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SOCIAL WORKERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER ADOPTIONS

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SOCIAL WORKERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS LESBIAN, GAY,
BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER ADOPTIONS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Christina Nicole Kemper
Natalie Jazmin Reynaga
June 2015

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the attitudes of social workers in relation to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) adoptions. Race, gender, generation, position and prior LGBT training are factors that can positively or negatively impact social workers' biases towards LGBT adoptions. Researchers contacted adoption agencies whom agreed to partake in the 26-question survey, including eight demographic questions and an 18 item scale. The current study used an adapted version of the Attitude Toward Gay Men and Lesbians as Adoptive Parent Scale (APS) ($\alpha = .95$). There were 28 survey respondents, however two surveys were discontinued due to incomplete informed consents. A series of Mann-Whitney *U* tests were conducted to find if two independent, yet similar groups of people answered questions significantly different. Results show that men answered two questions significantly different than women participants who answered the same questions, and that administrative workers answered four questions differently than front-line service providers answered the same four questions. Limitations of this study include time; sample size; and an overrepresentation of women, heterosexuals and Caucasians. Further research should be done on this population, because they may directly impact the progression of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adoptions.

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DEDICATION

To the agencies who participated in this study, and to the busy workers who took time to fill out our questionnaire. For without you, this project would have been impossible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Problem Statement.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	3
Significance of the Project for Social Work.....	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction.....	10
Social Workers and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Adoptions	10
Gaps in Literature	18
Methodological Limitations	19
Theories Guiding Conceptualization.....	19
Summary	22
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	
Introduction.....	23
Study Design	23
Sampling.....	24
Data Collection and Instruments	24
Procedures	25
Protection of Human Subjects	26
Data Analysis.....	27

Summary	28
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	
Introduction.....	29
Presentation of the Findings.....	29
Summary	42
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	
Introduction.....	43
Discussion	43
Limitations	46
Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research	48
Conclusions	49
APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE	51
APPENDIX B: EMAIL TO AGENCIES	54
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT	56
APPENDIX D: DEBRIEFING.....	58
REFERENCES.....	60
ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE.....	63

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographics	30
Table 2. Mean Scores on the <i>Attitudes Towards Gay Men and Lesbians as Adoptive Parents Scale</i> Items	33
Table 3. Mean Scores of Gay- and Lesbian-Focused Questions Compared to Transgender-Focused Questions	35
Table 4. <i>U</i> and <i>p</i> Values for Gender, Training, Degree, Position and Age.....	39

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Nationwide, thousands of children are in need of adoptive homes. Every year, children are emancipated out of the foster-care system without stable and eternal family systems. In many states, non-traditional family types are still prohibited, increasing the gap of fostered children. The current research project aims to find the attitudes social workers hold towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) adoptions, as they may greatly impact the advancement processes for non-traditional family types seeking adoption. This chapter reviews the significance of the current study and the contribution it makes to the field of social work, specifically in the practice of child welfare.

Problem Statement

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) parenting is becoming more common in Westernized nations, however the negative stigma remains (Pennington & Knight, 2010). When it comes to adoptions, there should be no discrimination between homo- and heterosexual parental orientation or parental sexual identity. However, there are obstacles and challenges when non-traditional families seek adoption, including same-sex parents, a single heterosexual parent, a single homosexual parent, or a transgender parent (Pennington & Knight, 2010). According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2008), social workers have a professional obligation to treat

non-traditional parental categories equally. Contrary to the NASW ethical standards, studies have shown that there are many homophobic social workers (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; Pennington & Knight, 2011).

Adoption social workers are responsible for placing foster children in appropriate homes that directly meet the needs of each child, and give direct implications that the parents, whether homo- or heterosexual, have the ability, resources and financial stability to successfully raise a child (Mallon, 2007). Since social workers are at the forefront of placing children, it is of interest to understand social workers' attitudes in regards to LGBT parental adoptions.

It is important to gain an understanding of what social workers' attitudes are because professionals serve a diverse population. According to the NASW (2008), workers must serve their clients in an ethical manner. This directly pertains to the current research study, as social workers must practice the ability to value the dignity and worth of each client, regardless of sexual orientation (Martinez, Barsky & Singleton, 2011; NASW, 2008). Since adoption social workers are responsible for finding homes for youth in foster care, their biases against non-traditional families can impact the selection and advancement process for prospective adoptive parents (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997).

Additionally, if there are biases in the current field, it is of interest to determine if a lack of knowledge, education and understanding pertaining to the homosexual community contributes to the negative attitudes about same-

sex parenting (Foreman & Quinlan, 2008). If social workers are not being properly prepared to work with diverse populations, it can be detrimental to their professional career and directly negatively impact their clients (Foreman & Quinlan, 2008).

According to the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (2013), 100,000 children are in need of adoptive homes, and 30,000 children per year can no longer receive services due to the age requirement and limitations of foster care. It is important to the social work profession and to the lives of family-less children to determine if their chances of being adopted directly depend on the personal values, beliefs and attitudes of social workers towards non-nuclear adoptive families. Specifically, it is important to find how these attitudes and beliefs affect same-sex parents and their prospective adoptive children.

Purpose of the Study

The current study seeks to determine the biases among social workers when working with the LGBT community who seek adoption for their family. Measuring attitudes can be an indicator of how current workers perceive LGBT parenting and adoption. The human population, social workers included, is bound to have a variety of individual personal beliefs, opinions and attitudes. Attitudes can stem from many aspects that will shape how we think, act and behave. Many factors contribute to attitudes towards a particular subject. These factors include, but are not limited to, religion, socioeconomic status,

age, gender, and life experience. Currently, there are more accepting views of the LGBT community, when compared to previous generations (Pennington & Knight, 2010). Although views on LGBT adoption have become more widely accepted, the United States as a whole still holds conflicting views on this subject. Previous research has shown that those who work closely with the LGBT community tend to have more positive attitudes concerning this population, when compared to people who do not frequently work with this population (Averetta & Hegdeb, 2012). Furthermore, Averetta and Hegdeb (2012), found that social workers were more inclined to have positive attitudes over other professions that work with the LGBT community. This is most likely due to the trainings that social work students attend prior to entering the workforce, combined with the ethical obligations social workers hold.

Previous research has found that exposure to gay and lesbian individuals can positively impact attitudes towards this population. The more interaction an individual has with gay or lesbian individuals, the more positive attitudes they will hold towards the LGBT population (Sevecke, Rhymer, Almazan & Jacob, 2015). Interestingly, researchers found that people who believe sexuality is innate tend to have more acceptance towards homosexual individuals, when compared to people who believe homosexuality is a choice (Frias-Navarro, Monarde-i-Bort, Pascual-Soler, & Badenes-Ribera, 2015). The same study also found that although same-sex couples are more

commonly accepted, there remains a negative attitude towards same-sex parenting.

Attitudes are an important concept to understand because our attitudes can influence the population(s) we serve. Research has indicated that negative attitudes are a primary reason for the lack of support of social rights of the lesbian and gay community and their ability to parent (Frias-Navarro, Monarde-i-Bort, Pascual-Soler, & Badenes-Ribera, 2015). Social workers are trained in cultural competency and are expected to have positive attitudes while working with the LGBT population. On the other hand, this is not always the case due to personal beliefs, which can create negative attitudes towards the population.

Social workers are at the forefront of finding proper homes for children, both in public foster care and private agencies (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997). It is vital to have an understanding of social workers' attitudes towards the LGBT community for the purpose of competent practice. Currently, studies have presented research indicating that social work students are not being properly prepared to work with LGBT individuals once they enter the workforce (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006). During the education process for both Bachelor's of Social Work (BSW) and Master's of Social Work (MSW) students, it is expected that the LGBT community would be discussed at length. This assumption is made due to the fact that social workers interact with diverse populations and should be trained adequately on how to handle legal issues,

biases, and difficulties among minorities. It is of interest to determine if social work students are receiving adequate training prior to entering the workforce in which they will encounter LGBT individuals.

