

SAME-SEX COUPLE ADOPTIONS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BELIEFS,  
ATTITUDES, EXTERNAL INFLUENCES, AND PLACEMENT DECISIONS

by

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(Under the Direction of Kevin L. DeWeaver)

ABSTRACT

The current study investigated the relationships between (1) sex role beliefs and attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions, (2) attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions and intention to recommend adoptive placement with same-sex couples, (3) the existence of formal agency policies and attitudes, (4) the existence of formal agency policies and intention to recommend placement, (5) social work education and attitudes, and (6) social work education and intention to recommend placement. To that end, a mailed questionnaire was used to collect data from a purposive sample of 31 licensed agency adoption workers and 34 former and current Title IV-E grant recipient social work students. The questionnaire was composed of several sections, including the newly-created *Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Couples as Adoptive Parents Scale* which underwent reliability and validity analysis as part of the study. Simple, multiple, and stepwise regression analyses, as well as t-tests, were used to test the above relationships, with results supporting the existence of relationships between sex role beliefs and attitudes; attitudes and placement recommendations; and social work education and placement recommendations (in part). Implications of the results, limitations of the investigation and directions for future research are presented.

INDEX WORDS: Sex role beliefs, Attitudes, Same-sex couple adoptions, Agency policies, Social work education, Placement recommendations

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

The present study will investigate the following: (1) the attitudes held by adoption workers employed by adoption agencies licensed by the state of Georgia and social work students receiving Title-IV-E funding toward gay and lesbian couples desiring to adopt; (2) the possible impact of these attitudes on placement decisions; (3) the relationship between these attitudes and gender role beliefs; (4) the relationship between these attitudes and agency policies; and (5) the relationship between these attitudes and social work education curricula. The findings of this investigation may impact state government and child welfare agency adoption policy implementation and structure, the training of adoption workers, and the content of social work education.

The structure of the family has changed considerably over the past century. The ‘traditional’ family ideal – mother, father, and children – has been subverted by the knowledge that families come in many forms, from single parent households to grandparents raising grandchildren. The 2000 United States Census found that less than 24% of households fit the traditional model of the family (Ferrero, et al., 2002). In keeping with these trends, child welfare services have expanded their pool of potential adoptive parents over the last two decades to include single men and women, the elderly, and relatives, in an attempt to meet the needs of the large population of children in out-of-home care. Approximately 547,000 children were in foster care in 1999, according to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System; further, about 117,000 of these children

were eligible for adoption (National Adoption Clearinghouse [NAIC], 2000). There is, however, a shortage of foster and adoptive parents for children in the child welfare system, a shortage agencies are struggling to fill (Leos-Urbel, Bess, & Been, 1999). Despite the shortage of parents and the vast number of children in need of permanent homes, child welfare agencies have been reluctant to allow one population of potential parents, gay and lesbian couples, to adopt.

Courts and public child welfare agencies must, first and foremost, adhere to state regulations regarding who can and cannot adopt. Depending on state statutes, same-sex couples generally have two legal strategies available by which to adopt together: (1) second-parent (also called co-parent) adoption, or (2) joint adoption. In second-parent adoptions, one partner adopts the child as a single individual; after this adoption has been finalized, the other partner petitions the court to be allowed to also adopt the child without terminating the first partner's parental rights. Joint adoption, on the other hand, allows both partners to adopt simultaneously. Four states explicitly allow joint adoptions: California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Vermont, plus Washington, D.C. (Ferrero et al., 2002). Three states have made clear their refusal to allow same-sex couple adoptions: Florida has formally banned gay and lesbian adoptions since 1977 (Ferrero et al., 2002); Mississippi recently enacted legislation prohibiting gay and lesbian couples from adopting; and, Utah has instituted a ban on adoptions by *unmarried couples*. Several other states have laws discouraging adoption by unmarried couples (e.g., Alabama).

The majority of states lack formal rules regarding gay and lesbian couple adoptions, which affords adoption workers, agencies, and courts a great deal of discretion in decision-making (Ferrero et al., 2002). In a survey of adoption officials from each of the fifty states, Reilly (1996) found that twenty-two states had unwritten, informal policies that favored granting placement with gay or lesbian individuals (though not necessarily couples). An additional

seventeen states had informal policies allocating such placement decisions to adoption workers, supervisors, and/or adoption teams. Reilly further elaborated, “In situations where state law and the courts have not clearly articulated policies about adoptions by gays and lesbians, the child welfare agencies have remained silent on the issue and developed informal policies which are inconsistently applied” (p. 100). Agencies, and the workers they employ, are guided by conflicting views and practices concerning adoption by gay and lesbian couples, both of which may depend heavily on the political and social structure of the community.

Liberalization in attitudes toward gays and lesbians in general over the past three decades have not translated into liberalization in attitudes toward gay and lesbian couples as parents. Results from the General Social Survey indicate that the number of Americans who believe that homosexuality is “always wrong” have decreased from over 70% in 1973 to 56% in 1998, while 31% believe it is “not wrong at all”; sixty-five percent would not restrict the civil liberties of gay men and lesbians (Loftus, 2001). Poll results reported in *The Advocate*, however, indicated that 61% and 65% of Americans disapprove of adoption (which is not considered a civil liberty) by female couples and male couples, respectively (1996). Why does adoptive parenting by same-sex couples strike such a cord? Why maintain such anti-gay and anti-lesbian views on this particular issue when adoption by gay and lesbian individuals is permitted with relative ease except in rare instances (e.g., in the state of Florida)? What is it about a gay or lesbian couple desiring to adopt together that challenges the flexibility and relative open-mindedness of child welfare and state legislative institutions?

Gay and lesbian couples are overlooked and/or dismissed as potential adoptive parents for reasons that have nothing to do with the reality of their individual parenting abilities. The conceptualization of gay and lesbian parenting has been dominated by four overarching myths/concerns, all of which are rooted in beliefs regarding the nature of gender and sexuality,

including: (1) children of gay or lesbian parents will suffer crises of sexual identity (a problematic myth for several reasons, among them the negative connotations assigned to identification as gay or lesbian and the implication of assumed stability of sexual identity); (2) children of gay or lesbian parents are more likely to be sexually molested; (3) children of gay or lesbian parents will suffer harassment and ostracism by peers due to their family structure; and, (4) gay and lesbian parents are not fit to parent because they are not fit gender role models (Mallon, 2000). These myths and concerns continue to be perpetuated in the adoption process, despite the existence of substantial empirical evidence contradicting each of the four arguments against gay and lesbian parenting. This suggests that the knowledge concerning gay and lesbian parenting is not being disseminated to and/or used by adoption professionals. There may also be a gap in the education and training of adoption workers.

Mallon (1998) wrote, “Parenting in a society that presumes heterosexuality . . . the reality of gay men and lesbians as a family rearing children is still an idea that is shocking to many” (pp. 167-168). According to Ball (2003), “Many Americans believe that the complementary characteristics traditionally associated with ‘fathering’ and ‘mothering’ are correlated with one’s gender” (p. 135). He goes on to argue, “there is no reason to believe that the positive characteristics we associate with fathering (such as providing and protecting) and mothering (such as nurturing and caring) are explained or determined by one’s sex” (p. 135). Our society and its child welfare system have historically marginalized, or outright rejected, gay and lesbian adoptive parents because they disrupt the ‘natural’ order of things; more than that, they disrupt the idea that the ‘natural order’ is, in fact, natural.

Queer theory provides a framework by which we may examine and critique the belief systems contributing to the structural impediments to same-sex couple adoptions. According to Kirsch (2000), the primary focus of Queer theory is the “disassembling of common beliefs about

gender and sexuality” (p. 33). In other words, Queer theory deconstructs and reinterprets a given society’s beliefs about gender and sexuality and their placement within that society. This deconstruction extends to the binarized category of parenting; Queer theory destabilizes “cultural associations that link parenting and procreation to gendered difference, and not just any sort of gendered difference, but one constituted through a heterosexual relationship” (Weston, 1991, p. 174). The tenets of Queer theory urge that, in an investigation of attitudes toward gay and lesbian couple adoptions, we ask the following: how prevalent are beliefs regarding parenting’s gendered differentials among adoption professionals, current and future, and what impact do those beliefs have on the actions taken during the course of the adoption process?

There is a dearth of information in the social work literature regarding the beliefs and resultant behaviors of adoptions workers toward same-sex couples who apply to become adoptive parents. Despite this dearth, there are two studies that provide the foundation for the present investigation. In the first of the two studies, Brooks and Goldberg (2001) conducted a qualitative study of child welfare agency workers and foster parents (both licensed and prospective) and found the following:

- study participants described the pervasive belief in the child welfare system that gay men and lesbians are unfit to be foster and adoptive parents;
- recruitment and approval of gay and lesbian foster parents depends greatly on the attitudes and informal policies of the agency (and that these attitudes and informal policies “have profound implications for recruitment and placement practices of individual workers” (p. 152)); and
- decisions regarding placement of children with gay and lesbian foster and adoptive parents are effected by the biases of child welfare workers.

The second foundational study to this investigation was a survey conducted by Ryan (2000), which specifically examined social worker attitudes on the issue of gay and lesbian adoptions. The study was framed by social constructionism, and examined the relationships between the dependent variable, placement recommendation, and several independent variables, including race/ethnicity, gender, religion, highest degree, special training, years of adoption experience, and attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as adoptive parents (as measured by a scale constructed for the purpose of this study). Results showed that the social workers in Ryan's sample held borderline favorable attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as adoptive parents; the earned scores on the scale used in the study, with 1.00 being "homophobic/nonplacement" and 5.00 being "nonhomophobic/placement" (p. 521), ranged from 1.64 to 5.00 ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = .79$ ). It should be noted that this investigation was not focused on gay and lesbian *couples* as adoptive parents, but rather gay and lesbian persons in general (though an open-ended question regarding adoption by a lesbian couple was included). We do not know how the results may have changed had it been placed in the context of same-sex couples adoption.

In summary, roadblocks standing between gay and lesbian couples and successful adoption of children through state-sponsored agencies can take many forms: (1) a state statute that prohibits outright same-sex couple adoptions, (2) a judge who will not legalize an adoption because s/he shares the beliefs of Alabama Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore who wrote, "Homosexual conduct of a parent . . . creates a strong presumption of unfitness that alone is sufficient justification for denying that parent custody of his or her own children" (Biskupic, 2003, p. 1A), or (3) an adoption worker who refuses to recommend adoptive placement with a gay or lesbian couple. Yet, while state laws and court rulings are commonly held up to public scrutiny, the behind-the-scenes action of the adoption process and its key participants, namely

the caseworkers responsible for facilitating placements, have not been examined to any great extent. Empirical evidence regarding the many facets of same-sex couple adoptions is sorely lacking, from a knowledge of the extent to which personal biases influence adoption professionals to the outcomes of gay and lesbian families with adopted children. This study attempts to take the first steps in redressing this oversight through a survey of current licensed agency adoption workers and social work students specializing in child welfare in the context of one particular state, which does not have formal policies governing same-sex couple adoptions. As caseworkers are ultimately the primary factor in determining if an adoptive placement will be made, it is essential to understand the personal beliefs and attitudes, as well as the external influences that impact their behavior, namely, the decision to recommend an adoption by particular prospective parents. Understanding the various components influencing this decision-making process is the first step in critically analyzing the institutional barriers to same-sex couple adoptions.

The following research questions will be addressed:

- Research question 1: What are the attitudes of adoption professionals and social work students specializing in child welfare toward gay and lesbian couple adoptions?
- Research question 2: Is there a correlation between attitudes toward same-sex couple adoption and beliefs regarding gender/sex roles?
- Research question 3: Is there a relationship between attitudes toward same-sex couple adoption and likelihood to recommend adoptive placement with a gay or lesbian couple?
- Research question 4: Is there a relationship between agency policies regarding gay and lesbian couple adoptions and attitudes toward those adoptions? Between agency policies and placement decisions?

- Research question 5: Is there a relationship between social work curricula on gay and lesbian parenting and family configurations and attitudes toward gay and lesbian couple adoptions? Between social work curricula and placement decisions?



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

What follows in this chapter is a review of the literature regarding adoption and gay and lesbian parenting relevant to this study. The issues explored include the predominant concerns about gay and lesbian parenting, the theoretical underpinnings of and challenges to those concerns, the history of adoption practice in the United States, contemporary best practice standards in the adoption field, current numbers of children in out-of-home placements, the timeline of involvement of gay men and lesbians as foster and adoptive parents, and the current legalities of same-sex couple adoptions.

#### *Gay and Lesbian Parenting*

*Statistics.* The exact number of both gay and lesbian parents and children of gay and lesbian parents in the U.S. is not known at this time. There are estimations, however, of the prevalence of gay and lesbian parents and their children. Approximately 10% of the U.S. population, or twenty-five million people, are gay or lesbian (NAIC, 2000); between six and ten million of this twenty-five million are parents (Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, 1997). In 1990, it was estimated that between six and fourteen million children had gay or lesbian parents, and between eight and ten million were being raised in gay and lesbian households (NAIC, 2000). The number of children who have been adopted by gay men and lesbians is not currently known.

*Concerns about Gay and Lesbian Parenting.* The conceptualization of gay and lesbian parenting has been dominated by four overarching myths/concerns, all of which are rooted in beliefs regarding the nature of gender and sexuality, including: (1) children of gay or lesbian

parents will suffer crises of psychological and sexual identity development (a problematic concern for several reasons, among them the negative connotations assigned to identification as gay or lesbian); (2) children of gay or lesbian parents are more likely to be sexually molested; (3) children of gay or lesbian parents will suffer harassment and ostracism by peers due to their family structure; and, (4) gay and lesbian individuals are not fit to parent because they have unstable lifestyles and are not fit gender role models (Huggins, 1989; Mallon, 2000). These myths and concerns continue to be perpetuated in the adoption process, despite the existence of substantial empirical evidence contradicting each of the four arguments against gay and lesbian parenting.

There is little to no empirical support for the claim that the healthy psychological development of children is compromised by having gay or lesbian parents. In a comparative study of children of lesbian and heterosexual mothers, Huggins (1989) found that there were no significant differences in the self-esteem scores of these children. Patterson's (1994) study of lesbian mothers and their children found that the social competence levels of these children were normal, that their behavior problems did not differ from those of children in the "normal sample" of a 1983 study done by Achenbach and Edenbrook, and that self-concepts relevant to Aggression, Social Closeness, and Social Potency did not differ from children of heterosexual mothers (this comparison group was also from another study). Beyond these two studies, additional researchers (e.g., Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua, & Joseph, 1995; Golombek, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983; Gottman, 1990; Kirkpatrick, Smith, & Roy, 1981) have found no differences between children of gay/lesbian parents and children of heterosexual parents concerning behavioral adjustment, emotional development, presence of pathology, levels of self-esteem, or relationship formation (Eliason, 1996; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Patterson & Redding, 1996).

Regarding sexual identity and gender roles (the latter halves of the first and fourth concerns): Patterson and Redding (1996) delineated three aspects of sexual identity (Johnson & O'Connor (2002) refer to these aspects as the components of gender development): (1) gender identity, i.e., self-identification as female or male; (2) gender role behavior, i.e., conformation of behavior to culturally-assigned masculine or feminine activities; and (3) sexual orientation, i.e., choice of sexual partners. In a review of the empirical literature on sexual identity outcomes for children of gay and lesbian parents, Patterson and Redding found that children in various studies (e.g, Green, 1978; Kirkpatrick et al., 1981; Hoeffler, 1981; Patterson, 1994a) have, for the most part, fallen within normal or conventional ranges, in investigations of gender identity and gender role behavior. For example, Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray, and Smith (1986) conducted a study comparing children of lesbian and heterosexual mothers on psychosocial and psychosexual parameters. The researchers found that the children scored comparably on measures of sexual identity and most of the children in both groups did not wish to be the other sex. As to gender role behavior, in measures of preference for adult roles, daughters of lesbian mothers chose 'masculine' jobs significantly more often than daughters of heterosexual mothers. Boys in both groups chose typically masculine toys, while girls showed a broader range in toy choice. Green et al.'s findings were similar to those found in Hoeffler's (1981) investigation of gender-typed toy preferences: in this study, there were no significant differences between children of lesbian and children of heterosexual mothers based on the mothers' sexual identities. Boys and girls of both groups preferred same-gender, sex-typed toys, and boys, more so than girls, preferred these gender-associated toys to those labeled gender-neutral.

Regarding sexual orientation, researchers have found no support in the literature for the notion that children with gay and lesbian parents are more likely than children of heterosexual parents to become gay or lesbian (Eliason, 1996; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Patterson &

Redding, 1996). One investigation, conducted by Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, and Mikach (1995), assessed the sexual orientation of sons of gay fathers. In this study, it was found that of 82 sons, 68 identified as heterosexual, 7 as non-heterosexual (less than 10% of the sample), and 7 as unable to rate with confidence. The findings here reflect what is generally considered the base rate for gay or lesbian identification in the general population, i.e., between 8 and 16 percent (Eliason, 1996). To summarize, the empirical literature to date fails to support the concern that having gay and lesbian parents is in any way detrimental to a child's sexual identity development.

The above studies are not without limitations. In addition to individual methodological issues, in almost all cases, small sample sizes restrict the generalizability of the results of these studies. Few investigations have examined the outcomes of families headed by gay fathers; almost all of the studies cited here focus on the outcomes of children of lesbian mothers. Furthermore, none of the studies looked exclusively at the outcomes of children adopted and raised by same-sex couples.

To address briefly the second concern: there is no empirical evidence to support the beliefs that gay or lesbian parents are more likely to sexually abuse their children (ACLU, 1999; Brooks and Goldberg, 2001; National Adoption Information Clearinghouse [NAIC], 2000; Patterson, 1995). On the contrary, individuals who molest children are predominately heterosexual men.

As to the third concern, child welfare agencies have grappled with the perception that the 'stigma' of having gay or lesbian parents would threaten the self-esteem and peer relationships of children. There is a belief among child welfare workers that children will be subjected to persecution (i.e., teasing) by their peers because they have two fathers or two mothers (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Ferrero et al., 2002). Again, this belief has no empirical basis. Studies

examining the issue of teasing have found that children of gay or lesbian parents have levels of self-esteem comparable to children with heterosexual parents; additionally, peer relationships of children with gay or lesbian parents did not differ from those of children with heterosexual parents (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Ferrero et al., 2002; Johnson & O'Connor, 2002; Laird, 1995; NAIC, 2000; Patterson, 1995). Again, however, these studies suffer from the limitations named above.

The final concern, parental unfitness due to unstable lifestyle, finds its basis in stereotypes which portray gay men and lesbians as mentally ill, unable to form stable relationships, and in violation of gender roles, e.g., effeminate gay men, butch lesbians. Laird (1995) noted that, regarding mental health, "there are no consistent differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals" (p.1607). As for the stability of relationships, Laird cited research (see Bell and Weinberg, 1978), which found that 82% of the lesbians included in a study were, at the time of the study, cohabitating with a partner. Kurdek (1998) conducted two studies of the stability of relationships between gay men and found that (1) 40-60 % of gay men were in stable relationships (1994) and, (2) after a five-year longitudinal study, 86% of 66 gay couples remained together for the duration of the project. The belief that gay men and lesbians violate gender norms because of their sexual orientation is discussed in the section of this chapter entitled "Theoretical Underpinnings." To summarize briefly, Butler's theory of performativity and Queer theory disrupt and disassemble the notion that gender and sexuality are stable or innate, thereby challenging the essentialism of gender role norms and the stigmatization of presumed violation of those norms by gay men and lesbians (or anyone else).

*Realities of Gay and Lesbian Parenting.* Yet, how do gay and lesbian parents compare to heterosexual parents? Researchers have found that, while gay and lesbian parents are not generally dissimilar to heterosexual parents, there are some notable differences. In a survey

comparing the parenting behaviors of gay and heterosexual fathers, Bigner and Jacobsen (1989) found that both groups were similar in overall parenting ability but different in terms of style and philosophy. Gay fathers tend to be more strict, to be more consistent in their emphasis on limit-setting, to promote more actively cognitive skills through explanation, and to be more egalitarian regarding child participation in family decision-making. The parenting style of gay fathers was found to be less sex-role typed and more androgynous. In another study, Patterson (1995) examined division of labor in families headed by lesbian couples. Previous studies had found that lesbian couples divided household labor on a more equal basis than did heterosexual couples. Patterson found in her sample of lesbian couples that biological mothers had greater childcare responsibility, while non-biological mothers tended to focus on out-of-home work. This pattern follows the traditional transition to parenthood found in heterosexual couples, with mothers assuming greater childcare and household duties and fathers concentrating their energies on out-of-home endeavors. The partners Patterson interviewed, however, did believe in equal labor across household, childcare, and decision-making domains, and more positive adjustment was found in children where the nonbiological mother was an equal participant in child-rearing.

Perrin (2002) reported, “Legal justifications and social beliefs have presumed that their [gay and lesbian parents] children would experience stigmatization, poor peer relationships, subsequent behavioral and emotional problems, and abnormal psychosexual development” (p. 342). There is no empirical evidence to date, however, to support the position that the sexual orientation of a parent is detrimental to the well-being of the child in said parent’s care (Bigner, 1996; Reilly, 1996). Specifically, research has shown that sexual orientation does not determine parental fitness, nor have objective studies yielded evidence indicating that children are harmed by having gay or lesbian parents (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 1999; Brooks & Goldberg, 2000; Reilly, 1996). The majority of studies have found (1) no differences between

children raised by gay and lesbian versus heterosexual parents in terms of biopsychosocial and sexual development, and (2) gay and lesbian parents are just as likely as heterosexual parents to provide homes which lead to positive developmental outcomes (Eliason, 1996; Mallon, 2000; Patterson, 1995; Patterson & Redding, 1996). Regarding gay fathers and lesbian mothers, Perrin (2002) summarized:

Empirical evidence reveals . . . gay fathers have substantial evidence of nurturance and investment in their paternal role and no differences from heterosexual fathers in providing appropriate recreation, encouraging autonomy, or dealing with general problems of parenting. Compared with heterosexual fathers, gay fathers have been described to adhere to stricter disciplinary guidelines, to place greater emphasis on guidance and the development of cognitive skills, and to be more involved in their children's activities. Overall, there are more similarities than differences in the parenting styles and attitudes of gay and nongay fathers . . .

