

Family ideology has been of concern to families themselves, policymakers, and researchers (McCarthy, Doolittle, Sclater, 2012) and globally families have been defined depending on their cultural beliefs (Georgas, 2003). This assignment will therefore introduce the westernised ideology of the traditional nuclear family (Murdock, 1949), considering the functionalist perspective and in contrary the feminist perspective (McCarthy and Edwards, 2011) of the traditional nuclear family, that has altered family dynamics. The assignment will then progress to critically discuss three family constructs, where two case studies will be provided for each construct, that will demonstrate how family constructs have diversified from the traditional nuclear family ideology. The focus will be located at the role of the mother within the family constructs, with reference to the diverse difficulties which are encountered which can negatively affect one's wellbeing.

It is argued that the concern of family understanding arose from the 19th century, in the work of Engle in 1884, due to realisation that private property was valuable and that there were concerns of inheritance, and therefore the need for reassurance of offspring became apparent, and thus the ideology of a monogamous family arose (White, Martin and Adamson, 2019). According to Murdock (1949) a family was recognised to be made up of a social group of individuals that have engaged in socially acceptable sexual relationships within marriage, that took place between an individual male and female, who have reproduced and therefore the family also comprises their biological dependent children, and that they all reside together, this an ideology of family was often closely associated with religious beliefs and practices (Marciano, 1987). This family construct is therefore structured through law, by marriage, and by blood, and the reproduction of children (Sanner, Ganong and Coleman, 2020).

This family construct would be considered as the traditional nuclear family (McKie and Callan, 2012). This ideology of family construct would have been considered to perform functions, such as sexual satisfaction within heterosexual relations that will allow for the reproduction of future generations, to socialise the younger generation, and as a unit work together to provide familial needs of shelter and food (Murdock, 1949). Parsons (1952) asserts that from a functionalist's perspective the male, father, would be the breadwinner and the female, mother, would be the housewife maintaining the home and raising the children, this would be deemed as the conjugal roles, and based upon the division of gender.

Both Murdock (1949) and Parsons (1955) ideology draws upon the theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1987), where this theory is portrayed as a hierarchy, where levels are needed to be met to enable an individual to progress and achieve self-actualization. The two lower levels of Maslow's theory believes that basic needs are required to be met initially, which include fulfilling the need for food and water, and having a place to rest that is safe and secure, thus being a home (Maslow, 1987). Thus, it can be considered that the male within the family works to financially support the family in being able to provide a home and food and whereas the mother provides social capital (Edwards, Franklin and Holland, 2003) to provide the safety and also the subsequent level of the hierarchy, love and belonging (Maslow, 1987), allows for the support to her husband and nurturing of children to transpire.

However, Zaretsky (1976) considers this family as a utopian system, that illustrates a false interpretation of the traditional nuclear family. Historically there was, as Giddens and Sutton (2017 a, p. 121) quote a 'dark side' to the traditional nuclear family, where emotional, physical, and intimate abuse occurred between the mother and father, whilst there was also abuse toward the children. This from a feminist perspective would be perceived as a form of gender oppression, where there would be an inequality of power, that would be considered as to originate from a conflict theorists' perspective (McCarthy and Edwards, 2011), and in the era of late 19th century and early 20th century society was patriarchal (Dillion, 2010).

Family constructs have altered from the traditional nuclear family (David, 1999), one of the main explanations emanate from the feminist movements, that challenged the functionalist perspective of family, from the 18th century, that was divided in three waves (Giddens and Sutton, 2017 b). The first wave consisted of activism for the right for women to vote, due to the ideology that women had the aspiration to be equal to the men in society (Dyer, 2016).

The second wave, occurred post World War II during which women had to undertake the work of the men, thus resulted in the need to challenge the stereotypical perceptions that women had to be the housewife (Browne, 1998) and therefore activism focused upon the opportunity to gain employment rights and, in addition, for equal pay and for gender issues to be resolved, such as sexuality and reproductive rights (Valk, 2008).

