

LGBTQ Foster Parents

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Abstract

In countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, growing numbers of LGBTQ people are becoming foster parents. This chapter summarizes what is known from the research evidence, primarily focusing on lesbian and gay foster parents given the dearth of research on bisexual, transgender, and queer foster parents. Key themes identified from the literature were: (a) the silencing of sexuality, (b) the pathologizing of sexuality, (c) the expectation that LGBTQ foster parents demonstrate “appropriate” gender role models, (d) resistance to placement matching of LGBTQ children in foster care, and (e) the expectation that LGBTQ foster parents educate child protection staff. The chapter concludes by considering gaps in the literature that require concerted attention, and explores recommendations for best practice derived from the research.

Keywords: child protection, discrimination, foster care, foster parents, gender, LGBTQ, sexuality

This chapter focuses on LGBTQ foster parents. It begins by providing a brief history of formal foster care in the context of Australia, the United Kingdom (U.K.), and the United States (U.S.), given these are the three countries where the research reviewed in this chapter has been undertaken. This background information is important as it provides a context to the differing ways in which formal foster care is utilized within the statutory child protection systems of each country. The chapter then considers the extant literature on LGBTQ foster parents, grouped under five key themes: (a) the silencing of sexuality, (b) the pathologizing of sexuality, (c) the expectation that LGBTQ foster parents demonstrate “appropriate” gender role models, (d) resistance to placement matching of LGBTQ children in foster care, and (e) the expectation that LGBTQ foster parents educate child protection staff. The chapter finishes by exploring gaps in the literature, opportunities for future research, and the implications of the existing research for both policy and practice.

Brief History of Formal Foster Care

Across the world, the history of formal foster care is far reaching. Formal foster care here refers to the statutory removal of children from their birth parents due to concerns about abuse and/or neglect, and their placement with foster families, either with the aim of reunifying children with their birth parents, or their subsequent placement in either long-term foster care or adoption. In countries such as Australia, the U.K., and the U.S., informal care for other people’s children has been commonplace for centuries, though the advent of formal foster care began in the 19th century (Scott & Swain, 2002). Beyond these three countries, practices of foster care are central to kinship in many geographic regions, dating back tens of thousands of years (Carsten, 2004).

Formalized foster care in Australia, the U.K., and the U.S. share something of a similar trajectory, before diverging in the late twentieth century. As noted above, caring for other people’s children in informal arrangements was historically common. With population

growth, however, came an increased demand for homes for children who were orphaned or whose parents could not care for them (Scott & Swain, 2002).

In response to this increased demand, benevolent organizations in the early 20th century turned their attention to child welfare, with the aim of placing children with families (Gowan, 2014). In each country, however, a series of scandals in relation to “baby farming” brought into question the efficacy of informal fostering arrangements, in addition to problems associated with the costs of state involvement in the care of children (Zelizer, 1994). The rise of orphanages was one attempt at reducing the trafficking of children and the treatment of children as indentured labor; however, this too was a cost to the public purse. Additionally, it was slowly acknowledged that outcomes for children raised in orphanages were often poor, and that many children experienced considerable abuse or neglect in orphanages due to underfunding and the (often negative) views of staff charged with the care of children (Gowan, 2014).

One answer to the “problem” of rising costs of state care and the abuse of children in orphanages was adoption. The legal transfer of parentage was one way to shift the cost of children from the state to adoptive parents, and it was also thought to hold the possibility of shifting the prevailing logic away from seeing children as indentured labor, instead framing them as loved family members (Zelizer, 1994). At the same time, however, extinguishing the rights of birth parents was increasingly recognized as problematic. This has meant, particularly in the U.S., that foster care still has a major role to play in the child protection system. As a result, in the U.S. children removed from their birth parents may live for a considerable period of time in foster care or with other birth family members before then being placed for adoption (Riggs & Due, 2018).