Previous research has indicated that BSW and MSW programs are not informing students about working with the LGBT population, and students are not learning how to address certain legal, ethical, and supportive behaviors towards this population. In other words, improper training of BSW and MSW students may possibly be related to overall attitudes toward the LGBT community. Also, not having training can result in biases held by the social workers, while working with the LGBT community in adoptions or in any field of practice (Gato & Fontaine, 2013).

It is apparent that the LGBT community does not always receive positive support when going through the adoption process. There are many obstacles to overcome for the LGBT community, with a primary factor being legality. There are still many states in the United States that do not allow same-sex adoption and there are some states that allow same-sex couples to petition for an adoption. Approval for a petition of adoption for a same-sex couple is at the discretion of the judge who takes the case (Goldberg, Weber, Moyer & Shapiro, 2014). Therefore, it may not be completely ethical or unbiased. The LGBT parents who seek adoptions through child welfare or private agencies still face discrimination whether the discrimination comes from social workers, judges, or lawyers.

Nationally, LGBT relations are widely unaccepted. According to National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (2014), relationship recognition for LGBT persons is unsubstantiated in many states. Data shows that 20 states have full and equal rights, two states have partial rights and one state has limited rights for people who identify as LGBT, when compared to the laws and rights of people who do not (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2014).

Although there is an immense difference between relationship and adoption, it may be implied that in the states with no laws against LGBT discrimination, LGBT adoption may not be commonly practiced. According to the National Census, 21 percent of same-sex households contain children that are either only stepchildren or only adopted children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). This is a relatively low percentage considering that 115,000 out of 594,000 same-sex couples have children, and that stepchildren and adopted children together make up the rather small statistic. Moreover, the majority of children reported by same-sex couples are biological to one partner and not legally adopted by the other.

The current study surveyed practicing adoption workers, including directors, supervisors, front-line service providers, family consultants, family recruiters and adoption interns, to gain an understanding of their attitudes on LGBT parental adoptions. Social workers' attitudes were measured using a quantitative cross-sectional research design. The research includes a sample of 26 social workers in the State of California. Five California adoption

agencies were contacted to permit sending the survey to their adoption social workers.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

Current research on LGBT parental adoptions primarily focus on same sex-adoptions, such as lesbian or gay parental adoptions. However, it is important that the transgender community is included in further research. Current researchers hope to obtain relevant information on social workers' attitudes towards all aspects of atypical sexuality, in order to expand the social work research data. Additionally, another area of significance in the current research on LGBT parental adoptions is to evaluate the education on the LGBT community that social workers received prior to entering the work field.

Research that finds relevant information on the education, or lack thereof, on the LGBT population for social work students can lead to further research on the education system for both BSW and MSW programs. It is important to maintain relevant research in social work and can be utilized in today's practice. Additionally, it is of extreme importance that social workers consistently practice competency in their profession. Social workers follow a Code of Ethics that sets the foundation for social work practice.

Results of this study will assist in understanding if social workers are currently practicing cultural competency in the workforce, or if their own pre-dispositions, beliefs, or biases are affecting their work with the LGBT community and, more specifically, LGBT adoptions. Additionally, the current

study will be utilized in all phases of the generalist intervention process. This is due to social workers' attitudes towards working with LGBT parents and will be relevant to all stages of the model. For instance, if a social worker has negative views or biases when working with an LGBT parent, they are likely to serve the client differently from the beginning throughout termination. Moreover, if social workers hold positive beliefs towards the population, the overall experience from the LGBT clients will be positive. The current study seeks to answer the question, "What are social workers' attitudes towards same-sex adoptions?" More specifically, do these attitudes affect actual progression and advancement for same-sex prospective parents?

This study is relevant to the practice of child welfare because the sole purpose of this study is to find if social workers lack of training and cultural competency concerning LGBT matters. The current study also aims to find how social workers currently view LGBT adoptions, and if their attitudes are prohibiting the progression of LGBT parental cases. As previously stated, more than 100,000 children nationwide are in need of adoptive homes, therefore the progression of parental LGBT adoptions can quite possibly decrease the amount of children in the child welfare system (Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, 2013). This conclusion not only contributes to the field of social work as it relates to child welfare, but the broader society.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Current research is explored to gain a better understanding of the reoccurring trends and the fissures on the present topic of LGBT adoptions. The current study bases its conceptualization around Bronfenbrenner's (1986) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) and the Social Constructionist Theory. These theories will be dissected and applied as the theoretical framework and guiding principles that tie social work and adoptions together.

Social Workers and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Adoptions

Dugmore and Cocker (2008) reported that society is holistically becoming increasingly more accepting of the homosexual lifestyle, as compared to the late nineties. This is seen by the continuous passing of laws, acts and legal procedures in relation to the rights of homosexual persons. Furthermore, Dugmore and Cocker (2008) believe that it is ethically and morally anticipated that social workers adhere to the lawful standards passed in the favor of atypical sexuality types. Social workers have a professional obligation to consider different family types, including LGBT individuals as a parental subsystem.

Similar to Dugmore and Cocker (2008), Hicks (2008) believes that social workers need to expand their policies to make atypical sexuality more widely accepted in the field of social work (Hicks 2008, as cited in Thompson, 1997, pp. 138-139). Hicks (2008) considers that people contributing to the social work profession need to deter from the idea of uncovering what it means to be a homosexual in a heterosexual world; rather social workers need to coexist with different sexuality types as humans contributing to society and to the betterment of fostered lives.

Camilleri and Ryan's (2006), examination of four components regarding undergraduate social work students was done to gain an understanding of how social work students perceive homosexuality, their knowledge pertaining to homosexuality, and views about homosexual parenting as an alternative to heterosexual parenting. Additionally, Camilleri and Ryan (2006), investigated if the social work curriculum at their university was providing lessons about homosexuality. The sample consisted of 60 students who voluntarily participated in filling out a questionnaire, in which 53 were female and seven were male. There were 21 randomly distributed questionnaires that contained case vignettes related to homo- and heterosexual parenting.

The findings suggested that social work students are quite knowledgeable, liberal and positive towards homosexual parenting. The study also found that the undergraduate program was not effective in teaching students more about the topic of homosexuality. Additionally, Camilleri and

Ryan (2006) found that the majority of undergraduate social work students hold a non-homophobic attitude. These findings suggest that the acceptance towards different sexuality types is not related to former training given on the LGBT population.

Similarly, Ryan (2000) sought to find if race, gender, religion, academic degree, and professional expertise contributed to general attitudes about homosexual adoptions. Ryan (2000) found it important to propose these research questions because, as the adoption population increases it leaves thousands of children in the foster system. Furthermore, if child welfare workers are selective in whom they allow as adoptive parents, the gap will continue to increase based solely on the predisposed morals and values of workers.

Ryan (2000) sent eight child welfare agencies packets containing a 14-question, Likert scale survey, two open-ended questions and a request for demographic information. Ryan (2000) sent 125 surveys to a total of eight child welfare agencies, however only 80 were returned and useable. The returned surveys showed that race and religion were representative samples, yet there were more females than males and more participants who earned their Master's degree than Bachelor's degree. Additionally, the majority of sampled participants did not receive any special training on gay men and lesbians prior to the study.

Ryan (2000) found that despite race, gender, religion, and the lack of training on gay men and lesbians as adoptive parents, social workers fulfill their professional objectivity, which requires them to remain neutral to any combination of non-nuclear families. Furthermore, Ryan (2000) found that child welfare social workers keep the needs of the adoptive children a priority when looking at potential adoptive parents. Parental sexuality is neither considered, nor a deterrent, to proceeding with adoption placement (Ryan, 2000).