Lesbian mothers strongly endorse child-centered attitudes and commitment to their maternal roles and have been shown to be more concerned with providing male role models for their children than are divorced heterosexual mothers. Lesbian and heterosexual mothers describe themselves similarly in marital and maternal interests, current lifestyles, and child-rearing practices. They report similar role conflicts, social support networks, and coping strategies. (p. 342)

Further, some research has suggested children with gay or lesbian parents are better-adjusted and more flexible in their thought patterns and tolerance of difference in others (Eliason, 1996; Ferrero et al., 2002; Laird, 1995).

All of the above findings have not, however, prevented or eliminated the predominant myths regarding gay and lesbian parenting. For many, the (assumed) nature of homosexuality presumes an unfitness to parent and an incompatibility with the notion of parenthood.

### *Theoretical Underpinnings*

Bell (2001) described the family as “the basic unit of society, the center of personal affections that ennoble and enrich human life.” What defines a family? The ‘traditional’ form of family – mother, father, child(ren) – has permeated Western culture and is, seemingly, the cornerstone of our society. Yet, the 2000 United States Census found that less than 24% of households fit this model (Ferrero, et al., 2002). Alternative family configurations have come to dominate the reality of life in the U.S.: single-parents, grandparents or other forms of kinship care, gay and lesbian individuals or couples choosing to have children, to name just a few. The traditional notion of family is no longer the tradition of families in the U.S.; yet, it remains the dominant paradigm by which we define, determine, and examine the family. Laird (1995) wrote, “Definitions of family are, among other things, political and ideological, created and recreated in social discourse and shaped in social relations of power, particular definitions gradually assuming the strength of conventionality” (p. 1604). Embedded in this paradigm, or discourse, of family are beliefs about what it means to be mother or father and, in turn, man or woman. In other words, inextricably linked to the definition of traditional family are mainstream definitions of gender and sex, and the identities and roles we assign to the categories within each of these concepts.

*Mainstream Definitions.* The *New Oxford American Dictionary* (Jewell & Abate, 2001) defined *sex* as, “either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and most other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions” (p. 1562) and *gender* as, “the state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural



differences rather than biological ones)” (p. 705). In other words, sex is based in biology, while gender represents the socio-cultural construct of sex. Additionally, the *Social Work Dictionary* (Barker, 2003) provided the following definitions of related terms:

- Gender identity: the relative degree to which an individual patterns himself or herself after members of the same sex (p. 174);
- Gender roles: behaviors and personality characteristics that are attached, often inaccurately, to people because of their sex (p. 175);
- Sexuality: characteristics of an individual that essentially pertain to the reproductive function, including anatomy and physiology, primary and secondary sexual traits, sex role patterns, and behavioral characteristics (p. 395);
- Sexual identity: degree to which an individual takes on the behavior, personality patterns, and attitudes that are usually associated with male or female sex roles. This is a synonym for gender identity (p. 394); and
- Sex roles: culturally defined expectations for “male behavior” and “female behavior” (p. 393).

As can be seen in the above definitions, there is a great degree of overlap and little room for distinction in traditional descriptions of gender, sex, and their offspring concepts.

Feminist and queer studies have put forth challenges to these mainstream conceptualizations. Two theories, in particular, question and deconstruct the meanings American society assign to sex, gender, and their various sub-categories. The first of these theories is feminist scholar Judith Butler’s theory of performativity; the second theory, which incorporates the ideas proffered by Butler, is Queer theory, first named by Teresa de Lauretis in 1991. What follows in this section is (1) a discussion of the major components of both the theory of

performativity and Queer theory, and (2) a discussion of the debate regarding the legitimacy of gay and lesbian parenting.

*Butler's Theory of Performativity.* The mainstream definitions of sex and gender presume that sex is inherent, that it occurs in nature, and that gender is its cultural construction or expression. The foremost critic of the standard definitions and demarcations of sex and gender is feminist scholar and academic Judith Butler. According to Butler (1999), gender is performative (repetitive, ritualistic acts that signify what is culturally-determined normative behavior) because “it has no ontological system apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (p.173). Rather than existing as an innate identity, the performative acts of having a gender identity constitute that identity. To summarize the various aspects of the theory of performativity (pp. 178-179):

- “the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all”;
- “the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them”;
- “the construction ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness”;
- “the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation”; and
- “the performance is effected with the strategic aim of maintaining gender within its binary frame.”

Gender is assumed to result from sex; it is naturalized because it is an expression of that which is natural. Sex is male or female, a binary. But what of those individuals who have both male and female sex characteristics, or those individuals whose gender (expression of sex) does not follow the male/man/masculine or female/woman/feminine pattern? Butler proposed that if one were to dispute the ontological character of sex, to claim that ‘sex’ is a cultural construct, then “the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (p. 11). She continued, “It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category” (p. 11). In other words, there is no ‘natural’ sex; the designations of male and female are not rooted in nature – they are as much social constructions as anything categorized as gender.

The binary is the institution governing gender identity and role development in our culture. Individuals are binarized, i.e., gendered, and hence, sexed, from the moment they are born and pronounced ‘a boy’ or ‘a girl.’ Once the designation of gender/sex has taken place, society and culture shape the expression of self to fit the normative conceptualizations of the assigned gender. Butler posited that the coherence of gender, the differentiation of genders, requires “a stable and oppositional heterosexuality” that is restricted within the bounds of the binary, “one is one’s gender to the extent that one is not the other gender” (1999, p. 30). To explain further, a causal relationship is sought between biology (sex), culture and society (gender), and desire (sexuality). This causal relationship functions in terms of the binary: the one and the other. In this case, the gender/sex binary refers to man-woman, male-female, and masculine-feminine. Desire, the expression of sex/gender, is presumed to maintain the binary: one gender desires its opposite. Therefore, heterosexuality is normalized. If desire ceases to function in terms of the binary, what consequence does that have for society’s system of gender and, subsequently, gender identity?

Gender identity, assumed as the mark of a person's natural being, is produced by the "stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality" (Butler, 1999, p. 23). The concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality are themselves considered stable; they have been naturalized, normalized, and standardized. When "gendered beings . . . fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined" (p. 23), the very legitimacy of their personhood is called into question. Gender is produced through performative acts to appear 'real' and 'natural,' that reality of gender signifying the demarcation of existence, i.e., to have a gender, and an identity as that gender, is to be a person. If gender identity is destabilized, the binary subverted and coherency and continuity lost, then the subject is somehow stripped of that rank of 'person' to become a spectre who exists only through being cast in another form of the binary – that as the Other to the Person, as some being outside of a particular society's continuum of personhood, which is constructed through the causal relationship described above.

In Butler's view, personhood is established through an existence with and adherence to the binary system of a given society. To operate outside that system is to operate on the fringe of society, to become marginalized and devalued as a member of that society. Claiming (or reclaiming) a position in society's center would necessitate a thwarting of the institution of the binary. Butler argued that the binary, which has been thus far assumed to be natural, is in fact not natural. In her estimation, there exist multiple genders and gender identities. So-called 'gender norms,' and their enforcement, are an act of violence against those who would dare to live outside the structure of the binary. Yet, reinforcement of gender norms is a commonplace practice: we see it on television, we hear it in music, we read it in print media, and we even go so far as to insert gender norms, the binary, into our public policies (e.g., the Defense of Marriage Act).

*Queer Theory*. In his 1985 work, *Sexuality and its Discontents*, Weeks wrote, “Sexuality today is, perhaps to an unprecedented degree, a contested zone . . . it has become a moral and political battlefield” (p. 4). Sexuality within our culture has been, and continues to be, the source of political and social strife. The meanings, values, and myths we ascribe to sexuality determine how we regulate, legislate, and moderate social stances on issues of marriage, adoption, medical care, economic support/responsibility, and legal connections/partnerships. Those who conform to society’s dominant notion of how sexuality should be expressed, i.e., heterosexuality, are validated and rewarded, while those who do not are denied access to those benefits and institutions that are commonplace in the ‘straight’ world – state-sanctioned union, insurance coverage for partners, joint adoption of children, to name a few. Queer theory, which disrupts, questions, challenges, deconstructs, and reconstructs sexuality, as well as sexual identity and gender, provides the knowledge base and forum for political and academic arguments and activism concerning the rights, freedoms, and societal treatment of non-heterosexuals.

Queer theory is a “school of literary and cultural criticism” that began its development in the United States in the mid-1980s (Wilkhom, 1999); it has its roots in social constructionism and post-structuralism. Constructionists attribute normative gender and sexuality categories, such as heterosexual and homosexual or masculine and feminine, to a society’s cultural system, rather than biology (i.e., the essentialist position). Further, “[w]hereas essentialists regard identity as natural, fixed and innate, constructionists assume identity is fluid, the effect of social conditioning and available cultural models for understanding oneself” (Jagose, 1996, p. 8). Post-structuralists take this position a step further by focusing on deconstruction, the disassembling of normative categories (Kirsch, 2000).

The theoretical underpinnings of both constructionism and post-structuralism are advanced by queer theory, which challenges the stability of categories of gender, sex, sexuality, and identity. As Jagose (1996) described, “Queer theory’s debunking of stable sexes, genders and sexualities develops out of a specifically lesbian and gay reworking of the post-structuralist figuring of identity as a constellation of multiple and unstable positions” (p. 3). Queer theory deconstructs and reinterprets a given society’s beliefs about gender and sexuality and their placement within that society.

Keeping in mind that there are “multiple localities of queer theory and practice” (Berlant & Warner, 1995), Rudy (2000) proposed that Queer theory is “loosely constituted by a set of four assertions regarding the nature of gender and sexuality today.” Those assertions are: (1) recognizing that the act of interpretation plays a role in the understanding of human life; (2) recognizing the gender and sexual identities are contingent upon a given society’s history and social and cultural mores and may be reconfigured differently at different points in time; (3) recognizing that the progressive politics advocated will not be readily accepted by regimes in power in dominant societal institutions and, (4) opposition to any moral or ethical plan that attempts to control or police sexual behavior (sexual behavior is qualified by Rudy as being mutually consensual).

The primary function, then, of Queer theory is to challenge the notion of normative, stable, and constant gender and/or sexual identities. According to Weeks (1985), identity is what we claim in order to give our lives and our sense of selves coherency. It allows us to recognize our commonalities with others, but it also highlights the differences, the departures we make from those around us. Identities are a constant work-in-progress, always subject to change, to re-ordering, and to choice – “[t]hey can be taken up and abandoned” (Weeks, 1995, p. 98). Weeks (1985) emphasized the element of choice in determining identity: choice based on

history, community, and environment, similar to social work's person-in-environment school of thought:

[W]e know, simultaneously, and often from the same people who so passionately affirm their sexual identity, that such an entity is provisional, ever precarious, dependent upon, and constantly challenged by, an unstable relation of unconscious forces, changing social and personal meanings, and historical contingencies. (p. 186)

Identities are therefore, not only the result of choice, but also the result of a battle for self-definition, a struggle against the imposition of definition by outside forces.

*Theoretical Challenges to Traditional Conceptions of Parenting.* Psychoanalytic and social learning theories of psychological development stress the importance to the social and personal development during childhood of having heterosexual male and female parents, emphasizing the “distinctive contributions each make to the social developmental process in children” (Patterson, 1992, p. 1027). Further, these theories predict negative outcomes for children who do not have parents fitting this model. As a result, there exists a pervasive belief that homosexuality is incompatible with procreation and parenting. In reaction to the 2002 American Academy of Pediatrics’ statement of support of co-parent adoptions (one avenue by which gay and lesbian couples adopt), Field (2002) wrote in a Letter to the Editor of *Pediatrics*, “The term ‘parent’ has been stretched to new limits . . . [t]he very nature of homosexuality goes against the qualifications of true parents who in all cases are male and female” (p. 1193).

Lesbians are presumed to be less maternal and lesbian motherhood is considered an “inherent contradiction” (DiLapi, 1989, p. 102; Falk, 1989). Regarding motherhood, DiLapi identified a social values-based, three-tiered hierarchy as to the question of who should bear and raise children. According to this hierarchy, married heterosexual women are deemed most appropriate, heterosexual women with non-nuclear families are marginally appropriate, and

lesbian women with non-traditional families are least appropriate. Zicklin (1995) also used the idea of the hierarchy in his discussion of gay and lesbian parenting, stating that “married-heterosexual-reproducing couples represent the pinnacle of hierarchically-arranged, morally-approved family relationships.”

Gay fatherhood has faced a similar stigma because, like lesbian motherhood, it is viewed as a contradiction. Stereotypes regarding the lifestyles of gay men have contributed to this idea, as has the belief that “the man who is both gay and a father [is] a victim of divided personal identity” (Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989, p. 164). The gay father is seen as having to mediate two cultures: one that defines his life as a gay man and the other (heterosexual) that defines his life as a father. According to Mallon (2000), gay men who parent “will be confronted with multiple questions about their ability to parent based purely on gender role orientation and on society’s viewpoint that men are not typically caretakers of young children” (p. 9).

According to Brown (1998), “Much of the hostility to lesbians and gay men fostering and adopting has been backed by ‘common-sense’ attitudes about children being unable to develop ‘normally’ within lesbians and gay households” (p. 101). These ‘common-sense arguments’ include: (1) “disturbances in gender identity and/or in gender role behavior” will occur, and (2) the psychological well-being of children will be compromised. Another argument against the use of gay or lesbian adoptive parents is “that it would not be fair to place vulnerable children with stigmatized adults” (Brown, 1998, p. 103; Ricketts and Achtenberg, 1990). Brown, however, urged workers to consider this issue from a strengths perspective: adults who have dealt with stigma may have developed healthy mechanisms for resolving such adversity that they can pass on to children in their care.

As was discussed earlier in this chapter, the aforementioned common-sense arguments have little empirical support. Further, both those arguments regarding children’s gender identity



and the presumption of unfitness due to sexual orientation are vulnerable to theoretical debate and deconstruction, particularly when we examine them under a Butlerian and Queer theory microscope.

*Issue of identity.* When issuing his ruling upholding Florida's ban on gay and lesbian adoptions in 2001, federal judge Lawrence King based his decision on 'common-sense arguments': "Plaintiffs have not asserted that homosexual families are . . . able to provide proper gender identification or are no more socially stigmatizing than married heterosexual families" (Wetzstein, 2001). In Butler's (1993) view, "Identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (p. 308). Further, those normative categories are policed and enforced through these regulatory regimes, as in the Florida case. Butler's theory of performativity challenges this notion of 'proper gender identification,' of gender's 'reality': "what we take to be 'real,' what we invoke as the naturalized knowledge of gender is, in fact, a changeable and revisable reality" (p. xxiii). Queer theory also contemplates a world lacking in 'proper gender identification,' a world in which people (children included) are allowed to identify themselves without the imposition of 'proper.' 'Proper' is the performative act of naturalized gender; it is that which, from Butler's (1999) perspective does not objectively exist,

There is no 'proper' gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another, which is in some sense sex's cultural property . . . *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*; in fact, it is the kind of notion that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself. (pp. 312-313)

Both Butler and Queer theory have proffered templates for the deconstruction of gender, and in turn, gender identity. Identity, according to Weeks (1985, 1995), is a work-in-progress,

fluid and changeable. To attack gay and lesbian parenthood on the grounds that children will not develop ‘proper gender identification’ is to canonize the notion that a ‘normal’ gender identification exists. In doing this, authorities, whether they be child welfare or judicial, gloss over a point of contention in Butlerian and Queer discourse: the determination of what constitutes a child’s gender identity. Who makes this determination? If a child’s identity, gender or otherwise, does shift and revise itself over time, by what authority do we determine that these shifts and revisions are detrimental to the child’s biopsychosocial well-being? That these shifts and revisions are caused by a parent’s sexual orientation? Indeed, that there is a causal link between sexual orientation and gender identification? At what point do we allow ourselves and our children to think outside the box, i.e., Gender, please check one: \_\_\_male \_\_\_female?

And what *is* ‘proper,’ anyway?

*Issue of fitness.* Mallon (1998) wrote, “Parenting in a society that presumes heterosexuality . . . the reality of gay men and lesbians as a family rearing children is still an idea that is shocking to many” (p. 167-168). According to Ball (2003), “Many Americans believe that the complementary characteristics traditionally associated with “fathering” and “mothering” are correlated with one’s gender” (p. 135). He goes on to explain, “there is no reason to believe that the positive characteristics we associate with fathering (such as providing and protecting) and mothering (such as nurturing and caring) are explained or determined by one’s sex” (p. 135). Our society and its child welfare system have historically marginalized, or outright rejected, gay and lesbian foster/adoptive parents because they disrupt the ‘natural’ order of things; more than that, they disrupt the idea that the ‘natural order’ is, in fact, natural.

The idea of gay and lesbian parenthood disrupts the coherency and continuity of parenthood as it is framed within the gender binary, under the auspices of heterosexuality.

According to Butler (1999), a failure to conform to proper gender creates a rift, destabilizes gender identity, and results in a revocation, at least to some degree, of the legitimacy of the ‘person.’ If those in power in child welfare somehow perceive prospective parents (i.e., gay and lesbian applicants) to be in any way less than fully legitimate persons (because they do not conform to gender norms and, therefore, mother and father norms), then the likelihood of child placement with those parents diminishes significantly. The reasoning process: if they are not quite persons, then they are lacking; if they are lacking, they cannot have the internal resources to provide a child with a loving, nurturing home. They are unfit. The theory of performativity undermines this logic by challenging the notion of ‘proper gender’ and, in turn, proper mother and proper father.

Both Butler’s theory of performativity and Queer theory have proffered a position of destabilized, denaturalized gender, as described previously. Here, that position is extended to include a destabilization, denaturalization of ‘mother’ and ‘father.’ If fatherhood and motherhood are indeed manifestations of gender, and are, therefore, performative, then they are no more natural than gender. They are, at most, gendered divisions of our cultural conception of parenthood and how that institution should operate. Morales (1995) stated, “being gay and a father has been viewed as impossible, an enigma, unlikely, incompatible, antithetical, incongruent, paradoxical, scandalous, and controversial” (p. 1086). It is telling of the social work profession that in identifying various configurations of gay fathers, two gay men jointly adopting was not named (Morales, 1995); the closest categorization named was “single, adoptive gay fathers” (p. 1087). Morales further wrote that, “unlike heterosexual fathers, gay fathers must integrate their gay identity with their identity as fathers” (p. 1087). Perhaps this is true, but it is just as likely that the dominant group (i.e., those who identify themselves as heterosexual) must

find a way to reconcile and integrate their perceptions of gay and lesbian identities with the ways in which they define parental identities.

Picking up the thread from Butler, Queer theory “describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire . . . queer locates and exploits the incoherencies in those three terms which stabilize heterosexuality” (Jagose, 1996, p. 3). Queer theory questions that basic model upon which heterosexual relationships are based: (1) an individual is born as a particular chromosomal sex (XX or XY); (2) the individual grows up as the gender (female or male) indicated by chromosomal sex (XX or XY, respectively); and, (3) the individual of a particular gender (female or male) and chromosomal sex (XX or XY) experience sexual desire for an individual of the opposite or other gender and chromosomal sex. Thus, the heterosexual relationship is formed, and from that heterosexual union, children are born, and heterosexual partners (XX/female and XY/male) become parents. But what if there are inconsistencies in the model? What if it does not come together as expected? What do each of the three components of the model actually represent then? Through these simple questions, Queer theorists challenge the definition of the model’s components, as well as the construction of the model itself. In so doing, Queer theory broaches another question – what if procreation does not produce parents? – destabilizing “cultural associations that link parenting and procreation to gendered difference, and not just any sort of gendered difference, but one constituted through a heterosexual relationship” (Weston, 1991, p. 174).

There are perhaps as many definitions of parenting as there are parents, and the extent to which those definitions include gendered conceptualizations is a function of mainstream mores. Ball (2003) provided a succinct summary:

As with marriage, a focusing on parenting through “degendered” lenses allows us to concentrate on the real values and qualities that underlie the forms of human associations that we as a society have decided to privilege. As with marriage, the dispute over gay and lesbian parents implicates the basic human needs and capabilities; those needs and capabilities have a complexity and a richness that are glossed over when we insist on grounding the value and meaning of parenting on gender differences and roles. To be a good parent, that is, to protect, nurture, provide, and care for a child – is not an expression of gender attributes; it is, instead, an expression (and realization) of one’s humanity. (pp. 135-136)

In other words, parenting (desiring to be a parent, the act of being a parent) is not a phenomenon or experience that occurs only when one is heterosexual. Rather, parenting is a state of being that transcends socially-inscribed gender roles; it is a strange mixture of love, concern, compassion, and boundary-setting that is unique to every parent-child relationship and has little to do with sexual orientation and its presumed association with the gendered roles of ‘mother’ and ‘father.’

