

ADOPTION LETTER TO EDITOR

by

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Writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine can be an important means of challenging heterosexism. This might be done to get a pro-gay viewpoint expressed, or to counter a previously published homophobic article or letter. Many people are not aware of the influence that letters to the editor have on a community. For several reasons it is important to challenge anything appearing in print that presents a homophobic viewpoint. First, letters to the editor are one of the most widely read parts of periodicals. It is crucial that readers realize that others in their community are committed to reducing heterosexism. Second, many readers have a tendency to believe something that is written authoritatively; just being printed lends an air of authority to a letter. If a homophobic diatribe remains unanswered, it will have an influence. Third, editors may not be aware that the writings in their publication are prejudiced, and it is important to educate them since they have such a big impact on public opinion. Fourth, editors want to sell their publication; if they see homophobia challenged by their readers, they are less likely to repeat such prejudices. Even if an editor does not respond positively to an anti-homophobia message, a reasoned counter argument will often have some impact (if not on that editor, perhaps on other staff who may succeed them as editor).

Below is an example of a Letter to the Editor that I wrote in April 1991 to the Daily Trojan, the campus newspaper of the University of Southern California. I wrote this letter in response to a blatantly homophobic "Viewpoint" opinion essay written by a USC student, in which that student argued that gays and lesbians should not be allowed to adopt children. I decided to respond, not only to counter his homophobia, but also to use the opportunity to present arguments in favor of adoption by lesbians and gay men. By presenting a reasoned approach, demonstrating the homophobe's lack of evidence and illogical reasoning, I hoped to change readers' attitudes toward lesbian and gay adoption. I wanted to publicize these ideas because I feel strongly that adoption is one of the most important issues for our future, both for ourselves as non-reproducing individuals and also as a social group which has much potential for contributing to society as adoptive parents.

I reprint my letter here, as a possible model to be used for analyzing the issues relating to adoption, as well as to provide possible strategies for writing letters to the editors of mass market publications. I will appreciate suggestions for making this kind of argument more persuasive.

April 5, 1991

Letter to the Editor of the Daily Trojan:

Tom Brown's Viewpoint piece "Homosexuals should not become parents" is the most blatantly prejudiced article I have read in our campus newspaper during all my years at USC. Did the editors think about the impact that this kind of diatribe has upon USC gay

and lesbian students, staff and faculty, or upon persons on campus who have a lesbian or gay relative or friend? What if articles appeared in the Daily Trojan headlined "Jews should not become parents"? Those were precisely the kinds of things being written in Nazi Germany fifty years ago, yet your editorial staff apparently sees no problem in printing such an inflammatory essay about homosexuals. I am not calling for censorship of different viewpoints, but Mr. Brown's essay is presented without any evidence at all, and his assertions are merely reflections of a sadly uninformed and illogical mind.

Mr. Brown, a political science major, asserts that "Biologically, homosexuals can not reproduce." This is not true. In our society today, people who identify as lesbian or gay often have children, either from previous heterosexual marriages, from an isolated heterosexual contact, or from spermal insemination. It is very easy for a lesbian woman to have a baby without having sex with a man; all she needs is a teaspoon of sperm and a turkey baster.

Brown argues from his (false) assumption, that since homosexuals cannot reproduce, "then such a couple should not be allowed to adopt children." He does not present any reasoning here at all. If a couple does not biologically have children, isn't that a prime example of a couple who should be first priority to take an adoptive child? Heterosexual couples who cannot reproduce often turn to adoption. Would Mr. Brown prevent these people from adopting?

From my research for my book *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*, I have found that in many societies when there is an orphan child, it is to non-reproductive homosexuals that the society turns as the FIRST choice to

become the adoptive parent. This is done for the clear reason that such individuals are not likely to have a child biologically, and should be the prime choice to adopt.

The question, then, is not should non-reproducers adopt, but why homosexuals should be kept from adopting. Mr. Brown makes several claims, but he presents not one piece of evidence to support his assertions. He says that because a homosexual couple is not the typical type of family, "any such deviation from the societal norms will overwhelm a child's development," and that such a child will be "confused." Where is his evidence for this view? Does this mean that any people who are different in other ways should not reproduce? Would he advocate that racial/religious minorities, or the musically-gifted, should not have children?

Brown is afraid that homosexual parents will become active role models for their children to become homosexual. Again, he presents not one piece of evidence for his assertion. In fact, many sociological studies show that children raised by lesbian or gay parents are no more likely to become homosexual than the general population. Sexual orientation is not something that is decided on the basis of parental role models; otherwise, all children of heterosexual parents would be heterosexual (which is not true).

What about older homeless kids who already identify as gay? Don't they deserve a gay adoptive parent who can be a positive role model for them? In a sense, it is too bad that more people are not homosexual, since our earth today is so overpopulated by people who are reproducing too much. What is this great value of reproducing

that Mr. Brown sees such a need for, in the future?

What we are left with, in Brown's diatribe, is simple heterosexism, the ideology that says that heterosexuality is by its nature superior. Brown has not presented one piece of evidence to prove this view. He might as well assert that black people should not reproduce, because white is better. The only statement he makes which is probably true is to say that a child adopted by gays "will not see society in the same light as most other children." A child who grows up in an untypical family might indeed see things differently. As one who values diversity, I think this is a positive reason in favor of homosexual adoptions. One thing our society needs much more of, for our future progress as a nation, is children who see things from different perspectives.

The American workforce badly needs original, creative minds, not stifling conformers. If people like Mr. Brown would worry less about making everybody "normal," and would instead encourage each individual to reach her or his own maximum potential fulfillment and happiness, our society will be a lot better off in the future.

In trying to restrict adoptions, Mr. Brown's homophobic diatribe misses the main point entirely: there are so many homeless children in the world today, that we simply cannot afford to write off a whole segment of the population as unsuitable to become parents. In the view of many social workers, gay and lesbian couples should be positively encouraged to adopt some of these pitiful kids, who are living on the streets or warehoused in overcrowded institutions. The

criteria for adoption should be solely the adult's capacity to be a kind competent parent, and to provide a nurturing home for the child.

Since Mr. Brown is so quick to restrict the criteria for adoption, is he planning to take in these homeless kids? Given the sort of prejudiced attitudes he has written, based on no evidence at all, I'm not sure I would want to see a child raised by such a narrowminded person. It is an embarrassment to our campus that we have to be witness to such unsupported rantings.