The third wave is considered to have arisen during the 1990s as a result of the failure of the second wave (Mann and Huffman, 2005), however it is also considered as the movement that challenged for full and equal opportunities in all manners of life (Cook, 2011), particularly for women and intersectionality (Evans, 2015). It was believed that women should be equal to men, whilst allowing for diversity to prevail, whilst eradicating discrimination (Kroløkke and Sørensen, 2006).

As already stated above, the feminist movement challenged for equality and opportunity to advance within society, this can be considered as a method to discover a woman's self-identity and self-worth (Schaefer, 2011). This is considered to be a concept known as politics of recognition (Taylor, 1992), where there have been challenges to transform societal and political perspectives to allow for individuals to be able to self-identify without encountering discrimination and promote equality and social justice.

With women having rights and liberation, it has allowed for family constructs to diversify (Chambers *et al.*, 2009), and as a result it has become more difficult to define a family, with Naldini (2017) taking the stances that each individual, globally, will perceive family to mean something different depending on their individual upbringing. Families are now considered as 'lone and step parenting, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) families and living apart together (LAT) couples' (May and Dawson, 2018, p. 867-868), however the United Nations defines a family as:

...in the narrow sense as two or more persons who live in the same household and who are related as marital, registered or consensual union (that is, cohabiting) partners of either opposite or same sex, or as parent and child. Thus a family comprises a couple without children, or a couple with one or more children, or a lone parent with one or more children...

(United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2015, p. 165).

Although family constructs have diversified, the nuclear family remains to be the desired family construct within westernised cultures (Allen *et al.*, 2011). In 2019, according to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) (2019) there was considered to be 19.2 million families

within the United Kingdom. Therefore, the assignment will now focus upon 3 family constructs that will demonstrate the diverse family constructs that now exists in contemporary society and the challenges they encounter.

Appendix 1 and 2 – Lone parent family construct.

Appendix 1 and appendix 2 both demonstrate lone parent families. Lone parent families are defined as, most commonly, a mother that has sole responsibility to raise her child or children, however, nowadays, it can also be the sole responsibility of the father to raise the children (Muncie and Sapsford, 1999). According to the ONS (2019) lone parent families made up 14.9% of UK families, which equates to 2.9 million lone parent families, which has increased by 14.5% since 1999 (ONS, 2019).

Historically children were born out of wedlock, however it was often under the presumption that marriage would occur, however often children were also born to lone mothers, both acts were perceived to be shameful and unacceptable acts and termed as illegitimacy (Muir, 2018). These illegitimate children were either kept within family and raised as siblings, or families would send the children away as to not bring shame against their families, or children from lower class families would be adopted to middle class married couples (Thane and Evans, 2012). Although, it was acceptable for a woman to become a lone parent due to bereavement (Lomas, 1994), although it is argued that she would not remain a lone parent, as she would remarry (refs), thus creating a further family construct, that is coined as the blended family (Poppen and White, 1984).

There are numerous justifications as to why lone parents exist and how these have differed from a historical perspective to contemporary society (Bernardi, Mortelmans and Larenza, 2018). In contemporary society, the justifications for being lone parents are due to separation, divorce, bereavement, and although not a novel concept, the concept of becoming a lone parent by choice, has lately become a focal point to researchers, although research remains limited (Van Gasse and Mortelmans, 2020), Stack and Meredith (2018) also state that lone parenthood arises from unplanned pregnancies.

Lone parenthood through choice is comparatively different to the lone parenthood that was initially described above. It is considered that lone parenthood by choice is as a result of the ideology of women realising that their biological reproductive time is about to run out, and that a rash decision to have a child (Van Gasse and Mortelmans, 2020). In order to have this family, a woman must find a suitable method to procreate (Van Gasse and Mortelmans, 2020), Stack and Meredith (2018) comment that one method is by insemination from a donor, via fertility clinics (Zadeh, Freeman and Golombok., 2013), whilst Pasch and Holley (2015) assert that adoption is a possible method to create a lone parent family, whereas other women may seek out a man and become pregnant by chance (Hertz, 2006).

