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Attitudes of Undergraduate Students Towards Same-Sex Couples Adopting

Melissa Gaa

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Melissa Gaa

Candidate

Department of Individual, Family & Community Education

Department

This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Thesis Committee:

Pamela Olson

Chairperson

Susan Smith-Pierce, PhD

Daniel Olson, PhD, LRC

Ann Marie Howard

**ATTITUDES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
TOWARD SAME-SEX COUPLES ADOPTING**

BY

MELISSA GAA

BACHELORS OF SCIENCE ANTHROPOLOGY

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts
Family Studies**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

July 2010

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family: Emerson, Aspen and Steven. I thank them for their support and encouragement.

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I heartily acknowledge Dr. Pamela Olson, my advisor and thesis chair, for continuing to encourage me through the years of classroom teachings and the long number of months writing and rewriting these chapters. Her guidance and professional style will remain with me as I continue my career.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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by

Melissa Gaa

B.S., Anthropology, University of New Mexico, 2004

M.A., Family Studies, University of New Mexico, 2010

ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental design study examines attitudes of 87 undergraduate students in a social science major, towards same-sex couples. The participants were given one of two vignettes describing a couple interested in adopting a 5-year-old child. The vignettes were identical except that the couples' orientation was depicted as either a gay male couple or a heterosexual couple. Using t-tests and an ANOVA test for difference in attitude scores, emotional stability of the parents, quality of parenting, whether the participant felt the child would experience physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, and whether the parents would raise the child with morals and values, with a level of .05, no difference was found between the two groups

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	x
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Rationale.....	3
Purpose.....	5
Research Question.....	7
Theoretical Framework.....	9
Operational Definition of Terms.....	12
CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	15
History/Policy.....	15
Gender Influence on Adoption.....	17
Social and Emotional Development.....	19
Attitudes Toward Gay Parenting.....	19
Risk Behavior.....	23
Religion and Homosexuality.....	23
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY.....	27
Design.....	27
Sample.....	27
Measures.....	28
Data Collection Procedures.....	29
Data Processing.....	30
Sub-Hypotheses.....	32

Ethical Consideration.....	33
Assumptions and Limitations of the Study.....	34
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS.....	35
Couples Rating Questionnaire.....	37
Hypothesis Testing.....	39
Summary of Results.....	44
Summary.....	44
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION.....	45
Summary of the Study.....	45
Findings.....	47
Areas of Future Research.....	48
Conclusion.....	50
REFERENCES.....	52
APPENDICES.....	57

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents.....	36
Table 2: Mean and SD for CRQ survey.....	38
Table 3: Results of T-tests on variables on Couples Rating Questionnaire.....	39
Table 4: F-tests of Parent's Education Level and Gender and overall Adoption Attitudes.....	43
Table 5: ANOVA Religiousness and Overall Adoption Attitudes.....	43

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The desire to have children is a basic human instinct that most people eventually pursue at some point in their lives (Jokela, Kivimaki, Elovainio & Jarvinen, 2009). Some people are able to have children naturally, some need medical help, and others look to foster care or adoption. Adoption and foster care are the only options for many Americans to become parents. While all families face challenges, same-sex couples face additional barriers. For lesbian couples (two females) artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization are options to become parents but the costs can be prohibitive. Even with these procedures there is still no guarantee they will have a child. Gay couples (two men) may try to find a surrogate mother to carry a child for them but this can be expensive and legalities can make this complicated for all persons in the relationship (Lobaugh, Clements, Averill & Olguin, 2006). Therefore, same-sex couples turn to adoption in order to become parents.

Although the traditional two-parent (mother and father) household is still considered the ideal norm for family structure, many families currently consist of two-parents of the same sex, a single parent, or grandparents raising children (Ross, Epstein, Goldfinger, Steele, Anderson, & Strike, 2008; Ryan, Pearlmuter & Groza, 2004). These families are sometimes referred to as “alternative families” (Crawford & Solliday, 1996). Gay and lesbian couples are increasingly expressing interests in adopting children (Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, & Jordan, 1999). With the increase in same-sex couples wanting to start families, there is a

need to better understand the attitudes of pre-professionals towards gays and lesbians adopting. Attitudes towards same-sex couples adopting could help or hinder the adoption process.

Americans' attitudes towards lesbians and gay men have become more positive over the past 30 years (Shackelford & Besser, 2007). The Gallup Organization (2007) has detailed analyses of recent homosexuality-related polls showing that more American's consider homosexuality to be an acceptable alternative lifestyle. Although attitudes are becoming more positive towards homosexual lifestyles, negative attitudes towards homosexual parenting continue (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006). The attitudes of future social scientists who may place children in the homes of families is in need of examination.

Many arguments are made against gay parenting. Some of which are: 1) children raised in alternative family settings will grow up with gender identity confusion, 2) the social and emotional development of these children are sometimes said to be at risk, and 3) parenting attitudes and behaviors, such as sexual abuse, have also been a source of concern in these families (Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). To date there is no empirical evidence that children raised by gay couples face any more challenges than children being raised by heterosexual couples (Crawford & Solliday, 1996).

Same-sex couples are an underutilized resource for adoption and the foster care system. Some of these couples face prejudices of social workers placing children. Undergraduate students may find themselves in decision making positions concerning placement of children. Therefore, it is important to

understand attitudes of undergraduate students' in a social science major towards same-sex couples adopting children.