In Australia and the U.K., foster care continues to play a significant role in child protection systems. In the U.K., foster care was the most common form of care for children

who could not live with their birth parents throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Since the turn of the millennium, however, adoption has been the preferred mode of placement for children who cannot live with their birth parents, yet significant numbers of children still live in foster placements either due to short term orders, or whilst awaiting an adoptive placement (Riggs & Due, 2018). In Australia, by contrast, foster care remains the primary form of placement (Riggs, Due, & Bartholomaeus, 2016). It has been argued that this is due to histories of adoption in Australia that have involved the forced removal of Indigenous (i.e., First Nations) children (Cuthbert & Quartly, 2012), recognition of which has cast adoption as inherently problematic. In recent years, however, certain legislatures in Australia have turned their focus to adoption, and have amended laws to increase the likelihood that children in long-term foster placements will be adopted (Murphy, Quartly, & Cuthbert, 2009).

This background information is important when turning to consider the experiences of LGBTQ people as foster parents. Specifically, and depending on the country, foster care may be a transitional family context situated between reunification with birth parents and placement for adoption, or it may be a permanent arrangement until a child turns 18. When we consider the literature on LGBTQ foster parents, however, and despite differences across countries in terms of foster care practice, we see many similarities, specifically with regard to ongoing discrimination. While, as will be shown in this chapter, this appears to be slowly changing, a culture of suspicion continues to predominate when it comes to LGBTQ foster parents.

Research on LGBTQ Foster Parents

In terms of the number of LGBTQ people who are foster parents, data on population sizes are scarce. No such information is available in the Australian context or for the U.K.. In the U.S., Gates and colleagues (2007) provided an estimate of the number of children living

with lesbian or gay foster parents, suggesting that at the time over 14,100 children lived with such parents, constituting 6% of children living with foster parents who are not birth family members.

With regard to how gender and sexuality have been theorized in research on LGBTQ foster parents, early research tended to focus on homophobia as experienced by lesbian and gay foster parents (e.g., Ricketts, 1991). Homophobia, in this research, focused on affect, and specifically the emotional reactions that heterosexual people have when interacting with or considering interactions with people who are not heterosexual (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980). As such, this early research theorized something of a direct relationship between the existence of lesbian and gay foster parents and responses to them: it was, in a sense, a causal relationship. Beginning with the work of Hicks (1996), however, research on lesbian and gay foster parents has increasingly sought to theorize how reactions to lesbian and gay foster parents are not caused by such parents, but rather by normative accounts of gender and sexuality that circulate within a broader framework of heteronormativity. Drawing on Butler's (1990) conceptualization of the "heterosexual matrix", Hicks and others have explored how lesbian and gay foster parents are often positioned outside of normative accounts of gender by default of not being heterosexual. This focus on heteronormativity has allowed for a broader focus on the positioning of lesbian and gay foster parents, rather than reducing responses to such parents to the causal accounts often produced by a focus on homophobia.

The sections below present a thematic review of research that has almost solely focused on lesbian and gay foster parents. The thematic review involved a reading of the body of literature on LGBTQ foster parents, from which repeated topics were identified from across the empirical findings. The thematic areas reported are those that predominate in the literature and are relatively consistent across the literature. Comment is made where the findings within a given thematic area appear to have shifted across time.

Silencing of Sexuality

This first theme refers to research that has focused on how discussions of lesbian or gay sexualities are silenced by child protection workers. In the U.K., Hicks (2000) conducted interviews with 30 social workers who reported that a “good” lesbian foster care applicant accepted the idea that lesbian sexuality should be silenced, or minimally spoken of. In the U.S., Patrick and Palladino (2009) interviewed nine lesbian or gay foster parents and similarly found that agency staff rarely spoke about lesbian or gay sexuality, which included refraining from (or refusing to) speak with both foster children and birth parents about foster parent sexuality prior to a placement occurring. In the Australian context, Riggs (2007), drawing on the assessment reports of five lesbian or gay foster parents, reported a contradiction between silence and deception. On the one hand, applicants were expected to mute discussions about their sexuality, yet on the other hand applicants were treated as deceptive if they did not speak openly about their sexuality as part of the assessment process.

In addition to child protection staff often refraining from talking about lesbian or gay sexualities, previous research also suggests that such sexualities are silenced via what Wilton (1995) refers to as “heterosexualization”. Heterosexualization occurs when non-heterosexual relationships are depicted as “just like” heterosexual relationships, or when non-heterosexual people are encouraged to present themselves publically as heterosexual. In his research on gay foster parents, for example, Hicks (2006) suggests that gay men may be rendered palatable as foster parents through their depiction as “maternal men”. While in some ways this depicts gay men as failed men (i.e., men are not normatively expected to be maternal), in other ways the maternal men narrative constructs gay men as non-threatening through being positioned as just like heterosexual mothers.