Lone parenthood has and continues to experience much criticism and stigmatization (Crocker, Major and Steele, 2018). According to Garner and Paterson (2014) and Zartler (2014) negative perceptions of lone parents exist within society, such as lone parents are young and unemployed with more than one child, this concept, in correlation to research by Stack and Meredith (2018) demonstrates that there is high risk of financial difficulty within lone parent families, that may negatively impact on the psychological wellbeing of lone parents. However, Chambaz (2001) argues that more lone parent mothers are employed in comparison to mothers that are married or cohabiting. Nevertheless, Lindell (2008) argues that even when lone parent mothers are employed, in comparison to other family constructs, they are highly likely to experience fuel poverty.

Within appendix 1 and 2, mothers have sole responsibility with the financial and nurturing burden, however Melli (1986) argues that the father has a responsibility in the upbringing of the child or children. Yet this is not always the circumstance as exemplified in appendix 1 and 2, where no fathers were involved in the children's upbringing or providing financial support. Even when legislation, such as the *Child Support Act 1991*, that required an accountable absent parents' obligation to pay support in respect of a child or children living with the parent with sole responsibility (Child Support Agency, 2008). Following failures to deliver this provision, reforms were undertaken, and in 2012 the Child Maintenance Service was established (Department for Work & Pensions, 2017), however this provision is only applicable subject to meeting criteria (Gov.uk, No Date a; Gov.uk, No Date b).

In order to financial support the family, a mother has to secure suitable employment (REFS), however this can be challenging to arrange around childcare (Youngblut *et al.*, 2000), and most often they are in lower paid employment (Jackson *et al.*, 2000). Burden (1986) argues that although employment is important as a source of financial support the mother is also burdened with the understanding that they may not participate enough with their children. It is also evident in research that the mother's needs are often disregarded as their responsibilities and obligations towards supporting the family is essential (Burden, 1986).

Appendix 3 and 4 – Sandwich generation family construct.

Appendix 3 and appendix 4 both demonstrate families that are coined as the sandwich-generation family. A sandwich-generation family is defined as 'adult children of the elderly, who are "sandwiched" between their aging parents and their own maturing children' (Miller, 1981, p. 419).

This definition has similarities to the vertically extended traditional families that existed (Kumagai, 2019), where a family resided in the same household, which comprised of a grandparent, parent, and child, with the grandparents being in authority, undertaking the caring and nurturing role of the children. This ideology is seen within appendix 4, where Rachel is identified as being the carer, however there are differences from the vertically extended traditional families. These differences being that Rachel had previously been in employment, but now retired, however she has had to take on the role of caring within her family, however she does not reside in the same household as the rest of the family (Ipsos Mori, 2013). Her caring role extended to her elderly mother-in-law, which moved closer to enable this to occur, as Rachel also had to care for her grandchildren, to allow her daughter to work (Ipsos Mori, 2013). With Rose, in appendix 3, having to care for several members of her family, where her father lives separately from the rest of the family. It is noted that Rose no longer undertakes employment, due to the lack of time (Ipsos Mori, 2013)

This type of informal care was deemed necessary as a whole for the family to alleviate the financial burden the cost of caring was generating (Ipsos Mori, 2013). It is noted by Metzelthin *et al.* (2017) that it is most commonly a family member who undertakes the caring role for the

elderly within the family, however, acknowledgment of the burden on the carer's wellbeing is noted. The impact is described by Bevans and Sternberg (2012) as being emotionally, physically, and financially difficult, more so when there is significant long-term care required, which can result in the carer becoming ill themselves. It is considered by Maresova *et al.* (2020) that informal caregivers are unable to maintain a job whilst undertaking fulltime caring responsibilities, leaving them financial insecure.

Appendix 5 and 6 – Same-sex family constructs.