Statement of the Problem

The United States Department of Health and Human Services report approximately 115,000 children of the 514,000 in foster care are currently awaiting adoption (U.S. Dept HHS, AFCARS, 2008). Foster care was designed as a temporary placement for children while their parents underwent rehabilitation with the intention of placing the children back with their parents (Ross, 2006).

Children spend an average of three years in the foster care system often being placed in different households (Gibson, 1999; Ross, 2006). This is typically referred to as “foster care drift”, when a child is continuously moved from one placement to another without the prospect of a permanent placement (Ross, 2006; Strijker Knorth & Knot-Dickscheit, 2008). Ross (2006) reported that about one-third of the children in foster care will never return home.

Rationale

Rhodes, Orme, Cox, and Buehler (2003) reported there is a chronic shortage of foster homes in the United States. As a result, these children are left with no permanent homes, while others are moved countless times between foster homes (Mallon, 2004). Rhodes et al. (2003) also reported many families discontinue fostering within the first year. Placing children with willing alternative families can help alleviate the shortage of foster homes and may lead to some of the children being permanently placed or adopted. Many studies have proven

children are better off when placed in one home instead of being moved between different homes (Bradley, 2007; Downs & James, 2006; Rhodes et al., 2003). On average children in the foster care system are 10 years old (Downs & James, 2006). Mallon (2004) reported an estimated one-quarter of the children entering the foster care system have no plans of being reunited with their birth families or being adopted by relatives or other family members. Same-sex couples are a resource that are not being used to their fullest potential when placing foster children in homes for either short or long-term foster parenting or permanent adoption. By allowing same-sex couples to foster and/or adopt children the number of children in foster care could greatly decrease, lower states' costs, and increase the number of more permanent placements. By allowing adoption of children into more homes, the states will have less expense in the foster system with fewer children to pay for.

Patterson (1995) reported that since the 1980s the number of gay men forming their own families through adoption and foster parenting has risen dramatically. However, Brooks and Goldberg (2001) suggest same-sex couples may experience considerable "scrutiny" based on their sexual orientation when attempting to foster or adopt children. For example, some state laws discriminate against same-sex couples adopting or fostering children. Each state varies in whether or not they allow same-sex adoption or foster care. Some states, such as Florida, specifically state they will not allow a child to be placed into a same-sex household (Clifford, Hertz, & Doskow, 2007). Some states do not directly state same-sex couples cannot adopt or foster children but make it

more difficult for homosexuals to obtain custody of children through laws that are written to favor heterosexual couples. These states typically decree that a person must petition with his or her spouse to adopt or foster children. It is illegal for same-sex couples to marry in most states, therefore in these states they would not be considered “spouses” thus unable to adopt. These policies create roadblocks for some same-sex couples trying to adopt or foster children and tie the hands of social service professionals.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify attitudes of undergraduate students in social science majors who may be in a position of placing children in homes for both foster care and adoption. This study, using a quasi-experimental design, examined the differences in attitudes of participants towards a heterosexual couple adopting a child and a homosexual couple adopting the same child. This study examined variables such as the best option for an orphan, if the parents would teach values and morals to the child, if the child would experience emotional neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Other variables examined were the emotional stability of the couple, the quality of parenting the couple would provide to the child, the likelihood of placing the child with the couple, and the religiousness of the participant. Participants rated their religiousness on a Likert scale from one to six with one meaning very religious and six meaning not religious at all.

There has been little research conducted with mixed results. Crawford's and Solliday's (1996) study found undergraduate students held negative attitudes

towards homosexual couples wanting to become parents to an orphan child ward of the state. Their study examined 97 undergraduate students at a small college in the Midwest. These students were enrolled in elective undergraduate psychology courses. In contrast, Camilleri and Ryan (2006) report social work students were more positive towards homosexual couples wanting to become parents. Their study examined 86 college students in the final year of a social work program. There were no significant prejudices found among these students towards homosexual parenting.

As undergraduate students prepare to enter one of the fields of social science, they may encounter families with gay and lesbian couples, either currently or wanting to raising children. When the law allows, these students must work with an open mind to provide families the same services and not discriminate. Individuals' attitudes towards alternative families may influence their decision making.

Social science undergraduate students are preparing to provide services and programs to families. It is important to understand their attitudes on this issue. With more information on the attitudes of future social scientists towards gay couples adopting, we can broaden our understanding of the factors associated with attitudes towards gay parenting. This topic can then be addressed appropriately in courses for undergraduate students in the fields of social science.

Research Question

Using quasi-experimental approach this study examined attitudes of undergraduate students towards adoption. The main research question is: do undergraduate students in a social science major have different attitudes toward a same-sex couple adopting than towards a heterosexual couple?

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no difference in attitude scores of undergraduate students in a social science major between the experimental group and control group adopting a child.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards a couple being able to teach the adopted child appropriate values and raising a morally responsible child.

Null Hypothesis 3

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing emotional neglect.

Null Hypothesis 4

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing physical abuse.

Null Hypothesis 5

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing sexual abuse.

Null Hypothesis 6

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the emotional stability of the couple adopting the child from foster care.

Null Hypothesis 7

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the quality of parenting styles of each couple.

Null Hypothesis 8

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in the likelihood the participant would place the child up for adoption in the home of the couple described.

To test these hypotheses the researcher ran statistical tests of difference, with a .05 level of rejection. Previous research has reported parent education level, religion, and gender as variables predicting attitudes towards gay parenting. Further hypothesis testing was conducted using only the experimental group, the participants that read about the homosexual couple, to determine if there were variables persuading the participants. Listed below are the sub-hypotheses:

Sub-Hypothesis 1

There is no difference in scores between the parent's education level of the participant and overall adoption score.