The research summarized in this theme spans two decades, suggesting that discomfort with, or opposition to, the voicing of lesbian and gay sexualities has been relatively consistent within the context of child protection.

Pathologization of Sexuality

In addition to lesbian or gay sexualities being silenced, research also suggests that such sexualities may be brought to the fore by child protection staff in order to question or pathologize them. In the study by Patrick and Palladino (2009) summarized above, some participants reported that birth parents used knowledge about lesbian or gay sexualities to make false allegations of child abuse by foster parents in order to pathologize their sexuality. In their survey of 60 lesbian, gay, or bisexual foster parents living in the U.S., Downs and Stevens (2006) found that a significant proportion hid their sexuality from birth parents for fear that it would be pathologized. In his work on gay foster parents, Hicks (2000) suggests that while in some contexts gay men are depicted as maternal men, in other contexts they are depicted as “perverts”, with suspicious motives to provide care. Riggs (2011a) also found this in his examination of five films featuring gay foster parents, in which gay sexualities were depicted as perverse, and a risk to children.

In terms of explicit pathologization, early research by Skeates and Jabri (1988) in the U.K. found that of the 11 lesbian or gay foster parents they studied, those who were out about their sexuality to agency staff experienced prejudice. Almost a decade later, in Hicks' (1996) interviews with 11 lesbians or gay men assessed to become foster or adoptive parents, participants reported that assessment workers displayed a prurient interest in their sexualities. A decade later again, and in the Australian context, Riggs and Augoustinos (2009) found in their interviews with 10 lesbian or gay foster parents that many reported experiencing homophobia from child protection staff. By contrast, recent research conducted in the U.K. by Wood (2015) with 24 lesbian or gay foster or adoptive parents found that none had been

refused assessment, none experienced a prurient focus on (or silencing of) their sexuality, and none reported experiencing discrimination. This may reflect changes in the ways that lesbian and gay foster carers are positioned by foster care agencies, or may potentially be a product of regional differences in recruitment strategies.

Research spanning three decades has consistently found that lesbian and gay foster parents experience pathologizing responses from birth parents and child protection staff. However, the most recent research suggests that such pathologization may be less common, indicating perhaps something of a shift in the acceptability of the explicit voicing of homophobia.

Expectation to Demonstrate “Appropriate” Gender Role Models

Consistent across the literature is an emphasis upon lesbian and gay foster parents reporting that they are expected to demonstrate that they will provide “appropriate” gender role models to foster children. Hicks (2000), for example, found that social workers reported that they expected lesbian applicants to demonstrate that they were not anti-men, that they were not militant in their feminism, and that they would adopt traditional female gender roles within the home. While as noted above, Wood (2015) found that her participants had not experienced overt discrimination, they nonetheless were still asked by assessment workers how they would provide appropriate gender role models. Notably, her participants were attuned to this expectation, yet felt that they had no capacity to question or resist the expectation given reasonable fears about not being approved or having children placed with them.

This theme of a focus on lesbian and gay foster parents being expected to provide “appropriate” gender role models links very much to the broader literature on LGBTQ parenting. The literature has consistently documented the expectation that lesbian mothers in particular account for how they will provide male role models to their children (e.g., Clarke,

2006; Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005). This may reflect the predominance of research on lesbian mothers, though it may also reflect a particular concern that children, and in particular boys, need ‘male role models’. It is thus perhaps unsurprising that the literature on lesbian and gay foster parents echoes this expectation.

Resistance to Placement Matching for LGBTQ Children in Care

Different to the expectation that LGBTQ foster parents should provide “appropriate” gender role models to children in their care, this theme focuses on how LGBTQ foster parents have at times been depicted as inherently *inappropriate* role models for LGBTQ children in care. For example, Australian interview research by Riggs (2011b) with 30 lesbian and gay foster parents reported that participants felt they were perceived by child protection staff as inappropriate role models for LGBTQ children specifically, and participants were denied requests to have LGBTQ children placed with them. This is concerning given research findings on the experiences of LGBTQ children in the context of child protection, and the views of heterosexual foster parents with regards to caring for LGBTQ children. For example, in the U.S., Mallon (2001) interviewed 54 young people about their experiences of foster care, and found that some reported that heterosexual foster parents terminated a placement upon learning that a child was lesbian or gay. Drawing from interviews with 10 LGBTQ youth, Gallegos and colleagues (2011) reported that just under half felt that being placed with an LGBTQ foster parent was important to them. Those who felt it would be important to be placed with an LGBTQ foster parent noted that this would make it more likely that they would be supported rather than discriminated against in care.