Appendix 5 and appendix 6 both demonstrate same-sex families, in these case studies they both demonstrate the difference methods of becoming a family, that highlights that this family construct can be diverse, and that each same-sex family will vary. Same-sex families are concerned with the sexual or romantic attraction between an individual and a person of the same sex, also known as homosexuality (Giddens and Sutton, 2017) which include either biological children or adopted children (Goldberg, 2010).

Historically, homosexuality was perceived to be a mental illness (Carr and Spandler, 2019) and socially deviant and morally wrong (Brooke, 1993). However, attitudes towards homosexuality have become more acceptable (Malmquist, Anderson and Jalomonsson, 2020, although there remains stigmatization, victimisation, and harassment (Rosen, 2019). However, since 2010, the United Kingdom government legislated the *Equality Act 2010*, which sought to protect nine characteristics by eradicating unfair treatment and promote equality (Hepple, 2010), one of the characteristics is sexual orientation (Hill, 2020). In today's society same-sex families are constructed by a variety of methods, traditionally same-sex families were as a result of a mother being in a prior heterosexual relationship, which had biological children, where the mother was concealing her true sexuality and eventually "came out" and has since coupled up with a woman and reconstructed their family construct (Crouch *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, with the desire to have children it has become common for a woman, in a homosexual relationship, to carry a biological child with the use of a donor or by artificial insemination (Bos, van Balen and van den Boom, 2003), whilst it is also possible to adopt a child or children (Appell, 2001; Hicks and McDermott, 2018) of which both these methods are demonstrated within appendix 5 and 6.

When a homosexual couple decide they want to have children through the use of a donor or by artificial insemination, a decision must be made to who will become the biological mother (Malmquist, 2015; Hayman and Wilkes, 2017), with it be argued by Malmquist (2015) that this decision would be crucial from many aspects. However, this can put considerable strain on the other mother (Aizley, 2006; Amodeo *et al.*, 2018), as they feel excluded from the pregnancy process, during the post-natal stage, and again during the child's upbringing (Raes *et al.*, 2015), as the child would display a preference to the biological mother, which is justified by Morse (2013) that a bond between the biological mother and child is stronger than then bond between child and the other mother, which then negatively affects the other mother's wellbeing as her desire to be a contributing mother becomes suppressed (McKelvey, 2013).

However, this tension is not seen within the two appendices for this family construct. Appendix 6, however, demonstrates how the mothers have a unified relationship, which also includes contact with the biological father, which does not often occur, particularly when utilising artificial doner (Haines and Weiner, 2000). In comparison, within Appendix 6, the children have not been adopted by the nonbirth mothers, this is due to then lack of legislative powers, which was available in Appendix 5 scenario. Changes in adoption rights occurred in 2005 following the *Adoption and Children Act 2002* (Brown and Cocker, 2008), this legislation allowed the right to adoption by unmarried partners, which included same-sex partnerships. However, with ongoing discrimination, the *Equality Act 2006* was introduced to prevent discrimination, which was later superseded by the *Equality Act 2010* (Hudson-Sharp and Metcalf, 2016). Within Appendix 6, the mother identified as Natalie, is confident that should there be a loss of a mother, then there would be family disputed over the children, however, Ciano-Boyce and Shelly-Sireci (2002) argue that legal obligations should be considered, as the non-birth mother would be omitted from having parental rights.

Conclusively, it is evident from the discourse, that although the traditional nuclear family construct is favourable, particularly to ensure a stable society is maintained, there hs been many feminist movements to challenge for equal rights and opportunities (Allen *et al.*, 2011). It is the outcomes from these movements that has allowed for family constructs to diversify (Thompson and Walker, 1995), even though they have their diverse difficulties, these

Module Code: SJSI6022

Student number: 2302532

Assessment No: 2

constructs explored here are only a minority of the vast family constructs that now exist in contemporary society (Pearce *et al.*, 2018).

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Module Code: SJSI6022

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Appendices.