Hall (2010) was also interested in the factors that contribute to social workers' perception of gay, lesbian or bisexual parents. Hall (2010) surveyed adoption workers from eight different counties in Northern California, and found that 95.7% of surveyed workers believed that people belonging to the gay, lesbian and bisexual community should not be discriminated against due to sexual orientation when considering adoptions. Hall (2010) also found that county adoption workers reported that they would consider transracial issues of prospective adoptive families more readily than considering parental sexuality. This is to say that adoption workers would place an adoptive child with same-sex parent before they would place an adoptive child with a mixed race family.

Next, Hall (2010) found that gay, lesbian and bisexual adoptions are significantly influenced by age; participants that were 45 and older had a greater rate of discrimination against same-sex adoptions, when compared to

respondents who were under 45. Additionally, Caucasian respondents considered other factors of prospective adoptive parents more than ethnically diverse workers. Next, parents considered the sexuality of prospective parents more than workers who did not have children. Hall (2010) did not find a variance in social workers' views when considering how long workers had been in their position as an adoptions worker.

Although there are research findings that show implications of non-bias and positive attitudes towards same-sex adoptions, there is conflicting research as well. Not all social workers are open and accepting to the lifestyle of homosexuals, nor do they believe it is developmentally appropriate for a child to have two dads, two moms, or any other combination of atypical family systems.

Berkman and Zinberg (1997), questioned if level of education determined views on homosexuality. The study examined heterosexual social workers who have obtained an MSW and are registered with the NASW. The researchers' first hypothesis sought to find out if men would test higher in homophobia and heterosexism than their female counterparts. Homophobia is described as a person having feelings of disgust or fear towards homosexuals, while heterosexism is defined as a belief that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997). The second question the researchers tested is if the level of education negatively correlated with homophobia and heterosexism. Another research hypothesis Berkman and

Zinberg (1997) tested whether religion contributed to having less bias towards homosexuality and heterosexism, and, more specifically if non-religious participants are less homophobic as well as less heterosexist.

The sample consisted of 189 heterosexual individuals who obtained an MSW degree, in which 70% were female and 90% were Caucasian. Respondents were sent a five-point Likert scale with 23 statements related to homosexuality, using the Index of Attitudes toward Homosexuality (IAH) by Hudson and Ricketts (1980). Berkman and Zinberg (1997) found that there was a gender difference in homophobia between men and women. These results confirm the initial hypothesis that males are more homophobic than women. Additionally, inconsistent with Camilleri and Ryan (2006), results indicated that there was a negative correlation between level of education and homophobia. This means that while level of education increased, homophobic attitudes decreased. It is implied that more education about homosexuality could be a contributing factor to social workers' attitudes and minimizing biases (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Berkman & Zinberg, 1997).

Previous research has focused primarily on social workers' attitudes in relation to homosexuality and heterosexism definitions. However, Martinez, Barsky and Singleton (2011) were interested in having updated research in regards to homophobia. They sought to test homophobia and positive or negative beliefs about gays and lesbians. The researchers utilized a survey, a

Modern Prejudice and Liberationist Beliefs Scale (MPLB), and focused on the concept of queer consciousness (QC) to measure the results.

The sample was comprised of 500 clinical social workers who were randomly selected using simple-random sampling from the NASW list of social workers. From the 500 surveys that were sent out, only 148 were returned and used for the study. This study was a nationwide study, and the results were positive in confirming previous studies related to social workers having positive perspectives on gay and lesbian individuals (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997). The findings also suggest that social workers, regardless of religious commitments, are still less likely to hold negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians in comparison to non-social workers. Additionally, the social workers who responded to the survey and had low QC scores, which indicated positive attitudes towards gay men and lesbians for one out of the four dimensions measured. Results indicated that three out of the four dimensions tested on social workers showed that social workers hold a negative attitude towards gay men and lesbian women. This means that negative attitudes substantially outweigh positive attitudes when testing for homophobia (Martinez, Barsky & Singleton, 2011).

In addition to Martinez, Barsky and Singleton (2011), Gato and Fontaine (2013) conducted a study with a large sample size, including 768 university students who were given vignettes on LGBT parenting and adoption. The researchers sought to determine participants' attitudes about

LGBT couples who adopted children and the outcome of the child's sexuality and gender development in relation to their gay or lesbian parents. It was hypothesized that participants would believe that children who have LGBT parents have more issues with sexuality and gender development, when compared to those with heterosexual parents. It was also hypothesized that male participants believe that male children will have less-than-normal sexual and gender development than female children whom were adopted in LGBT families.

The sample consisted of 768 undergraduate students from Polytechnic Institute of Porto. There were more women than there were men in this study; more specifically there were 64% female and 46% males. These results confirm both hypotheses in which participants did score higher on believing that LGBT parents would interfere with the child's sexual and gender development, when compared to children having heterosexual parents. Results also confirmed the second hypothesis, which found that all participants scored male children less likely to demonstrate typical sexual and gender development, when compared to their female counterparts (Martinez, Barsky, & Singleton, 2011).

Although westernized cultures have traveled a long way in terms of accepting atypical sexuality types, there is still conflicting research that demonstrates negative attitudes towards LGBT parenting. Since there is research supporting and against LGBT adoptions in relation to social workers'

attitudes, it is important to do further research in this area. Some studies reported positive or neutral attitudes of social workers' and social work students', while other studies showed extreme biases, negative perceptions, and non-compliance to advancing LGBT adoption placements. It is important to further evaluate social workers' attitudes towards this population, because often times attitudes are a direct predictor of actions and behavior (Ryan, 2000).

Gaps in Literature

Although extensive research has been done covering social workers' attitudes about and perception of same-sex adoptions, there is little research done exploring social workers' attitudes and perception of transgender adoptions. The transgender community has been slowly expanding and is beginning to gain more recognition, when compared to same-sex issues. Mallon (2011) recognizes the growth of the topic, and revisits his earlier study regarding same-sex home studies to add in the bisexual and transgender sexuality types (Mallon, 2011; Mallon, 2007).

The current study aims to find research that narrows the gap between same-sex adoptions and bisexual and transgender adoptions. The reality is that bisexual and transgender people exist and adoption workers have a heavy hand in placement options and cannot be ignored or minimized in conducting further research.

Methodological Limitations

Through research of current literature, several methodological limitations were found. First, almost every sample analyzed was largely outweighed by women social workers. It could be suggested that men are not equally represented in studies because social work is predominately a woman's profession, and the men included in the samples are representative of how few men there are in the field of social work.

Next, adoption workers are considered to be in a specialized field, therefore there are few adoption workers per adoption agency. Therefore, it is a challenge to reach adoption workers, and survey them on their attitudes towards matters concerning adoptions. Additionally, when researchers formerly studied social workers' attitudes and perceptions of adoption affairs, they were predominately social workers whom had little to do with the actual processes themselves. Although it is important to know how generalist social workers view LGBT adoptions, it creates concern and can be presented as a limitation because all social workers do not directly affect the advancement and finalization process.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) Ecological Systems Theory and the Social Constructionist Theory will be applied to the current study to guide conceptualization. First, Ecological Systems Theory establishes four different systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Neal &

Neal, 2013). Each system is layered on a larger, more complex system and together they make up the entire system. The microsystem is the smallest system, which can resemble a family or small group of people, while the largest system is the macrosystem, which can resemble the views of the society as a whole (Neal & Neal, 2013). The mesosystem includes interpersonal relationships between two subsystems, and the exosystem includes policies and laws that influence the other systems regarding a particular matter (Neal & Neal, 2013).