In regards to the views of heterosexual and/or cisgender foster parents, Clements and Rosenwald (2007), drawing on focus groups conducted with 25 foster parents living in the U.S., found that many held misconceptions about LGBTQ children, including a fear that LGBTQ children placed with them would abuse their children, religious beliefs that

positioned homosexuality as a sin, and a view of lesbian or bisexual children as safe, while gay male children were seen as a risk. Of the seven participants who previously had an LGBTQ child placed with them, six had terminated the placement on the basis of views about the child's gender or sexuality. Finally, survey research by Bucchio (2012) conducted in the U.S. with 304 foster mothers found that 40.8% of the sample reported that they were unwilling to accept a placement for a sexual minority youth.

Given these findings with regard to the relative unwillingness of heterosexual and/or cisgender foster parents to care for LGBTQ children, and given estimates made by Wilson and Kastanis (2015) that in Los Angeles California alone approximately 19% of children in care are LGBTQ, it is concerning that there appears to be an unwillingness to place such children with LGBTQ foster parents. This may reflect ongoing systemic discrimination towards LGBTQ foster parents, or it may reflect a lack of awareness by child protection staff of the benefits of placement matching to LGBTQ children in care.

Expectation to Educate Child Protection Staff

The final theme evident across the literature is the expectation that LGBTQ foster parents should educate child protection staff in order to facilitate their inclusion and acceptance in foster care assessment and practice. In interview research conducted by Wood introduced above (2015), for example, her lesbian and gay participants reported no discrimination. Yet this may be because they felt compelled to disclose their sexuality early in the assessment process, and to do so in ways that demonstrated that it would not negatively impact upon children potentially placed with them. In so doing, the participants were educating child protection staff about a very particular version of lesbian or gay families that was most likely to be seen as palatable (i.e., that they were in stable monogamous relationships).

Research by Riggs (2010) in the Australian context introduced above has also suggested that many of the participants felt compelled to accept “pragmatic imbalances”. Riggs used the term “pragmatic imbalances” to refer to the ways in which many of his participants felt compelled to put aside their own political views so as to educate child protection staff about a specifically palatable and hence acceptable version of lesbian or gay sexualities. Willingness to do so was explained by participants as focus on the needs of children—needs that had to be weighed against any personal desire to speak more openly with child protection staff about lesbian and gay politics. Riggs (2007) also notes how lesbian or gay foster care applicants are expected to educate child protection staff about lesbian or gay sexualities in order to warrant their own inclusion. A failure to do so was experienced by some participants as risking a poor assessment, and thus the potential of not being approved to provide care.

This theme suggests that the expectation for LGBTQ foster parents to educate child protection staff is subtle but ongoing. In having to educate staff, LGBTQ foster parents not only must have an informed opinion on the lives of LGBTQ people to share with child protection staff, but may also feel compelled to present a particular normative image of LGBTQ people. This may come at the expense of a more inclusive, nuanced, and diverse account of LGBTQ people’s lives.

Directions for Future Research

Despite the relatively consistent findings reported in the research summarized above, there are also some consistent gaps in this work, primarily pertaining to gender, sexuality, race, location (i.e., urban or regional), nationality, and religion. Of the studies reviewed, only one included bisexual participants, yet the authors note that given the sample included 30 gay men, 25 lesbians women, and five bisexual people, analysis of the latter was not undertaken separately, and that “casual inspection of the data suggested no obvious differences” (Downs

& James, 2006, p. 286). A closer and more focused analysis of the data might, however, have identified unique experiences pertaining to bisexual foster parents.