Appendix 1.

Bradford

The family

- Julie is a single mother of four boys and two girls: Tom, Ricky, Leo, Charley. Kia and Donna
- Sonia is the children's aunt.

The family had been known to a number of services for many years. Julie was periodically absent from the family home and was involved in criminal behaviour and suspected prostitution to fund her heroin habit.

Sonia was in effect the primary carer of the four boys and two girls. The eldest child, Tom, was involved with the youth offending team due to his criminal behaviour.

None of the children were attending school on a regular basis, and three of the boys were permanently excluded and supposed to be attending alternative provision. The youngest child was attending nursery only 3 per cent of the time and was behind with immunisations.

There were concerns about general neglect of the children.

The family was living on an estate earmarked for demolition, but housing providers experienced difficulty rehousing the family due to high levels of antisocial and criminal behaviour, including convictions for robbery, shoplifting, criminal damage, rowdy behaviour, begging, and substance misuse.

The local community had had enough of problems caused by the family, and some local people had taken matters into their own hands, trying to push the family out of the area by smashing windows in the property.

Activity with the family

Julie and Sonia were very mistrustful of agency involvement and were worried that the intervention of the local authority would lead to the children being taken into care.

Serious consideration was given to removal into care of the younger children. It was agreed with the family that this would be deferred on the condition that they engaged with a key worker and worked intensively on a number of agreed actions to improve the situation.

The offer of a new social housing tenancy was made conditional on the family's engagement with services. Failure to do so would result in them being evicted from their current home and classed as intentionally homeless.

The family was given a short-term tenancy, and compliance with the family intervention plan was written into the tenancy requirements. Once the family moved into their new home, the key worker helped them to get the home in decent order. The family responded well to their new surroundings, and everyone started to take pride in the home.

Julie was referred to and stuck with a local drugs support project and went on to complete an educational course in basic literacy. She stopped her criminal behaviour and the number of unsuitable visitors to the family home decreased as a direct result.

Sonia worked with the Family Links Nurturing Programme run by the intervention project to improve parenting and relationship skills, and the key worker also worked intensively with her on budgeting, debt advice and implementing routines for the children.

The children's school attendance improved to over 90 per cent and Sonia began to take a more active role and attended parents' evenings.

Tom completed his youth offending team order successfully, although he was still involved with anti-social behaviour and eventually left the household to live in another city with his father. His departure had a positive impact upon his brothers as they were no longer involved in anti-social behaviour themselves.

The key worker worked intensively with the family and other agencies for a full year. The exit strategy included stepping down the level of intensive intervention, and the housing association has taken on lead agency role to monitor the family. The tenancy was made permanent, secure, and fully assured, providing long-term stability for the family.

(Communities and Local Government, No Date).

Appendix 2

Life as a Single Parent: Case Study.

Jess Conroy has twin boys aged 8 and is bringing them up alone as a single parent. Their father has had nothing to do with their upbringing since they were three years old and never sees his sons. “It used to break my heart that the boys don’t see their dad but now we’ve got used to it and we are a little unit.”

Supporting the family

Their father does not pay child maintenance and Jess has never chased him up about it. Instead, she went back to work following her divorce and works as a teaching assistant in a local secondary school. “It was tough going out to work when the boys were only three, but it was important to me that I was able to support them.” Fortunately, Jess’ mother lives nearby and she was able to look after the boys several days a week. The other two days they went to a local nursery.

“I want my boys to see my example as someone who is independent. I want them to grow up feeling that they can take on responsibilities too. I don’t want them to be like their father.”

Juggling responsibilities

Even now the boys are at school it is still difficult for Jess to juggle her responsibilities. She drives to work and drops the boys off at their primary before continuing to her secondary school. “It is the school the boys will go to when they are older, so that should make things a little easier.” Mornings are always a rush and neither of her sons are ever ready on time.

