



WASHINGTON SQUARE NEWS

Navigating gay adoption

Panel looks at hurdles and struggles for LGBT couples

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David Strah wears blue and green Nikes. He's the father of a 10-year-old boy and a 7-year-old girl. He lives in Chelsea - with his long-time boyfriend.

"I thought that the whole world was either gay people or straight people. When we [he and his partner] had children, it became people with children and people without children," Strah said.

Strah, a Gallatin graduate and author of the book "Gay Dads: A Celebration of Fatherhood," sought a domestic adoption for his two children. He considers himself lucky because he, unlike many parents who seek to adopt, had to decide whether he wished to adopt a boy within 24 hours of finalizing the petition.

He said yes.

But when his son was born, Strah and his partner faced an issue familiar to many gay people who wish to adopt. The doctors at the hospital would not recognize Strah as the parent of his newborn. Strah and his partner are just one of over 250,000 same sex couples to adopt children.

Last Thursday, NYU's Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Student Services held a workshop about queer adoption where 15 people and three panelists discussed the intricacies of adoption in the LGBT community. Julia Hall, Outspoken Peer Educator at Large and a student in the Silver School of Social Work, was inspired to plan the workshop after her internship at Sanctuary for Families, where she works in the clinical and legal department. It was there that she gained an interest in LGBT adoption.

In the two months she spent planning the event, Hall contacted Terry Boggis, director of Center Kids at the LGBT Center, who put her in contact with Strah and Carol Buell, a lawyer who dedicates one-third of her case load to alternative family cases. To round off the panel, Boggis was invited to speak as well. All three panelists are gay, and all three have adopted children.

Buell assures that the families she represents "are accepted and loved by the court system" but admits "it's taken a while to get here."

But there are still some areas in which the courts still hinder the LGBT community, according to Buell. She notes that it is a felony in the New York state to aid surrogacy arrangements.

"It has become a feminist issue," Buell said. "There are concerns about women being used as vessels, like the 'The Handmaid's Tale,' " referring to Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel about a dystopian society in which the role of certain women is simply to give birth.

The panelists recommended Family Focus in Queens for would-be parents inquiring about adoption. The organization, now in its 20th year of operation, just last year began recognizing LGBT adoptions. Many birth certificates also continue a hetero-normative tradition, according to

the panelists. Some states only print certificates that read "mother/father," not "mother/mother" or "father/father." However, some states do print them as "parent/parent" according to Strah.

But in regard to birth certificates, Buell said "things gets complicated with transgender parents."

Also discussed within the topic of domestic adoption was the homelessness problem among LGBT youths. According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, citing results from the New York City Council, nearly one-third of all homeless youths are LGBT. Hall noted the Ali Forney Center for homeless LGBT in Chelsea as a resource.

While New York City is a very open place to the LGBT community, Boggis says there are still hurdles.

International adoption is particularly hard for queer individuals. The Hague Convention, an agreement signed by the United States on April 1, 2008, bans adoption of international children by gay men and women.

"[People] find it threatening, a threat to ideology, to what an American family should be," CUNY graduate student and event attendee Lynn Horridge said. "Homophobia is a huge psychological underpinning."