### *Brief Overview of Adoption Practice in the United States*

Formal adoption is a relatively young process in the United States. Although the first adoption statute was created by Massachusetts in 1851 (Cole & Donley, 1990), by 1929, thirty of the then-forty-eight states still had no formal adoption laws (Ruark, 2002). This may have been a reflection of the influence of English Common Law on U.S. government practices; England did not enact adoption statutes until 1926 (Babb, 1998). Another influence may have been social workers; in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, social workers were reluctant to place children with families not of blood relation (Ruark, 2002). Workers were concerned that (1) children would not be fully accepted into the families, and/or (2) children were not “fit” to be adopted

(e.g., genetically). This conception of adoption by social workers changed after World War II, during which time social workers became strong advocates of professionally-supervised adoption. In 1948, the CWLA declared every child fit to be adopted.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of two movements critical to adoption in the U.S. The first of these movements was the adoptive parent movement. The adoptive parent movement sought to empower prospective adoptive parents and give them a voice in the adoption process. According to Nelson (1985),

The traditional approach to placement was investigative or evaluative, that is, workers exerted nearly complete control over the placement process. They investigated prospective parents to determine their suitability, and they decided which children would be placed with which parents. But many practitioners have come to feel that parents know their own strengths and weaknesses better than a worker can. Therefore, the evaluative approach is giving way to an educative approach that allows parents to decide for themselves whether they can handle the demands of . . . adoptive parenthood. (p. 4)

The second movement was the best interests of the child movement, which began in the early 1970s. With the best interests movement, “the emphasis in adoption practices shifted from finding children for parents to finding parents for children” (Laws, 1998, p. 86). The needs of children became the primary criteria for determining fit between child and prospective parents.

#### *Contemporary Practices in Child Welfare/Adoption Services*

There are presently three general venues for pursuing adoption: public agencies, private agencies, and independent adoptions. Public agencies are state-run facilities; the children available for adoption in these agencies are children who are in the custody of the state because their birth families are unable to provide a safe, healthy living environment. The majority of these children are considered ‘special needs,’ a category of adoptees that refer to those children

who are difficult to place because they are older, belong to a minority group, and/or have some type of physical or emotional disability. Private agency (whether licensed by the state or not) and independent (i.e., attorney-arranged) adoptions generally deal with the placement of infants (NAIC, 2002). Recently, states have moved to increase the role of private agencies in adoption practice. In Georgia, for example, private agencies are increasingly enlisted in arranging adoptions, recruiting prospective parents, conducting home studies and parent preparation, supervising placements, and providing post-adoption services (Georgia Department of Human Resources, 2002). Whether an agency is public or private, however, it is governed by both state statutes and adoption practice standards.

Current adoption practice is governed by the goal of meeting the best interests of the child standard, which is the foundation for child custody and placement decisions in the United States today. To that end, best practice guidelines for adoption practice that emphasize the ‘best interests’ standard have been established. The primary publishers of those standards are the Child Welfare League of America and the Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children.

*Best interests of the child.* By 1988, courts across the United States were routinely using the ‘best interests of the child’ standard in deciding the custody and placement of children. What is the ‘best interests of the child’ standard? There are certain factors that the court will focus on when determining a child’s best interests, including care, attention, and time a potential parent is able to devote to a child, the stability of the potential parent, and the home environment. In using the ‘best interests’ standard, the courts must decide whether a recommended adoptive placement best meets the child’s needs and qualifies as a suitable, permanent home. Further, the standard requires a “finding that the homosexuality has an adverse effect on the child before the test will allow exclusion of the homosexual parent” (Bell, 2001).

The complication with the best interests of the child standard is that there is no uniform criteria for determining what constitutes the child's best interests and how those interests should be served. This lack of clearly delineated criteria leaves the standard open to highly subjective interpretation. As Ryan (2000) stated, "Because the best-interest argument clearly lacks applicable standards, the choice is left to social workers and the judiciary – with potential homophobic attitudes, not necessarily the child's best interest, guiding the placement decision" (p. 519). An example of the subjectivity of the standard: in a 2002 custody case, Alabama Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore wrote, "'Homosexual conduct of a parent . . . creates a strong presumption of unfitness that alone is sufficient justification for denying that parent custody of his or her own children'" (Biskupic, 2003, p. 1A).

*Child Welfare League of America.* The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), a non-profit organization committed to improving the quality of child welfare services, was established in 1920 (CWLA, 2000). Since its inception, one of the primary goals and functions of the CWLA has been to set standards for child welfare. In 1938, the first adoption standards were developed by the CWLA, with an update in format taking place in 1955 and additional revisions occurring in 1958, 1978, 1988, and, most recently, 2000 (p. vii). Public and private child welfare agency boards, administrators, and staff and public officials, such as judges and legislators, are among those who form the audience the CWLA hopes will receive and utilize the standards. The aims of the standards of excellence are to:

- Provoke critical examination and revision of current practices;
- Provide content for child welfare education and training, both within academic and professional settings; and



- “Promote an understanding of how a service may more effectively meet the needs of children and their families, what it should be expected to do, and how it can be used” (pp. vi-vii).

So what are the CWLA’s standards of excellence regarding adoption services and, specifically, the determination of who qualifies as an adoptive parent?

The CWLA recommends that agencies remain flexible and open regarding accepting adoptive applicants, recognizing the increasing diversity of family formations, including adoptive families, e.g., “foster families, families of color, older individuals and families with children, two-parent working families, single parents . . . , gay and lesbian couples, families with modest incomes . . .” (2000, p. 3). An orientation as to adoption, its definition, process, and challenges, should be provided to individuals who express interest in becoming adoptive parents. The agency should then work with an applicant in determining if the applicant has the internal and external resources available to parent an adopted child, and, if so, deciding what type of child would benefit from placement with the applicant’s family.

When the applicant(s) has decided to move forward in the adoption process, the CWLA recommends several steps take place. The first of those steps is the obtainment of references from both relatives of the applicant and non-relatives who are familiar with the applicant and have an understanding of his/her capacity to parent (CWLA, 2000). The agency should also conduct background checks of all applicants for any child abuse and/or criminal records. Final decisions made by the agency regarding the adoption application should follow the homestudy and preparation process. The preparation process helps to build a relationship between the applicant and the agency through discussion of a wide range of subjects including (but not limited to), feelings regarding birth parents, explaining adoption to children, the adoption process

itself, and the impact of the adoption on the child; the CWLA believes this relationship is important to future support and utilization of agency services (p. 57). The homestudy is a key component of the adoption process; it should include an in-depth investigation of the applicant's psychological and social history, an evaluation of external and internal characteristics considered indicative of the ability to parent an adopted child (e.g., maturity, stability, access to community supports), and an exploration of the reasons for choosing adoption.

The agency's decision as to whether an applicant is a suitable adoptive parent is based on a judgment regarding the applicant's ability to "make a lifelong commitment to (*sic*), protect and nurture, and provide a safe, loving, and permanent family for a child not born to them" (CWLA, 2000, p. 62). A decision against allowing an applicant to adopt should be determined by an applicant's inability to meet the needs of a child or be satisfied with adoptive parenthood. More to the point, the CWLA standards of excellence includes a section entitled "Nondiscrimination in Provision of Services to Adoptive Applicants" (2000); the section states that all adoptive applicants should have an equal opportunity to adopt, should be treated in a fair manner equivalent to all other applicants, and should be evaluated based on ability to parent rather than issues of race, ethnicity, income, age, appearance, lifestyle, and/or sexual orientation. Applicants who successfully complete the adoption process should do so on the basis of their capacity to meet the needs of adopted children.

The final step in the adoption process is a review of the adoption application by the court. The primary concern in the agency's decision to recommend and the court's decision to legalize the adoption should be, according to CWLA, the child's best interests: Are a child's best interests served through adoption by this particular applicant based on the information collected by the agency?

*Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children.* COA, or the Council on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children, was established in 1977; its original sponsors were the CWLA and Family Service America (COA, 1985). It is an international, independent, non-profit “child- and family-service and behavioral healthcare accrediting organization” (see website listed in References section). In 2001 alone, COA accredited or was working to accredit over 1,400 public and private organizations in the United States and Canada. Evaluation of an organization is done against best practice standards published by COA. Those best practice standards are, in part, based on CWLA’s standards of excellence described above. In Georgia, there are over twenty COA-accredited organizations. COA’s (1985) accreditation provisions for adoption services, in particular, services for adoptive applicants, include the following:

- “orientation to adoption, its impact and meaning, the adoption process, agency procedures, and the availability of children for adoption” (p. 77);
- provision of information regarding the criteria used to determine an applicant’s suitability;
- determination of applicant’s ability to meet an adopted child’s needs;
- best-fit matching between applicant and child; and
- preparation for child placement.

Other services include post-placement assistance to parents and child and assistance with legal proceedings to finalize the adoption. The nondiscrimination standard COA (1985) applies to the agencies it accredits reads as follows: “The agency makes available its services without discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, or handicap” (p. 11).

### *Current Statistics*

At this time, there are approximately 568,000 children in the foster care system of the United States (Ferrero, et al., 2002). Of those 568,000, about 117,000 are available for adoption. And although 46,000 children are adopted annually through public child welfare agencies (which accounts for approximately 20% of all adoptions), the number of children entering the system far exceeds the number of those exiting. State-run child welfare organizations are struggling to find permanent homes for those children who have been released for adoption. While a review of the literature did not reveal any clear numbers regarding gay and lesbian couples who have adopted or would like to adopt, the viability of this population as a resource for adoptive placements cannot be dismissed.

### *Gay and Lesbian Adoptive Parenting*

There are three predominant discourses in the literature regarding gay and lesbian adoptive parenting: (1) the history of gay and lesbian involvement in adoption and fostering; (2) the legal debates and legislation, or lack thereof, regarding such adoptions; and (3) the beliefs and attitudes of child welfare organizations and professionals toward gay and lesbian couples as prospective parents.

*History.* According to Ricketts and Achtenberg (1990), there have been few published articles regarding the history of gay and lesbian adoptive (and foster) parenting. The authors did, however, provide a timeframe for considering gay and lesbian fostering and adoption, produced from those reports which *did* find an outlet:

- 1973. It was reported by *The Advocate* that the Director of the Department of Children and Family Services of Illinois had publicly acknowledged that children believed to be gay or lesbian were being placed with gay or lesbian foster parents;

- 1974 and 1975. Both Washington and Oregon, moved to ban placement of children in gay and lesbian foster homes;
- 1977. Florida instituted a ban on gay and lesbian adoptions (Ferrero et al., 2002; Ricketts & Achtenberg, 1990);
- 1974 to 1979. Other states (including California, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York) and the District of Columbia were increasingly allowing fostering by gay men and lesbians; and
- 1976. The Los Angeles County Department of Adoption appealed to single men to adopt boys over age nine, stating, “We seek the single adoptive parent who is comfortable in his sexual role and accepting of the opposite role” (p. 86).

Additionally, Ricketts and Achtenberg cited a March, 1979 article from *The Advocate* that reports an adoption by an openly gay couple in Los Angeles; the legalities of the adoption, however, are unknown.

Since the late 1970s, several mainstream health and children’s organizations have issued statements in support of lesbian and gay parenting. Those organizations include the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Child Welfare League of America, the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), and the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (NAIC) (Ferrero et al., 2002; NACAC, 2002; NAIC, 2000). Further, the NAIC (2000) recommended agencies and child welfare workers keep five questions in mind for *all* prospective adoptive parents:

- Is this person, or couple, caring, nurturing, and sensitive to others?
- Do they have the qualities needed to parent a child?
- What are their individual strengths and weaknesses?

- How do their individual strengths and weaknesses complement the needs of the child?
- Do they have the capacity to nurture a child not born to them?

The above questions are designed to focus the worker's placement investigation on who the applicant(s) is as a person and the potential fit between the applicant(s) and the child. In this manner, the worker is concentrating on the best interests of the child and not the extraneous issue of the applicant's sexuality and/or gender.

This is a time of transition regarding the rights of gays and lesbians to form legally-recognized families. There is a tension between the Defense of Marriage Act, passed by the federal government in 1996, which defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman, and a recent Supreme Court ruling, *Lawrence et al. v. Texas*, that gay men and lesbians had a Constitutional right to privacy under the due-process clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment (Thomas, 2003); Justice Anthony Kennedy declared for the majority of the Court that gays and lesbians are, "entitled to respect for their private lives" (p. 40). The *Lawrence* ruling brought to the national forefront the ongoing debate regarding such issues as same-sex marriage, military service, and adoption. Policy governing adoption by same-sex couples remains in a nationwide state of flux; some states allow these adoptions, others ban the practice, while still others have no clear, formalized statute or policy on the issue. In this last instance, child welfare agencies and their workers are left to develop their own informal rules on whether to place children with gay and/or lesbian couples.

*Legal issues.* The *Social Work Dictionary* (1996) offered the following definition of adoption: "taking a person, usually an infant or child, permanently into one's home and treating the child as though born into the family." Federal laws concerning certain aspects of adoption practice exist, for example the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 and the

Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997; however, these laws have, for the most part, remained silent on the subject of who shall (and shall not) be allowed to adopt. The adoption process is primarily structured by state law; statute dictates who is or is not eligible to adopt a child – adoption is not viewed as a fundamental individual right (Bell, 2001). Adoption statutes vary from state to state; in other words, while one state may have more liberal adoption policies, another state may severely restrict the eligibility of potential parents. Although there has been some effort to reconcile differences among state policies, for example the Uniform Adoption Act developed by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (under the 1971 revision of the act, unmarried individuals and gays and lesbians were protected from being “explicitly excluded from being considered as prospective adoptive parents”), the true scope of the variation becomes glaringly obvious when examining same-sex couple adoption (Crawford, 1999, p. 272).

Same-sex couples generally have two avenues available by which to adopt together: (1) second-parent (also called co-parent) adoption, or (2) joint adoption. In second-parent adoptions, one partner adopts the child as a single individual; after this adoption has been finalized, the other partner petitions the court to be allowed to also adopt the child without terminating the first partner’s parental rights. Joint adoption, on the other hand, allows both partners to adopt simultaneously. Four states explicitly allow joint adoptions: California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Vermont, plus Washington, D.C. (Ferrero et al., 2002). It is also common in Oregon, although there is no formal policy. Several states have “established statewide recognition” of second parent adoptions: California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Connecticut, Illinois, New York, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Vermont, plus Washington, D.C. (Ferrero et al., 2002, p. 19; Biskupic, 2003); in addition, Washington and Alaska are known for granting co-parent adoptions, and the local courts of at least a dozen other states have granted such adoptions. The

appeals courts of Ohio, Colorado, and Wisconsin, however, have refused to recognize second-parent adoptions (Ferrero et al., 2002; Ingersoll, 2002). Three states have made clear their refusal to allow same-sex couple adoptions: Florida has formally banned all gay and lesbian adoptions since 1977 (Ferrero et al., 2002); Mississippi recently enacted legislation prohibiting gay and lesbian couples from adopting; and, Utah has instituted a ban on adoptions by *unmarried couples*. Further, several states have laws discouraging adoption by unmarried couples (e.g., Alabama).

Courts and child welfare agencies must, first and foremost, adhere to state regulations regarding who can and cannot adopt. Yet, the majority of states have no formal rules regarding unmarried and/or gay and lesbian couple adoptions, which affords courts a great deal of freedom in decision-making (Ferrero et al., 2002). In a survey of adoption officials from each of the fifty states, Reilly (1996) found that twenty-two states had unwritten, informal policies that favored granting placement with gay or lesbian individuals (though not necessarily couples). An additional seventeen states had informal policies allocating such placement decisions to adoption workers, supervisors, and/or adoption teams. Reilly further elaborated, “In situations where state law and the courts have not clearly articulated policies about adoptions by gays and lesbians, the child welfare agencies have remained silent on the issue and developed informal policies which are inconsistently applied” (p. 100). Agencies, and the workers they employ, are guided by conflicting views (namely, the gendered beliefs governing parental roles and what defines a family) and practices concerning adoption by gay and lesbian couples, both of which may depend heavily on the political and social structure of the community.

Brown (1998) stated that adoptive parents should be chosen by child welfare agencies on the basis of their ability to form “caring, containing, facilitative, understanding and productive relationships with children and young people” (p. 102). In the United States, each state develops



its own set of policies and guidelines delineating the qualifications necessary to become a foster and/or adoptive parent. For example, in Georgia, the following constitute the basic requirements a prospective foster parent must fulfill: a drug screen, a medical exam, a home safety inspection, provision of references, possession of a Georgia driver's license and a social security card, and completion of a thirty-hour pre-service preparation program, which includes a family assessment (Georgia Department of Human Resources [DHR], "Facts on Foster Parenting"). The DHR also has a statement of nondiscrimination: "This agency does not deny any person the opportunity to become a foster parent on the basis of the race, color or national origin of the prospective parent." (Please note that sexual orientation is not mentioned in this nondiscrimination statement.)

According to Brown (1998), however, while many gay and lesbian applicants are deemed by agencies to be suitable foster parents for children, such qualification does not automatically translate into actual child placement.

*Child Welfare Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Couples as Adoptive Parents.* The desire to parent is not solely within the purview of heterosexual individuals – gay and lesbian individuals also experience the yearning to become parents (Mallon, 2000). Options available to gay and lesbian couples who want to have children include artificial insemination, surrogacy, and adoption. This last option, as has been discussed in detail in prior sections, is a challenge on several levels: state laws may restrict the access of gay and lesbian couples to adoption, child welfare agencies may have formal or informal policies against approving same-sex couple applications, and/or the belief systems and biases of adoption workers may prevent them from recommending placement with gay or lesbian couples.

Unfortunately, regarding the potential barriers imposed by adoption workers, there is a dearth of information in the social work literature regarding the beliefs and resultant behaviors of

adoptions workers toward same-sex couples who apply to become adoptive parents.

Numerous empirical studies have pointed to an overall attitude of ambivalence toward gay men and lesbians in the social work community; however, there have been only a limited number of investigations of attitudes in the specific context of same-sex couple adoptions. Three studies stand out as addressing issues of policy, attitudes, and the impact of both on placement in gay and lesbian adoptions.

The first study was a survey conducted by Ryan (2000), which specifically examined social worker attitudes on the issue of gay and lesbian adoptions. The study was framed by social constructionism, and examined the relationships between the dependent variable, placement recommendation, and several independent variables, including race/ethnicity, gender, religion, highest degree, special training, years of adoption experience, and attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as adoptive parents (as measured by a scale constructed for the purpose of this study). Results showed that the social workers in Ryan's sample held borderline favorable attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as adoptive parents; the earned scores on the scale used in the study, with 1.00 being "homophobic/nonplacement" and 5.00 being "nonhomophobic/placement" (p. 521), ranged from 1.64 to 5.00 ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = .79$ ). It should be noted that this investigation was not focused on gay and lesbian *couples* as adoptive parents, but rather gay and lesbian persons in general (though an open-ended question regarding adoption by a lesbian couple was included).

In the second study, Brooks and Goldberg (2001) conducted a qualitative study of child welfare agency workers and foster parents (both licensed and prospective) and found the following:

- study participants described the pervasive belief in the child welfare system that gay men and lesbians are unfit to be foster and adoptive parents;
- recruitment and approval of gay and lesbian foster parents depends greatly on the attitudes and informal policies of the agency (and that these attitudes and informal policies “have profound implications for recruitment and placement practices of individual workers” (p. 152)); and
- decisions regarding placement of children with gay and lesbian foster and adoptive parents are effected by the biases of child welfare workers.

The results here suggest that the responses of the child welfare system to gay and lesbian prospective parents occur on both a macro and micro level, and should be further investigated accordingly.

Finally, Brodzinsky (2003), in a 2001-2002 study sponsored by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, surveyed 51 public and 844 private adoption agencies regarding their policies, practices, and attitudes toward adoption by gay and lesbian individuals. With a return rate of 34%, 277 private and 30 public agencies participated in the project. Brodzinsky found that 63% of participating agencies accepted applications from gay men and lesbians and 37.7% placed children with these prospective parents. Special needs and international adoption agencies were more likely to accept gay and lesbian applicants, as were public, Jewish, and non-religion based agencies. These agencies’ directors were also likely to rate gay and lesbian applicants as not in need of more extensive evaluation, preparation, and support than other applicants, whereas directors of domestic infant adoption agencies (where only 48% would accept such applicants) were likely to rate gay and lesbian applicants as being in need of greater evaluation, preparation, and support. A final noteworthy finding: in follow-up telephone calls

with non-responding agencies, it was found that one-third of these organizations had policies against accepting gay and lesbian applicants.

The findings of these three studies suggest that further examination of the beliefs and biases of adoption workers is needed to better understand the institutional and interpersonal barriers to same-sex couple adoptions.

### CHAPTER III

#### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The present chapter describes the theoretical model guiding the implementation of the current exploratory investigation. The first step in explicating the conceptual framework of this study is to define its parameters, and more specifically, the configuration of the factors involved in what is ultimately the decision to recommend or not recommend adoptive placement of children with same-sex couples. What follows is a discussion of the proposed framework, or model, representing both (1) the specific relationships between the factors delineated in the research questions and (2) the overarching relationship governing adoption recommendations.

