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## My Child (Benim Cocugum)

Kozak rating: 5 stars

by **Oktay Ege Kozak**

The Oregon Herald Movie Reviewer

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It's a given that The Middle-East has a long way to go as far as LGBT acceptance is concerned. Remember that sound byte of Ahmadinejad claiming that Iran doesn't have any homosexuals? Turkey is supposed to be the most secular and liberal Muslim country in the Middle-East, yet its religious, right wing government still considers homosexuality to be a disease.

I'm a US and Turkish dual citizen and right around the time when the Supreme Court is expected to vote on a monumental decision to legalize gay marriage in the US, my faith in the inherent good and courage within human beings was ratified by laying eyes on a group of Turkish parents who made the decision to fully support their LGBT children knowing full well



this decision could turn them into social pariahs.

It's becoming relatively easier here in the US for people to express their support for the LGBT community, especially in the

two liberal cities I called home so far since immigrating from Turkey over ten years ago, San Francisco and Portland. But to make a stand against a highly religious and intolerant society and face discrimination, ridicule, and sometimes even physical danger to protect your child's identity and freedom? That takes a different kind of courage.

Can Candan's powerful and profoundly emotional documentary *My Child* successfully defend the idea that acceptance in any society begins with acceptance at home. It focuses on the parents of LGBT children and hands them an open mike to tell their stories. With minor differences, their journeys are all almost identical. First comes the self-blame ("What did we do wrong?"), then comes the desperation ("What can be done?") and finally, the acceptance and the ensuing unconditional love and support.

After maxing out four credit cards on psychiatrists, a parent of a transgender child expresses the confusion she felt while teaching her biologically male child how to put on women's underwear. Later, she says she proudly held her hand to lead her through the part of security at school reserved for female students.

Another parent reminisces on a conversation he had with his religious mother, who asked him if "This came from God, and not through a bad experience during childhood?" When he told her that it did indeed come from God, she simply said, "If it's God's will, we can only accept it." The same parent's father immediately accepts his biologically female grandchild and gladly calls him "His son." If an 82-year-old religious man from rural Turkey can accept his grandchild the way he is, what excuse do the rest of us have?

Candan's film is cleverly split into two parts. The first half consists of the parents telling their stories. It follows the Errol Morris (*The Fog of War*) school of filmmaking and places the camera directly in front of the parents' faces. The parents look into the camera pretty much the entire time. This deceptively simple yet highly effective approach enables the audience to engage directly with the subjects.



The second half adopts a fly-on-the-wall approach as we follow the parents organize meetings to support other new parents of LGBT children and prepare to march with their own flesh and blood at the Istanbul LGBT Pride Parade. One sequence that stood out to me was when a new LGBT parent wrongfully states that his child decided to become gay at college, a psychiatrist devoted to educating the public on LGBT awareness simply explains, as if talking to a four-year-old, why sexual identity is not a choice.

The speech is highly effective in its simplicity. It's easy for us in the liberal west to get on our high horses and proclaim that the facts presented in this quick biology lesson were already obvious to us, but unfortunately I can think of too many US senators and policy makers off the top of my head who could highly benefit from that speech.

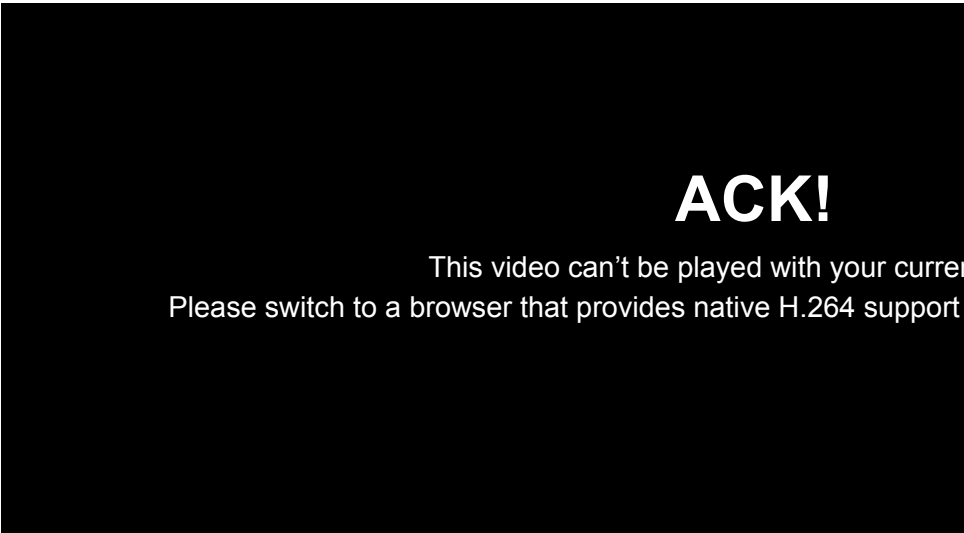
The film begins with a single parent sitting in front of a camera in a small room and ends with a glorious shot of Istiklal Street (Perhaps the most popular part of Istanbul) full of thousands of LGBT people and their parents proudly exclaiming their support for their children through megaphones so the whole world can hear. It successfully makes the point that even a single person's tolerance and acceptance can make a huge difference.

Unfortunately, *My Child* is not yet available in the US market. Director Candan urges those who wish to see the film to demand it from their local film festivals and lead them to the film's web site at <http://www.mychilddocumentary.com/>



Photo: Parents of LGBT children walk with them during the Istanbul LGBT Pride March

Photo 2: Pinar, one of the parents describes how she taught her transgender child to put on a bra



[Benim Çocugum Fragman 1 - My Child Teaser](#) from [Can Candan](#) on [Vimeo](#).