

“We are going to change society into a better society and there’s nothing you can do about it”. An interview on the experience of same-sex parenting.

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LGBT people worldwide face various forms of discrimination, and in many countries, diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are still criminalized. Adopting a rights-based approach, voting for inclusive policies and legislation is essential to safeguard the rights of LGBT individuals and their families, protecting them from discrimination and its severe impact on mental health. While legislation and policies are crucial for change, they should be complemented by relevant training and community awareness programs that promote inclusion and human rights for everyone.

In 2024 Greece became the first Orthodox country to vote for marriage equality and finally acknowledging the rights of children growing up with same-sex parents. The impact in wellbeing and mental health of LGBTIQ families is significant bringing visibility and making the lives of such families easier. Luca Tancredi Barone, high school teacher, journalist and Communications Director of [GAEM](#), living in Barcelona and member of FLG (Catalan Association of LGBT families), was interviewed providing his own insight into how it was for a family with two foster dads in Spain. The interview took place as part of a training programme for the Attica Region Social Welfare Center (KKPPA) for the social workers, relating to potential same-sex foster parents that we had coordinated with Irini Koutela, mental health counsellor and had collaborated with the [Network of European LGBTIQ Families Associations](#) and [Rainbow Families Greece](#). In a narrative style we have selected extracts from that interview and further provide a short reference to recent evidence on the development of children growing up with same-sex parents. The interview took place on 31.03.2021.

On becoming foster dads.

“As a gay couple, both identifying as males, deciding to set up family is something that does not happen to you. It’s something you have to think about, you have to decide, you have to assess whether you feel prepared for that or not, and then try to see the different ways you can set up a family.

We went through the different options and for a number of reasons we decided that what could work for us would be to become foster parents. We both agreed that this suited us the most and after 10 years of being foster dads, we are not only convinced that it was the right choice, but we are also advocating for more families to become foster families. It’s a fulfilling experience, it’s challenging sometimes but, hey, are there parenthoods that are not challenging?”

On how LGBT families are treated.

“What happens really depends on people like you [the professionals working in the system]. There’s no reason as to why a same-sex family is any different than any other family. We can be as good or as bad as parents as any other type of parent. In fact, I have the luck to live in a country where same-sex marriage was introduced in 2005: we are talking about many years ago. And now experience teaches us that we are as good a family as any other family”.

“Our personal experience was that we were not treated differently than any other family. We were asked the same questions, and I have to say we were even looked at with a special, a caring eye from the administration and from the social workers in the system because I think people are aware that same-sex parents have to really think a lot before becoming parents. Gay couples have given things a lot of thought before

starting the process. In a way, I think that people expect us to be even more ready than other families to have children. I often use this anecdote that is very telling. Over here in Barcelona when I tell people: “We are two foster dads”, usually people will respond “Oh! What does fostering mean exactly?”. Whereas, if I say the same sentence in Italy, my native country, people will look at you and say “What do you mean ‘two dads?’”. This shows where people focus their attention. Italy is a more conservative country, like Greece probably, and a number of people are still puzzled by the idea of two dads having a normal family and a normal life as any other family, and here in Spain people are intrigued by fostering and they want to know more about that. They typically want to know the difference between adoption and fostering.

I would say that the way that fostering for LGBT families goes really depends a lot on you [the professionals working in the system] and not on the family itself. Because it’s the way you look at them. The way you consider them a good family or not. It depends on you and your prejudices. Internal prejudices even that you may not be aware of. You might have the thinking “Oh! Maybe they will not be as good as other families”, or even “they are going to have it harder”, or “the child is going to reject it” but the experience here in Spain teaches us that this is not the case.

As far as other institutions, schools, doctors, our experience is that people have never showed any problem with us being two dads. Sometimes there’s still some institutional heteronormative and “machist” approach or look that need to be overcome. We still have a lot to fight. You still can find forms in school that have room for mother, room for father, forgetting that many children at school might not have a dad or a mum, not because their parents are LGBT: they might have lost a parent or they might be a single parent family, or living with grandpas and grandmas, or they might have foster parents and not have “mum” and “dad” but carer 1 and carer 2, which should be the normal way to call the people that take care of the children. We are most and foremost carers, and the main difference with non-foster families is that we, foster families, from day one are more focused on the idea that our children are not really ‘ours’, they do not belong to us in the traditional sense. But no child is ever anybody’s: even biological children are not properties of their parents but they belong to themselves”.

On visibility.

“The president of our association of LGBT families always says: once you become family, once you become dads or moms, you have to come out of your closet. You have no choice. You have to be out because you have to take your child to school and you have to meet all the other families, and you have to say out and loud “yes, we are here”, “yes, we need a pediatrician like any other family”, “yes, we need to be members of the parents’ association in school like any other family”. So, becoming a family forces you to become an activist whether you want it or not, because you’re out and you’re visible. But by doing this you’re making society better, because LGBT families whether we want it or not, we are a motor of social change. There’s nothing we can do about it. We are going to change the society into a better society just because we exist and we cannot just pretend we are not there, we cannot hide anymore, because we owe it to our children. As for any other parent, our children are the most important thing for us. Any parent knows that their children is the number one reason why they are devoting most of their energy”.

On evidence about wellbeing and differences in childhood- development in families of children with same-sex parents.

A study in Netherlands conducted Mazrekaj, Fischer and Bos (2022) looked at the well-being of children that grow up in families with same-sex parents looking into behavioral development and potential issues related to emotion, conduct and other dimensions. The study showed that there are no differences for children growing up with same-sex parents when compared to two-parent families of different sex. The study took into consideration education and socioeconomic status making sure that these are controlled for. Discussing this study, it is important to see that although LGBT people are often experiencing minority stress due to discrimination in society, this is not translated into worse outcomes for the mental health of the chil-

dren. The authors of this study suggest that same-sex parents are helping their children become resilient towards discrimination and heterosexism, facilitating less rigid gender roles, while they have developed strong support networks that are providing essential support to their families. It is also important to note that the legal framework is considered an important buffer for the mental health of the parents and their children. In other words, if as societies we prioritize the wellbeing of the children in various family types, it's important to focus on providing a solid legal framework, promoting inclusive institutions and accessible resources for all. Lastly, further research (Mazrekaj, De Witte & Cabus, 2020) documents better school outcomes for children growing up with same-sex parents which may be attributed to parental planning and motivation. In short, the more time the parents dedicate and invest in parenthood the better the later outcomes for the children.

On the interviewer experience.

As Luca suggested in the interview, in many cases it's often up to mental health professionals like myself, who are often gatekeeping how people from different groups are treated, if they are pathologized or not and what kind of services they receive. At the time of the interview though, I was listening with an additional lived experience perspective, identifying as queer myself. That has been a long year process for me, with an effort to find the proper words to first acknowledge it in myself and then express it where it felt safer. Several years later, I realized more and more the importance of a nurturing environment. Interviewing Luca inspired me to believe that society is changing, and there's no stopping that change. Mattering, feeling valued and seen by others, according to Flett (2021), is significant for the development of self and for coping with life challenges and growing. We learn more about ourselves through connecting with others, trusting ourselves in others and feeling accepted, learning new words, and expressing our own truth. That's how we grow. Growth needs interaction; growth needs nurturing, and growth needs spoken language. Becoming more nurturing as a society helps families better foster development and that can happen only through safeguarding human rights and equality for all.

References

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