##### *The Theoretical Model*

Fishbein and Azjen (1975) have proffered a model for prediction of (1) intent to perform specific behaviors and (2) the behaviors themselves (a visual representation of this model is attached as Appendix A). This model serves as the conceptual framework from which the present investigation explores the relationships between internal and external factors influencing the positions of adoption workers and social work students on same-sex couple adoptions, and the subsequent decision to recommend said adoptions. To understand the model, we must first outline the basic structure of previous models of the relationship between attitudes and behavior. Previous models of the relationship between attitudes and behavior have focused on the object: beliefs about an object lead to attitudes about the object, which lead to enumerated intentions toward the object, which then lead to corresponding behaviors with respect to the object. Four key concepts are identified in the summation of the earlier models: beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. The concepts are defined by Fishbein and Azjen as follows:

- Beliefs. According to Fishbein and Azjen (1975), beliefs are the association of various attributes to an object. In other words, beliefs are the learned information a person holds regarding some object. Beliefs are developed through direct observation of an object or the provision of information about the object from outside sources. Further, they serve “as the informational base that ultimately determines [a person’s] attitudes, intentions, and behaviors” (p. 14).
- Attitudes. A person’s attitudes toward an object are based on his/her beliefs about that object (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975). Attitude is distinguished from belief in that, an attitude is an affective or evaluative response toward an object; that affective or evaluative response is based on the set of learned beliefs (and not one specific belief) about that object. It is generally agreed that, “a person’s attitude towards some object constitutes a predisposition on his part to respond to the object in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner” (Fishbein & Azjen, 1974, p. 59). It has been assumed that attitudes are strong predictors of behaviors; this assumption has not found strong support in empirical investigations. Investigations, however, have been limited to examinations of the relationship between attitudes and single behaviors. Fishbein and Azjen theorized that this lack of support is due to the neglect of other factors, in combination with attitudes, that form the basis for a person’s behaviors; these other factors may include personal disposition and temperament, the particular situation, and social norms. It is also posited that attitude is a general predisposition toward an object, but it “does not predispose the person to perform an specific behavior” (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975, p. 15), that “a given attitude may elicit any of a number of responses consistent with the

attitude” (Fishbein & Azjen, 1974, p. 61) and, rather than directly predicting single behaviors, attitudes should be consistent with an overall pattern of behaviors.

- **Intentions.** Intentions here refer to plans to act or behave in a certain manner regarding an object; they are considered a special case of beliefs. An intention’s strength is “indicated by the person’s subjective probability that he will perform the behavior in question” (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975, p. 12). Fishbein and Azjen proposed that attitude is related to intentions to perform behaviors; however, they do not view this relationship as that of an attitude toward an object leading to formulation of a single intention to commit a single behavior. Rather, they believed that attitude toward an object is related to a set of intentions to perform a set of behaviors.
- **Behaviors.** The final key category to consider is that of behaviors, which are overt, observable acts committed in response to, or with respect to, some object. Fishbein and Azjen (1975) suggested that behaviors can be studied independently or as inferences of beliefs, attitudes, and/or intentions. Interestingly, included in their discussion as examples of overt, observable acts were responses to questionnaires.

The above concept delineations have focused primarily on explaining the relationship between beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors to some object, the common strategy in the general attitude-behavior model prior to Fishbein and Azjen (1974, 1975). Fishbein and Azjen proposed a modification to this model: rather than focus on the relationships (between the four concepts) to an object, the emphasis should be on explanation of the forces (and the relationships between those forces) that coalesce to produce a specific behavior. As was previously discussed, attitude alone has been demonstrated a poor predictor of a single behavior. In the proposed framework, however, attitude is one of several interrelated concepts organized to explain their

function in the production of a behavior. Fishbein and Azjen's conceptual framework addresses the issue of the relationships between the four concepts, two additional concepts (normative beliefs and subjective norm), and a specific behavior.

The Fishbein and Azjen framework is explained thus: a behavior is a result of an intention to perform said behavior. The intention is a result of two influences: (1) attitude toward that behavior, and (2) the subjective norm concerning that behavior. Both attitudes and subjective norms about the behavior function in tandem to produce the intention to act. In turn, the attitude toward the behavior is born from beliefs about the consequences of the behavior, while the subjective norms are the result of the normative beliefs about the behavior (reminder, the framework is cast in a visual representation in Appendix A). Normative beliefs refer to "beliefs that certain referents think the person should or should not perform the behavior in question" (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975, p. 16); the subjective norm is the sum of the normative pressures. Referents, i.e., outside influences, may be individuals, institutional forces, and/or socio-cultural factors.

#### *Application of the Framework to the Current Investigation*

The current study employs the Fishbein and Azjen framework as an explanatory model in the process by which adoption workers decide to recommend or not to recommend adoptive placements with gay and lesbian couples. The components of the theoretical model guiding this investigation may be conceptualized as follows (a visual representation is attached as Appendix B):

- Behavior: recommend/not recommend adoptive placement with same-sex couple;
- Intention to perform behavior: decision to recommend/not recommend adoptive placement with same-sex couple;



- Attitude toward behavior: affective or evaluative response to the adoptive placement of children with same-sex couples;
- Subjective norm concerning behavior: the totality of interpersonal, societal, cultural, legal, and professional pressures regarding the placement of children with same-sex couples;
- Beliefs about consequences of behavior: acquired information about the bio-psychosocial and sexual developmental outcomes for children placed with (parented by) same-sex couples; and
- Normative beliefs about behavior: beliefs imposed on the worker by outside influences, including agency policies (formal, informal, or lack thereof), legal statutes, education, and social, cultural, and/or political factors/institutions/figures.

The behavior, recommendation of same-sex couple adoption, stems from the worker's intention, or decision, to recommend such placement. This intention is based on both the worker's attitude toward gay and lesbian couples, a response which is based on the worker's beliefs about the outcomes of children parented by gay men and lesbians, and the subjective norms the worker is faced with, which result from exposure of the worker to the beliefs of external forces, such as a supervisor, an instructor, or a religious leader. (It should be noted that, for the purposes of this study, the emphasis is *not* on the model's end result, the behavior, but on the intention to perform that behavior.)

#### *Critical Factors Within the Model*

The above bulleted points represent the model's critical factors: normative beliefs about behavior, beliefs about consequences of behavior, subjective norm with respect to behavior,

attitudes toward behavior, intention to perform behavior, and the behavior itself. The remainder of this section will explicate each of these factors, as it pertains to the present study.

*Normative beliefs about behavior.* Normative beliefs regarding same-sex couple adoptions are constructed through various sources, including (but not limited to) child welfare agency policies (both formal and informal), state adoption statutes, education, and environmental influences (such as socio-cultural, religious, and political factors). These external sources act upon the adoption worker, influencing his or her decisions and behaviors toward gay and lesbian couples attempting to adopt. Brooks and Goldberg (2001) found that an agency's attitude toward adoptions by lesbians and gay men "can have profound implications for recruitment and placement practices of individual workers" (p. 152). Formal agency policies stem from state statutes; however, as was discussed in the previous chapter, many states lack clear legislation on the issue of adoption by same-sex couples. In those states where the law is not explicit on the subject, agencies are left to develop their own practices and policies, whether formal and written or informal and unwritten.

Despite the overwhelming lack of formal statutes, the position of many states on the issue of gay and lesbian couple adoptions may be derived from other state positions on gay and lesbian issues. The Defense of Marriage Act was signed into law by President Clinton in September of 1996 (Knight, 1997); this law defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman. By February of 1997, eighteen states had enacted similar laws. Another venue of legislation that may be telling of a state's stance on gay and lesbian issues is that of partner benefits – does that particular state support the conference of benefits to the partners of gay men and lesbians? A third legislative subject, sodomy laws, were, until the summer of 2003, used to criminalize same-sex relationships through the legalized violation of sexual privacy between consenting adults. The Supreme Court's ruling in *Lawrence et al. v. Texas* declared such laws in violation of the

constitutional right to privacy, overturning a previous ruling, *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which upheld sodomy laws.

As an extension of state influence, the court system can also have an impact on an adoption worker's decisions. When formal statutes are not in place, the courts have broader discretion in deciding to grant an adoption. Individual judges may be more reluctant to do so than others. Decisions on adoption cases are cloaked in the 'best interests of the child' standard. Courts may use the standard to justify the denial of an adoption petition by a same-sex couple, stating that the prospective parents' sexual orientation is a fundamental threat to the best interests of the child. Such rulings may compel adoption workers to question the utility of advocating for same-sex couples, their own beliefs about gay and lesbian parenting or both.

A third source of normative beliefs, education, has several contributing components. The first is formal social work curricula, which refers to any practice, policy, theory, or research coursework that may impact the belief system and/or practice philosophy of social work students. Coursework here does not necessarily have to pertain directly to gay and lesbian issues. As Cain (1996) summarized, "Social work education is about more than just teaching new information and skills; it is also about encouraging students to question their assumptions and values, and the structure of the world around them" (p. 65). Child welfare workers, however, are not necessarily formally-trained social workers. It is estimated that only 28% of child welfare workers in the United States have bachelor's or graduate degrees in social work (Schneider, 2003); in Georgia, that number falls to below 20%, according to a study conducted by Ellett.

Whether or not adoption workers are formally-trained social workers, training in agencies is relied upon to orient the worker to the interworkings of that agency and its place within the child welfare system. Ryan (2000) found that special training had a significant impact on the

attitudes of social workers toward gay and lesbian adoptions (please note that ‘special training’ was not further defined). Button (2001) advocated the use of diversity workshops which “allow trainers to present accurate information about homosexuality, dispel common misconceptions, and lower anxiety” (p. 17). If we assume that special training is some form of diversity training, then to what extent is diversity training included in agency training? And how much of training content is devoted to working with gay men and lesbians? Furthermore, best practice standards in adoption explicitly state a policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation in selection of adoptive parents. Yet, we do not know the extent to which these standards are incorporated into an agency’s structure, nor do we know if workers are familiarized with these standards.

Environmental factors are the fourth category of normative belief sources; as Ben-Ari (1998) stated, “social workers, just like other people, are products of a culture and socialization process which are to a large extent homophobic” (p. 60). Factors in this socialization process are diverse and highly individualized, and can include anything from the opinions of friends and family members to religious affiliation to political affiliation (e.g., right-wing Republicans are less likely to support same-sex couple adoptions than Democrats of any wing). Ben-Ari encourages social workers and social work students (and for the purposes of this study, that encouragement is extended to adoption workers) to examine the sources of their reactions to gay men and lesbians, and to evaluate and modify those reactions when necessary. In the case of same-sex couple adoptions, workers should examine the external contributors to their behaviors toward facilitating these adoptions.

*Beliefs about consequences of behavior.* Beliefs about the consequences of a behavior are distinguished from normative beliefs in this manner: beliefs about consequences are formed on the basis of knowledge acquired through observation by the individual, while normative

beliefs are the beliefs of persons or institutions that impact the individual. As was discussed in the previous chapter, beliefs about consequences of gay and lesbian parenting, adoptive or otherwise, can be categorized as (1) questions regarding the outcomes of children concerning biopsychosocial and sexual development and identity formation, and (2) questions regarding the competencies of gay men and lesbians to parent. These two categories can be further broken down into the four primary concerns constituting the knowledge base on gay and lesbian families with children: (1) children of gay or lesbian parents will suffer crises of psychological and sexual identity development (a problematic concern for several reasons, among them the negative connotations assigned to identification as gay or lesbian); (2) children of gay or lesbian parents are more likely to be sexually molested; (3) children of gay or lesbian parents will suffer harassment and ostracism by peers due to their family structure; and, (4) gay and lesbian individuals are not fit to parent because they have unstable lifestyles and are not fit gender role models (Huggins, 1989; Mallon, 2000). As was found in various empirical studies previously discussed, there is little to no evidence sustaining these concerns. This evidence, however, has not stymied the propagation of contradictory evidence perpetuating and exacerbating these concerns.

At the core of the concerns regarding gay and lesbian parenting is our society's conceptualization of the roles of mother and father and, in turn, the roles of women and men. Same-sex relationships and same-sex couples as parents challenge the traditional sex role designations that are at the heart of heterosexual relationships. As Mallon (1998) stated, in our society, there is "gender role strain inherent in having two parents of the same gender" (p. 168). From a social learning perspective, sex role beliefs are learned and culturally determined (Lottes & Kuriloff, 1998). Whitley (1987) defined sex roles as "one's patterns of behavior relative to members of one's own and the other sex, and the degree that one's personality fits the societal

definition of the masculine and feminine personality” (p. 104). Due to stereotypes of gay men and lesbians, there is a presumption that these individuals do not conform to their given sex roles. The degree of investment in traditional sex role beliefs is associated with attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Whitley found that for both men and women, less traditional role beliefs were associated with less negative attitudes toward homosexuality. Stark (1991, as cited by Black, et al., 1998, p. 171) found that “although both traditional male and female roles strongly correlated with high levels of homophobia, a person’s belief in the gender role for her or his sex most strongly shaped homophobic beliefs.” Black et al.’s findings supported those of Whitley and Stark.

Kite and Whitley (1996, as cited by LaMar & Kite, 1998) proposed that the evaluation of gay men and lesbians done by heterosexual individuals is based on a generalized gender belief system that operates regarding an attribution binary – what is feminine is not masculine and what is masculine is not feminine. We can extend this proposition to parenting – what is mothering is not fathering and what is fathering is not mothering, and each of these is associated with one of the two genders (Ball, 2003). According to the binary then, same-sex couples represent a lack of one or the other. As was elaborated in the previous chapter, strict adherence to the binary system would require workers to view parenting as a highly gendered function and parenting by same-sex couples as a disadvantage, a lack in the total package of parenting, and a detriment to children. While Queer theory challenges this position, and the premise that to be good parents you must fit the heterosexual model, sex role beliefs (which include beliefs about parenting) remain prevalent.

*Subjective norm with respect to behavior.* The four sources of normative beliefs delineated above, agency policies, state statutes, education, and environmental factors, work together to form the subjective norm with respect to gay and lesbian couple adoptions.

Remember, the subjective norm is the totality of normative beliefs regarding a behavior.

Information on same-sex couple adoptions from the four sources are synthesized together to form the subjective norm the worker will use as one factor in deciding whether or not to recommend adoptive placement with a gay or lesbian couple. The four sources may or may not be given equal weight during the synthesis; one source may take precedence over another. There may also be conflicting information from the various sources; how these conflicts are resolved are dependent upon the individual worker.

*Attitudes toward behavior.* There are a range of attitudes (i.e., affective or evaluative responses) toward same-sex couple adoptions that may result from the beliefs of adoption workers, ranging from complete acceptance of these couples as adoptive parents to complete objection to gay and lesbian adoptive parenting. Brooks and Goldberg (2001) suggested that individual worker biases against placement with gay men and/or lesbians can affect the outcomes of the application process, and that workers may go so far as to sabotage the process. Mallon (1998) concluded that there is an “inherent difficulty in separating personal attitudes from professional prerogatives with respect to homosexuality” (p. 8).

Attitudes result from beliefs about the consequences of a behavior, in this case, recommending adoptive placement with a same-sex couple. As was discussed previously, beliefs are dependent on the information the worker has collected. If that information is favorable to gay and lesbian couple adoptions – outcomes for children and parenting skills of gay men and lesbians are both good – then the attitude of the worker is highly likely to be favorably disposed toward recommending the adoption. If, on the other hand, the information and resultant beliefs are not favorable, then the attitudes formed are also not likely to favor recommending placement.

According to Mallon (1998), “while most social workers have ‘politically correct’ ideas about gay men and lesbians, many professionals have not always had the opportunity to deal with the deeper prejudices and heterosexual privileges that they, themselves possess” (pp. 14-15). The results of the Ryan (2000) study could be interpreted in support of this statement. Ryan found that social workers’ attitudes were only moderately in favor of gay and lesbian adoptive parenting. This moderate result hints at a tentativeness in supporting adoptions by gay men and lesbians, whether as couples or individuals.

*Intention to perform behavior.* The intention to perform a specific behavior, recommending or not recommending adoptive placement with a same-sex couple, is a decision-making step. It is the result of both attitudes and the subjective norm, which are themselves the result of individual and normative beliefs, respectively. For the purposes of this study, intentions are the overarching concern of the researcher: given the other components of the model, what are the intentions of workers toward placement recommendations? Other intentions which may be measured include the intention of the worker to, (1) accept same-sex couples as adoptive applicants on the worker’s caseload; (2) counsel and prepare same-sex couples to become adoptive parents; and (3) conduct a home study of the same-sex couple applicants. Yet, performance of these behaviors does not necessarily result in placement (Brown, 1998), therefore, by necessity we must specifically examine the intention to recommend or not recommend.

*Behavior.* The behavior addressed here is the actual recommendation to place or not place a child in an adoptive home headed by a gay or lesbian couple. Other specific behaviors could take the place of this one, while the remainder of the model’s components go unchanged. Adoption is a process, not a one-shot deal, and because of this, there are several steps that must take place before the recommendation is made. These steps include, but are not limited to: (1)



the decision by the agency to accept a particular applicant; (2) the agreement of a worker to work with the applicant; (3) the preparation of the applicant by the worker; and (4) the worker's counseling of the applicant. Ultimately, however, the recommendation is the primary behavior of concern in the adoption process.

### Research Questions

To reiterate, the following research questions will be addressed in the present study:

- Research question 1: What are the attitudes of adoption professionals and social work students specializing in child welfare toward gay and lesbian *couple* adoptions?
- Research question 2: Is there a correlation between attitudes toward same-sex *couple* adoption and beliefs regarding gender/sex roles?
- Research question 3: Is there a relationship between attitudes toward same-sex *couple* adoption and likelihood to recommend adoptive placement with a gay or lesbian *couple*?
- Research question 4: Is there a relationship between agency policies regarding gay and lesbian *couple* adoptions and attitudes toward those adoptions? Between agency policies and placement decisions?
- Research question 5: Is there a relationship between social work curricula on gay and lesbian parenting and family configurations and attitudes toward gay and lesbian *couple* adoptions? Between social work curricula and placement decisions?

The research questions stated here attempt to examine specific relationships within the model, but do not necessarily attempt to validate the model as a whole. Validation of this nature is beyond the scope of this investigation, which is meant to lay the groundwork for future evaluation of the impact of adoption workers on same-sex couple adoptions.

## Hypotheses

As this is an exploratory study, the hypotheses tested will be limited. They are as follows:

1. The direction of beliefs regarding sex roles are directly related to the direction of attitudes regarding same-sex couple adoptions.
2. The direction of attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions are directly related to intentions to recommend adoptive placements with same-sex couples.
3. The existence of formal agency policies is directly related to the direction of attitudes regarding same-sex couple adoptions.
4. The existence of formal agency policies is directly related to the decision or intention to recommend adoptive placements with same-sex couples.
5. The influence of social work education is directly related to the direction of attitudes regarding same-sex couple adoptions.
6. The influence of social work education is directly related to the decision or intention to recommend adoptive placements with same-sex couples.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Research Design*

A correlational research design was employed in the current investigation; self-administered questionnaires, in the form of a mailed survey, were used to collect data. Practical issues influenced the choice of the survey design for this study, and with these issues in mind, it was concluded that the mailed survey would be the most feasible design for the purposes of the current research study. A survey is more likely to capture the dimensions of the variables that are the focus of the present research; to explain further, the attitudes, beliefs, and norms impacting behavior cannot be directly observed, nor do they lend themselves to the utilization of a group research design. Therefore, a design has been chosen that will allow the researcher to begin to explore these variables in some depth. In addition, the mailed survey was chosen because other variations of the correlational design, e.g. interviews and telephone surveys, were deemed impractical due to time, costs, and the length of the instrument. Finally, due to the sensitive nature of the survey's content, the mailed questionnaire's format and its accompanying promise of anonymity or confidentiality, depending upon distribution method (discussed below), regarding identifying information may have provided respondents with a sense of privacy and a distance from the researcher that will facilitate forthright responses not influenced by social desirability.

#### *Sampling*

Two populations were sampled as part of the present study: (1) child welfare workers employed by adoption agencies licensed by the state of Georgia, and (2) students who are or

were enrolled in a social work program at a college or university in Georgia. Both samples were recruited through purposive sampling; for the purposes of the research, specific sub-groups of child welfare workers and social work students were targeted for inclusion in the sample. Regarding child welfare workers, the sample was limited to those workers who specialize in domestic adoptions (either special needs or infant); the rules governing international adoption would introduce complicating factors that are beyond the scope of this study. Social work students, both present and former, were asked to participate in the investigation and were limited to those who are currently receiving or have previously received Title IV-E grant funding, which requires students to make a commitment to work in the child welfare field. Despite common stereotypes, social work students do not *en masse* enter into child welfare, and it is therefore more useful to the current study to focus on those students who *are* specializing in this particular field.

In summary, data were collected from two samples: (1) child welfare workers employed by public and private adoption agencies licensed by the state of Georgia who specialize in domestic special needs and infant adoptions, and (2) students who are or were enrolled in a social work program at a college or university in the state of Georgia and are or were receiving Title IV-E funding. A list of adoption agencies licensed by the state of Georgia was obtained from the Georgia Department of Human Resources' Office of Regulatory Services website. All agencies who facilitate domestic adoptions were contacted regarding participation in the current study – 32 in total. Seventeen agencies agreed to participate. Dr. Alberta Ellett, coordinator of the Title-IV-E project at the University of Georgia, whose work is focused in the area of child welfare, agreed to assist the researcher in gaining access to the student population targeted for this project. To this end, Title IV-E coordinators at Georgia universities were contacted and

permission to survey their students was requested; initially, four universities were selected to participate.

*Dissemination of questionnaire.* Two methods of distribution were utilized to supply the survey instrument to sample members in each group. In both methods, a self-addressed, stamped return envelope was included in the questionnaire package, for the convenience of the respondent. In the first method, questionnaires were mailed directly to adoption workers and former/current students at either their home or work addresses. In the second method used to distribute the survey to students and adoption workers questionnaire packets were mailed to a program's Title IV-E coordinator or an agency supervisor who then distributed the questionnaire to students or workers. The method of distribution was decided upon by the program/agency administrator.