Sub-Hypothesis 2

There is no difference in scores between gender of the participant and overall adoption attitude score.

Sub-Hypothesis 3

There is no difference in scores between stated religiosity of the participant and overall adoption attitude score.

To test these sub-hypotheses the researcher ran statistical tests of difference, with a .05 level of rejection.

Theoretical Framework

Using Social Cognitive Theory as a theoretical framework, this study looked at the attitudes of Family Studies undergraduate students towards same-sex adoption. This theory emphasizes social variables as determinants of behavior and personality (Thomas, 2005). Albert Bandura not only believed children learn from social experience but also could manipulate knowledge in their minds to form new understandings (Thomas, 2005). Social Cognitive Theory explains behavior as being shaped and controlled by environmental influences (Bandura, 1999).

Social Cognitive Theory takes on an agentic prospective to human development (Bandura, 2002). How people create and effect societal norms is an important factor. Bandura believes people learn as much through observing behaviors of others as through their own experiences (Allen, 2006). If negative attitudes towards certain people are expressed in one's environment, it may reflect in their own personal opinion. When manipulating new ideas, reactions might be caused by certain behaviors and generate future plans.

If a person foresees a negative reaction towards homosexuality this may cause someone to transform their views and either live a lifestyle they do not

wish to live and/or hold negative attitudes towards certain people in society. Conversely, if a child is raised in an environment with positive or open reactions towards homosexuality their attitudes may likely be more positive towards homosexuality in general. Either environment will demonstrate that certain attitudes towards human behavior can be passed on to the children observing such positions on this topic. Allen (2006) stated people will learn through their observations within their own environment.

Albert Bandura (1999) sees imitation as a powerful force in the development of personality. The way in which children learn comes from imitating and modeling (Allen, 2006; Bandura 1999; Thomas, 2005). Bandura (1999) stated learning can be achieved by observing people's actions and the consequences for them. If a person sees that certain behaviors cause negative reactions from society they may stay away from and have negative attitudes towards these behaviors. If children are taught at an early age from their societal influences that homosexuality is bad or wrong they may grow up with negative attitudes toward homosexuals. A single model can transmit new ways of thinking and behaving (Bandura, 1999).

Rakoczy (2007) reported that infants from their second year of life begin to imitate and learn social practices from others. Social learning is not static and as people continue to learn from their parents or other environmental factors, their attitudes towards certain ideas may become embedded in their upbringing. Parents' unconscious motivations and projections may also shape the personality of their children (Levinson, 1995). If parents have a negative attitude towards

homosexuality they in turn may pass this same attitude on to their children. Their children may continue to believe homosexuality is wrong, well into adulthood. On the other hand, if parents display more positive attitudes towards homosexuality their children may view gay parenting, and same-sex couples starting families more optimistically.

Parents' cultural and personal beliefs are transmitted to their children during their formative years. Social Cognitive Theory suggests children derive knowledge from their environment (Thomas, 2005). As one grows older they may choose whether to continue the beliefs taught to them or change their views. People will evoke different reactions from their social environment depending on their roles and status (Bandura, 1999). The social reactions are based on their environmental biases and these biases may be taught at an early age by their social environment (i.e., home and church).

Social behavior is said to be acquired through learning processes either by observing behaviors or through symbolic learning (Peters & McMahon, 1988). Within the belief of Social Cognitive Theory a child is not born with moral values and beliefs (Thomas, 2005). For example, a child is not born believing homosexuality is good or bad. This is something they learn by watching how people react to homosexuals, more specifically how their parents and/or culture react. People are not born with certain attitudes, they are learned.

Operational Definition of Terms

- Attitudes scores were taken from the Couples Rating Questionnaire (CRQ) the undergraduate students answered about the couples wanting to adopt. Ranging from 9 to 54 with higher scores being more open minded.
- Alternative family is defined as a family institution that does not fall under the “traditional” family definition of a married man and woman.
- Appropriate Values in question two on the CRQ questionnaire was measured by a Likert scale asking the participants to rate one through six.
- Control Group is defined as the group of undergraduate students that read the vignette about the heterosexual couple wanting to adopt a child ward of the state.
- Couple Rating Questionnaire (CRQ) is a nine-item questionnaire developed by Issiah Crawford, PhD. to rate the attitudes towards same-sex couple adoption.
- Emotional Neglect in question three on the CRQ questionnaire was measured by a Likert scale asking the participants to rate one through six.
- Emotionally Stable in question six on the CRQ questionnaire was measured by a Likert scale asking the participants to rate one through six.

- Experimental Group is defined as the group of students that read the vignette about the homosexual couple wanting to adopt a child ward of the state.
- Gay couples are defined as two men in an intimate relationship.
- Heterosexual couples are defined as two people of the opposite sex involved in an intimate relationship.
- Homosexual and same-sex couples are defined as two people of the same gender involved in an intimate relationship.
- Lesbians are defined as two females in an intimate relationship.
- Morally Responsible in question two on the CRQ questionnaire was measured by a Likert scale asking the participants to rate one through six.
- Physical Abuse in question four on the CRQ questionnaire was measured by a Likert scale asking the participants to rate one through six.
- Quality of Parenting in question seven on the CRQ questionnaire was measured by a Likert scale asking the participants to rate one through six.
- Religiousness in question nine on the CRQ questionnaire was measured by a Likert scale asking the participants to rate one through six.

