

### **Case Study: Sexuality and Adoption**

In 2002, the issue of whether gay couples should be allowed to adopt children has been hot on the political agenda. The existing system, according to the Adoption and Children Bill, is such that only married couples and single people (including gay people) can adopt. However, the New Labour government has been trying to amend this by extending the right to gay couples. The Health Secretary, Alan Milburn, suggested that all unmarried couples should be allowed to apply for adoption, providing they were over 21 and could prove that they were in a long term relationship that would provide financial and practical security for a child. In May 2002, this amendment was passed through the House of Commons with a vote of 301 against 174. However, when it reached the House of Lords in October 2002, the amendment was overturned by a free vote of 196 to 162. This effectively means that the law cannot be changed, even if ministers in the government support it. Many Conservative politicians have spoken out against the amendment, however, emphasising traditional family values. For example, Ann Widdecombe and Earl Howe have claimed that only a married couple can provide the stability and security needed by children who have suffered a traumatic upbringing. On the other hand, gay activists and human rights campaigners such as Peter Tatchell have argued that same sex couples are equally capable of loving and caring for a child in a secure family home. They say that there are plenty of children living in institutions and waiting to be adopted, but bureaucracy and prejudicial discrimination are preventing this from happening.

**Source:** [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/2334657.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2334657.stm)  
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#### **Questions:**

1. Do you think that unmarried and gay couples can provide as stable and secure a family home as married couples?
2. At present, gay couples cannot be legally recognised as married. How does this affect their position in the debate?
3. What kind of image of childhood is presented here?
4. How is the Conservative ideology of 'traditional family values' reflected in this account of marriage?
5. Given the current trends in marriage, divorce and cohabitation, what do you think will be the long term result of this debate?