According to Rubin and Babbie (2001), in order to achieve statistical power greater than .80 with a medium effect size, a sample size of 90 is needed. To have power for both groups, therefore, each group needed at least 90 respondents. As per the following discussion of return rates, the goal of this study was to have at least a 60% return rate. Taking into consideration these two factors, it was determined that 150 questionnaires should be distributed per group (60% of 150 is 90, thereby meeting the requirement for statistical power). It was planned that three hundred surveys would be distributed in total; however, there were several barriers to distribution, including agency and university lack of response or ability to participate at the time of the study and the limited number of workers at agencies. Therefore, the following number of surveys was distributed to the two sub-samples: (1) adoption workers – 57, and (2) students – 60.

*Return rate.* A chief concern for any researcher conducting an investigation through the use of a mailed questionnaire is the return rate. According the Rubin and Babbie (2001), there are “three rules of thumb about return rates” (p. 368): (1) “a response rate of at least 50 percent

is considered adequate for analysis and reporting,” (2) “a response of at least 60 percent is *good*,” and (3) “a response rate of 70 percent is *very good*.” The goal of this researcher is to achieve a return rate of at least 60 percent from each sub-sample (adoption workers and students).

With this in mind, a strategy of multiple mailings was used to increase the response rate among both the adoption worker and student sub-samples. The initial mailing included a one-page cover letter (Appendix C) explaining the study’s purpose and promising confidentiality or anonymity (depending on distribution method), the survey instrument, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for convenient return mailing. Regarding the adoption worker sub-sample, a second mailing to agency administrators was conducted four weeks after the first mailing, and the contents were the same as the first. Regarding the Title IV-E student sample, if questionnaires had been distributed by the Title-IV-E coordinator, then the second mailing package was sent to him or her. This package included notices to be given to students asking them to complete and return the survey; in addition, extra copies of the questionnaire were included in the packet, in case students had misplaced their originals. In one case, a follow-up mailing was done directly to students who had received the first mailing through the coordinator; in this case, the coordinator provided the researcher with the names and addresses of students.

### *Data Collection*

As stated above, data were collected through a mailed survey instrument; two versions of the instrument were created – one version for adoption workers and a second version for social work students (please see Appendix D for adoption worker version, and note that the student version does not include a section on agency policies). The adoption workers’ survey instrument is composed of the following seven sections: (1) questions pertaining to agency policies; (2) questions pertaining to social work education; (3) the Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale; (4) the

Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Couples as Adoptive Parents Scale; (5) the Homophobia Scale; (6) self-rated statements regarding the adoption process; and (7) demographics. The students' instrument is composed of sections (2) – (7). What follows is a discussion of the composition and properties of each of these sections.

*Agency Policies.* This section was to be completed only by child welfare workers who specialize in adoption and are currently employed by an adoption agency licensed by the state of Georgia. Five questions were included; those questions were designed to elicit information regarding current employment status (with regard to employment in an adoption agency licensed by the state of Georgia) and the existence of formal and informal same-sex couple adoption policies in the agencies these workers are employed by, and whether or not these agencies allow adoptive placement with gay male couples and/or lesbian couples. Two of the questions included open-ended contingency questions asking respondents to describe the policies of their agency, should policies regarding same-sex couple adoptions (either formal or informal) exist.

*Social Work Education.* The education section of the survey was to be completed by any respondent who is currently enrolled or has already completed formal social work education. Six questions were included in this section; these questions were designed to determine (1) current education status, (2) the impact of social work coursework on beliefs regarding same-sex couple adoptions, (3) if content regarding gay and/or lesbian parenting and adoption was included in social work curricula, and (4) if social work curricula was a primary basis for beliefs regarding same-sex couple adoptions.

*Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale.* Developed by Beere, King, Beere, and King (1984; King & King, 1993), the *Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale* (SRES) examined sex roles in the context of relationships. Beere et al. defined sex role egalitarianism as “an attitude that causes one to respond to another individual independently of the other individual's sex” (p. 564). Two

alternative forms of the SRES were developed, B and K; each form contains 95 items. The SRES is composed of five domains, i.e., marital roles, parental roles, employment roles, social-interpersonal-heterosexual roles, and educational roles, and each domain consists of 19 items. All domains for both forms had internal consistency coefficients of .84 or higher. Overall, both forms B and K had internal consistency coefficients of .97 and test-retest coefficients of .88 and .91, respectively (King & King, 1993, p. 25).

King and King (1993) summarized evidence in support of the SRES' convergent and discriminant validity. Several studies, including Honeck (1981), Jaffa (1985), King, Beere, King, and Beere (1984), and King and King (1986), examined the relationship between the SRES and the *Attitudes Toward Women Scale* in successful attempts to provide evidence of convergent validity; correlations between the two scales were found in these studies to range from .81 to .86. Evidence of discriminant validity was found in other studies (e.g., Gaffney, 1990; King, 1985; King & King, 1990) through an investigation of the relationship between the SRES, which measures the "egalitarianism construct in the context of relationships" (p. 39), and the *Bem Sex Role Inventory*, which is a self-report index of gender traits. In this case, low and nonsignificant correlations between the two instruments were found, thereby providing support for the SRES' discriminant validity.

Abbreviated versions of the SRES were created for both forms B and K; these abbreviated versions are referred to as forms BB and KK, respectively. Form BB was selected for inclusion in the survey instrument developed for the current investigation. The 25 item form BB includes five items from each of the aforementioned five domains in the original form B; those items with the strongest relationship between domain score and individual item were selected for inclusion on the short form (King & King, 1993). Regarding scoring, possible



scores on the BB range from 25 to 125; higher scores indicate more egalitarian attitudes toward sex roles.

In an evaluation of form BB's reliability, a coefficient alpha of .94 was found. Furthermore, the coefficient of stability was .88 and the coefficient of equivalence was .87. The BB also has a correlation of .95 to its full form, B. An internal consistency estimate of reliability was computed for the SRES-BB for the current sample ( $N = 65$ ). As with the prior evaluation, a relatively high alpha was found - .91. Concerning validity, face, content, and factorial validity appear strong. In addition, evidence of concurrent validity was found in two studies cited by King and King (1990) (i.e., Crossman, Stith, & Bender, and Bender, both of which were in press at that time); these two studies found negative, significant correlations between the short forms of the SRES and measures of approval of marital violence. King and King (1993) concluded that the short form of the SRES appears to "satisfactorily represent that which is measured by [its] parent full form" (p. 27).

*Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Couples as Adoptive Parents Scale.* The *Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Couples as Adoptive Parents Scale* (ATSCAP) is a modified version of the unpublished *Attitudes Toward Gay Male Couples as Adoptive Parents Scale* (ATGP; please see Appendix F) (Spivey, 2002). The ATGP was designed as a measure of child welfare worker attitudes toward adoption by gay male couples. The term 'gay male couple' refers to two men, self-identified as homosexual, in a relationship who seek to adopt a child jointly. Attitudes toward gay male couples was defined as those beliefs and feelings that stem from formal and informal adoption policies/practices, knowledge/myths regarding the lifestyles of gay male couples, knowledge/myths regarding the parenting abilities of gay male couples, and knowledge/myths regarding the outcomes for children raised by gay male couples. The bases for the construction of the ATGP were this theoretical definition and the concept of

homonegativism, defined by Hudson and Ricketts (1980) as, “intellectual attitudes toward homosexuality as a phenomenon and personal affective responses to gay people” (p. 358). Thus, the ATGP included two domains, (1) intellectual attitudes and (2) personal affective, or homophobic, responses.

The items of the scale were constructed so as to capture either an intellectual belief or choice (e.g., “I believe . . .”) or an affective response (e.g., “I would feel . . .”) to some statement regarding those elements of child placement and same-sex couples as parents explored earlier in Chapter Two. Further, items were constructed to represent at least one of the four components of the theoretical definition: policies/practices, lifestyles beliefs, parenting abilities beliefs, and outcomes for children beliefs. The majority of the items of the ATGP were written in terms suggesting homonegativity (e.g., “I would feel nervous ” and “I would feel uncomfortable”). As a safeguard against response bias, the scale included five ‘positive’ statements, which were reversed scored; those items were: 5, 6, 7, 9, 14. The reverse-scored items used wording such as, “I would feel confident” and “I would feel comfortable” to indicate non-homonegativist attitudes. Concerning scoring, the ATGP has a score range of 14 to 84. Higher scores indicate less negative attitudes.

Several items on the scale were developed based on similar items used in the *Attitude Toward Gay Men and Lesbian as Adoptive Parents Scale* (APS; see Appendix B) (Ryan, 2000). Like the ATGP, the APS is a fourteen-item measure. The APS, created for the Ryan study, utilized a Likert response set ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), and had a high coefficient alpha reliability, .95. Despite the inspiration provided by the APS, the ATGP differs from the previous measure in several ways. First, the ATGP focuses specifically on attitudes toward gay male couples. The items on the APS, on the other hand, refer to gay men, lesbians, or homosexuals; only item 3 requires the respondent to consider gay *couples* as

adoptive parents. Second, the ATGP utilizes a 6-point response set, with values ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree); there is no neutral value. Third, the items on the ATGP are written as 'I-statements,' personalizing the responses of participants. Finally, the ATGP was constructed to measure both intellectual and affective attitudes, while the APS was created with a focus on affective responses.

In a pilot study of the ATGP (Spivey, 2002), reliability was evaluated using *SPSS 10.0*. Inter-item correlations ranged from the very weak (-.0010 between items 8 and 12) to the very strong (.9158 between items 3 and 11). The coefficient alpha, .95, indicated very good reliability for the scale as a whole. In examining alpha values if certain items were deleted, it was found that alpha would increase with the deletion of item 5 (.9534), item 8 (.9523), or item 12 (.9503). Face and content validity were determined to be good; a limitation of this pilot was the lack of evaluation concerning other forms of validity.

The ATSCAP changes the structure of the ATGP in two ways. First, item 12 on the ATGP has been eliminated from the ATSCAP. Item 12 was eliminated because it was deemed to be inconsistent with the original theoretical definition the ATGP was meant to reflect, which has been expanded to include lesbian, as well as gay male, couples. Second, in order to capture attitudes toward both gay male couples and lesbian couples, items 2-13 were divided into parts "a" and "b," with part a of each item referring to gay male couples and part b of each item referring to lesbian couples. This division created two sub-scales: (1) the Gay Couple Sub-scale (GCS), items 2a through 13a; and, (2) the Lesbian Couple Sub-scale (LCS, items 2b through 13b. Scores for the ATSCAP may range from 25 to 150; scores on the two sub-scales range from 12 to 72. Again, higher scores indicate less negative or more favorable attitudes. (Please refer to the full survey instruments presented in Appendices D and E to view the ATSCAP.)

As the modifications made to produce the ATSCAP were limited, it was expected that the reliability coefficient for the ATSCAP would remain consistent to that found in the pilot study of the ATGP. An internal consistency estimate was computed for the ATSCAP, based on the results produced by the current sample ( $N = 65$ ); the value for coefficient alpha was .9694, indicating excellent reliability. In examining alpha values if certain items were deleted, it was found that alpha would remain essentially the same if items 5a (.9694), 5b (.9693), 13a (.9693), or 13b (.9693) were eliminated. Further, it was found that alpha would increase if items 8a (.9707) or 8b (.9705) were deleted.

Coefficient alphas for the sub-scales, GCS and LCS, were also computed. The alpha for the GCS was .9348, and the alpha for the LCS was .9375. As with the ATSCAP, the elimination of certain items from both sub-scales would either not change or would increase the coefficient alpha for each. For the GCS, deletion of items 5a (.935) or 13a (.9344) would not change the alpha value; elimination of item 8a (.9412) would increase alpha. Regarding the LCS, alpha would remain the same with the deletion of item 13b (.9382) and would increase with the deletion of items 5b (.9382) and 8b (.9436).

Item analyses were conducted on the 25 items hypothesized to assess Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Couple Adoptions. Each of the 25 items was correlated with the total score for the ATSCAP (with the item removed). All the correlations were greater than .5 except for two items: 8a ( $r = .31$ ) and 8b ( $r = .39$ ). Item analyses were also conducted on the 12 items hypothesized to assess Attitudes Toward Gay Couple Adoptions (i.e., the GCS). Each of the 12 items was correlated with the total score for the GCS (with the item removed). All the correlations were greater than .5 except for item 8a ( $r = .3309$ ). Finally, item analyses were conducted on the 12 items hypothesized to assess Attitudes Toward Lesbian Couple Adoptions

(i.e., the LCS). Each of the 12 items was correlated with the total score for the LCS (with the item removed). All the correlations were greater than .5 except for item 8b ( $r = .3473$ ).

Regarding the validity of the ATSCAP, face and content validity remained strong. A discussion of the scale's concurrent and discriminant validity is included in the next section.

*Homophobia Scale.* The *Homophobia Scale* (HS) was developed by Bouton et al. (1987). The purpose of the 7 item HS was to measure attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexuals. According to prior study, the HS has an internal consistency alpha of .89, indicating good reliability, and appears to have good factorial validity. The coefficient alpha for the current sample ( $N = 65$ ) was .93. Moreover, an examination of the HS's relationship to a fear of AIDS scale found a low correlation between the two, providing preliminary evidence of discriminant validity. Scores on the HS range from 0 to 28, with higher scores indicating greater homophobia.

As mentioned above, the HS has been included in the survey solely for the purpose of building evidence of the concurrent and discriminant validity of the ATSCAP. Concurrent validity, a form of criterion-related validity, tests a measure (in this case, the ATSCAP) according to "its correspondence to a criterion that is known concurrently (Rubin & Babbie, 2001, pp. 194-195). Here, that criterion is the HS; as the ATSCAP is attempting to determine the attitudes, or affective responses, of current and would-be professionals in the adoption field, it would be expected that those who hold less negative attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions, as indicated by high scores on the ATSCAP, would also receive low scores on the HS, indicating less negative attitudes toward homosexuality in general. The bivariate correlation computed between the two scale support this presumed relationship,  $r = -.905$ ; however, the strength of the correlation also raises the question – are the two constructs measuring the same concept? In order to address this question, an item analysis was computed.

To assess the discriminant validity of the ATSCAP, item analyses were conducted on the 25 items of the scale to assess Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Couple Adoptions and Homophobia. Initially, each item was correlated with its own scale and with the HS. In seven cases, however, items were more highly correlated to the HS than to their own scale. Those items are 5a and b, 8a and b, 12a, and 13a and b. Based on these results, and previous reliability and item analyses, it would seem that the ATSCAP's reliability and construct validity would improve with the elimination of items 5a and b, 8a and b, and 13a and b.

*Adoption Process.* This section will be completed by both adoption workers and social work students. *Adoption Process* asks respondents to place themselves in the following hypothetical situation: A same-sex couple who is able to meet the needs of children that your agency services desires to adopt a child through your agency. Nine statements flowing from this premise are then presented which follow several steps through the adoption. The respondent is then asked to rate his/her responses to these nine statements on a scale from 1 ("not likely at all") to 7 ("very likely"). In other words, the respondent is asked to make a judgment as to how he/she would react to working with a same-sex couple over the course of the adoption process.

*Demographics.* Respondents are asked to complete a demographics section as part of the survey instrument. Demographic information collected as part of the study include: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) race/ethnicity, and (4) highest level of education achieved.

## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS

#### *Return Rate*

As stated in the previous chapter, a total of 117 surveys were distributed – 57 to adoption workers and 60 to former and current social work students. Of those 117, 65 (55.6%) were returned. Adoption workers had a return rate of 54.4% (n = 31), while students had a return rate of 56.7% (n = 34). As indicated by Rubin and Babbie (2000), both the overall and the individual sub-sample return rates are considered adequate.

#### *Demographics*

*Total sample.* Of the 65 participants in the current investigation, 31, or 47.7%, were adoption workers and 34 (52.3%) were former or current social work students who have received Title IV-E funding. The majority of the participants were female (n = 55, or 84.6%), while the remaining 10 (15.4%) were male. Regarding age, the largest percentage of the sample (38.5%) fell in the 20-30 years old range (see Table 1 below for all age groups).

Table 1. Age groups for total sample.

Age Groups	n	%
20-30	25	38.5
31-40	16	24.6
41-50	14	21.5
50 and over	10	15.4
Total	65	100

The sample identified predominately as Caucasian (n = 51, or 78.5%); for the racial and ethnic composition of the sample, refer to Table 2 below. The participants were asked to state the highest level of education they had achieved: 38 participants (58.5%) held Master's degrees, while 24 (36.9%) held Bachelor's degrees and 3 (4.6%) held high school diplomas.

Table 2. Racial/Ethnic groups for total sample.

Racial/Ethnic Groups	n	%
Caucasian	51	78.5
African-American	10	15.4
Multiracial	2	3.1
Hispanic	1	1.5
Native American	1	1.5
Total	65	100

Regarding religion, the majority of the participants (70.8%) identified as Protestant (see Table 3 for the distribution of religious affiliations among respondents).

Participants were also asked to identify their political affiliation: 21 (32.3%) stated they were Republican, 27 (41.5%) were Democrat, and 14 (21.5%) were members of a political party not included on the survey instrument.

*Adoption workers.* A total of 31 adoption workers participated in the present study. The sub-sample was predominantly female (n = 27, 87.1%); the remaining 12.9 % (n = 4) were male. As shown in Table 4 below, the sub-sample was evenly distributed over age groupings.

As with the total sample, the majority of the sub-sample was Caucasian (n = 22, 71%) (see Table 5 below for racial/ethnic composition of worker sub-sample).



Table 3. Religious affiliations for total sample.

Religious affiliations	n	%
Protestant	46	74.2
Catholic	5	7.7
Jewish	3	4.6
Atheist/Agnostic	2	3.1
Other	6	9.2
No data provided	3	4.6
Total	65	100

Table 4. Age groups for worker sub-sample.

Age Groups	n	%
20-30	9	29
31-40	7	22.6
41-50	8	25.8
50 and over	7	22.6
Total	31	100

Table 5. Racial/Ethnic groups for worker sub-sample.

Racial/Ethnic Groups	n	%
Caucasian	22	71
African-American	6	19.4
Multiracial	2	6.5

Hispanic	1	3.2
Total	31	100

Concerning education, 21 (64.5%) indicated that their highest level was Master's, while the remaining 32.3 % (n = 10) had earned Bachelor's degrees. Regarding religion, the majority of the sub-sample identified as Protestant (n = 20, 64.5%) (see Table 6 below for the distribution of religious affiliations among respondents). Politically, 41.9% (n = 13) of the sub-sample participants identified as Republican, 25.8% (n = 8) as Democrat, and 25.8% (n = 8) as other.

Table 6. Religious affiliations for worker sub-sample.

Religious affiliations	n	%
Protestant	20	64.5
Catholic	1	3.2
Jewish	3	9.7
Atheist/Agnostic	2	6.5
Other	3	9.7
No data provided	2	6.5
Total	31	100

*Social work students.* A total of 34 current and former social work students participated in the present study. The sub-sample was predominantly female (n = 28, 82.4%); the remaining 17.6 % (n = 6) were male. The majority of the sub-sample was Caucasian (n = 29, 85.3%), while 4 (11.8%) were African-American and 1 (2.9%) was Native American. Concerning education, 17 (50%) indicated that their highest level was Master's, while 41.2 % (n = 14) had earned Bachelor's degrees and 8.8 % (n = 3) had earned high school diplomas. Regarding religion, the majority of the sub-sample identified as Protestant (n = 26, 76.5%); the remainder of the sample

were 11.8% (n = 4) Catholic and 8.8% (n = 3) other. Politically, 23.5% (n = 8) of the sub-sample participants identified as Republican, 55.9% (n = 19) as Democrat, and 17.6% (n = 6) as other. The sub-sample's distribution over age groupings is shown in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Age groups for student sub-sample.

Age Groups	n	%
20-30	25	38.5
31-40	16	24.6
41-50	14	21.5
50 and over	10	15.4
Total	65	100

*Hypothesis I: The direction of beliefs regarding sex roles are directly related to the direction of attitudes regarding same-sex couple adoptions.*

*Total sample.* A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of ATSCAP scores (i.e., variable indicating attitudes regarding same-sex couple adoptions) based on the SRES scores (i.e., variable indicating beliefs regarding sex roles) of the study's participants. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the score on the SRES increases, the score on the ATSCAP increases. The means and standard deviations of the SRES scores and the ATSCAP scores are as follows: (1) for SRES scores, mean = 110.2 and standard deviation = 10.83; and (2) for ATSCAP scores, mean = 103.3 and standard deviation = 31.92. The regression equation for predicting an ATSCAP score based on a SRES score is:

$$\text{Predicted ATSCAP Score} = 1.819(\text{SRES Score}) - 97.154$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that SRES score was a statistically significant predictor of ATSCAP score, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .617,  $F(1, 63) = 38.795$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 38% of the variance of ATSCAP scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to SRES scores.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not significant differences exist between the ATSCAP scores of the two sub-samples, workers and students. The test was significant,  $t(63) = -3.869$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that student scores (mean = 116.5, SD = 21.89) were significantly different from worker scores (mean = 88.7, SD = 35.06). As significant differences in ATSCAP scores existed between the sub-samples, separate analyses were conducted for each group.

*Adoption workers.* A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of ATSCAP scores based on the SRES scores of adoption workers. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the score on the SRES increases, the score on the ATSCAP increases. The means and standard deviations of the SRES scores and the ATSCAP scores are as follows: (1) for SRES scores, mean = 107.7 and standard deviation = 11.04; and (2) for ATSCAP scores, mean = 88.7 and standard deviation = 35.06. The regression equation for predicting an ATSCAP score based on a SRES score is:

$$\text{Predicted ATSCAP Score} = 1.955(\text{SRES Score}) - 121.748$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that SRES score was a statistically significant predictor of ATSCAP score, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .615,  $F(1, 29) = 17.679$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 38% of the variance of ATSCAP scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to SRES scores.