- Sexual Abuse in question five on the CRQ questionnaire was measured by a Likert scale asking the participants to rate one through six.
- Social Science Major is defined as a person enrolled in an undergraduate program that falls within the social sciences.
- Traditional family is defined as two parent household consisting of a male (father) and female (mother).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

All children require security, love, acceptance, and lifetime families for their healthy growth and development (Mallon, 2004). Children also need stable families and supportive communities to form secure attachments and success in their adulthood (Mallon, 2004). While many same-sex couples fit this description there is still hesitation in placing these children in homes of same-sex couples. Excluding same-sex couples from becoming foster or adoptive parents means some children will have to live in institutional settings or numerous nonpermanent homes (Wald, 2006).

This literature review will provide a detailed look at previous research on attitudes towards adoption, attitudes towards gay parenting, policy and religious beliefs about homosexuality.

History/Policy

Attitudes towards gay parenting can influence a social scientist in a position to place children with a family. Crawford & Solliday (1996) reported while there is an increasing acceptance of homosexuality within the American culture, there are still prejudices regarding gay parenting. When same-sex couples are looking to start a family they may encounter social scientists that have biases against their sexual orientation. These biases may stand in the way of helping people who are potentially good candidates for adopting children.

Children in the foster system need permanent homes. These children have a greater chance of healthy development when placed in permanent homes

rather than being moved around between different families (Mallon, 2004).

Children in the foster system need to create a positive relationship with a family to feel secure (Jokela, Kivimaki, Elovainio, & Jarvinen, 2009). If children are staying in the foster system for years they may not develop positive relationships and may incur social or emotional problems in the future.

Gay and lesbian parents, as well as heterosexual parents, cannot protect their children fully from teasing on the playground, discrimination, or the effects of stigmatization. Therefore, according to Perrin (2002), the sexual orientation of the parent should not be a variable in predicting their ability to provide a home environment that supports children's development.

Courts and policy makers largely have a say in whether or not homosexual couples can adopt or obtain custody of children (Stacey & Biblarz, 2008; Crawford & Solliday, 1996). When parents divorce and fight for custody the courts will often take the parents sexual orientation into consideration, if given, when deciding where the child will live. The odds that a gay man or lesbian woman will lose the battle for custody of their child will increase if the parents' sexual orientation is an issue in custody hearings (Clifford, Hertz & Doskow, 2007). McIntyre (1994) reports children of divorce are better adjusted if they continue a relationship with both parents, gay or not.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) became law in 1997. Ross (2006) reports this law was introduced to reduce the number of children lingering in the foster care system by placing them in homes willing to adopt. Ross (2006) also reports that people working in child welfare agencies are simultaneously

working to try and return foster care children back to their biological parents and also seeking an alternative permanent placement in case children are unable to return to their biological parents. Gendell (2001) states this law was passed to help place children into nurturing homes and not stay in the foster system for more than 15 to 22 months. Although this law was passed to help the children in the foster system, there are still many children waiting to find permanent homes.

Another concern of society and the court systems is possible sexual abuse of the children raised by homosexuals (Cramer, 1986; Crawford & Sullivan, 1996; McIntyre, 1994). This topic continues to be presented in cases of homosexuals trying to adopt or foster children, yet there is no empirical evidence of truth to this accusation. The majority of sexual abuse cases in the foster system are of heterosexual men performing sexual acts on children (McIntyre, 1996; Perrin, 2002; Rhodes et al. 2003; Wegar, 2000). Courts still may deny custody to gay or lesbian parents in fear that the children will be molested by the homosexual parent or one of the parents' friends (McIntyre, 1996). Until policy makers and courts acknowledge there is no truth to gay men and/or lesbian women having a higher percentage of molesting children, discrimination against gay parenting will continue.

Gender Influence on Adoption

Attitudes towards adoption

People have different opinions about adoption in general. Wegar (2000) reported women in general have a more positive attitude about adoption than men. Tyebjee (2003) reports 90% of Americans have a positive view of adoption,

although half say that adopting is “not as good as having one’s own child”. Other research has shown similar results with beliefs that adopting is “second best” to having one’s own children (Wegar, 2000). Men typically believe this more than women (Wegar, 2000). Tyebjee (2003) reported attitudes are divided across social groups. Less-educated Americans tend to be more skeptical towards adoption and men are more skeptical than women. Rhodes et al. (2003) also report that higher education is linked with more adoptions.

Attitudes towards adoption have historically been shaped by society with a stigmatization of children born out-of-wedlock. Only recently have attitudes changed towards more acceptance of children being born to single mothers (Wegar, 2000). With more acceptance of children born out-of-wedlock, more women are choosing to keep their children rather than putting them up for adoption. Even with more single women keeping their children, the numbers of children available for adoption and foster care continue to rise in the United States.

Wegar (2000) reports while the majority of Americans view adoption as serving a useful purpose to society, most still question the mental health of the child for adoption. Many people worry about adopting children because something may be wrong with the children and most do not want to take on a “troubled” child. More men than women usually have this label on children waiting to be adopted (Wegar, 2000). A stigma has been put on these children, especially older ones, making adoption more difficult. Men typically worry more about adopting these children than do women (Wegar, 2000).

The attitudes of professionals in social services can also influence whether or not certain couples are able to adopt children. With men having more negative attitudes towards adopting this could be of concern with male professionals working with homosexual families. Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, and Jordan (1999) report psychologists' attitudes toward gay and lesbian adoption is biased against placing female children in such situations. With discrimination against same-sex couples, it makes it harder for them to achieve their goal of parenthood.

