

The Process of the Ukrainian Hiv-Positive Boy Adoption by Elton John in British and Ukrainian Media

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Abstract

The study contents compositional and lexical analysis of the mass media texts, dedicated to the adoption process of the Ukrainian HIV-positive boy by Elton John in 2009. For this research we chose print media of two countries which showed the interest to this event: British The Guardian and Ukrainian Podrobnosti.ua. To make the study more comprehensive and representative, the history of the phenomenon of children adoption by homosexuals was studied thoroughly. To study the articles quantitative, content and comparative analysis methods were used. Then we compared the results which we had got. Using the received information we found similarities and differences between positions of these three mass media and understood the national peculiarities of the situation's description based on the political situation and the author's position. The conclusions we made were logical and predictable. First is that reaction of every periodical was fundamentally different. Second is that each of them found its own way to express its opinion using not only the text, but also the opportunities of the convergent journalism such as photos and emotional videos. Third is that the certain dynamic in the coverage of the topic was observed. Data collected during the study showed the attitude of the mass media of two countries to the children adoption by homosexuals and to children with diseases as a social phenomenon and the level of tolerance in different societies.

Keywords: Adoption by homosexuals, same-sex parents' family, Elton John, homosexuality, homosexual orientation.

Introduction

Activists of the LGBT (*lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender*) community from all over the world want to have a right to adopt and parent children in same-sex unions, but there are a lot of obstacles created by society. The legislation of many countries does not allow homosexual couples to adopt children, but nevertheless a lot of countries have already legalized the children adoption by same-sex couples, by 2017 there will be 34 of them.

The adoption of children by homosexuals is still a very resonant issue. Mass-media regularly practices double standards policy. Liberal media don't openly support the adoption by homosexuals, but, on the other hand, they do not condemn it either and adhere to a neutral position. At the same time, conservative media are do not even try to hide their negative attitude and speak out strongly against this issue, and sometimes even insult sexual minorities.

Methods

We chose the following media as an empirical basis: a socio-political periodical *The Guardian* and a private project *Podrobnosti.ua*.

Having analyzed both editions in terms of their attitude to the subject of Elton John's attempt to adopt the Ukrainian, we studied all publications in these periodicals dedicated to it. *The Guardian* addressed it 5 times. *Podrobnosti.ua* covered the subject 9 times, but the most comprehensive author's position on the subject was in 4 of them, and this number was selected by us for subsequent analysis.

The following methods were used during the study:

1. *The monitoring* of articles gave us an opportunity to reveal the interest of each periodical to the subject;

2. *The lexical and stylistic analysis* of articles helped us to identify the attitude of each periodical to the topic of children adoption by homosexuals;

3. *The comparative analysis* of the obtained results allowed us to find similarities and differences between the ways of how these two periodicals presented the topic and to make a general conclusion.

Results

Sociological studies conducted in many countries show that homosexual couples adopt children much more willingly than heterosexual. They often wish to adopt disabled, disadvantaged or HIV-infected children. Experience has also shown that children growing up in families with two mothers or fathers become adherents of non-traditional sexual orientation not more often than children raised by heterosexuals [1]. However, conservative society strongly believes that homosexuality is closely linked to pedophilia, and that being in such environment is extremely damaging for the child's mind [2]. There is also an opinion, that the lack of role models of the opposite sex parents is also dangerous in terms of personality formation, because in that case children will not be able to completely realize themselves in their heterosexual relationships [3]. But there are facts that show the opposite. A study conducted by the USA found that children brought up by two mothers behaved in accordance with the basic sex roles. There is only a slight blurring in gaming preferences and a future profession planning [4]. Another argument against the adoption by homosexual families is a suggestion that children can emulate the sexual orientation of their parents as the only possible and observed. However, it was not confirmed either. Statistics showed that homosexually orientated adults mostly grew up in heterosexual families. So, as we can see, there is no connection between the family and the type of sexual orientation [5].

In our study we also used a research article of H.M.W. Bos and N. Gartrell, dedicated to a possible negative effects of gay family for adolescents [6]. We based our research on N. Gartrell, H. Peyser and H.M.W. Bos article about American lesbian family reviews [7] and on their common study about sexual orientation and sexual behavior of children brought up by homosexual parents [8].