*Social work students.* A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of ATSCAP scores based on the SRES scores of former and current social work

students. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the score on the SRES increases, the score on the ATSCAP increases. The means and standard deviations of the SRES scores and the ATSCAP scores are as follows: (1) for SRES scores, mean = 112.5 and standard deviation = 10.27; and (2) for ATSCAP scores, mean = 116.5 and standard deviation = 21.89. The regression equation for predicting an ATSCAP score based on a SRES score is:

$$\text{Predicted ATSCAP Score} = 1.251(\text{SRES Score}) - 24.170$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that SRES score was a statistically significant predictor of ATSCAP score, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .587,  $F(1, 32) = 16.84$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 35% of the variance of ATSCAP scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to SRES scores.

*Summary.* Hypothesis one proposed that sex role beliefs were directly related to attitudes toward same-sex couples as adoptive parents. Analyses of the data provided by adoption workers and former and current social work students provide significant statistical support for this hypothesis. Moderately strong, positive, significant correlations were found across the analyses conducted regarding this hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 2: The direction of attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions are directly related to intentions to recommend adoptive placement with same-sex couples.*

*Total sample.* Scores on the full ATSCAP ranged from 36 to 148, with a mean score of 103.3,  $SD = 31.92$ . The scores on the sub-scales were also examined and are shown in Table 8 below.

Table 8. ATSCAP, LCS, and GCS descriptive statistics for total sample.

Scales	n	mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
ATSCAP	65	103.3	31.92	36	148
LCS	65	49.9	15.73	15	71
GCS	65	49.7	15.55	15	71

Apart from the ATSCAP, respondents were asked if they would (1) recommend placement with a gay male couple, and (2) recommend placement with a lesbian couple. They were asked to rate their responses on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (“Not likely at all”) to 7 (“Very likely”). Regarding placement with gay male couples, 36.9% (n = 24) answered 7; when questioned about placement with lesbian couples, 40% (n = 26) answered 7. The distribution of responses regarding placement recommendation are shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Distribution of scores on placement recommendation responses for total sample.

Likert responses	Gay couples n (%)	Lesbian Couples n (%)
1	17 (26.2)	17 (26.2)
2	2 (3.1)	2 (3.1)
3	0 (0)	0 (0)
4	6 (9.2)	6 (9.2)
5	7 (10.8)	6 (9.2)
6	9 (13.8)	8 (12.3)
7	24 (36.9)	26 (40)
Total	65 (100)	65 (100)

A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with gay male couples (AD8) based on the ATSCAP scores of participants. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the ATSCAP increase, so increases the likelihood that the participant would recommend placement. The mean and standard deviation for the ATSCAP were noted above; the mean for AD8 was 4.6 and the standard deviation was 2.48. The regression equation for predicting an AD8 score based on an ATSCAP score is:

$$\text{Predicted AD8 score} = .06784(\text{ATSCAP score}) - 2.36$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that ATSCAP score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD8, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .874,  $F(1, 63) = 203.762$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 76% of the variance of AD8 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to ATSCAP scores.

A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with lesbian couples (AD9) based on the ATSCAP scores of participants. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the ATSCAP increase, so increases the likelihood that the participant would recommend placement. The mean and standard deviation for the ATSCAP were noted above; the mean for AD9 was 4.7 and the standard deviation was 2.51. The regression equation for predicting an AD9 score based on an ATSCAP score is:

$$\text{Predicted AD9 score} = .06881(\text{ATSCAP score}) - 2.414$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that ATSCAP score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD9, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .876,  $F(1, 63) = 208.83$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 77% of the variance of AD9 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to ATSCAP scores.

To further describe the relationship between placement recommendations and attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions, the sub-scales of the ATSCAP, GCS (Gay Couple Sub-scale) and LCS (Lesbian Couple Sub-scale), were used to consider the impact of the couple as gay or lesbian, separately. A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with gay male couples (AD8) based on the GCS scores of participants. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the GCS increase, so increases the likelihood that the participant would recommend placement with gay male couples. The means and standard deviation for the GCS, as well as for AD8, were noted above. The regression equation for predicting an AD8 score based on a GCS score is:

$$\text{Predicted placement score} = .138(\text{GCS score}) - 2.195$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that GCS score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD8, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .863,  $F(1, 63) = 184.024$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 75% of the variance of AD8 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to GCS scores.

Finally, a bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with lesbian couples (AD9) based on the LCS scores of participants. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the LCS increase, so increases the likelihood that the participant would recommend placement with lesbian couples. The mean and standard deviation for the LCS, as well as for AD9, were noted above. The regression equation for predicting an AD9 score based on an LCS score is:

$$\text{Predicted placement score} = .139(\text{LCS score}) - 2.223$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that LCS score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD9, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .87,  $F(1, 63) = 195.466$ ,  $p <$



.001. Approximately 76% of the variance of AD9 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to LCS scores.

Two independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether or not significant differences exist between the placement recommendation scores (as indicated by AD8 and AD9) of the two sub-samples, workers and students. The test for AD8 was significant,  $t(63) = -5.981$ ,  $p = .000$ , indicating that student scores (mean = 6.1, SD = 1.07) were significantly different from worker scores (mean = 3.1, SD = 2.66). The test for AD9 was also significant,  $t(63) = -6.154$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that student scores (mean = 6.1, SD = 1.08) were significantly different from worker scores (mean = 3.1, SD = 2.66). As significant differences in AD8 and AD9 scores existed between the sub-samples, separate analyses were conducted for each group.

*Adoption workers.* The scores of workers on the full ATSCAP ranged from 36 to 147, with a mean score of 88.7, SD = 35.06. The scores on the sub-scales were also examined and the findings are shown in Table 17 below. The responses of workers on the placement recommendation questions, AD8 and AD9, are shown in Table 10 below. The majority of workers 54.8% ( $n = 17$ ) answered “1” (“Not likely at all”) for both placement with gay couples and placement with lesbian couples.

Table 10. ATSCAP, LCS, and GCS descriptive statistics for worker sub-sample.

Scales	n	mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
ATSCAP	31	88.7	35.06	36	147
LCS	31	42.9	17.81	15	71
GCS	31	42.9	17.64	15	71

Table 11. Distribution of scores on placement recommendation responses for worker sub-sample.

Likert responses	Gay couples n (%)	Lesbian Couples n (%)
1	17 (54.58)	17 (54.58)
2	2 (6.5)	2 (6.5)
3	0 (0)	0 (0)
4	2 (6.5)	2 (6.5)
5	1 (3.2)	1 (3.2)
6	1 (3.2)	1 (3.2)
7	8 (25.8)	8 (25.8)
Total	31 (100)	31 (100)

A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with gay male couples (AD8) based on the ATSCAP scores of adoption workers. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the ATSCAP increase, so increases the likelihood that the adoption worker would recommend placement. The mean and standard deviation for the ATSCAP were noted above; the mean for AD8 was 3.1 and the standard deviation was 2.66. The regression equation for predicting an AD8 score based on an ATSCAP score is:

$$\text{Predicted AD8 score} = .06795(\text{ATSCAP score}) - 2.933$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that ATSCAP score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD8, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .895,  $F(1, 29) = 116.353$ ,  $p <$

.001. Approximately 80% of the variance of AD8 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to ATSCAP scores.

A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with lesbian couples (AD9) based on the ATSCAP scores of adoption workers, and the results were identical to those of the AD8/ATSCAP analysis. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the ATSCAP increase, so increases the likelihood that the adoption worker would recommend placement. The mean and standard deviation for the ATSCAP were noted above; the mean for AD9 was 3.1 and the standard deviation was 2.66. The regression equation for predicting an AD9 score based on an ATSCAP score is:

$$\text{Predicted AD9 score} = .06795(\text{ATSCAP score}) - 2.933$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that ATSCAP score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD9, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .895,  $F(1, 29) = 116.353$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 80% of the variance of AD9 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to ATSCAP scores.

To further describe the relationship between placement recommendations and attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions, the sub-scales of the ATSCAP, GCS and LCS, were used to consider the impact on workers of the couple as gay or lesbian, separately. A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with gay male couples (AD8) based on the GCS scores of adoption workers. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the GCS increase, so increases the likelihood that the adoption worker would recommend placement with gay male couples. The mean and standard deviation for the GCS, as well as for AD8 were noted above. The regression equation for predicting an AD8 score based on a GCS score is:

$$\text{Predicted AD8 score} = .133(\text{GCS score}) - 2.616$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that GCS score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD8, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .881,  $F(1, 29) = 101.061$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 78% of the variance of AD8 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to GCS scores.

Finally, a bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with lesbian couples (AD9) based on the LCS scores of adoption workers. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the LCS increase, so increases the likelihood that the adoption worker would recommend placement with gay male couples. The mean and standard deviation for the LCS, as well as for AD9 were noted above. The regression equation for predicting an AD9 score based on an LCS score is:

$$\text{Predicted AD9 score} = .132(\text{LCS score}) - 2.551$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that LCS score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD9, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .88,  $F(1, 29) = 99.906$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 78% of the variance of AD9 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to LCS scores.

*Social work students.* The scores of students on the full ATSCAP ranged from 55 to 148, with a mean score of 116.5,  $SD = 21.89$ . The scores on the sub-scales were also examined and the findings are shown in Table 12 below.

The responses of students on the placement recommendation questions are shown in Table 13 below. Sixteen students, or 47.1% of the student sub-sample, answered "7" ("Very likely") for placement with gay couples, and 18 (52.9%) answered 7 for placement with lesbian couples.

Table 12. ATSCAP, LCS, and GCS descriptive statistics for student sub-sample.

Scales	n	mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
ATSCAP	34	116.5	21.89	55	148
LCS	34	56.6	10.35	27	71
GCS	34	56.2	10.35	27	71

Table 13. Distribution of scores on placement recommendation responses for students.

Likert responses	Gay couples n(%)	Lesbian Couples n(%)
1	0 (0)	0 (0)
2	0 (0)	0 (0)
3	0 (0)	0 (0)
4	4 (11.8)	4 (11.8)
5	6 (17.6)	5 (14.7)
6	8 (23.5)	7 (20.6)
7	16 (47.1)	18 (52.9)
Total	34 (100)	34 (100)

A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with gay male couples (AD8) based on the ATSCAP scores of social work students. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the ATSCAP increase, so increases the likelihood that the student would recommend placement. The mean and standard deviation for the ATSCAP were noted above; the mean for

AD8 was 6.1 and the standard deviation was 1.08. The regression equation for predicting an AD8 score based on an ATSCAP score is:

$$\text{Predicted AD8 score} = 1.761 + .03688(\text{ATSCAP score})$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that ATSCAP score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD8, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .753,  $F(1, 32) = 41.991$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 57% of the variance of AD8 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to ATSCAP scores.

A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with lesbian couples (AD9) based on the ATSCAP scores of social work students. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the ATSCAP increase, so increases the likelihood that the student would recommend placement. The mean and standard deviation for the ATSCAP were noted above; the mean for AD9 was 6.1 and the standard deviation was 1.08. The regression equation for predicting an AD9 score based on an ATSCAP score is:

$$\text{Predicted AD9 score} = 1.677 + .03836(\text{ATSCAP score})$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that ATSCAP score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD9, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .78,  $F(1, 32) = 49.608$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 61% of the variance of AD9 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to ATSCAP scores.

To further describe the relationship between placement recommendations and attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions, the sub-scales of the ATSCAP, GCS and LCS, were used to consider the impact on students of the couple as gay or lesbian, separately. A bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with gay male couples (AD8) based on the GCS scores of students. The two variables

have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the GCS increase, so increases the likelihood that the student would recommend placement with gay male couples. The mean and standard deviation for the GCS were noted above, as were the mean and standard deviation for AD8. The regression equation for predicting an AD8 score based on a GCS score is:

$$\text{Predicted AD8 score} = 1.752 + .07659(\text{GCS score})$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that GCS score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD8, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .74,  $F(1, 32) = 38.634$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 55% of the variance of AD8 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to GCS scores.

Finally, a bivariate linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of likelihood to recommend placement with lesbian couples (AD9) based on the LCS scores of students. The two variables have a positive linear relationship, such that as the scores on the LCS increase, so increases the likelihood that the student would recommend placement with gay male couples. The mean and standard deviation for the LCS, as well as for AD9, were noted above. The regression equation for predicting an AD9 score based on an LCS score is:

$$\text{Predicted placement score} = 1.556 + .08113(\text{LCS score})$$

The results of the analysis further indicated that LCS score was a significant predictor of placement score on AD9, as Pearson's correlation coefficient was .78,  $F(1, 32) = 49.765$ ,  $p < .001$ . Approximately 61% of the variance of AD9 scores was accounted for by its linear relationship to LCS scores.

*Summary.* Hypothesis two proposed the existence of a direct relationship between attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions and intent to recommend adoptive placement with same-sex couples. It was found that attitudes were highly and significantly correlated in a positive direction to placement recommendation intentions across the total sample and the two

sub-samples. Attitudes also proved a significant predictor of intentions in the various bivariate regression analyses conducted on the sample and sub-samples. Overall, hypothesis two is supported by the statistical evidence, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

*Hypothesis 3: The existence of formal agency policies is directly related to the direction of attitudes regarding same-sex couple adoptions.*

The adoption worker sub-sample was asked to report whether or not the agency they were employed by had formal, written policies regarding adoption by gay and lesbian couples. Of the 31 workers in the sample, 28 (90%) provided answers: of those 28, 17 (61%) reported that their agency did not have formal policies, while 11 (39%) reported that their agencies did have formal policies.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not significant differences exist between the ATSCAP scores of the workers who were employed by agencies who did have formal policies versus those who worked in agencies that did not. The test was not significant,  $t(26) = 1.551$ ,  $p = .133$ , indicating that the scores of those in agencies without formal policies (mean = 96.59, SD = 33.7) did not differ significantly from scores of worker in agencies with formal policies (mean = 76.3, SD = 34.06).

In conclusion, the null hypothesis in this case, the existence of formal agency policies is not directly related to the direction of attitudes regarding same sex-couple adoptions, is not rejected.

*Hypothesis 4: The existence of formal agency policies is directly related to the decision or intention to recommend adoptive placement with same-sex couples.*

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not significant differences exist between the AD8 scores of the workers who were employed by agencies who did have formal policies versus those who worked in agencies that did not. The test was not



significant,  $t(26) = 1.611$ ,  $p = .119$ , indicating that the scores of those in agencies without formal policies (mean = 3.7, SD = 2.69) did not differ significantly from scores of worker in agencies with formal policies (mean = 2.1, SD = 2.43).

A separate independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not significant differences exist between the AD9 scores of the workers who were employed by agencies who did have formal policies versus those who worked in agencies that did not. Identical to the AD8 results, the test was not significant,  $t(26) = 1.611$ ,  $p = .119$ , indicating that the scores of those in agencies without formal policies (mean = 3.7, SD = 2.69) did not differ significantly from scores of worker in agencies with formal policies (mean = 2.1, SD = 2.43).

As with hypothesis three, the null hypothesis, i.e., the existence of formal agency policies is not directly related to the decision or intention to recommend adoptive placement with same-sex couples, is accepted.

*Hypothesis 5: The influence of social work education is directly related to the direction of attitudes regarding same sex couple adoptions.*

Of the 31 adoption workers who participated in the current research study, 21 (68%) indicated that they held a degree in social work. Therefore, the data of those 21 workers, in addition to the data provided by the 34 social work students, were used in the analyses of Hypotheses 5 and 6. In addition, two separate independent variables are used to indicate the influence of social work education: (1) participants were asked to indicate whether or not social work classes had contributed to their beliefs about same-sex couple adoption, and (2) participants were asked to indicate whether or not social work classes had changed their beliefs about same-sex couple adoption.

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not significant differences exist between the ATSCAP scores of participants whose social work classes did

contribute to their beliefs regarding same-sex couple adoption versus those whose classes did not. The test was not significant,  $t(52) = -1.741$ ,  $p = .088$ , indicating that the scores of those whose classes did contribute to their beliefs ( $n = 19$ , mean = 116.9, SD = 22.18) did not differ significantly from those whose classes did not contribute to their beliefs ( $n = 35$ , mean = 101.1, SD = 36.03).

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not significant differences exist between the ATSCAP scores of participants whose social work classes changed their beliefs regarding same-sex couple adoption versus those whose classes did not. The test was not significant,  $t(52) = -1.526$ ,  $p = .133$ , indicating that the scores of those whose classes changed their beliefs ( $n = 5$ , mean = 128.2, SD = 16.22) did not differ significantly from those whose classes did not change their beliefs ( $n = 48$ , mean = 105.3, SD = 32.9).

*Summary.* In the case of hypothesis five, analyses indicated that there were no significant difference between the attitudes of those sample members whose social work classes had contributed to or changed their beliefs toward same-sex couple adoption and those whose social work classes had not. Thus, the null hypothesis, the influence of social work education is not directly related to the direction of attitudes regarding same-sex couple adoption, is accepted.

*Hypothesis 6: The influence of social work education is directly related to the decision or intention to recommend adoptive placement with same-sex couples.*

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not significant differences exist between the AD8 scores of participants whose social work classes did contribute to their beliefs regarding same-sex couple adoption versus those whose classes did not. The test was significant,  $t(52) = -2.477$ ,  $p = .017$ , indicating that the scores of those whose classes did contribute to their beliefs ( $n = 19$ , mean = 6.1, SD = 1.18) differed significantly from those whose classes did not contribute to their beliefs ( $n = 35$ , mean = 4.5, SD = 2.66).

A separate independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not significant differences exist between the AD9 scores of participants whose social work classes did contribute to their beliefs regarding same-sex couple adoption versus those whose classes did not. The test was significant,  $t(52) = -2.721$ ,  $p = .009$ , indicating that the scores of those whose classes did contribute to their beliefs ( $n = 19$ , mean = 6.2, SD = 1.18) differed significantly from those whose classes did not contribute to their beliefs ( $n = 35$ , mean = 4.5, SD = 2.66).

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not significant differences exist between the AD8 scores of participants whose social work classes changed their beliefs regarding same-sex couple adoption versus those whose classes did not. The test was not significant,  $t(51) = -1.543$ ,  $p = .129$ , indicating that the scores of those whose classes did change their beliefs ( $n = 5$ , mean = 6.6, SD = .55) did not differ significantly from those whose classes did not change their beliefs ( $n = 48$ , mean = 4.9, SD = 2.38).

A separate independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not significant differences exist between the AD9 scores of participants whose social work classes changed their beliefs regarding same-sex couple adoption versus those whose classes did not. The test was not significant,  $t(51) = -1.678$ ,  $p = .099$ , indicating that the scores of those whose classes did change their beliefs ( $n = 5$ , mean = 6.8, SD = .45) did not differ significantly from those whose classes did not change their beliefs ( $n = 48$ , mean = 5, SD = 2.4).

*Summary.* Analysis of hypothesis six found that, those sample members with a social work education whose social work classes had contributed to their beliefs regarding same-sex couple adoption were significantly more likely to recommend adoptive placement with a same-sex couple than those whose classes had not made a contribution to their beliefs. The intentions to recommend placement did not differ significantly between those whose classes had or had not changed their beliefs. Further, when examining the sub-samples, significant difference were not

found on either the contribute variable or the change variable. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted in part and rejected in part.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

The following chapter addresses the results of the data analysis presented previously. The findings of the various analyses are summarized and their implications are organized and discussed according to each of the six hypotheses. Further, the limitations of the current investigation are explored, and future directions for research in the area of same-sex couple adoption are proposed.

#### Summary and Implications of Results

The sample was comprised of (1) adoption workers employed by licensed agencies in the state of Georgia and (2) former and current Title IV-E grant recipient social work students who are attending or have graduated from social work programs at universities in Georgia. A total of sixty-five respondents participated in the survey, producing a return rate of 56%. The sample was almost equally composed of adoption workers and students. In addition, the sample was predominately female, Caucasian, Protestant, and Democrat; the majority of participants also had a Master's degree.

The primary variables involved in the analyses of the present investigation's hypotheses are as follows: sex role beliefs, attitudes toward same-sex couple adoption, and intention to recommend placement with same-sex couples. Regarding measurement, the *Sex-Role Egalitarianism Scale* (SRES) was selected to measure sex role beliefs, the *Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Couples as Adoptive Parents Scale* (ATSCAP) was created by the researcher to capture said attitudes, and two Likert-based questions were asked to measure likelihood to recommend adoptive placement with (1) gay couples and (2) lesbian couples. Scores on the

SRES tended to be high, with 81 being the lowest score out of a possible 125, suggesting that sample members tended to be moderately to strongly egalitarian in their sex role beliefs. This finding may reflect the values of the fields of child welfare and social work, as well as general societal trends regarding the liberalization of gender/sex role views that have taken place since the beginning of the modern women's movement in the 1960s. Attitude scores overall for the sample were moderately favorable toward same-sex couple adoptions; examination of sub-sample scores, however, showed more divisiveness between the two groups of participants, as student attitudes were considerably more favorable than those of adoption workers. Trends in placement recommendation scores also tended to be determined according to sub-sample membership: again, students were more likely to recommend placement with gay and lesbian couples than were adoption workers. The majority of workers, in fact, were not likely to recommend placement. The sample as a whole was neutral to slightly more likely to recommend placement. These findings will now be discussed in greater detail as part of the overall discussion of the results of the hypotheses analyses.