Many children in the United States wait in the foster care system for an approved home with good parents. Despite the growing number of children in the foster care system, many prospective parents who identify themselves as gay or lesbian are being denied as candidates for fostering or potentially adopting children based on their sexual orientation (Bradley, 2007; Gibson, 1999; Stein, 1996; Lobaugh, et al., 2006). It is important to place these children in loving homes capable of providing the emotional and financial support they need for further development. Heterosexual couples face stress when adopting children such as financial and changes in family dynamics. Same-sex couples face these same stresses but also face societal discrimination which makes fostering and/or adoption more difficult (Lobaugh et al., 2006).

Social and Emotional Development

Attitudes toward gay parenting

One of the most common arguments against gay couples adopting is they have an agenda to influence their children to become gay (Mallon, 2004;

Mooney-Somers & Golombok, 2000). Others argue that same-sex couples, especially males, have poorer than average parenting skills relative to accepted social norms (Lobaugh et al., 2006). Another argument is the social and emotional development of the children raised by same-sex couples is slower than those of children raised by heterosexual couples. These arguments are widely debated but have poor empirical evidence in research (Lobaugh et al., 2006). Such antigay attitudes can have a major effect on child welfare professionals' decision making, including their assessment of gay and lesbian couples as potential foster and adoptive parents (Mallon, 2004).

Mallon (2004) reports that the term "gay fathering" makes many people, including child welfare professionals, uncomfortable and the suggestion of gay parenting seems alien, unnatural and even impossible to some. Such prejudices may influence a person in the position of placing children in homes to find another home they feel is more suitable for the child.

A major argument against gay parenting is that the children being raised by gay and lesbian couples will end up gay as well (Crawford & Sullivan, 1996; Mallon, 2004; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Although no evidence has proven this to be true it is still the opinion of opponents towards gay parenting (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Mallon, 2004; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Golombok and Tasker (1996) reported in their study there was no difference in sexual orientation of adults who were raised by lesbian mothers compared to adults who were raised by heterosexual couples.

Opponents of gay parenting also argue these children will develop gender identity confusion (Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Stacey & Biblarz, 2008). Children are believed to learn social roles from their parents; therefore, if they are raised by homosexual parents, the children will become confused about their own sexual identity. Many of the well-known opponents of gay parenting offer limited implicit theoretical explanations for disadvantages of gay parenting (Stacey & Biblarz, 2008). Research reports children raised by homosexual couples have not shown any more or less of these signs of gender identity confusion than children raised by heterosexual couples (Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Stacey & Biblarz, 2008).

Many studies have compared children being raised in alternative family lifestyles to children being raised by heterosexual parents (Cramer, 1986; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Golombok, Perry, Burston, Murray, Mooney-Somers, Stevens, & Golding, 2003; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Although these studies have been going on for some years and no evidence has proven children raised by same-sex couples have more or less difficulty with their gender identity, these arguments are still being made in the American press, society, and in the court systems. Cramer (1986) reports that gay fathers do not have a higher percentage of gay children than would be expected of heterosexual fathers.

Questions are constantly raised in terms of homosexual parenting. Developmental outcomes of children raised in same-sex households are often questioned (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006). Not only is the argument made that the children of these families will have sexual identity confusion but the emotional

and social development of these children are of concern. Perrin (2002) reports that children of divorced lesbian mothers grow up very similar to children of divorced heterosexual mothers. Several studies comparing children who have a single lesbian mother to a single heterosexual mother have failed to document any differences between such groups on an emotional or social development (Patterson, 2006; Perrin, 2002; Stacey & Biblarz, 2008; Stein, 1996). Similar studies on children raised by heterosexual couples and same-sex couples, have shown no developmental differences in the children (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Stacey & Biblarz, 2008).

Stacey and Biblarz (2008) found one difference between lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers. Heterosexual mothers were more likely to prefer their boys to engage in masculine activities and their girls in feminine ones, whereas lesbian mothers had no preference in their child's activities. The lesbian mothers preferences for their children's play were gender-neutral.

Perrin, (2002) reports that gay fathers show no difference from heterosexual fathers when providing emotional support for their children. Gay fathers have proven to have substantial nurturance and investment in their paternal role. Gay and lesbian parents have shown to be just as committed to their parental role and just as capable of being good parents as their heterosexual counterparts (Downs & James, 2006; Gibson, 1999). Stacey and Biblarz (2008) report lesbian and gay parents and their children display no differences from heterosexual counterparts in well-being and adjustment.

Risk Behavior

Religion and Homosexuality

Religion is often a very important influence in some people's lives. Its belief system imparts heavily on one's opinions about certain issues. Many people rely on their religion to help understand certain human behaviors. When religions take a stand on an issue such as homosexuality, their followers accept these opinions often without questioning. For example the Catholic Church states that homosexuality is a "sin"

(<http://www.catholic.com/library/Homosexuality.asp>). Southern Baptist beliefs are also negative towards homosexuality stating this lifestyle is a "sin"

(<http://www.sbc.net>). Personal beliefs and attitudes of church members are formed by church policy towards homosexuality and same-sex couples raising children.

Some religions are against same-sex couples raising children. Wilson (2008) discusses a case when Catholic Charities of Massachusetts closed their adoption agency that had been running for 103 years when legislation prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. This was a private charity that held the state contract for placing children in homes for adoption. They refused to place children in homes of same-sex couples; therefore, not abiding by the laws of Massachusetts. When they were told the sexuality of a couple should not be taken into consideration when placing children, they closed their doors rather than conforming to the law. Catholic Charities of Massachusetts is still operating

today but only to offer post-adoption services of counseling the adoptive families (<http://www.ccab.org/services/adoption/>).