To apply Bronfenbrenner's (1986) Ecological Systems Theory directly to LGBT adoptions, one must begin from the largest ecological system and condense to the smallest ecological system. The macrosystem contains the views that social workers have on LGBT adoptions, which could directly impact the progression and finalization process. Next, is the exosystem, which is the laws and policies revolving around LGBT adoptions. As previously mentioned, not all areas of the country allow the LGBT population to partake in adoption, therefore it directly affects the process itself. The next area, and questionably the most critical system in relation to LGBT adoptions, is the mesosystem. This describes the relationship between the social worker and the prospective adoptive parents. If the social worker has a positive attitude in relation to LGBT adoptions, it could increase the likelihood of permanency for that particular family. If a social worker has a negative attitude towards the LGBT community, the results could be exactly the

opposite. Henceforth, the mesosystem directly impacts the microsystem and therefore directly impacts LGBT prospective families.

Goldberg et al. (2013) also uses Bronfenbrenner's model to mold their literature. They suggest that all the systems interact and have an influence on the other systems in the model. This means that the social worker system impacts the smaller, more immediate system. Furthermore, the adoption process can be directly influenced by the larger, more political system.

Another theory used to guide the current study is the social constructionist theory, which suggests that society molds people's perceptions of their reality (Solomon, 2002). These social constructs can be molded by the environment, political influences, religion, professional obligations and education (Solomon, 2002). Although society largely influences social constructs, they are not rigid and unyielding, but can be shifted to form other societal constructs.

This can be applied to the current study by implying that although social workers may have been taught the traditional family type through societal constructs, their perceptions may shift to fit their professional duties as a social worker. As previously stated, other influences can be present which yield one's reaction to atypical familial types. In this case, social workers can generate unbiased attitudes towards LGBT adoptions regardless of their previously developed social construct.

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) Ecological Systems Theory and the Social Constructionist Theory both guide the present study by suggesting that social workers' attitudes can be derived from multiple factors, some of which are unknown and subconscious to the social worker. As awareness of the LGBT population grows, social workers become prepared to work with various family types.

Summary

Literature was explored to analyze societal views of non-traditional family types, and how social workers perceive LGBT adoptions. There is evidence supporting and opposing the biases placed on LGBT adoptions, which can be related to lawful circumstances, region of practice, prior training on LGBT matters, generational gaps, and religious factors. In conclusion, there are still several implications for further research, including further examination of transgender issues, when directly related to adoptions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter covers the study design and a brief description of the participants in the study. It also addresses the reasons for and importance of selecting these participants, as well as the recruitment strategy. Next, an overview of the instrument, including the strengths and weaknesses, will be addressed. The procedures and data analysis of the current study will be outlined in full detail.

Study Design

The purpose of this study is to evaluate social workers' attitudes towards LGBT adoptions, which could best be measured by using a quantitative cross-sectional research design. This design will allow for a sample that includes adoption workers who currently work in the field. Additionally, agencies were contacted from different regions of California to increase the sample size. The regions covered in the present study are the counties of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, Ventura, Lassen, Plumas, Sierra, Nevada, and Placer. The present research question is: What are social workers' attitudes towards LGBT parental adoptions?

Sampling

Twenty-two adoption agencies were contacted via telephone, where the goals of the study were addressed. A letter of support was requested from the agencies, then the researchers sent agencies who agreed to participate a link to access the survey. Although 13 adoption agencies offered their support during the initial contact, only five California adoption agencies sent their letter of support to researchers. These agencies were sent the 18-question survey. The criteria for research participation was that participants must be current adoption interns, workers, family recruiters, family consultants, supervisors or program directors. It is important to collect data from a sample of workers who directly impact parent selection, which fit the above criteria. These workers predict the outcome and family type for adopted children, therefore it is important to assess the attitudes adoption workers have towards LGBT adoptions. This study uses an availability sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method, for the selection of study participants.

Data Collection and Instruments

Researchers asked eight demographic questions at the beginning of the survey to gain basic background information about participants. Nominal demographic information includes gender, race and ethnicity, former participation in LGBT training, and sexual identity; ordinal demographics includes the level of education, age, and years of experience as an adoption worker.

The current study used the Attitude Toward Gay Men and Lesbians as Adoptive Parents Scale (APS), which is a 14-question survey measure using a five-point Likert Scale format (Appendix A) (Ryan, 2000). The number “one” represents that the participant strongly agrees with the corresponding question, while the number “six” represents that the participant strongly disagrees with the corresponding question. APS is designed to gauge attitudes by making general statements about family composition, parental sexual orientation and child outcomes of lesbian and gay parents. APS ($\alpha = .95$) was found to be accurate and effective in measuring attitudes towards gay and lesbian adoptions (Ryan, 2000).

In addition to the demographics and original survey, four questions were adapted to the existing survey to account for the transgender population. Questions one, two, five and seven in the original version of APS were reworded to include the transgender population. These questions were added at the end of the study, which accounted for questions 15, 16, 17 and 18. At the end of the adapted version of APS, an open-ended question was added to ask the overall beliefs and attitudes towards LGBT adoptions. This gave participants the opportunity to address additional beliefs and attitudes not addressed by the APS.

Procedures

A list of adoption agencies was retrieved from the California Department of Social Services. For this study, only private adoption agencies

were contacted. Researchers called the agencies, and were either transferred to the director or asked to email the director of the adoption department. If the call was forwarded to the director, researchers explained the current study and asked for agency participation. If asked to email the directors, the researchers explained their project and asked for agency participation via email (Appendix B). Researchers asked agency directors to submit a formal letter of support, so that the survey link could be distributed to that agency. Overall, a letter of support was gained from five out of 22 contacted California adoption agencies.

Once agency support was granted, an email was sent to the directors of participating adoption agencies. Demographic questions and an adapted version of the APS were transferred into Qualtrics, which the directors agreed to forward to their adoption workers and supervisors. Qualtrics is an online survey service that allows participants to access the questionnaire as long as they have access to the link. The survey was open to study participants from January 2015 to March 2015.

Protection of Human Subjects

Participation in this study was completely anonymous. Subjects were informed that they were free to participate in the study and were free to stop at any time during the study (Appendix C). Confidentiality and anonymity were protected because the researchers only knew the names of participating agencies and the name of the director of adoptions. The researchers do not know, nor does Qualtrics track, the names of the participants or which agency

they represent. Furthermore, researchers are unable to track which agencies have members who participate in the study. Once the study was completed, participants received a debriefing statement that included the purpose of the study, confidentiality, how to access the findings, and contact information (Appendix D).

Data Analysis

Univariate analysis was conducted to find the frequency distributions for the demographic portion of the questionnaire. The central tendencies, the mean and range, were found for age. Descriptive statistics, which includes frequency counts, were found for each of the following variables: gender, age, race and ethnicity, sexual identity, level of education, LGBT training, years of experience, and position.

Additionally, a bivariate analysis was done to find if there is a relationship between demographic variables and the attitudes towards LGBT adoptions scale. A series of Mann Whitney *U* tests were conducted to find associations between age, level of education, previous LGBT training, gender and position and the attitudes of social workers about LGBT adoptions. Additionally, a qualitative analysis was performed by coding participant responses to the open-ended question then finding common themes among adoption workers.

Summary

The study design, participant demographics, and sampling procedures were explored in this chapter. Additionally, the informed consent, APS instrument, and debriefing statement and the protection and rights of human subjects were presented. Last, procedures and data analysis were discussed. Frequency distributions, central tendencies, and a series of Mann Whitney *U* tests will be used to find the predominant demographics along with the relationships between the dependent and independent variables.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter outlines the demographic information provided by respondents of the current study. Additionally, the descriptive statistics are outlined, comparing responses to questions pertaining to lesbian and gay parenting and transgender parenting. Lastly, a series of Mann Whitney *U* tests were conducted to find if there are significant differences in the way respondents ranked the 18 scale questions based on their training, degree, age, gender and position in the organization.

