



# Contact with Birth Families Three Months and One Year Post-Placement among Adoptive Families with Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Parents

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## Introduction

- The numbers of lesbian and gay adults who have adopted children has doubled in the last decade (Gates, 2011).
- Openness in adoption (i.e., opportunities for contact between birth and adoptive families) has also become more common (Grotevant, in press).
- There is substantial literature about openness in adoption (e.g., Wolfgram, 2008) and a growing literature about adoptive lesbian- and gay-parent families (e.g., Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010; Goldberg & Smith, 2011).
- Little research has examined openness in adoption among lesbian- and gay-parent adoptive families (e.g., Goldberg, Kinkler, Richardson, & Downing, 2011).
- The purpose of this study was to explore contact with birth families among adoptive families with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents at two time points: three months post-placement, and one year post-placement.

## Method

- Participants included 106 adoptive families (33 lesbian couples, 34 gay couples, 39 heterosexual couples). Demographic information is presented in Table 1.
- Children were placed at less than one week old on average, with no differences in child gender or placement age by family type.
- At three months and one year post-placement, participants completed questionnaires and participated in semi-structured interviews about their adoption experiences.
- Variables of interest regarded openness in adoption and contact among birth and adoptive family members. Variables included type of contact, frequency of contact, and contact with whom.

Table 1. Demographic information about adoptive families

Variable	Lesbian mothers	Gay fathers	Heterosexual parents
Age (years)	39.11 (4.91)	36.73 (4.46)	37.76 (5.15)
Race (% White)	87%	87%	91%
Education (% college or graduate degree)	69%	69%	70%
Family income (\$K)	132 (113)	182 (126)	145 (104)

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

Table 2. Arrangements between adoptive couples and birth mothers at three months and one year post-placement

	Lesbian couples	Gay couples	Heterosexual couples	Sample	Chi-square
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	
3 mos post-placement					(2, N = 103)
Met birth mother	22 (67%)	27 (84%)	33 (87%)	82 (79.5%)	5.08, p = .079
1 year post-placement					10.86, p = .210
Shared ID'ing info	4 (12.90%)	6 (18.18%)	9 (23.08%)	19 (18.4%)	
Non-ID'ing contact	10 (32.26%)	5 (15.15%)	8 (20.51%)	23 (22.3%)	
Visit	4 (12.90%)	1 (3.03%)	1 (2.56%)	6 (5.8%)	
Plans for contact	9 (29.03%)	19 (57.58%)	9 (23.08%)	46 (44.7%)	
No contact	4 (12.90%)	2 (6.06%)	3 (7.69%)	9 (8.7%)	

Table 3. Type of contact between birth mothers and adoptive couples at one year post-placement

	Lesbian couples	Gay couples	Heterosexual couples	Sample	ANOVA
Type of contact	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	F (2, 100)
Visit	1.13 (2.85)	2.79 (5.64)	1.72 (3.01)	1.89 (4.03)	1.42
Phone calls	3.02 (7.48)	6.76 (7.93)	3.31 (3.96)	4.33 (6.70)	3.37
Emails	6.97 (18.44)	15.15 (24.41)	11.74 (22.35)	11.40 (21.99)	1.12
Mail	2.68 (2.85)	3.55 (5.52)	2.79 (3.39)	3.00 (4.05)	0.44
Other	0.27 (0.74)	0.25 (0.88)	0.56 (3.21)	0.38 (2.08)	0.26

## Results

- The majority of families had met the birth mother at three months post-placement. Family type was marginally significant; lesbian couples were less likely to have met the birth mother than gay and heterosexual couples (see Table 2).
- At one year post-placement, a substantial minority of families had formal plans for future contact (see Table 2). The remaining families varied in whether they had shared identifying information with birth families, had non-identifying contact (photos, letters, etc.), or had a non-identifying face-to-face visit. Few families had no contact. Chi-square analysis showed no differences by family type in these arrangements.
- Type of contact in the past year between adoptive and birth families also varied. Families reported face-to-face contacts, phone calls, emails, contacts by mail, and other contacts. No contact varied by family type, except phone calls; gay couples reported the most compared with lesbian and heterosexual couples.
- Child gender was unrelated to contact except that the level of contact at three months post-placement was greater if the child was a girl versus a boy,  $t(98) = 2.11, p = .037$ .

## Discussion

- This study is among the first to explore openness in adoption among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive parent families.
- A majority had ongoing contact or plans for contact with birth families. Most had met the birth mother, and there were a variety of ways adoptive and birth families had experienced contact in the last year.
- There were few differences by family type, but future research should continue exploring these dynamics as children grow older.
- Given growing trends toward openness in adoption as well as adoption by lesbian and gay parents, these results are informative for policy and practice – furthering our understanding of openness dynamics among diverse adoptive families.

## References

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