Catholic priests sermonize about how homosexuality is immoral and a sin. The Vatican states (September 2, 2009): portrayals of homosexuality in the media promotes “inimical to marriage and the family” and is detrimental to society (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_f_amily_doc_20080905_antonelli-media_en.html). This information may play a major role in the formation of people’s attitudes towards same-sex couples adopting.

The Southern Baptist religious beliefs are similar to that of the Catholic beliefs. They also believe that living a “homosexual lifestyle” is a sin and one can make the decision to change their ways. The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) states that homosexuality is not caused by hormonal imbalance but by an unhealthy relationship with their parents (<http://www.sbc.net>). They go on to explain that homosexuals can lead moral lives but they must become celibate to do so. Most importantly, the SBC states that discrimination against homosexuality is proper in the areas of protecting the family (<http://www.sbc.net>). This information can influence a person’s decision on gay parenting or placing a child in a same-sex couples’ home.

While these religions are opposed to homosexuality there are some religions that openly support gay rights. The United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church support equal rights for homosexuals (Van Geest, 2008). Openly homosexual individuals and couples are allowed within their

congregation and are viewed as equals. Cadge, Olson, and Wilderman (2008) report the local affiliations to these national churches are more salient in influencing the ways clergy address sexuality. It is also reported by Cadge, et al. (2008) that local congregations factors such as history, demographics, financial situation, and geographic location may influence the congregation's day-to-day operations more than denominational ties.

The website for the United Methodist Church states all persons are “of sacred worth”, which includes anyone regardless of their sexual orientation (<http://www.umc.org>). Since the United Methodist Church views homosexuals as equals this positive attitude may carry over to the personal beliefs of the congregation. People within this church will more than likely have an easier time accepting others living with same-sex partners and raising children together. Their views on gay parenting may also be more encouraging because of their church's beliefs on this topic.

Cadge et al. (2008) report the Evangelical Lutheran Church provides concrete educational resources to their congregation about homosexuality. This church not only distributes educational material but also holds training sessions in some regions about sexuality and homosexuality for congregations wanting to study this topic (Cadge, et al. 2008). Van Geest (2008) also reports the Evangelical Lutheran Church is in favor of equality for homosexual couples. These positive views towards homosexuality will pass on to their congregation and will have a more positive outcome of attitudes towards same-sex couples and gay parenting.

With the knowledge that certain religions have negative stands on homosexuality, social scientist need to be aware of this and taught to set their personal attitudes aside when helping families and placing children in homes. Some social scientist may still discriminate when placing children in homes, although some states have made it illegal to discriminate against a person because of their sexual orientation (Fish, 2008).

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Design

This study used a quasi-experimental approach to examine attitudes of social science undergraduate students towards adoption. Kline (2009) explains quasi-experimental design as having two groups, one control group and one experimental group with the groups being as similar as possible. According to Kline (2009, p.76), “the hallmark of experimental design is random assignment”.

Differences in attitudes of undergraduate students between a heterosexual and homosexual couple adopting a child ward of the state was examined. The control group in this study consisted of students that read a vignette about a heterosexual couple. The experimental group of students read the same vignette but with names changed to two males to reflect a homosexual couple. All subjects within this study were undergraduate students with a social science major and most being similar in age. The researcher examined how demographic and religious factors within the two groups influenced attitudes towards same-sex couples adopting.

Sample

Participants for this study were volunteer undergraduate students enrolled in selected Family Study courses at the University of New Mexico, Fall, 2009. Family Study courses were chosen since many of these students have a major and/or minor in a social science field. The classes were chosen as a sample of convenience. Once IRB approval (see Appendix A) was obtained, the

researcher contacted the instructor to arrange for a time to enter the classroom to survey the students. Family Studies 281 Introduction to Family Studies, 341 Aspects of Ecological Housing, and 343 Family Management Theories were used to participate in this study.

Measures

Two measures were used to collect data in this study, a demographics form (see Appendix B), developed by the researcher, and the Couple Rating Questionnaire (CRQ; see Appendices C and D) designed by Isiaah Crawford, PhD, and Elizabeth Solliday (Crawford & Solliday, 1996) to study attitudes of undergraduate college students toward gay parenting. Permission was received from Isiaah Crawford, PhD, to use this scale on the current study (see Appendix E).

The demographics form provided data for both description of the sample and variables used for testing. The questionnaire was comprised of nine questions. The participants were to rate the couple on their likelihood of placing the child a Likert scale. The CRQ was modified for this research due to questions that are not applicable. The researcher added a question concerning the participants' religiosity.

The participants rated their opinion about the couples on values and morals, level of emotional security the couple would provide the child, parental potential of each couple, the level of dangerousness of the couple's home, and the likelihood the participant would award custody of the child to the couple.

These questions were rated on a Likert scale from one to six. Questions one, four, five, six, and seven were reversed.

Two different vignettes (Appendix C and D) were handed out to the students. The stories were identical except the name of John's partners were either "Kim" or "Ken". Each student received one of the two possible vignette's that describe either a heterosexual or a homosexual couple attempting to adopt Kevin.