Presentation of the Findings

Demographics

Data for the current study were drawn from survey responses of 28 participants, two of which were not included because they did not complete informed consent. Out of the remaining 26 respondents, 24 reported their age, which yielded a mean of 38.5. The youngest participant was 22 years old, and the oldest participant was 64 years old. The study included 23 females (88.5%) and three males (11.5%). Various levels of education were represented in the present study sample, including High School Diploma/GED (3.8%), Bachelor's Degree (19.2%), Master's Degree (73.1%) and Doctorate Degree (3.8%). Nine participants hold administrative roles, while 17

participants are front-line service providers in adoption agencies. Eighteen participants were Caucasian (69.2%), three identified as Multi-ethnic (11.5%), two reported being African-American (7.7%), two reported being Hispanic or Latino (7.7%), and one reported being Native American or American Indian (3.8%). All of the participants reported being Heterosexual, and zero participants identified as gay, lesbian, queer, questioning, intersex, or other variation of sexual orientation. Fifteen respondents reported having received previous LGBT training (57.7%) while 11 respondents did not receive prior LGBT training (42.3%).

Table 1. Demographics

	Frequency n	Percent %	Mean	Range
Gender				
Female	23	88.5		
Male	3	11.5		
Age			38.5	22-64
Education				
High School Diploma /GED	1	3.8		
Bachelor's Degree	5	19.2		
Master's Degree	19	73.1		
Doctorate Degree	1	3.8		
Ethnicity				
Hispanic/ Latino	2	7.7		
Caucasian	18	69.2		
African American	2	7.7		
Native American/Indian American	1	3.8		
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0		
Other	3	11.5		

Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	26	100
LGBT Training		
Yes	15	57.7
No	11	42.3

Descriptive Statistics

Attitudes towards Lesbian and Gay Parental Adoption. Table 2 presents the mean scores on the Attitude Toward Gay Men and Lesbians as Adoptive Parents Scale (APS) items for research participants. Scale items were scored on a scale of one to five, with a score of one indicating participants strongly agreed with the statement and a score of six, indicating participants strongly disagreed with the statement. Scale item one had an average of 3.21 ($SD = 1.27$), which indicates that the average study participant agrees that a child raised by a gay or lesbian couple would face ridicule. The average scale score for item two is 5.17 ($SD = 0.72$), indicating that the average respondent disagrees that gay men and lesbians should undergo psychotherapy. Item three has an average score of 1.82 ($SD = 1.14$). This suggests that the average study participant agrees that gay men and lesbians should be allowed to adopt children. Scale item four has a mean score of 5 ($SD = 1.38$), indicating that the average participant disagrees that homosexuality is detrimental to society. Item five had an average response score of 1.61 ($SD = 0.84$), which means that the average respondent agrees that gay men and lesbians make suitable parents. Item six indicates that the average

respondent does not agree that homosexuality is a mental illness ($M = 5.78$, $SD = 0.42$), and item seven indicates that respondents agree that children with homosexual parents do not have significant developmental differences when compared to children raised in traditional homes ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.23$). The average response for item eight was 5.57 ($SD = 1.16$), which indicates that the average respondent does not agree that homosexuals are more likely to sexually abuse their children when compared to heterosexual parents. On average, participants responded to item nine with a mean score of 2.05 ($SD = 1.21$), which suggests that the average participant agrees that homosexual relationships are as stable as heterosexual relationships. Item 10 suggests that the average participant disagrees that homosexual people are more likely to demonstrate sexual acts in front of their children ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 0.71$). The average scale score for item 11 was 2.57 ($SD = 0.71$), indicating that the average respondent agrees that children raised by homosexual parents will not be denied of spiritual growth. The average respondent disagrees with items 12 and 13, which state that LGBT parents should only be allowed to adopt hard-to-adopt children ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 0.95$) and that a child raised by homosexual parents are likely to become homosexual ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.18$). The average scale score for item 14 was 5.04 ($SD = 1.26$), indicating that the average respondent disagrees that homosexuals are more likely to engage in short-term sexual relationships. Overall, the average respondent agrees to positively worded statements, when compared to negatively worded

responses. Furthermore, the average respondent disagrees with negatively worded response.

Table 2. Mean Scores on the *Attitude Toward Gay Men and Lesbians as Adoptive Parents Scale* Items

<i>Attitude Toward Gay Mean and Lesbians as Adoptive Parents Scale</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Children raised by homosexual parents will experience more ridicule by peers.	3.23	1.28
Gay men and lesbians should be required to undergo psychotherapy.	5.17	0.72
Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to adopt children.	1.82	1.14
Homosexuality is detrimental to society because it breaks down family values.	5.00	1.38
Gay men and lesbians make suitable parents.	1.61	0.84
Homosexuality is a mental illness.	5.78	0.42
Children who grow up in homosexual homes have no significant developmental differences than children raised in heterosexual ones.	2.17	1.23
Homosexuals are more likely than heterosexuals to sexually abuse their children.	5.57	1.16
Homosexual relationships are as stable as heterosexual ones.	2.05	1.21
Homosexuals demonstrate sexual acts in front of their children.	5.65	0.71
A child raised by homosexual parents will not be denied of spiritual growth.	2.57	1.65
If allowed, LGBT parents should only be able to adopt hard-to-place children.	5.48	0.95
A child raised by gay and lesbian parents will probably become homosexual.	5.30	1.18
Homosexuals are more likely to have short-term sexual relationships.	5.04	1.26
Children raised by transgender parents will experience more ridicule by peers.	3.13	1.46
A transgender parent should be required to undergo psychotherapy.	4.52	1.16
Transgender people make suitable parents.	2.22	1.13
Children who grow up with transgender parents have no significant developmental differences than children raised in more traditional homes.	2.65	1.27

Attitudes towards Lesbian and Gay Parental Adoption Compared to Transgender Parental Adoption. Table 3 represents the mean scores of questions pertaining to gay men and lesbians, and the mean scores of like-worded questions pertaining to transgender individuals. Scale item 15 had an average response score of 3.13 ($SD = 1.46$) compared to the same item referring to lesbian and gay adoptions ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.23$). The average respondent was more likely to agree that children of transgender parents will experience more ridicule when compared to children adopted by lesbian and gay couples. Scale item 16 had an average response score of 4.52 ($SD = 1.16$) compared to the same question referring to homosexual couples ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 0.72$). This indicates that the average respondent is more likely to disagree that homosexuals should undergo psychotherapy when compared to transgender parents. Scale item 17 had an average response score of 2.22 ($SD = 1.13$) compared to item five, the same question but referring to homosexual couples. The average responder agrees that homosexual parents are suitable parents when compared to the suitability of transgender parents. The average response score of item 18 was 2.65 ($SD = 1.27$) compared to the same question referring to lesbian and gay parents ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.23$). The overall responses indicate that the average responder is likely to agree more with lesbian and gay parents when compared to transgender parenting.

Table 3. Mean Scores of Gay- and Lesbian-Focused Questions Compared to Transgender-Focused Questions

<i>Scale Items</i>	Gay and Lesbian Items		Transgender Items	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Experience more ridicule by peers	3.22	1.28	3.13	1.46
Required to undergo psychotherapy	5.17	0.72	4.52	1.16
Suitability of parents	1.61	0.84	2.22	1.13
Developmental differences in children	2.17	1.23	2.65	1.27

Inferential Statistics

Mann-Whitney U is a non-parametric test that tests differences in means between two independent samples (De Veaux, Velleman, & Bock, 2008, p. 595). Having stated this, a series of Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to find if independent variables influenced the individual questions in the APS. Table 4 outlines the findings in the series of tests conducted, which compares training, degree, age, gender and position in the organization to the responses on the 18 scale item responses.

First, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted on LGBT training and the 18 scale questions. There was no significant differences in response to the scale item questions between respondents who received previous LGBT training ($n = 15, 57.7\%$), when compared to respondents who did not receive LGBT training prior to the research study ($n = 11, 42.3\%$). This indicates that training did not influence the responses of the average study participant.

Second, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted on degree type and the 18 scale questions. Degree type was collapsed into graduate degree ($n = 18$) and non-graduate degree ($n = 5$). There was no significant difference between respondents who obtained a graduate degree, when compared to respondents who did not receive a graduate degree on mean response scores on the 18 scale items. This suggests that level of education did not significantly influence the responses of the average research participant.

Third, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to find if age influenced responses on the APS were answered by the two groups. Based on the mean age of the sample (38.5), researchers separated the sample into two groups including those over and under the age of 40. The ages were collapsed into two groups: under 40 ($N = 10$) and over 40 years old ($n = 11$). There were null-findings for each of the 18 scale questions and age. This means that there is no significant difference in the way respondents under or over 40 years old answered the 18 questions.

Fourth, a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted on gender and the 18 scale questions. There was a significant relationship between the way males ($n = 3$) and females ($n = 20$) responded to items nine ($U = 7.00, p = .04$) and 11 ($U = 6.00, p = .03$). A cross-tabulation was conducted to see where the differences lied. The variables were manipulated, so that the test could be conducted. Scale items 9 and 11 were collapsed into two groups: agree and disagree. Respondents who answered “strongly agree”, “agree”, and

“somewhat agree” were collapsed into one group and given the value of 1. Respondents who answered “somewhat disagree”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree” were collapsed into a group and given the value of 2. Results show that male participants were more likely to disagree that homosexual relationships are as stable as heterosexual ones, when compared to the responses of female participants at a statistically significant level. Male participants were also more likely to disagree that children raised by homosexual parents will not be denied of spiritual growth, when compared to the responses of female participants.

Lastly, a Mann Whitney U test was conducted on position in the organization and the 18 scale questions. Position in the organization was collapsed into two categories: administrative position and front-line service providers. Administrative roles consisted of two managers, five directors, and two supervisors. Front-line service providers consisted of 10 adoption social workers, six interns, two adoption consultants, and one family recruiter. Overall, there are nine administrators and 17 front-line workers. A Mann Whitney U was conducted to find if there are significant differences in the way administrators answered item questions, compared to the way front-line workers answered item questions. There was significance in the way administrators ($n = 8$) and line workers ($n = 17$) answered questions three ($U = 24.00$, $p = .029$), four ($U = 23.50$, $p = .04$), five ($U = 25.00$, $p = .02$) and 17 ($U = 17.50$, $p < .01$). The average score for item three was 2.63 ($SD = 1.41$)

for administrative workers, when compared to the average mean for field-line workers ($M = 1.36$, $SD = .63$). Results show that administrative workers are more likely to disagree that gay men and lesbians should be allowed to adopt, when compared to front-line service providers. The mean score for item four was 3.86 ($SD = 1.77$) for administrative workers, when compared to the mean score for field-line workers ($M = 5.53$, $SD = .74$). Results show that administrative workers are more likely to agree that homosexuality is detrimental to society because it breaks down family values, when compared to front-line service providers. The average score for item five significantly differs between administrative workers ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.04$) and front-line service providers ($M = 1.27$, $SD = .46$). Results show that front-line services providers are more likely to agree that gay men and lesbians make suitable parents, when compared to administrators who disagree. Lastly, there was a significant difference in item 17 when comparing administrative workers ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.28$) and front-line workers ($M = 1.67$, $SD = .49$). Results show that administrators are more likely to disagree that transgender people make suitable parents, when compared to field-level workers, who tend to agree.

Table 4. *U* and *p* Values for Gender, Training, Degree, Position and Age

	Gender		LGBT Training		Degree Type		Position Type		Age	
	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Q1	21.50	0.46	60.00	0.78	43.50	0.91	39.50	0.19	48.50	0.65
Q2	26.00	0.76	56.50	0.61	44.50	0.97	48.00	0.47	53.00	0.98
Q3	9.00	0.26	51.00	0.65	38.50	0.76	24.00	0.03	42.50	0.60
Q4	20.50	0.46	57.50	0.95	38.50	0.76	23.50	0.04	44.50	0.68
Q5	19.00	0.36	56.00	0.61	44.50	0.97	25.00	0.02	52.50	0.86
Q6	26.00	0.76	55.50	0.56	44.00	0.97	57.00	0.88	45.50	0.51
Q7	20.50	0.40	50.00	0.38	44.50	0.97	38.00	0.17	52.00	0.86
Q8	24.00	0.63	63.50	0.93	32.00	0.36	53.00	0.68	54.50	0.97
Q9	7.00	0.04	41.00	0.26	40.00	0.88	39.00	0.37	41.00	0.53
Q10	28.00	0.90	59.00	0.74	38.00	0.64	48.00	0.47	40.00	0.31
Q11	6.00	0.02	57.50	0.65	44.50	0.97	52.00	0.64	34.00	0.15
Q12	28.50	0.90	59.50	0.74	40.50	0.75	31.50	0.07	54.50	0.97
Q13	25.50	0.70	57.00	0.65	41.00	0.80	47.50	0.43	53.00	0.92
Q14	16.50	0.23	57.50	0.65	40.50	0.75	36.00	0.13	45.50	0.51
Q15	24.00	0.64	52.00	0.45	40.00	0.75	49.50	0.51	49.00	0.71
Q16	26.00	0.76	38.00	0.10	31.00	0.33	34.00	0.10	42.50	0.39
Q17	18.50	0.31	61.50	0.83	43.00	0.91	17.50	<.01	54.50	0.97
Q18	9.00	0.06	53.50	0.48	42.00	0.86	42.50	0.27	47.00	0.61

Qualitative Analysis

At the end of the survey, respondents answered the question, “What is your overall attitude towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adoptions?” Of the 26 respondents, 20 filled out the qualitative response. The responses were coded between positive responses, negative responses, neutral responses, and conflicting responses. Of the responses, 16 were coded positive, three were coded neutral or unsure, and one was coded conflicting. The quoted statements reflect comprehensive answers made by

six research respondents, which show the position of positive attitudes, neutral attitudes or conflicting attitudes.

One respondent stated, “I believe that anyone who is willing and able to support a child in need of a stable home, and is able to pass all of their adoptive assessments, should be eligible for placement of a child” (Respondent 4, personal communication, March 2015). This respondent believes that if a parent is capable of providing the minimum level of care, there is no explanation for deciding not advance adoption to LGBT parent(s).

Another supporter of LGBT adoptions stated:

I believe this is a population who has been underserved and discriminated against. I believe they should be considered for adoptions and think this is slowly evolving as societal values progress and evolve. All families need to be evaluated in the same methods prior to receiving an adoptive placement. People can make excellent or suitable parents, regardless of sexual orientation and identification (Respondent 9, personal communication, March 2015).

This respondent agrees that the LGBT community should have the same rights and privileges as traditional households. This worker does not believe that discrimination should be present in the adoption process, as long as the prospective parent(s) is able to provide a stable household for the adopted child(ren).

One respondent stated, “LGBT Parents can provide a child the same

love, stability and protection that a heterosexual parent can”, while another stated, “People should be considered for adoption by other measures... Character matters. Any stable, caring, mature couple should be able to adopt” (Respondent 19, personal communication, March 2015).