Previous literature is almost entirely silent on queer or transgender foster parents. One policy document produced for the Human Rights Campaign foundation in the U.S. was identified that focused on transgender or non-binary foster and adoptive parents and did include the views of a small number of such parents (Perry, 2017), but these were not analyzed systematically nor was a research method reported in the document. The second edition of Hicks and McDermott's (2018) edited collection on lesbian and gay foster carers also includes one story by a transgender foster parent, Dylan, who noted that he was treated well by his assessing foster care agency, though was treated poorly by a medical professional who was required to provide an assessment. Queer foster parents are not mentioned at all in the previous literature, though as noted above queer foster children have been the focus of recent research on LGBTQ children in care (Gallegos et al., 2011).

Also largely overlooked in previous literature are the topics of race and class. This is of particular concern given the high rates of Black and Indigenous children in care in the three countries focused on in this chapter (Roberts, 2006; Tilbury, 2009). While the research samples reviewed in this chapter almost exclusively included White lesbian or gay foster parent, this does not explain why the whiteness of such participants is not a topic of investigation, nor why the race of their foster children was not explored. As Riggs (2006) has noted, as much as White LGBTQ foster parents may experience discrimination on the basis of their gender or sexuality, they likely also experience considerable privileges on the basis of their race. Hicks and McDermott (1999; 2008) note this specifically in both editions of their collection that documents the experiences of lesbian or gay foster and adoptive parents living in the U.K.. Black foster parents, Barbara and Shazia, who contributed their stories to Hicks and McDermott's collection (2018), noted that racism and homophobia intersected in the

child protection system, shaping the placements they were offered, and the supports they had access to. In the Australian context, Riggs (2012a) reports on a single case study of a non-indigenous gay man caring for an Indigenous child. Riggs notes the ways in which the man actively attended to his race privilege, which included making concessions to birth families with regard to their views on his sexuality (i.e., that he accepted some degree of negative affect directed towards him as a gay man, given his awareness of specific Indigenous cultural values in regards to the community from which the child was removed), concessions he made based on awareness of cultural differences that he might not have otherwise made.

Given histories of forced removal of children, and particularly First Nations and Black children, further attention is required to examine complicity with, or resistance to, colonization and racism on the part of White LGBTQ foster parents. Complicity may occur when White LGBTQ foster parents accept placements for Black or First Nations children without questioning placement principles that, in countries such as Australia, emphasize the importance of children being placed within their own communities (Kee & Tilbury, 1999). Such foster parents are no more inherently outside of racialized systems of power and control than are White heterosexual foster parents. As such, research examining how LGBTQ foster parents, and particularly White LGBTQ foster parents, understand racialized power imbalances and their impact upon child protection systems is important. This is important so as to identify best practice for White LGBTQ foster parents in supporting non-white children placed with them where this is the only placement option available.

Other topics that might provide useful avenues for future research are indicated in some of the previous literature. Both Hicks and McDermott (1999; 2018) and Riggs (2011) suggest that there might be unique benefits to children being raised by LGBTQ foster parents. These include providing same-gender only households for children who have previously experienced abuse from someone of a different gender, or conversely providing opportunities

for positive interactions with someone of a different gender. Research on the potential advantages of placement matching for all children, and here specifically LGBTQ children, would benefit from adopting an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1990), so as to explore how matching based on, for example, gender, sexuality, race and class might serve to promote positive outcomes for both children and parents. Research may also usefully explore in closer detail the views of child protection staff, including perceived advantages and barriers to placement matching for LGBTQ foster parents and children.

In terms of children, it is notable that to date no research has been undertaken with children of LGBTQ foster parents, including LGBTQ children—although some work on LGBTQ youth with LGBTQ adoptive parents has been conducted (see Farr, Vazquez, & Patterson, this volume). This is in some ways surprising, given the now extensive body of research on children of LGBTQ parents more broadly. It is, however, perhaps less surprising if we consider how narratives of “vulnerability” serve to inform research with children in foster care (Riggs, King, Delfabbro, & Augoustinos, 2009), and perhaps particularly children placed with LGBTQ parents. Nonetheless, listening to the views of children placed with LGBTQ foster parents is important, as it offers the possibility to either affirm or extend on the views previously expressed in research with LGBTQ foster parents.

Also in terms of avenues for future research, the findings of Wood (2018) in her research with 25 lesbian or gay foster or adoptive parents suggests that lesbian and gay foster parents might be uniquely attuned to the needs of birth parents, and more willing than other foster parents to work on developing positive relationships with birth parents. This possibility is also suggested by research on lesbian and gay adoptive parents (e.g., Goldberg, Kinkler, Richardson, & Downing, 2011). Given the importance of best connections with birth parents for children in care, this is an area deserving of closer attention in the future.