### *Hypothesis One*

As discussed in the literature review, critics of gay and lesbian parenting in general, and gay and lesbian adoption in particular, argue that these individuals are unfit because they do not conform to traditional gender/sex roles and, therefore, their children will lack proper gender/sex role or identity socialization, a 'gendered' parent position, if you will (Huggins, 1989; Mallon, 2000). It is further argued, from the viewpoint of psychoanalytic and social learning theories, that it is important for children to have heterosexual parents, one male and one female, to facilitate healthy psychological development. Although this position has little empirical support, lesbian mothers and gay fathers, due to their sexual orientation and non-traditional family formation, are presumed to lack the qualities that define 'mother' and 'father.' In other words,

their abilities to parent are devalued or dismissed due to connections assumed to exist between sexual orientation and fulfillment of gender roles, i.e., gay men and lesbians, because of their non-heterosexuality, do not fulfill the requirements of American society's (stereotyped) gender/sex roles of man and woman, including parenting roles (DiLapi, 1989; Falk, 1989; Zicklin, 1995; Mallon, 2000). Therefore, it was conjectured that a relationship would exist between sex roles beliefs and attitudes toward same-sex couples as adoptive parents, e.g., those individuals who held less egalitarian sex role beliefs were not likely to hold favorable attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions, a proposition that bore out in the data analysis.

As stated earlier, scores on the SRES, ranging from 81-125 with a mean of 110.2, tended toward moderate to greater egalitarianism among sample participants. The mean and distribution of the scores were consistent with previous studies (e.g., Crossman, Stith, & Bender, 1991; Fuller, 1986; King, 1988; King & King, 1990; as cited by King & King, 1993) done using the four forms of the SRES, which found scores to be moderately high and, therefore, more egalitarian. In addition, prior investigation showed scores for males were somewhat lower, a trend that continued in the current study with male participants having a mean score of 104.8, while female participants had a mean score of 111.16. The patterns found in this and previous research reflect the general liberalization in sex role beliefs in the United States in the past four decades, but suggests that while more egalitarian overall, traditional beliefs continue to influence the meanings and interpretations of sex roles. Similarly, ATSCAP scores for the total sample indicated that, in general, the sample held moderately favorable attitudes toward same-sex couples as adoptive parents, with scores ranging from 36 to 148 and a mean of 103.3. Regression analyses were conducted to test the aforementioned predicted relationship between beliefs and attitudes.

The simple linear regression analysis revealed a moderately strong, positive relationship (Pearson's  $r = .617$ ) between sex role beliefs and attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions. Further, sex role beliefs were a significant predictor of attitudes. As data were collected using a correlational design, a causal relationship cannot be inferred from the results. This simple model, however, accounted for more than a third of the variance (adjusted  $R^2 = .38$ ) in attitude scores. Therefore, on the whole, those respondents who scored highly on beliefs were also more likely to score highly on attitudes.

Bivariate regression analysis of the adoption worker sub-sample data also supported hypothesis one. As in the case of the total sample, the regression analysis found (1) a moderately strong relationship (Pearson's  $r = .587$ ) between beliefs and attitudes of workers and (2) that beliefs were a significant predictor of attitudes. Additionally, as with the results of the total sample analysis, 38% of the variance in the attitude scores was explained by belief scores.

As with the worker sub-sample analyses, the student sub-sample results provided support for hypothesis one. Again, there was a moderately strong correlation (Pearson's  $r = .61$ ) between sex role beliefs and attitudes, suggesting a positive relationship between the two variables. Sex role beliefs were, again, a significant predictor of students' attitude scores and explained 35% of the variance in attitude scores.

The results of the hypothesis one analysis provided relatively strong support for the predicted relationship between sex role beliefs and attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions. It was found across the board that there is a moderately strong relationship between the two variables and that beliefs are a significant predictor of attitudes. These findings are consistent with those of Whitley (1987), who found that less traditional sex role beliefs were associated with less negative attitudes toward homosexuality, and Stark (1991, as cited by Black et al., 1998), who found strong correlations between sex role beliefs and level of homophobia. The



results also provided empirical support for one element in the conceptual model discussed in Chapter Three: within the model, it was proposed that the beliefs regarding the consequences of behavior, or the beliefs about the outcomes for children parented by same-sex couples – one critical aspect of which is sex role belief system – produce the attitudes held by an individual (in this case, attitudes toward same-sex couples as adoptive parents). The relationship was one suggested by Feminist and Queer theory and was consistent with the literature found on concerns regarding gay and lesbian parenting, adoptive or otherwise, wherein critics of same-sex couple adoption are more likely to cite deviant gender/sex roles in both parent and child as one of the primary arguments against allowing gay and lesbian couples to adopt children (Brown, 1998; DiLapi, 1989; Falk, 1989; Field, 2002; Perrin, 2002; Zicklin, 1995).

To reiterate, the relationship found in the analysis discussed above bears out the supposition that a direct relationship exists between beliefs and attitudes, and that those whose sex role beliefs were more egalitarian and less traditional would also be more favorable toward adoption by gay and lesbian couples. Feminist and Queer scholars have been critical of the ‘gendered parent’ position taken by critics of gay and lesbian adoption, offering deconstructed views of the binarized gender system and the rigid adherence to the traditional roles, duties, and characteristics assigned to each gender (Ball, 2003; Mallon, 2000; Weston, 1991). As in Butler’s estimation, gender is a performative act, rather than an innate, natural imperative on the part of a human being. If the traditional acts of gender, including those we think of as mothering and fathering, are challenged, then the notion of who we find fit to be parents must also be challenged. If the act of parenting, as an act of human life, is viewed as ungendered or unsexed, and hence, egalitarian within the binary system, then the focus shifts from the sexual orientation of the parent/individual to the needs of the child; as a result, adoption by gay and lesbian couples would face far fewer obstacles. National child welfare organizations, such as the Child Welfare

League of American, the North American Council on Adoptable Children, and the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, have offered support to this view in the form of best practice standards and recommendations to adoption agencies and professionals that emphasize the prospective parent's ability to nurture and provide for the child, rather than his/her gender or sexual orientation.

### *Hypothesis Two*

Overall, the sample held moderately favorable attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions, with a mean score of 103.3 on the ATSCAP; moreover, sub-scale scores indicated similar findings regarding lesbian couples (LCS mean = 49.9) and gay couples (GCS mean = 49.7), respectively. Further, the majority of the sample was likely to recommend placement with both lesbian and gay couples (61.5% scored 5 or higher on both AD8 and AD9). The picture changes somewhat when the focus shifts to the sub-samples. The worker sub-sample mean on the ATSCAP was much lower (88.7) than the total sample, though the sub-sample's LCS and GCS mean scores (42.9 for both) were only a few points lower. This decrease in favorable attitudes was reflected in the placement recommendation scores, with the majority of the sub-sample (61.8% scored 3 or lower on both AD8 and AD9) not likely to recommend placement with gay and/or lesbian couples. The student sub-sample, on the other hand, was overwhelmingly favorable toward same-sex couple adoptions, with mean scores of 116.5 on the ATSCAP, 56.6 on the LCS, and 56.2 on the GCS. Moreover, the vast majority of the student sub-sample was likely to recommend placement with both lesbian and gay couples (88.2% on both counts). With these findings in mind, regression analyses were conducted to more closely examine the relationships between attitudes and placement recommendations.

The bivariate regression analyses of the relationships between the ATSCAP and its sub-scales, as the attitude measures, and the recommendation variables revealed strong, significant

correlations between attitudes toward gay and lesbian couple adoptions and intent to recommend placing children with these couples. Moreover, in all cases (total sample, worker sub-sample, and student sub-sample) the attitude variables were significantly predictive of placement recommendation score. The relationships between attitudes and placement recommendation were positive, meaning that the higher the score on the ATSCAP, LCS, and/or GCS, the more likely the individual was to recommend placement with a same-sex couple.

Regarding the total sample, the bivariate correlation between the ATSCAP and placement recommendations, as represented by AD8 and AD9, were strong and positive (Pearson's  $r = .87$  in both cases). In the former case, 76% of the variance in AD8 scores was explained by attitude scores; 77% of the variance in AD9 scores was explained by attitude scores. Also strong were the bivariate correlations between the LCS and AD9 (Pearson's  $r = .86$ ) and the GCS and AD8 (Pearson's  $r = .86$ ). In the case of the subscales, 76% of variance in AD9 was explained by LCS scores, while 75% of variance in AD8 scores was explained by variance in GCS scores.

The results of the analysis of the worker sub-sample data played out in a fashion similar to that of the total sample. With the worker sub-sample, the bivariate correlations between the ATSCAP and the placement recommendation variables, AD8 and AD9, were strong and positive (Pearson's  $r = .88$  and  $.87$ , respectively). In the former case, 80% of the variance in AD8 scores was explained by attitude scores; similarly, 80% of the variance in AD9 scores was explained by attitude scores. The bivariate correlations between the LCS and AD9 (Pearson's  $r = .88$ ) and the GCS and AD8 (Pearson's  $r = .87$ ) were also strong. In this case, 78% of variance in AD9 was explained by LCS scores, just as 78% of variance in AD8 scores was explained by variance in GCS scores.

The results of the student sub-sample analysis played out in a similar fashion. Here the bivariate correlations between the ATSCAP and AD8 and AD9 were strong and positive (.77 and

.79, respectively), as were the bivariate correlations between the GCS and AD8 (Pearson's  $r = .76$ ) and the LCS and AD9 (Pearson's  $r = .79$ ). Fifty-seven percent of the variance in AD8 scores was explained by attitude scores, while 61% of the variance in AD9 scores was explained by attitude scores. In the case of the subscales, 61% of variance in AD9 was explained by LCS scores, while 55% of variance in AD8 scores was explained by variance in GCS scores.

The findings described here provide substantial support for the relationship (in its various incarnations) predicted in hypothesis two between attitudes toward same-sex couple adoption and intention to recommend placement with said couples. Strong relationships existed between attitudes and recommendations, and, in addition, attitudes were a significant predictor of placement recommendations. The strong relationships between the variables, as they were conceptualized and measured in this study, also provided (1) empirical data in support of the conceptual model put forth in Chapter Three, which proposed a direct, causal link (though causality cannot be inferred here) between attitudes and intentions, and (2) evidence in support of previous studies of social work, child welfare, and gay and lesbian adoption.

Recall from Chapter Three that one component of the conceptual framework for the current investigation predicted a relationship between attitudes toward a behavior, in this case, attitudes toward adoptive placement with same-sex couples, and intention to perform a behavior, i.e., intention to recommend adoptive placement with a same-sex couple, which would ultimately lead to the enactment of the behavior (actual placement recommendation). This proposed relationship was based primarily on the Brooks and Goldberg (2001) suggestion that worker biases against lesbians and/or gay men can affect the adoption application process. The relationship was supported by the results of the current study, which found (1) strong correlations between attitudes and placement recommendations and (2) that attitudes were a significant predictor of placement recommendations.

The results of the present investigation were similar to those of the Ryan (2000) study, which looked at social workers' attitudes toward gay and lesbian adoption. Ryan found that social workers held slightly favorable attitudes with respect to adoption by gay men and lesbians, though the extent to which these results can be extended to gay and lesbian couples is not known. Here, it was found that adoption workers also held borderline to moderately favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian couples as adoptive parents; Title IV-E social work students, in comparison, held attitudes that were firmly in favor of such adoptions. These findings suggested interesting questions for future research regarding social work students: (1) How do Title IV-E students compare to non-Title IV-E social work students? (2) What is it about the Title IV-E program of study that produces social workers with such favorable attitudes toward adoption by gay and lesbian couples? (3) Do students enter the program more favorably disposed than other social work students or do they become so as a result of their participation in the specialized child welfare training? (4) Do these positive attitudes change, for better or worse, after entering the child welfare workforce, and for what reasons?

Brooks and Goldberg (2001) found that decisions to place children with gay and lesbian foster and adoptive parents were effected by the biases of child welfare workers, and the current findings are consistent with those results. As has been stated, the attitudes of workers were borderline to moderately in favor at best and the intention to recommend placement scores were reflective of this. The majority of workers in this study were not likely to recommend adoptive placement with a gay or lesbian couple. Again, it would be useful to employ other research designs in order to ascertain any changes in attitudes and intentions that may have occurred as a result of working in an environment that may not look favorably upon placing children with gay and/or lesbian couples, which leads to another point for future contemplation: the issue of differing responses to lesbian couples and gay male couples. While only minute differences

were detected by the attitude scales and placement recommendation items in reaction to whether the same-sex couple was identified as male or female, these small disparities may be due to the context of the study. Participants were responding to survey items on both populations concurrently and may not have been able to process differing responses; an alternate research design might allow for more precise measurement of attitudes and intention toward gay couples and lesbian couples, individually.

### *Hypothesis Three*

The results of the current investigation indicated that the ATSCAP scores of adoption workers employed by agencies with formal policies regarding same-sex couple adoptions did not differ significantly from the ATSCAP scores of those workers employed by agencies who did not have formal policies. The disparity in mean scores, however, is of some interest: the mean score of the agency-with-formal-policy group (76.3) was twenty points *lower* than that of the no-formal-policy group (96.59). The findings may be due, at least in part, to the limited number of participants who responded to the question of the existence of formal agency policies ( $n = 28$ ). The small portion of the sample available for analysis of this particular hypothesis, combined with the differences in mean scores for the two groups, suggest further study in this area is necessary. An increase in the number of respondents is a critical first step in future investigations.

The results may also suggest that attitudes toward same-sex couples as adoptive parents supercede employment in a particular adoption agency. Indeed, workers may seek employment in agencies that reflect their personal belief systems. A future research study, quasi-experimental in design, should measure the attitudes of professionals entering the employ of an adoption agency for the first time and then re-measuring those attitudes after a period of time in order to

better understand the possible connection between agency policies and the attitudes of adoption workers.

#### *Hypothesis Four*

The results of the present study indicated that the intentions of adoption workers to recommend placement with both gay and lesbian couples did not differ significantly if they were employed by agencies that do have formal policies regarding such adoptions ( $n = 11$ ) versus those who were employed by agencies that do not ( $n = 17$ ). As with the previous hypothesis, the mean score of the group employed by agencies with policies (mean for both AD8 and AD9 was 2.1) was slightly lower than the group employed by agencies without formal policies (mean for both AD8 and AD9 was 3.7); however, both means indicated that each group was not likely to recommend placement. Again, the small sample size may have played a role in producing the current results, and follow-up studies with an improved number of participants should be conducted. As the responses pertaining to placement may reflect agency values, and not necessarily the beliefs of the worker, an additional question should be asked in future research: If your agency has a formal policy allowing same-sex couple adoptions, how likely are you to recommend placement with a gay/lesbian couple? Further, as with the previous hypothesis, it may be useful to use alternate research designs to improve understanding of the agency-worker dynamics that ultimately produce a placement recommendation.

#### *Hypothesis Five*

Several interesting findings were produced by the analysis of the variables involved in hypothesis five, some of which were not related to the data. Overall, the results indicated that there was not a significant relationship between attitudes toward same-sex couple adoption and whether or not social work classes contributed to beliefs about same-sex couple adoption; additionally, there was not a significant relationship between attitudes toward same-sex couple

adoption and whether or not social work classes changed beliefs about same-sex couple adoption. It is worth noting, however, that the mean scores on the ATSCAP were higher for those whose classes did contribute to (mean = 116.9) and/or change (mean = 128.2) their beliefs than those whose classes did not (contribute mean = 101.1; change mean = 105.3).

There is a critical problem associated with the independent variables in this case that should be accounted for when considering the hypothesis five results. The two questions used as the independent variables called for respondents to recall their reactions to social work classes retrospectively. Participants may not have previously considered the potential impact of these classes on their attitudes and beliefs regarding this particular issue. At the point in time the survey instrument was completed, the true influence of past social work courses may have been underestimated or ignored altogether in favor of more recent and immediate influences. Therefore, a better measure of the relationship between social work education and attitudes toward same-sex couple adoption would involve utilization of an experimental or quasi-experimental design during the course of a participant's social work training. Another possible venue for future research is a qualitative study in which individuals are interviewed in-depth regarding their social work educational experiences and any impact they may have had on same-sex couple adoption attitudes.

#### *Hypothesis Six*

Regarding the relationship between social work education and intention to recommend placement, the results varied according to which of the two independent variables was used in the analysis. Scores on placement with both gay and lesbian couples of those whose classes did contribute to their beliefs on same-sex couple adoption (AD8 mean = 6.1; AD9 mean = 6.2) were significantly different from those whose classes did not contribute to their beliefs (AD8 mean = 4.5; AD9 mean = 4.5). In other words, individuals whose social work education did contribute



to their beliefs on same-sex couple adoption were more likely to recommend placement than those whose classes did not contribute to their beliefs. Regarding the question of whether or not classes changed beliefs, placement scores were not significantly different between the changed/not-changed groups, though mean scores were higher for those whose classes had changed their beliefs (AD8 mean = 6.6 and AD9 mean = 6.8 versus AD8 mean = 4.9 and AD9 mean = 5).

The weight given to the results of the hypothesis six analysis is limited by the problems discussed previously: the questions used as the independent variables may not be accurate or meaningful measures of the true import of social work education in this area. The questions were deemed appropriate for the scope of the current study, but their application and utility are limited. As with hypothesis five, future research on this relationship should employ alternate research designs and measures to gather data.

#### Limitations

There are several general limitations that must be acknowledged as a caveat to the results of the present study (please note that several specific limitations were discussed in the Summary and Implications of Results section and will not be repeated here). The first, and possibly the most critical, is the small sample size. Sixty-five participants, thirty-one adoption workers and thirty-four former and current Title IV-E social work students, responded to the survey questionnaire. This small number seriously limits the external validity, or generalizability, of the results and does not achieve the desired level of power (.80); moreover, the statistical power with a medium effect size of each group is approximately .37 (Rubin & Babbie, 2000, p. 539). Power analysis “assesses the probability of correctly rejecting a null hypothesis that is false” (p. 537); in other words, power analysis produces the probability of committing a Type II error, i.e., failing to reject a false null hypothesis. In this case, that probability is approximately .63.

The reasons behind the low respondent numbers are twofold: (1) two universities asked to participate were unable to do so, and (2) several agencies contacted chose either not to respond to requests or not to participate due to limited available time, heavy caseloads, or religious objections. As was stated previously, 17 of the 32 agencies asked to participate did so; however, there were a limited number of workers in each of these agencies (several employed only one or two), which restricted the number of possible surveys, both in distribution and return. Additionally, with the move to privatize adoption in Georgia, licensed agencies are often faith-based and affiliated with a religion whose tenets may not be conducive to allowing adoption by same-sex couples (in this case, at least 12 of the 32 agencies contacted were established as faith-based organizations), which points to a further problem with the small sample size: self-selection. The nature of the study's topic, same-sex couple adoption, may have proven too controversial for the comfort of some agencies asked to participate. It is possible that those individuals who chose to participate in the study did so because of their more favorable position on same-sex couple adoption. The attitudes and beliefs of those who did not participate may tell a very different story about Georgia adoption workers than the current results.

The composition of the sample itself suggests a further limitation – a lack of diversity. The respondents were predominately Caucasian, Protestant, and female. This finding is telling in its reflection of the stereotype generally held about child welfare workers and even more so in its possible reflection of the actual population of adoption workers and social work students in the state of Georgia. Due to the limited diversity of the already small sample, it is with caution that a generalization of results, both to the majority and minority groups within the sample, is approached.

A third limitation related to sample size is the return rate. According to Rubin and Babbie (2001), the return rate for the study, at 56%, is adequate. It is not, however, good.

Efforts to boost the return rate, including follow-up contacts via telephone and electronic mail, in addition to follow-up mailings and attempts to include agencies and schools who had not previously responded to inquiries, had minimal success. Replication studies should attempt to reach a return rate of at least 60%, with 70% being the goal. Strategies for doing so include approaching agencies and schools about the possibility of distributing and collecting the questionnaires in person, editing the length of the survey instrument (at 7-8 pages, it may have been cumbersome to sample members), and giving potential respondents the option of completing the survey online, which may prove more convenient than a mailed questionnaire.

Other limitations of the survey are based on the questionnaire itself. A scale, the ATSCAP, had to be created for the purposes of the current study. No other scale was found that specifically captured attitudes toward same-sex couple adoptions. Ryan (2000) created a scale, the *Attitude Toward Gay Men and Lesbians as Adoptive Parents Scale* (APS), but it was deemed too broad for the purposes of the current study; Ryan's scale was, however, vital in the development of the ATSCAP, as certain items from the APS were used as a base from which to develop items for first the ATGP and then the ATSCAP. As the ATSCAP was developed for the purpose of this study, it was implemented with limited knowledge of or support for its reliability and validity. The reliability of the ATSCAP and its sub-scales, GCS and LCS, proved to be quite high (.9694, .9348, and .9375, respectively), and the findings from the validity analyses were encouraging: the ATSCAP proved to be highly correlated to the *Homophobia Scale* and 18 of the ATSCAP's 25 items were more highly correlated with their own scale than with the HS, providing evidence of both concurrent and discriminant validity. The encouraging results did have a flip side that is cause for concern. The ATSCAP and the HS were correlated to such a degree that it is a question as to whether they are actually measuring the same concept; the discriminant validity analysis found seven items on the ATSCAP were more highly correlated to

the HS than to the ATSCAP, which brings into question the strength of the ATSCAP's discriminant validity. With a few modifications, the results of both the reliability and discriminant validity analysis suggested eliminating items 5a and b, 8a and b, and 13a and b, the ATSCAP will likely be a highly reliable and valid instrument; as it is still in its development, the results found with the ATSCAP should be examined critically and with caution, and further validation and replication studies utilizing the scale should be implemented.

A second questionnaire-related limitation has to do with the placement questions (AD8 and AD9). As discussed previously, two Likert-based questions were used to assess intention to recommend placement with (1) gay couples and (2) lesbian couples. Because the questions were straight-forward single-item indicators rather than scales, we cannot determine beyond face validity how accurately the questions capture the intentions of workers and students, nor can we determine, with respect to workers, if AD8 and AD9 scores reflect their actual intentions or their intentions as dictated by agency policy. Therefore, replication studies and in-depth interviewing are needed to better understand the true meaning of scores on the placement recommendation questions.