Respondents who were neutral stated, “I am neutral on the subject. I think they should adopt through the foster system or from birth parents who specifically request a homosexual couple”, and “I don’t have any beliefs towards this population adopting. I think it’s good that this population is able to adopt” (Respondent 1, personal communication, March 2015; Respondent 20, personal communication, March 2015). In these statements, it does not appear that the respondents had conflicting views of LGBT adoptions, rather they did not agree nor disagree with the progression of these cases. The first response implies that LGBT parents should adopt through public agencies, opposed to private adoption agencies. Additionally, this respondent feels that children should not be placed with LGBT parents, unless the birth parents explicitly ask for their biological children to be placed with a member of the LGBT community. The other neutral respondent feels that LGBT parental adoption is a positive progression, however he or she is still neutral on this matter.

Lastly, the conflicting respondent mentioned religion, stating, “I believe in the Biblical definition of marriage between a man and a woman. However, I also believe that orphans need care and care from any parent in better than

orphanage care. Therefore, I have conflicting feelings about this” (Respondent 6, personal communication, March 2015). It appears that the conflict derives from the personal beliefs of this participant. This response does not state that the LGBT population should not be able to adopt, rather religious beliefs play a major role in the perception of LGBT adoptions.

After coding and analyzing the statements, major themes were formed. The majority of respondents used the terms “love”, “ability”, “stable” and “safety”. Overall, respondents believe that if prospective LGBT parents are able to provide a loving, safe and stable household for children, they should be able to adopt. Furthermore, sexual preference and sexuality type should not be a deterrent, nor a common factor, for assessing prospective adoptive homes.

Summary

Although analysis of qualitative responses demonstrate that respondents show positive attitudes towards LGBT adoptions, gender and positions showed significant differences when answering particular questions. In two questions, males had more conservative views on LGBT adoptions, when compared to the views of women. In four questions, respondents who held administrative roles had more conservative views, when compared to respondents who held front-line positions. Previous training, degree type, and age showed no significant differences in the way respondents answered survey questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter outlines a discussion of the findings presented in the current study and includes the conclusion and implications found, as a result of the research study conducted. Furthermore, the limitations of the study are described and recommendations are made for future research, practice, and policy advancement.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to find what social workers' attitudes are towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) adoptions. Researchers found it conducive to explicitly survey adoption workers from five adoption agencies in California, because adoption workers are at the forefront of advancing adoptions. Researchers expected to find several differences, which are influenced by age, previous LGBT training, and level of education.

Hall (2010) found that participants over the age of 45 lacked support for non-traditional family types, while the current study did not show any significant finding for participants over and under the age of 40. Dugmore and Cocker (2008) found that professionals who attended a one day, eight hour training on LGBT issues were more likely to change their attitudes towards the

LGBT community. Camilleri and Ryan (2006) found a negative correlation between level of education and homophobia. This means that, in their study, level of education impacted the way respondents answered scale questions. Dissimilarly to the current study, level of education did not impact responses.

On the contrary to the studies presented by Hall (2010), Dugmore and Cocker (2008), and Camilleri and Ryan (2006), but similarly to the current study, Ryan (2000) did not find significant differences among study participants based on demographic characteristics. In fact, the research study found that despite gender, religion and lack of previous training, social workers were likely to support gay and lesbian adoptions. The reason for this could possibly be that social workers hold their professional objectivity above their personal values and biases.

Although significant results were anticipated, the current study did not find significant differences between age, previous LGBT training, or level of education and the way respondents answered questions pertaining to LGBT adoptions. There were several null-findings, however three significant findings emerged. Gender and position showed significant differences in the way participants answered survey questions. Additionally, common themes were found among the open-ended question at the end of the survey.

First, two questions showed significant differences in the way male respondents answered questions, compared to the way female respondents answered the same questions. Significant differences showed that male

respondents were more likely to disagree with the statement that homosexual relationships are as stable and significant as heterosexual ones, when compared to the responses of female participants. Male participants were also more likely to disagree with the statement that children raised by homosexual parents will not be denied of spiritual growth, when compared to the responses of female participants. Although there were only three male participants, compared to 20 female participants, the way males responded to these two items were significantly different than the way females answered these questions. Berkman and Zinberg (1997) found that attitudes towards homophobia are strongly correlated to gender. It was found that men are more likely to display homophobic attitudes, when compared to females. Berkman and Zinberg's (1997) study supports the current study, as significant differences were found in the way men answered two questions, when compared to the way females answered the exact same question.

Second, four questions showed significant differences in the way administrative workers answered questions, when compared to front-line service providers. Compared to front-line service providers, findings show that administrative workers were less likely to think that lesbians and gay men should be allowed to adopt; that administrative workers agree that homosexuality breaks down family values, making homosexuality detrimental to society; administrative workers disagree that gay men and lesbians make suitable parents; and that administrative workers disagree that transgender

individuals make suitable parents, when compared to the front-line service providers who responded to the survey. Overall, administrative workers ranked their responses more conservatively, when compared to front-line adoption workers.

Lastly, one major theme was found in the way respondents answered the open-ended question at the end of the survey, which stated, “What is your overall attitude towards LGBT adoptions?” The major theme that emerged is that the majority of respondents stated that as long as children have a loving and stable home, sexual orientation should not be a deciding factor for the basis of adoption. Additionally, the majority of respondents stated that they believe LGBT parents are just as capable of providing a loving, stable home for children as heterosexual parents are. Berkman and Zinberg’s (1997) study supports this finding. Their study, too, found that despite differences in some attitudes, social workers’ overall consensus on LGBT adoptions is support and acceptance. Once again, this could be because social workers place social work values above their own, personal values and biases

Limitations

Though this study makes a contribution to the social work knowledgebase, the study findings should be contextualized within the limitations of the study. The research study was conducted among five adoption agencies, in which current social workers were sent an online survey aimed to find their attitudes towards LGBT adoptions. The research study

used a non-probability convenience sample for the study which limits the study generalizability.

First, the sample contained 26 participants, which is a rather small sample size. Next, the surveys were distributed to California-based adoption agencies. As a result, the study cannot be generalized outside of the state of California. A higher response rate would have been more desirable. Moreover, the allotted timeframe given to distribute and collect data was limited to 60 days. A larger timeframe for data collection could have increased the sample size.

There was a limited representation of males in the sample, as the study consisted mostly of females. This resulted in limiting the representation of the male perspective. The lack of male participants may be due to the underrepresentation of males in the social work profession as a whole. Research has indicated that male social workers are a minority in the field of social work, which is reflected in the current study. It is also relevant to note that 69.2% of participants were Caucasian, which implies that the sample is not ethnically diverse. Also, the current sample contains an entirely heterosexual sample. Considering the study is seeking to find social workers' attitudes toward LGBT adoptions, results are limited in generalizability due to the underrepresentation of males, an ethnically diverse group, and varying sexuality types.

Another limitation is the tool used, which does not include attitudes towards bi-sexual adoptive parents. Since the measurement does not analyze bisexuality, it is missing a relevant aspect of understanding social workers' attitudes towards LGBT adoptions. Additionally, respondents' religious beliefs were not measured, therefore, a comparison including religion and how respondents answered the 18 scale questionnaire could not be conducted. Researchers were unable to find if a relationship existed between religion and attitudes about LGBT adoptions.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

For future research, it is recommended that a larger sample is collected to find results that can be generalized to adoption social workers. To achieve this, it is recommended that a nationwide sample of adoption social workers be surveyed. Goldberg, Weber, Meyer and Shapiro (2011) found that nationally, gay and lesbians are not accepted in the community. Therefore, it is important to analyze the nation as a whole, since the state of California tends to be more liberal when compared to other states. Also, it is relevant to future researchers to analyze attitudes of male social workers, which can be done by conducting a study that holds criteria for only male participants. Additionally, it is recommended that future researchers invest in developing a tool that analyzes attitudes towards individuals who are transgender and bisexual. Also, it is of high importance that future research adds the religion in

the demographic portion of the survey. This will increase the understanding of the relationship between religious beliefs and attitudes. Previous research has indicated that there is no relationship between religion and homophobia (Berkman & Zinberg, 2006). Dissimilarly, a different study indicated that there is a negative relationship between attitudes of gay men and lesbians and religion (Whitley, 2009).