To identify the stand on the children adoption by same-sex families of various countries, we chose an event that affected several countries at once. One of the most resonant of international events was the intention of Elton John to adopt an HIV-positive boy from Ukraine. It happened in 2009. For our analysis two periodicals were selected: the British one, as the singer is a UK citizen and the Ukrainian one, as the boy was in a Ukrainian orphanage. To make the study more comprehensive and representative, we have chosen the socio-political edition (*The Guardian*, UK [6]) and the private news project (*Podrobnosti.ua*, one of the printed versions of the Ukrainian TV channel Inter, Ukraine [7]).

We have explored the entire volume of publications about the attempt of Elton John to adopt the HIV-positive boy without reference to time. The purpose of analysis was to identify the attitude to the event of all periodicals. The objectives were:

- To identify editions' attitude to the issue;
- To identify similarities and differences between their positions.

The Guardian covered this topic 5 times, the site '*Podrobnosti.ua*' did it more often - 9 times.

The Guardian mentioned the topic for the first time on 13th of September, 2009 at 11.01. The article was entitled 'Elton John: I want to adopt baby boy'. The article was accompanied with a large photo on which the singer held a laughing baby and kissed him. The photo was signed: 'Elton John kisses baby Lev at an orphanage in the Ukrainian town of Makeyevka'. The article contained following sentences: 'Elton John has announced that he wants to adopt a 14-month-old boy from an orphanage in Ukraine who has "stolen his heart"'; 'He said: "David and I have always talked about adoption, David always wanted to adopt a child and I always said 'no' because I am 62 and I think because of the travelling I do and the life I have, maybe it wouldn't be fair for the child. But having seen Lev today, I would love to adopt him. I don't know how we do that but he has stolen my heart. And he has stolen David's heart and it would be wonderful if we can have a home. I've changed my mind today"', as well as the following quote of John: "Last week I lost one of my best friends, my keyboard player died of a heart attack at 52. It broke my heart because he was such a genius and so young and has two wonderful children. What better opportunity to replace someone I lost than to replace him with someone I can give a future to".

Twelve hours on the site there was a note under the title: "The charitable organization warns of Elton John from adopting a child." The meaning of small volume of publication is as follows: a charitable organization «Every Child» singer appreciated help in the dissemination of information on children affected by HIV in Ukraine, but if Elton will not give up its plan, many children may well remain unadopted.

The third article dedicated to this topic was published next day, on the 14th of September, 2009: 'Elton John blocked from adopting HIV-positive Ukrainian child'. This article, like the first one, had a photo of the singer with the boy in his arms, but because of the given circumstances it made rather sad impression. Text said that 'Elton John won't be able to adopt a 14-month-old HIV-positive child from Ukraine because the pop star is too old and isn't married, the government said today'. (...) The singer is 62 and Ukrainian law requires a parent to be no more than 45 years older than an adopted child. John and Furnish tied the knot in 2005 in one of the first legalised civil unions in Britain, but Yuriy Pavlenko (Family, Youth and Sports Minister) said Ukraine does not

recognise gay unions as marriage: "The law is the same for everybody: for a president, for a minister, for Elton John". Pavlenko also said that Ukraine was grateful for the singer's charity work and expressed hope that his desire to adopt Lev would spur the domestic adoption of more children with health problems, which is still rare in Ukraine. The article also contains the quote of Svyatoslav Sheremet, head of Ukraine's Gay Forum: 'If I were that child, I would feel very bitter and sad'.

In a few hours another text was released. It was almost identical to the previous one, but there was a statement added to it: 'Save the Children UK said celebrity adoptions risked the wrong message about helping foreign children. "They can exacerbate the problem by encouraging parents to abandon children in the hope of giving them a better life"'.

The last article about this topic was published a year and a half after, on the 2nd of January, 2011, and it was dedicated to Elton John's fatherhood – he became a biological parent of a surrogate baby. It was titled 'Three cheers for Elton, say I'. The article had a lead: 'Yes, Elton and David's baby has caused the usual hoo-ha. But what exactly is wrong with giving a child a caring home?' and the following author's opinion: 'Only a year ago, Elton John and David Furnish tried to adopt a baby and were rejected. Lev was 14 months old, HIV positive and living in a Ukrainian orphanage. Some bureaucratic moron decided he was better off staying there than living with a father who was "too old", in a civil partnership unrecognized by Ukrainian law. I hope that same person is prepared to explain the decision to Lev when he's 18 years old, armed and skint. They'd better hope he grows up severely homophobic'. (...)Elton John and David Furnish are about to give an affluent, loving home to a baby that need not have been born at all. That same home and same love were offered to a child who's growing up in an orphanage, with HIV, amid who knows what kind of emotional and physical deprivation. Just another bit of good denied to the world, by people in power who think they know best'.

