, but also on the early relational events and actual characteristics of the parents, which are not at all guaranteed by their sex and sexual orientation.

### **(Same-sex) Parenting: conceiving the bond.**

A person who looks without prejudice, perhaps with wonder or even with confidence, at two people of the same sex deciding to have a child is not delirious: He or she knows that to make a baby, the egg and the sperm, the female and the male, are fundamental. He or she also knows that oocyte and sperm can meet in ways that do not necessarily require sexual intercourse. That a couple can become parents of children born to previous relationships of one partner. That there are adoptive parents who have imagined a child who was biologically conceived but then rejected by other people in their emotions and thoughts for a long time. He or she also knows that, as reasonable as it is for heterosexual couples to turn to heterologous artificial insemination, children with same-sex parents born via alternative forms of conception are long-desired and pursued. In short, he or she knows that there are different ways to become parents, that a family can include two biological parents or only one, or neither, and therefore it cannot be built on *ius sanguinis*.

Even if they cannot be fertile together, some same-sex couples do not lose their desire to be parents and so decide to face the obstacles and difficulties, both internal and external, specifically the distrust and theoretical apocalypses that advance the collapse of the “symbolic order” or the end of the difference between the sexes (Lingiardi, 2007/2012; Scotto di Fasano, 2011).

On the other hand, adoptive couples have to elaborate the absence of the biological continuity through the generations, the “foreignness” of their children’s body, as evidenced by the difference of facial features and the persecutory phantasies related to the biological parents (Kancyper, 1991).

Since it stresses the voluntary – and therefore social – aspect of parenting, adoption allows us to make independent the body and the biological dimensions of the horizon of filiation. It also allows us to disclose the functioning of our parental rules, laying

bare the mechanisms by which society authorizes or rejects some family configurations. It could even suggest who is a desired child and who is a rejected one. As has already been pointed out, a child's conception and his or her birth are not sufficient to make the biological parents his or her parents in all respects. Being born and coming into the world are physical facts, but creating a relationship of paternity and/or maternity is a social fact (Cadoret, 2002).

Although the empirical research (which in this area, as in many others, is greatly influenced by the type and quality of the sample and appropriate assessment tools) achieved up until now leaves us to predict not pathological configurations, or at least ones that are substantially comparable to those of hetero-parenting, whether positive or negative, it is hard to foresee what forms of psychic functioning will be produced by these new same-sex geometries.

Most of the objections to same-sex parenting can be classified under the heading: "it is against the interest of the child". We think this is an abstract and ideological idea of "child." In fact, it is hard to say what is for or against the child. Is the divorce of two quarrelsome parents for or against the child? Is staying in an orphanage rather than being adopted by a homosexual couple in the interest of the child? Is being conceived by accident or by mistake by a heterosexual couple in the interest of the child? Is being long desired and carefully planned for by a homosexual couple in the interest of the child?

Determining what is in the interest of the child could also start from simpler assumptions. According to the American Psychoanalytic Association (2002), <<*the best interest of the child requires attachment to committed, nurturing and competent parents. Evaluation of an individual or couple for these parental qualities should be determined without prejudice regarding sexual orientation*>>.

Or, citing the American Academy of Pediatrics (2006), what in the interest of the child is that who care for him or her are <<*conscientious and nurturing adults, whether they are men or women, heterosexual or homosexual*>> (p. 361).

Recalling the famous Tolstojan open word, we could say: "All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way". Each of us, son, daughter, or parent, has to *find the words* to re-construct our own story.

When we are born (in whatever way: affective, adoptive, biological, biotechnological), we are entrusted to the uncertain fate of "belonging." Now, families with adoptive parents and those with homosexual parents give us a significant perspective for thinking about how love is constructed.

## Notes

1) Recently on three different occasions, the judges had to take a position on the parental ability of a homosexual person. In January 2013, with the judgment n. 601/2013, the First Civil Chamber of the Supreme Court dismissed the appeal of a father who wanted sole custody of his child because the mother had left him to go live with another woman. Among the reasons for the judgment, we can read: <<there is no scientific evidence or experience data, but only the mere prejudice, that living in

a family with homosexual parents can harm the balanced development of the child... It takes for granted what is, conversely, to be proved, that is the harmfulness of that family environment for the child>>. In February 2013, other two judgments were handed down. The European Court of Human Rights has accepted the appeal of an Austrian lesbian couple, stating that in same-sex couples, the partner has the right to adopt his or her partner's children (stepchild adoption), just as it is for unmarried heterosexual couples. The German Constitutional Court of Karlsruhe has allowed for the possibility that a married homosexual couple might adopt a child previously already adopted by the spouse.

2) See the task of Associazione Genitori Omosessuali "Famiglie Arcobaleno" to promote the visibility of family with one or more homosexual parents (see <http://www.famigliearcobaleno.org>).

3) Luzzatto (2011) noted that the theme of abandonment is not a primary theme among adopted children; it is an emerging theme at some point in their lives, but it does not appear till the abandonment ends. According to him, abandonment needs an emotional and psychic place where it can be designed and expressed to someone else.

4) Carone, N. (2012), *Ghosts in the same-sex families. Le figure del donatore e della portatrice nell'immaginario e nella costruzione delle famiglie omoparentali*. Unpublished dissertation, Faculty of Medicine and Psychology, "Sapienza" University of Rome.

5) Here is the press release issued by the Italian Association of Psychology (AIP, February 2011) on the admissibility of the adoption of children by a single person: <<In the 3572 judgment of 14 February 2011, the Supreme Court says that for the legislator it is time to "provide, in specific circumstances, to give to a single person the eligibility for the adoption of children." At the same time, the Supreme Court pointed out that this would not be in contradiction with what is stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child signed in 1967 in Strasbourg, which contains guidelines for adoption. On the one hand, the judgment was welcomed by many as an extension of possibilities for children to grow up in positive environments. On the other hand, some representatives of our political, social, and religious institutions have stated that children need a mother and a father to grow up healthy. The Italian Association of Psychology emphasized that international research on the correlation between family relationships and people's psycho-social development does not attest to the absolute need for a mother and a father. In fact, the results of psychological research have long documented that the group configuration is not as related to the psycho-social well-being of family members as the quality of relational processes and dynamics. In other words, neither the number nor the gender of parents per se – whether adoptive or biological – guarantees the best developmental conditions for children. What matters is their ability to take on these roles and the relative educational responsibilities. In particular, *psychological research has shown that what is important for the well-being of children is the quality of the family environment provided by parents, regardless of whether they are living together, separated, remarried, single, same-sex*. Children need adults who are able to ensure

care and protection, to teach them a sense of limits, to encourage both the experience of belonging and of autonomy, to negotiate conflicts and differences, to overcome doubts and fears, and to develop emotional and social skills. The Italian Association of Psychology invites the leaders of our political, social, and religious institutions to consider the results of scientific research produced on issues under discussion>> (free translation).

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