Data Collection Procedures

Following approval of the University of New Mexico IRB the survey was administered to 87 undergraduate students in the Family Studies classrooms during the Fall, 2009 semester. The researcher acquired permission from the professor of Family Studies courses FS 281, FS 341, and FS 343 to administer the surveys. The researcher entered Family Studies classes during the last fifteen minutes of class. The participants were first informed of their privacy and right to refuse to participate, and to withdraw at any time during the survey process. There were little anticipated risks associated with completing the survey and they received no benefits for their participation. The students were not asked to provide their names and they were told information they provided would be kept confidential. The researcher asked the students to voluntarily participate in this study that was designed to investigate appropriateness of candidates for the adoption of children. The benefits of this study will help to have a better understanding of attitudes towards adoption. The contact information to the University AGORA crises center was provided on the consent

letter in the event thinking about these issues prompted a participant to seek help.

First, participants were given a consent form (see Appendix F) to read and keep. As per the University Internal Review Board, the consent letter explained the rights of the participants as well as potential risks and benefits associated with the survey. The consent letter explained that by turning in the completed questionnaire they were giving the researcher permission to use their data.

The researcher then handed out a survey to each student. The surveys were mixed together with every other survey being the heterosexual couple. The first survey handed out was the heterosexual couple with the homosexual couple being next and so forth. The students were asked to return their completed survey in a brown folder provided. The survey took approximately ten minutes to complete. Participants and the classroom instructor were thanked for their participation and time.

Data Processing

Code numbers were used to identify surveys and were stored in the principle investigators' office. Surveys will be destroyed within one year of completion of study per requirement of the University Internal Review Board.

Data was entered into the statistical software SPSS 16 for Windows. All data management, and statistical analyses have been performed using SPSS 16. Group means, overall patterns, standard deviations, and demographic numbers and percentages have been computed.

Each response from the Couples Rating Questionnaire (CRQ) was entered into the database; with questions one, four, five, six, seven and nine being reversed coded. See Appendix G for a description of data coding. Means, percentages, and standard deviations were obtained and reported on all appropriate measures. The scores for each group were compared using t-tests.

The researcher ran t-tests for hypotheses one through eight on the CRQ Questionnaire to determine if there was a difference between each group. The researcher ran additional t-tests on the sub-hypotheses for parent education and gender within the experimental group to see if there was a significant difference. The t-tests were used to see if there were significant differences in the participants' parent's education level and overall attitude towards adoption. Additional t-tests were run to examine if there were differences between the participants' gender and the overall attitude towards adoption. An ANOVA test was run on the sub-hypothesis of religiosity and overall attitude scores of adoption.

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no difference in attitude scores of undergraduate students in a social science major between the experimental group and control group adopting a child.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards a couple being able to teach the adopted child appropriate values and raising a morally responsible child.

Null Hypothesis 3

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing emotional neglect.

Null Hypothesis 4

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing physical abuse.

Null Hypothesis 5

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing sexual abuse.

Null Hypothesis 6

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the emotional stability of the couple adopting the child from foster care.

Null Hypothesis 7

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the quality of parenting styles of each couple.

Null Hypothesis 8

There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in the likelihood the participant would place the child up for adoption in the home of the couple described.

To test these hypotheses the researcher ran statistical tests of difference, with a .05 level of rejection.

Sub-Hypotheses

Previous research has reported parent education level, gender, and religiosity as variables persuading attitudes towards gay parenting. Further

hypothesis testing was conducted using only the experimental group. Listed below are the sub-hypotheses.

Sub-Hypothesis 1

There is no difference in scores between the parent's education level of the participant and overall adoption score.

Sub-Hypothesis 2

There is no difference in scores between gender of the participant and overall adoption attitude score.

Sub-Hypothesis 3

There is no difference in scores between stated religiosity of the participant and overall adoption attitude score.

To test these sub-hypotheses the researcher ran t-tests on parental education level and gender and ANOVA tests on religiosity at a .05 rejection level.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were given a consent letter prior to completing the survey. The letter provided participants with information concerning the study, the requirements of the participants, and the length of time the survey was expected to take. The letter informed participants of potential risks associated with completing the survey and identified benefits of engaging in the study, such as a better understanding of attitudes towards adoption. The participants were informed of minimal risks and there were no benefits to them for their participation. Participants were advised that completing the survey was voluntary and they could end their participation at any time. Included in the consent form

was the name and phone number of the University of New Mexico AGORA crises center in case any issues arose while taking the survey. There were no known cases of participants utilizing the AGORA crises center because of issues that surfaced after completing this survey. Participants were asked not to provide names or any other personal information other than what was asked on the demographics form to ensure anonymity. Participants were provided with the contact information of the principal investigator, overseeing faculty member and the University of New Mexico Internal Review Board.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The researcher assumed all participants in this study answered the questions honestly and could read the vignettes and questions.

This study has a number of limitations. First, the study included a relatively small number of participants. Due to time constraints only three classes were used to survey participants and the sample was comprised of university students from one school in the southwest. Despite the drawback of a sample from one university the participants had a diverse population with respect to age of students, and ethnicity.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter the demographic information and hypothesis testing is presented pertaining to the sample and survey. For each of these items, descriptive statistics are reported. Following the description of the demographics information, each individual question from the Couples Rating Questionnaire are reported followed by hypothesis testing results.