Given the ongoing demand for foster parents, and the increased recognition that LGBTQ people can meet this demand, future research might usefully focus on how LGBTQ people perceive becoming foster parents—that is, the challenges, barriers, and benefits. Given the known barriers and challenges identified in the research summarized above, it will be important that child protection systems understand what LGBTQ people make of such barriers and challenges, and how they may be addressed in terms of welcoming LGBTQ people as prospective foster parents.

Finally, this chapter has focused on research undertaken in Australia, the U.K., and the U.S.. A likely explanation for the predominance of these locales is the use of formal foster care in each, and the relative visibility of LGBTQ people as potential research participants. It is not the case, however, that formal foster care is absent in other locales, nor that other forms of care (such as informal foster care or kinship care) do not occur (see Brainer, Moore, & Banerjee, this volume). Whilst in certain locales accessing LGBTQ research participants may be somewhat more difficult, it will be important that into the future researchers attempt to address the gap in the literature constituted by the sole focus on Australia, the U.K., and the U.S.. It will also be important that future research seeks to engage other research methodologies in addition to the primarily interview and focus group-based research reviewed in this chapter. This might include using dynamic methodologies such as photo elicitation or walk and talk approaches, and may also involve the use of large-scale quantitative surveys.

Implications for Practice

Beyond empirical research, there are a growing number of publications that focus on specific practice and policy issues pertaining to LGBTQ foster parents. Researchers such as Mallon (2011; 2015) have advocated for the need for a holistic approach to engagement with LGBTQ foster parents, one that begins with how agencies promote their services and

advertise for foster applicants, through to the assessment process, the placement process, and the subsequent support of placements. Other policy and practice recommendations include the need to assess whether agency materials are heteronormative (and cisgenderist), the importance of LGBTQ support groups, and the need to avoid heteronormative (and cisgenderist) assumptions in placement matching (Cosis Brown, Sebba, & Luke, 2015). Finally, it has long been acknowledged that for many LGBTQ people kinship extends beyond birth families, with friends often included as kin (Weston, 1997). Child protection agencies might usefully engage with the ways in which friendships may be unique sources of strength and support for LGBTQ foster parents (Riggs, 2010b).

Beyond these general recommendations for policy and practice, there are specific recommendations that focus on transgender and non-binary foster parents. A recent U.S. policy document (Perry, 2017) outlines the importance of proactive inclusivity by agencies for transgender and non-binary foster parents (such as flags or reading materials); the provision of a space in registration forms to speak about gender history; gender identity or gender expression being discussed in policy documents; the use of affirming language by staff; gender neutral bathrooms available at agencies; agencies advertising in community magazines; agencies having transgender and non-binary staff members; the inclusion of transgender and non-binary people in training materials; and not asking questions beyond the interview schedules used in assessments that would suggest personal curiosity about transgender and non-binary people's lives.

In terms of lesbian and gay foster parents specifically, and drawing from the Wood (2015), it is important to acknowledge that while her participants did not experience overt discrimination, many felt that they were expected to present a very specific image of lesbian and gay families. This would suggest the importance of child protection staff being aware of and welcoming of a diversity of family forms. Wood's participants also highlighted that the

training materials they were exposed to almost exclusively included heterosexual foster parents. The inclusion of a diversity of foster parents in training materials, including racially diverse foster parents, and bisexual, transgender and queer foster parents, is thus an important way of ensuring the inclusion of LGBTQ foster parents.

In conclusion, LGBTQ people bring with them unique experiences and strengths that may be seen as assets in their role as foster parents. Importantly, however, the inclusion of LGBTQ people in the child protection system should not be solely based on what they uniquely have to offer. Rather, the inclusion of LGBTQ people should be premised upon recognition of the heteronormative and cisgenderist views that have historically precluded the inclusion of LGBTQ people as foster parents, undoubtedly to the detriment of both LGBTQ people and children needing foster placements. In this sense, then, LGBTQ people are not merely an untapped resource for child protection systems. Rather, LGBTQ people as foster parents are part of a wider child protection system that should have as its central focus the wellbeing of children, which necessitates a diversity of placement options so as to best meet their needs.

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