The Guardian, being a private newspaper in a quite tolerant towards homosexuals country, emphasized its point of view with every aforecited text. A selection of comments, their layout, as well as the author's last article spoke in the favor of Elton John's idea and disapproval of the ban imposed on the little Ukrainian boy adoption. Moreover, this selection indirectly hinted that Elton John hadn't been allowed to adopt a child not because of officially named reasons, but because of his sexual orientation.

Podrobnosti.ua covered the topic of Ukrainian boy's adoption by Elton John 9 times. The most clearly author's position was explained in 4 publications.

First time the topic was mentioned in the article 'Elton John wants to adopt the Ukrainian boy' on the 12th of September, 2009. The publication described in detail the singer's visit to Donetsk region of Ukraine. It contained some quotes of participants of the event. For instance, Elena Franchuk, the head of Ukrainian Anti-AIDS fund said that the Elton John's arrival is a miracle and he came to prove that that miracle was possible even in the lives of the most disadvantaged HIV-positive orphans. It also published an Elton John opinion: he thought that the orphanage worked fine and the children could be loved there. But he noticed that he was very sad because these children were isolated from society.

On the 14th of September the text 'Elton John is denied the Ukrainian boy adoption' was published. It said that the Ukrainian law required that the adoptive parent had to be married, but the singer did not hide his homosexuality. It also informed that the orphanage where little Lev was living was a specialized one for children whose parents died of AIDS.

On the 20th of September the topic was unexpectedly continued by the article 'Mass media is 'intolerant' towards the child Elton John was talking about'. It gave specific examples: media hadn't

had rights to show pictures of the boy, to reveal his name and to say anything about his unconfirmed HIV-positive status. It turned out that the child had a biological mother who was not deprived of parental rights and who was trying hard to get her children back from orphanages.

But it was not the end. On the 5th of October the periodical published an article ‘A Ukrainian woman didn’t let Elton John to adopt a child’. Little Lev’s biological mother, Marina, 25, prone to alcoholism and HIV-positive, did not want to give her son to Elton John. She promised to solve all her problems and to get her children back. This information was taken from the British newspaper The Sun.

The issue of the Ukrainian child adoption was also mentioned in the articles on the 4th of October, 2009 (‘Elton John might adopt a child from Africa’), on the 2nd of November, 2009 (‘Elton John is seriously ill’), on the 31st of December, 2010 (‘Elton John and David Furnish have decided who will be a mother of their child’), on the 25th of March, 2012 (‘Elton John turns 65 today’) and on 10th of January, 2013 (‘Elton John becomes a father for the second time’).

The site Podrobnosti.ua actively covered the issue and even came back to it when it seemed to be over. But some of the texts were controversial. For instance, an article on 14th of September, 2009 said that the boy was in the orphanage for children whose parents had died from AIDS, but on the 20th of September the periodical wrote that he had an alive mother with parental rights. The boy also was called a HIV-positive in one of the publications, but in the other text it was told that his HIV-status was not confirmed.

Discussion

Our research confirmed the theory that homosexuals are not afraid to adopt children with diseases. We also saw that the periodicals’ opinions had divided on the matter of children adoption by homosexuals. For instance, The Guardian, according to the point of view gave in the article of Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe and Mikach [1], was covering the issue positively, trying to find good facts and sincerely judging the ban of adoption. It is clear that The Guardian was sure that homosexual parents couldn’t be dangerous for the child.

Podrobnosti.ua, in its turn, covered the topic from the position of conservative members of society [2]. It believed that it would be better to let the mother prone to alcoholism get the child back than to allow him to be adopted by a new family abroad only because of Elton John’s sexual orientation.

Conclusion

We can conclude that there is a certain tendency in a coverage of child adoption by homosexuals in different types of media in different countries. British periodical supported homosexuals in the person of Elton John, or, at least, kept the polite neutrality. In four anonymous articles dry and laconic comments were given, but it was obvious that the singer and homosexuals adopting children were treated positively, without prejudice. It became clearer in the last not-anonymous article, where the author did not mince words and openly blamed officials who had not allowed Elton John to adopt the child. It is worth noticing that the periodical was not influenced by the authorities and it was free to form its own information policy. It means that all the articles expressed the opinion of The Guardian journalists.

The Podrobnosti.ua site was more active in covering the topic – it did it 9 times to some extent. Ukrainian periodical, despite the apparent socio-political orientation, however, was inclining to search for ‘tabloid’ facts, which could not be related to the main subject, but obviously attracted the interest of audience, making the homosexuality topic even more resonant than it could be.

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