Activities

Jess feels it is important for her boys to take part in social activities and both play for the local under-9s football team. “We turn out every Wednesday night for training and then there are matches most Saturdays.” Jess stays to watch training and tries to offer all the encouragement that a father would. “Sometimes my father comes with us. Their grandfather is the biggest male

role model in their lives, and I do feel it is important for them to spend time with a man, seeing as they don't have a father."

Support

It can be quite a responsibility to be the sole breadwinner and to have to offer all the practical and emotional support that the boys need. Jess feels lucky that she can turn to her own parents for support and she has a close relationship with both of them. Now that the boys are at school her mother no longer needs to babysit during the day but regularly offers to do so in the evenings to allow Jess some time to herself. "It is nice to occasionally go out with friends or work colleagues and to get a chance to let my hair down." Jess is also doing a maths A-level at college as she wants to improve her qualifications and perhaps one day train as a teacher.

"I haven't been on a date since I got divorced. Friends tease me but it is simply not on my agenda. My priority is my boys, and I do not feel ready for any kind of complication. I feel that we work well as a team just as we are."

(Recently Separated, 2017).

Appendix 3

Rose's story: working long hours as a sandwich carer.

Rose* lives in Northern Ireland and is a full-time carer. She splits her time between caring for her husband, father, brother, and four children who all live at home. Her responsibilities range from cleaning, cooking, and ironing, to driving family members to appointments and helping them with paperwork. She works seven days a week and struggles to find time for herself.

“They [people without caring responsibilities] might go off to an office or a place of work to do their work, but I go to my dad's house, where my father has arthritis in his shoulders, and it's left to me to look after my brother, who's a big, tall man, and I, I can safely tell you I worked in a factory, and I'm working far harder now than I ever did in a shirt factory.”

(Ipsos Mori, 2013).

Appendix 4

Rachel's story: driving down the cost of childcare Rachel* retired a few years ago from her job as a special educational needs worker in a school. Whilst she did not specifically retire in order to provide care, the timing worked out well for the whole extended family, as it meant she was able to increase the amount of support she could give her elderly mother-in-law (whom they recently had persuaded to move to be closer to them) and meant she could look after her grandchildren after her daughter had finished her maternity leave.

Had she not been able to do so, her daughter and son-in-law would have had to put almost all of the daughter's salary towards the cost of childcare. Rachel also felt that the amount of care her mother-in-law was starting to need was going to wipe out almost all of her pension, another situation that she could not in good conscience allow to happen. Since retiring, Rachel has had a busy schedule, popping over to see her mother-in-law every morning with a newspaper and some shopping, and spending three days a week driving down to London to look after the grandkids. Rachel is proud that she is able to indirectly support her children and mother-in-law financially by saving them childcare costs.

(Ipsos Mori, 2013).

Appendix 5

Sarah and Louise tell us their adoption story.

We tried fertility treatment for quite a long time and that was unsuccessful, so we were exploring our options and looked at adoption. We went to a coffee morning with Families for Children. There were only five couples sitting around a table, it was very informal. They had an adopter who came along and spoke so nicely about her little girl. It made it feel much more real and possible.

The reality is that the type of children who are up for adoption have complex backgrounds and needs but Families for Children put more of a positive twist on it. While the children are likely to have challenging backgrounds, they are also little kids who need a family.

Fertility treatment largely meant me going off and having stuff done to me. The adoption process was much more even, we were in it together. We both had to do everything. The adoption process was more intrusive in many other ways, but in ways that made sense.

We found the process interesting. Before embarking on our journey, we had certain preconceptions I suppose. We went in thinking that birth families were awful people, that they have mistreated these children, that is why they have been taken away and they should not have any rights to have any information or whatever. We thought that we would take this child, forget their past and make a fresh start. We changed some of our points of view along the way. We are really open with our daughter about her family and we think that is important and we encourage conversations about what has happened before. We are still massively in touch with her foster carers and I think that is really important for her.