The limitations of the study are perhaps as important as the results, because they provide direction to the development of future research projects replicating and relating to the current investigation.

### Future Research

Both the results and the limitations of the current study open the door to numerous future research projects. Those future projects may cover the areas of replication, scale development, policy development and analysis, education assessment, and comparative studies.

Perhaps the starting point for future research is replication of the current study, both in Georgia and in states with similar policies on gay and lesbian couple adoption. Goals of

replication studies should include increased sample size, increased diversity of sample, and increased return rate. Replication will allow us to assess the stability and accuracy of the current project's findings, as well as increase the external validity of the results. After replication studies have taken place, the next step should be to conduct comparative studies. Comparative studies could be taken in two possible directions: (1) analysis of the attitudes, beliefs, and intentions of workers and students in states with ambiguous gay and lesbian adoption policies, as compared to those in states that clearly allow both second-parent and joint adoption by gay and lesbian couples; and (2) analysis of the attitudes, beliefs, and intentions of workers and students in states with ambiguous gay and lesbian adoption policies, as compared to those in states that explicitly do not allow either second-parent or joint adoption by gay and lesbian couples. Such comparisons will increase knowledge of the impact of state policies on the belief systems and decision-making processes of potential and in-the-field child welfare professionals.

As a component of replication and comparative studies, the ATSCAP should continue to be refined and validated. The current study's initial findings with respect to reliability and validity are promising. The ATSCAP and its sub-scales were found to be highly reliable (all alpha coefficients were above .90) and concurrent and discriminant validation with the *Homophobia Scale* has suggested points for revision to increase the ATSCAP's validity. Revision of the scale to exclude items 5a and b, 8a and b, and 13a and b raises the coefficient alpha to .9725 and improves the scale's discriminant validity without compromising the integrity of the ATSCAP as a whole. The ATSCAP should continue to undergo validation against other criteria, including other homophobia-related scales, such as the *Index of Homophobia* (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980).

As suggested previously, alternate research designs (i.e., quasi-experimental or experimental in nature) should be used to gather more precise data regarding the impact of (1)

agency policies on attitudes and placement decisions, and (2) social work education on attitudes and placement recommendations. As this was a one-shot correlational effort at collecting data, a design involving pre- and posttests, such as a time series design, may be more telling as to changes in attitudes and/or placement intentions as a result of exposure to agency policies or social work education, should any changes occur. Such designs may allow researchers to better understand, in terms of both breadth and depth, the effects of policies (formal, informal, or some combination of both) and social work courses (what classes impacted students and in what ways and to what extent?).

Social work curricula, which refer to any practice, policy, theory, or research coursework, may impact the belief system and/or practice philosophy of social work students. As Cain (1996) summarized, “Social work education is about more than just teaching new information and skills; it is also about encouraging students to question their assumptions and values, and the structure of the world around them” (p. 65). Further, whether or not adoption workers are formally-trained social workers, agency-sponsored training is relied upon to orient the worker to the interworkings of that agency and its place within the child welfare system. As previously cited, Ryan (2000) found that special training had a significant impact on social worker attitudes toward gay and lesbian adoptions, while Brodzinsky (2003) found that 48% of the agencies he surveyed were interested in specialized training in working with gay and lesbian applicants. Button (2001) supported the use of diversity workshops as forums for trainers to provide “accurate information about homosexuality, dispel common misconceptions, and lower anxiety” (p. 17). Researchers should evaluate the outcomes of social work curricula and diversity training centered on working with gay men and lesbians in terms of attitudinal and behavioral changes in those who utilize such resources, whether they be social work students or adoption workers.

Positive results may lead to institutionalization of training programs and educational courses at an increased number of agencies and schools.

A related issue to consider is the commitment to and longevity of professionals in the adoption field. Title IV-E students, who must agree to spend a certain amount of time in the child welfare field, may not choose to work specifically in adoption, opting to practice in another area, such as foster care. Further, these former students may choose not to remain in the field past the required time commitment. In addition, recent research has found that nationally only 28% of child welfare workers have degrees in social work (Schneider, 2003). What impact do these shifts in employment and diversity of education have on the institution of adoption and, specifically, same-sex couple adoptions, over time? Future research should include longitudinal aspects that examine the professional training trends of those in the adoption field, the length of time workers remain in the field, the changes in attitudes over time as a result of actual practice experience, and the comparative attitudes of those adoption workers who receive social work training versus those who were schooled in another area. A question that is critical to both gay and lesbian rights activists seeking substantive allies in the adoption field and social work scholars advocating the increased participation of degreed social workers in child welfare: Does the participation of social workers, who have an ethical commitment to social justice, in adoption increase the likelihood that same-sex couple adoptions will be granted?

The adoption field has become increasingly populated by private agencies, some of which are organized to serve the interests of gay and lesbians individuals and couples who are interested in adoption. Learning more about the facilities, training, services, and programs of these private agencies could provide models for other agencies, as well as favorable data regarding successful same-sex couple adoption (such data could build security within an agency around the idea of formalizing policies allowing same-sex couple adoptions). The research as to

the outcomes of children raised by gay or lesbian parents has not focused specifically on those children who were adopted by same-sex couples. A great deal of work has been done examining the children (usually biological) of lesbian mothers and gay fathers on measures that address the myths and concerns discussed in Chapter Two, namely sexual orientation, gender role development, and social relationships. Patterson, for example, has done extensive research on the gender role identification and behaviors of children of lesbian mothers. Future research should follow similar patterns of addressing the following areas of concern in the context of adoptive families headed by gay and lesbian couples: self-esteem, peer relationships, sexual and gender identification, and psychological well-being of children, and the general adjustment and outcomes of these families as a whole. Researchers should take care to account for the experiences of children prior to placement with same-sex couples, as those pre-placement experiences may impact biopsychosocial and sexual development.

Finally, a survey of international policies regarding same-sex couple adoptions, including success rates and outcomes, should be conducted. Several countries, including Canada and South Africa, have passed laws allowing same-sex couple adoptions (and Canada recently legalized same-sex marriage). It would be interesting to learn the impact of such laws on the following: adoption rates, public opinion, adoption agency procedures, and efforts to recruit adoptive parents, to name a few of the issues. In addition, comparative studies should be conducted of adoption workers in countries permitting same-sex couple adoptions and adoption workers in countries with ambiguous national policies, such as in the U.S. Issues to be addressed in this case would include: reconciling belief systems, attitudes, and policy mandates, negotiating the adoption process, and interaction with prospective parents. The involvement of social workers in the adoption field and their impact would be a further point of study, as would an



examination of adoption worker training practices, as they relate to working with gay and lesbian clients.

### Conclusions

Despite the research that has been done over the past thirty years with the goal of dispelling misconceptions regarding gay and lesbian parenting, there continue to be doubts regarding the legitimacy of gay and lesbian parents and the well-being of children raised in gay and lesbian households. Nowhere is this more evident than in the practice of adoption. It is imperative, for children languishing in the child welfare system and for gay and lesbian couples who long to parent children, that the adoption industry reexamines its systems, priorities, and empirical research in order to provide the best possible services to would-be families.

The present investigation was a step toward better understanding the obstacles faced by gay and lesbian couples as they enter the world of adoption, both on an individual and a systemic level. Adoption workers are the front line in service provision to couples wishing to become parents. If these critical figures in the adoption process are not open to the acceptance of gay and lesbian applicants, then little progress will be made on behalf of same-sex couples. The findings here are optimistic; adoption workers show attitudes ranging from very much not in favor to very much in favor of same-sex couple adoption, and social work students, who are the future of the adoption profession, were overall very much in favor of these adoptions. It now falls to researchers to continue to examine the various components contributing to the placement, or denial of placement, with gay and lesbian couples.

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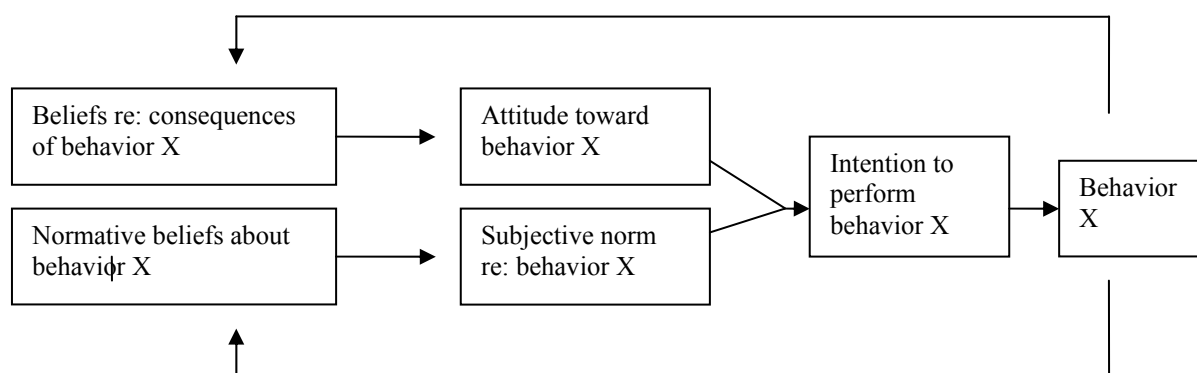
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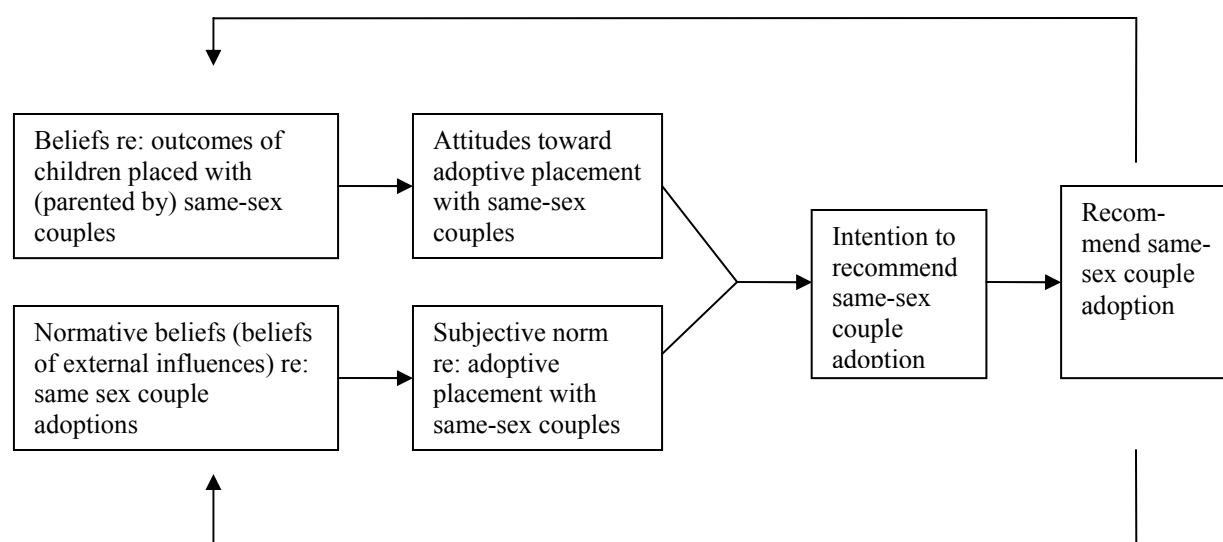
## APPENDIX A

FIGURE 1. FISHBEIN AND AZJEN'S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



## APPENDIX B

FIGURE 2. THEORETICAL MODEL OF THE PROCESS BY WHICH ADOPTION WORKERS RECOMMEND ADOPTIVE PLACEMENT WITH SAME SEX COUPLES.



## APPENDIX C

## COVER LETTER

Date

Agency's/University's Name and Address

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please find enclosed a questionnaire that attempts to measure your beliefs, attitudes, and actual and/or hypothetical practices regarding same-sex couple adoptions. This survey, entitled, "Same-Sex Couple Adoptions: The Relationship Between Beliefs, Attitudes, External Influences, and Placement Decisions," is being conducted as part of my dissertation research project at The University of Georgia's School of Social Work, under the advisement of Dr. Kevin DeWeaver, who may be contacted at the following address or telephone number: University of Georgia, School of Social Work, Tucker Hall, Athens, GA 30606, (706) 542-5473. The benefit expected from the research is as follows: by understanding different factors in the decision-making process regarding adoptive placement, we may better understand the educational, training, and policy issues in this controversial area of adoption.

Two groups were selected to participate in this research study: (1) child welfare workers who specialize in domestic special needs and infant adoptions and are employed by licensed agencies in Georgia and (2) Title IV-E funded students who are enrolled in a social work program at a college or university in the state of Georgia. Your experience and knowledge are important aspects of adoption practice and policy development, and your contribution to the knowledge base through participation in this study will be of great value to the child welfare profession. Please take 15 to 20 minutes out of your busy schedule to complete the questionnaire and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope as soon as possible. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to answer every question, but I encourage you to do so. No risks, discomforts, or stresses are expected. The results of this participation are anonymous. No one, including myself, will be able to link your returned questionnaire with your identifying information.

I will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 706-552-2607. Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,  
Christina A. Spivey, M.A., LMSW  
130 Chateau Terrace, #25

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

## APPENDIX D

### SURVEY INSTRUMENT

#### ***Section I: Policies*** (Only included in Adoption Workers' version of Instrument)

Please answer the following questions.

1. Are you currently employed by an adoption agency licensed by the State of Georgia?

a. ☐ Yes      b. ☐ No

If you answered Yes, please answer the following questions:

What is your job title? \_\_\_\_\_

Does your job include facilitation of adoptions? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you worked in the child welfare system? \_\_\_\_\_ In you current position?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Does your agency have formal, written policies concerning adoption by same-sex couples?

a. ☐ Yes      b. ☐ No

If yes, please describe those formal policies:

3. Does your agency have informal, unwritten policies regarding same-sex adoption?

a. ☐ Yes      b. ☐ No

If yes, please describe those informal policies:

4. Your agency accepts gay male couples as adoption applicants.

a. ☐ Yes      b. ☐ No

5. Your agency accepts lesbian couples as adoption applicants.

a. ☐ Yes      b. ☐ No



Please further describe the influence ranked **4** above and how that influence has contributed to your views on same-sex couple adoptions:

### ***Section III: SRES***

The SRES is not published here out of respect for the copyright held by the instrument's creators.

### ***Section IV: ATSCAP***

This questionnaire is designed to measure your feelings and beliefs regarding same-sex couples as adoptive parents. It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Answer each item as carefully and as honestly as you can by placing a number beside each statement as follows.

**1 = Strongly Agree**

**2 = Agree**

**3 = Slightly Agree**

**4 = Slightly Disagree**

**5 = Disagree**

**6 = Strongly Disagree**

1. \_\_\_\_ I believe the best interests of children are served by placement with heterosexual couples.
2. \_\_\_\_ (a) I would feel uncomfortable placing a child in a home where he/she would have two male parents.  
       \_\_\_\_ (b) I would feel uncomfortable placing a child in a home where he/she would have two female parents.
3. \_\_\_\_ (a) I would feel nervous placing children with gay male couples.  
       \_\_\_\_ (b) I would feel nervous placing children with lesbian couples.
4. \_\_\_\_ (a) I would feel angry if a child were placed with a gay male couple instead of a heterosexual couple.  
       \_\_\_\_ (b) I would feel angry if a child were placed with a lesbian couple instead of a heterosexual couple.
5. \_\_\_\_ (a) I do not believe children raised by gay male couples are more likely to be sexually abused than children raised by heterosexual couples.  
       \_\_\_\_ (b) I do not believe children raised by lesbian couples are more likely to be sexually abused than children raised by heterosexual couples.
6. \_\_\_\_ (a) I believe children raised by gay male couples are no more likely to experience significant developmental differences than children raised by heterosexual couples.  
       \_\_\_\_ (b) I believe children raised by lesbian couples are no more likely to experience significant developmental differences than children raised by heterosexual couples.
7. \_\_\_\_ (a) I would feel confident in placing a child in the care of a gay male couple.  
       \_\_\_\_ (b) I would feel confident in placing a child in the care of a lesbian couple.
8. \_\_\_\_ (a) I believe children raised by gay male couples are more likely to be teased by their peers.  
       \_\_\_\_ (b) I believe children raised by lesbian couples are more likely to be teased by their peers.
9. \_\_\_\_ (a) I would feel comfortable working with gay male couples as prospective adoptive parents.  
       \_\_\_\_ (b) I would feel comfortable working with lesbian couples as prospective adoptive parents.
10. \_\_\_\_ (a) I fear children raised by gay male couples are more likely to become homosexual.  
       \_\_\_\_ (b) I fear children raised by lesbian couples are more likely to become homosexual.

11. \_\_\_\_ (a) I feel the lifestyle of gay male couples makes them unsuitable as parents.  
 \_\_\_\_ (b) I feel the lifestyle of lesbian couples makes them unsuitable as parents.
12. \_\_\_\_ (a) I believe gay male couples do not have stable relationships.  
 \_\_\_\_ (b) I believe lesbian couples do not have stable relationships.
13. \_\_\_\_ (a) I would allow my children to play with children raised by gay male couples.  
 \_\_\_\_ (b) I would allow my children to play with children raised by lesbian couples.

### ***Section V: HS***

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement by placing a checkmark on the appropriate line.

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
1. Homosexuals contribute positively to society.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Homosexuality is disgusting.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Homosexuals are just as moral as heterosexuals.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Homosexuals should have equal civil rights.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. Homosexuals corrupt young people.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. Homosexuality is a sin.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. Homosexuality should be against the law.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

### ***Section VI: Adoption Process***

A same-sex couple desires to adopt a child through your agency. The couple is able to meet the needs of children that your agency services. Please rate your response to each of the following statements according to the following scale:

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Not likely at all</b>			<b>Neutral</b>			<b>Very likely</b>

1. You would recommend the couple pursue the adoption through your agency.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

2. You would recommend the couple pursue adoption through another agency.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

3. You would agree to work with the couple.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4. You would recommend the couple work with another caseworker in your agency.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

5. You would work with the couple through the adoption process (e.g., preparation, home study, parenting classes).

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

6. You would seek guidance regarding work with the couple from a supervisor.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

7. You would consult empirical literature on gay and lesbian parenting.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

The couple has fulfilled all requirements for prospective adoptive parents and is now eligible for child placement. Please rate your response to the following statements:

8. You would recommend placement with a gay male couple.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

9. You would recommend placement with a lesbian couple.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

### ***Section VII: Demographics***

#### **1. Gender:**

a. \_\_\_ Male    b. \_\_\_ Female    c. If not stated, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **2. Age:**

a. \_\_\_ Under 20    b. \_\_\_ 20-30    c. \_\_\_ 31-40    d. \_\_\_ 41-50    e. \_\_\_ Over 50

**3. Race/Ethnicity** (Select only ONE):

- a. \_\_\_ African American      b. \_\_\_ Hispanic/Latina(o)      c. \_\_\_ Asian/Pacific Islander  
d. \_\_\_ Caucasian      e. \_\_\_ Native American      f. \_\_\_ Multi-racial  
g. If not stated, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Education** (Please select all that apply):

- a. \_\_\_ High School Diploma/GED  
b. \_\_\_ Bachelor's Degree      with a Major in \_\_\_\_\_  
c. \_\_\_ Master's Degree      in \_\_\_\_\_  
d. \_\_\_ Doctorate Degree      in \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Religious Affiliation:**

- a. \_\_\_ Jewish      e. \_\_\_ Buddhist  
b. \_\_\_ Catholic      f. \_\_\_ Hindu  
c. \_\_\_ Muslim      g. \_\_\_ Atheist/Agnostic  
d. \_\_\_ Protestant      h. If not stated, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Political Affiliation:**

- a. \_\_\_ Republican  
b. \_\_\_ Democrat  
c. If not stated, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F

## ATTITUDES TOWARD GAY MALE COUPLES AS ADOPTIVE PARENTS

This questionnaire is designed to measure your feelings and beliefs regarding gay male couples as adoptive parents. It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Answer each item as carefully and as honestly as you can by placing a number beside each one as follows.

- |                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 = Strongly Agree | 4 = Slightly Disagree |
| 2 = Agree          | 5 = Disagree          |
| 3 = Slightly Agree | 6 = Strongly Disagree |

- \_\_\_ 1. I believe the best interests of children are served by placement with heterosexual couples.
- \_\_\_ 2. I would feel uncomfortable placing a child in a home where he/she would not have a mother.
- \_\_\_ 3. I would feel nervous placing children with gay male couples.
- \_\_\_ 4. I would feel angry if a child were placed with a gay male couple instead of a heterosexual couple.
- \_\_\_ 5. I do not believe children raised by gay male couples are more likely to be sexually abused than children raised by heterosexual couples.
- \_\_\_ 6. I believe children raised by gay male couples are no more likely to experience significant developmental differences than children raised by heterosexual couples.
- \_\_\_ 7. I would feel confident in placing a child in the care of a gay male couple.
- \_\_\_ 8. I believe children raised by gay male couples are more likely to be teased by their peers.
- \_\_\_ 9. I would feel comfortable working with gay male couples as prospective adoptive parents.
- \_\_\_ 10. I fear children raised by gay male couples are more likely to become homosexual.
- \_\_\_ 11. I feel the lifestyle of gay male couples makes them unsuitable as parents.
- \_\_\_ 12. I believe homosexuality is an indicator of mental illness.
- \_\_\_ 13. I believe gay male couples do not have stable relationships.
- \_\_\_ 14. I would allow my children to play with children raised by gay male couples.