Furthermore, future research should aim to recruit study samples that are more culturally diverse. Since the majority of the current study were Caucasian, it is worth sampling other ethnicities/races for the purpose of having diversity within the sample. Researchers should utilize a larger allotted time frame to increase the opportunity to reach out to more participants. Lastly, there is limited research that analyzes other professionals that will work closely with the LGBT population. Previous research has indicated that LGBT individuals are generally treated unfairly and harassed by various professionals they interact with (Goldberg, Weber, Meyer, & Shapiro, 2014). Future research can test the attitudes of professions that are most likely to work with LGBT individuals such as lawyers, doctors, and judges.

Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to gain an understanding of the biases, pre-judgments, and overall attitudes that adoption social workers hold towards LGBT individuals as prospective adoptive parents. Although there were few significant findings in the current study, gender and position

appeared to influence the way respondents answered survey questions. Furthermore, the findings of the study found significant relationships between Overall, respondents typically agreed to positively worded statements and disagreed with negatively worded statements concerning LGBT adoptions. Similarly, respondents stated that they believe LGBT people should be allowed to if they are capable of providing a safe, loving, stable environment for children. Although there was some variance in the way different groups answered the questions, findings from this study indicates that overall, people are becoming more accepting of the LGBT population.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic Information

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender (Male to Female)
- Transgender (Female to Male)

What is your age?

What is your race/ethnicity?

- Caucasian
- Hispanic or Latino
- African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Other: _____

What is the highest level of education that you completed:

- High school diploma/ GED
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate degree

Have you had any previous LGBT training so you can more effectively work with the LGBT community?

- Yes
- No

How would you describe your sexual identity:

- Heterosexual
- Gay or Lesbian
- Queer
- Questioning
- Intersex
- Other: _____

How many years have you worked in adoptions?

What is the title of your position you hold within adoptions?

- _____

Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbians as Adoptive Parents Scale

Ryan, S. D. (2000). Examining social workers' placement recommendations of children with gay and lesbian adoptive parents. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 81(5), 517-528.

1. Children raised by homosexual parents will experience more ridicule by peers.
2. Gay men and lesbians should be required to undergo psychotherapy.
3. Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to adopt children.
4. Homosexuality is detrimental to society because it breaks down family values.
5. Gay men and lesbians make suitable parents.
6. Homosexuality is a mental illness.
7. Children who grow up in homosexual homes have no significant developmental differences than children raised in heterosexual ones.
8. Homosexuals are more likely than heterosexuals to sexually abuse their children.
9. Homosexual relationships are as stable as heterosexual ones.
10. Homosexuals demonstrate sexual acts in front of their children.
11. A child raised by homosexual parents will not be denied spiritual growth.
12. If allowed, LGBT parents should only be able to adopt hard-to-place children.
13. A child raised by gay and lesbian parents will probably become homosexual.
14. Homosexuals are more likely to have short-term sexual relationships.
15. Children raised by transgender parents will experience more ridicule by peers.
16. A transgender individual should be required to undergo psychotherapy.
17. Transgender people make suitable parents.
18. Overall, what are your beliefs about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adoptions? Why?

APPENDIX B
EMAIL TO AGENCIES

Director of the Adoption Department,

I contacted your agency about possible participation in our research study: Social Workers' Attitudes Towards LGBT Adoptions. The receptionist gave me your email address, and told me it would be best to contact you via email. Our research project is required to fulfill our MSW obligations at California State University San Bernardino. If your agency participates in research studies, and would like to participate in this one, we ask you to fill out the "Letter for Agency" attachment and mail it to:

School of Social Work CSUSB
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407-2397
ATTN: Dr. Rosemary McCaslin

Additionally, I have attached "LGBT Adoptions Survey" which reflects the survey we are asking your agency to participate in. It will be transferred into Qualtrics, and will be completely confidential and anonymous. After we get IRB approval from our campus, we will email you with the Qualtrics link and ask you to FWD: it to adoption workers and supervisors in your agency. This will happen sometime in January.

Thank you for your consideration in participating in our research study!
Christina Kemper and Natalie Reynaga, MSW Students
California State University, San Bernardino

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT



College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work

Social Workers Attitudes Pertaining to LGBT Adoptions

Informed Consent

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary.

You are invited to participate in a study that has been designed to assess social workers' attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parental adoptions (LGBT). This study is being conducted by Natalie Reynaga and Christina Kemper under the direct supervision of Dr. Erica Lizano, Assistant Professor of Social Work. This study has been approved by the Department of Social Work Institutional Review Board Subcommittee of California State University, San Bernardino.

As a participant, you will be asked to respond to a set of questions via electronic survey form. The survey will ask you to provide general background information about yourself, as well as to respond to a series of questions pertaining to your personal opinion about LGBT adoptions. The questionnaire should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Your participation is anonymous. We will not ask for your name. More importantly your answers will be assessed as a group and not individually.

The results of the study will be presented in group format only. Results will be presented by Natalie Reynaga and Christina Kemper's research project and may be presented at regional conferences, or published in peer reviewed journals. All of your responses will be held in the strictest confidence by the researchers. All data from this study will be kept from inappropriate disclosure and will be accessible only to the researchers and their faculty advisor.

Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw or refuse to answer any question at any time. If you have any questions or concerns, regarding this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Erica Lizano, Assistant Professor of Social Work (Eizano@csusb.edu).

This study involves no risks beyond those routinely encountered in daily life, nor any direct benefits to you as a participant other than assisting two MSW advanced year students in their research.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand the true nature and purpose of this study.

909.537.5501

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

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Maritime Academy • Monterey Bay • Northridge • Pomona • Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Diego • San Francisco • San Jose • San Luis Obispo • San Marcos • Sonoma • Stanislaus

APPENDIX D
DEBRIEFING

Debriefing Form for Participation in a Research Study
California State University, San Bernardino

Thank you for your participation in our study! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Purpose of the Study:

We previously informed you that the purpose of the study was to assess social workers' attitudes pertaining to LGBT parental adoptions. The goal of our research is to determine biases, attitudes and beliefs of practicing social workers in the workforce, specifically pertaining to their biases, attitudes and beliefs when working with LGBT parents seeking to adopt.

Final Report:

If you would like to receive a copy of the final report of this study (or a summary of the findings) when it is completed, please feel free to contact us.

Useful Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, its purpose or procedures, or if you have a research-related problem, please feel free to contact the researcher(s), Natalie Reynaga and Christina Kemper (909) 537-5584. If you have other concerns about this study or would like to speak with someone not directly involved in the research study, you may contact the Director of the School of Social Work, Dr. Laurie A. Smith at lasmith@csusb.edu.

*****Please keep a copy of this form for future reference. Once again, thank you for your participation in this study!*****

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:
Team Effort: Christina Kemper and Natalie Reynaga
2. Data Entry and Analysis:
Christina Kemper
3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
 - a. Introduction and Literature
Team Effort: Christina Kemper and Natalie Reynaga
 - b. Methods
Christina Kemper
 - c. Results
Christina Kemper
 - d. Discussion
Team Effort: Christina Kemper and Natalie Reynaga