You know stage one of the process is however long, and you know stage two is going to be a certain length but the next bit, finding your child, you just don't know. We met people who did not have their child for three years until after their approval. But we were also on the training course with someone who had their children lined up before they went to their final panel, so it is a real unknown, which is really hard.

When we were approved it was like right, "where's my child now?" Then it became quite personal because we applied for lots of children and most of the time, we did not hear anything back or we were turned down. You can take that quite personally.

We went to a video evening which felt very weird, but that is where we found our daughter. We left with a leaflet about her and about another little girl and I knew, if anyone was going to let me have her, she is the one I wanted. A couple of weeks later they came back and said they were interested in us. We met the social workers and then it went from there.

It took six months to get her home and we could not tell anyone which was very difficult. But there were some great moments too, like getting the house ready, making our introduction book, buying all the first things and it becoming a reality. And then of course meeting her.

We could not go to panel until we had had a two-week cooling off period after meeting the medical advisor. We found out a lot of stuff that we had not known and that was really difficult. But at that point we already considered her our daughter.

She finally arrived with us on 6th July. We got up one morning and her foster carers had sent through a little video saying, "see you later". Just waking up and thinking we are going to meet our daughter today was the weirdest thing.

I was really, really worried about introductions because we had spent all that time falling in love with her, but we had not met her. You do not do internet dating and commit to marriage before you have met the person do you? I was worried I would not like her smell and that period of time is so fake how do you know what you are feeling are real feelings. We took lots of video and photos and looked at them in the evening to see how it was all sitting. Because at that point if you decide it is not a goer it is a big deal.

I was all prepared for adoption, but I was not prepared for parenthood at all. It came as a massive shock. Those first few weeks were so odd. She was grieving and I suddenly had someone who followed me everywhere and did not stop talking at me. Those first few weeks were like, “oh my goodness!” But lovely as well.

To be an adopter you need to be honest with yourselves, your social worker, and your child. You need stamina.

Families for children have just been amazing. They did not try and force us into anything, but they were not scared to tell us if they thought we were taking the wrong route. It was not just about allocating families to children or vice versa it was about getting the right families for the right children.

(Families for Children, No Date).

Appendix 6

Lesbian parent: the case studies - These same-sex couples have successfully become parents.



CASE STUDY: Natalie Drew and Ashling Philips:

“We just had to find a donor”

Natalie Drew, 35, is an English teacher in Sutton Coldfield. She has two children, Gianna, 5, and Kai, 2, with her partner, Ashling Phillips. The children’s biological father, Ben, 31, has regular contact. She says: “Ashling and I have known each other for 16 years and it developed into a relationship about seven years ago. We had our civil partnership in 2006. We wanted to show our commitment to one another and we’d always wanted that big white wedding. I had said that when I was 30 I wanted to have children, so we knew that it was just a matter of finding a donor.

“We looked on a website, Man Not Included [since closed down]. Once we had chosen Ben, our donor, we asked to contact him, which was quite unusual. We met him a few times to see

if he was the sort of man we were looking for and agreed that we would send him updates — photos and the odd e-mail — on how the baby was doing. But then, when I had Gia, Ben was inquisitive about her and we decided to have contact. We just felt that it would be better if she knew where she came from. Once Ben met her he fell in love with her. He lives in London and we live in the West Midlands, so he visits only occasionally. As soon as we decided to try for the next baby Ben said that he would donate again and Ash got pregnant with Kai.

“When Gia was born the law hadn’t changed so we couldn’t put Ashling on the birth certificate, and we just missed out on the law change when we had Kai. But neither of us has felt the need to adopt — it’s a long-winded process and I’m wary of opening ourselves up to social workers. Our families are very supportive and there would never be an issue about where the children should go if one of us were to die.

“We last saw Ben about a month ago. He’s straight — he says he’s got to start focusing on having his own family, but he hasn’t got round to it yet. We’re starting to plan for the next baby after Christmas — I’ll be the birth mother again this time — and he’s said if we need him, he’s there.”

(The Times, 2010).