Participants (n=87) responded to the survey. Of the 87 surveys returned all were used. The participants responded to eight demographic variables (See Table 1). Refer to Appendix G for coding of demographics form. Gender was reported as either male or female. Respondents ages were grouped into three categories: 18 – 23, 24 – 32, and 33+. Eighty-three percent (n=72) of the sample were women, primarily Family Studies (47%, n=41) undergraduate majors. Fifty-three reported being Christian (61%) coming from a middle income background (78%, n=68). The majority of the respondents identified themselves as Caucasian (44%, n=38), or Hispanic/Latino (36%, n=31). Refer to Table 1 for demographics profile.

The respondents were asked to provide one of their parents' highest level of education. The participants were able to chose which parent and did not indicate which parent they chose. The reported numbers were collapsed into two groups of approximately equal numbers; having a bachelors degree or less, and having a graduate or professional degree or higher. Fifty-eight percent of

respondents indicated their parents' education level was having a "bachelors degree or less".

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 87)

Variable	Total		Group 1		Group 2	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender						
Male	15	17	9	21	6	13
Female	72	83	33	79	39	87
Age						
18-23	68	78	34	81	34	76
24-32	10	12	4	9.5	6	13
33+	9	10	4	9.5	5	11
Undergraduate Major						
Family Studies	41	47	17	41	24	53
Psychology	24	30	15	36	9	20
Other	20	23	10	24	12	27
Ethnicity						
Caucasian	38	44	22	53	16	36
Hispanic/Latino	31	36	9	21	22	49
Other	18	20	11	26	7	15
Religious Affiliation						
Christian	53	61	33	79	20	45
Other	12	14	2	4	10	22
None	22	25	7	17	15	33
Background						
Low Income	11	13	3	7	8	18
Middle Income	68	78	35	83	33	73
High Income	8	9	4	10	4	9
Parent Education						
Bachelors degree or less	50	58	26	62	24	53
Masters degree or higher	37	42	16	38	21	47
Religiousness						
Less Religious	45	52	26	61	21	47
More Religious	42	48	16	38	24	53

Similarities and differences appeared between the two groups. Although within both groups the majority of religious affiliation is Christian, the number of

participants that chose other is double in group two. Group two also had a higher rating of self reported religiousness (See Table 1).

Couples Rating Questionnaire

Each participant received a case vignette describing a couple and child they were interested in adopting as well as a questionnaire designed specifically to assess their attitudes toward the couple depicted in the vignette. Nine survey items were combined to form a total score on the Couples Rating Questionnaire (CRQ). Scores from the CRQ ranged in number from 23 to 48 with 54 being the highest possible score. Each question was scored from one to six on a Likert scale. Data from the overall scores on the Couples Rating Questionnaire were used to compare the two groups. The mean and standard deviation for the total sample as well as the mean and standard deviation for each group are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean and SD for CRQ survey

Survey Question	TOTAL (n=87)		Group 1 (Heterosexual) (n=42)		Group 2 (Homosexual) (n=45)	
	\bar{X}	(SD)	\bar{X}	(SD)	\bar{X}	(SD)
1. Best option for an orphan	5.35	(.99)	5.60	(1.10)	5.53	(.86)
2. Values and morally responsible child	4.83	(1.24)	4.92	(1.20)	4.73	(1.28)
3. Emotional neglect	4.63	(4.47)	4.45	(1.43)	4.80	(1.51)
4. Physical abuse	5.08	(1.40)	5.00	(1.49)	5.15	(1.33)
5. Sexual abuse	5.29	(1.09)	5.38	(1.03)	5.22	(1.14)
6. Emotionally stable couple	4.54	(1.46)	4.64	(1.39)	4.44	(1.54)
7. Quality of parenting	5.12	(.87)	5.23	(.69)	5.02	(1.01)
8. Likelihood of placing child with the couple	5.12	(1.05)	5.26	(.91)	5.00	(1.16)

Hypothesis Testing

Table 3: Results of T-tests on variables on Couples Rating Questionnaire

	T value	Probability	df
Adoption attitude	2.66	.107	85
Values	1.473	.228	85
Emotional Neglect	.007	.935	85
Physical Abuse	.118	.732	85
Sexual Abuse	.208	.650	85
Emotional Stability	1.843	.178	85
Parenting	1.387	.242	78
Placement	1.17	.281	82
Overall	1.54	.215	78

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in attitude scores of undergraduate students in a social science major between the experimental group and control group adopting a child.

With an alpha level of .05, the overall scores of attitudes of undergraduate students towards adoption was not statistically significant between the control group and experimental group, $t(84, 85) = 2.66, p=.107$. Therefore, fail to reject this Null Hypothesis. Refer to Table 3.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards a couple being able to teach the adopted child appropriate values and raising a morally responsible child

With an alpha level of .05, the couple being able to teach the adopted child appropriate values and morals was not statistically significant between the control group and the experimental group, $t(84,85) = 1.473$, $p=.228$. Therefore, fail to reject this Null Hypothesis. Refer to Table 3.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing emotional neglect.

With an alpha level of .05, the attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing emotional neglect was not statistically significant between the control group and the experimental group, $t(84, 85) = 4.45$, $p=.935$. Therefore, fail to reject this Null Hypothesis. Refer to Table 3.

Null Hypothesis 4: There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing physical abuse.

With an alpha level of .05, the attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing physical abuse was not statistically significant between the control group and the experimental group, $t(84,85) = .118$, $p=.732$. Therefore, fail to reject this Null Hypothesis. Refer to Table 3.

Null Hypothesis 5: There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing sexual abuse.

With an alpha level of .05, the attitudes of undergraduate students towards the adopted child experiencing sexual abuse was not statistically significant between the control group and the experimental group, $t(84,85) = .208$, $p=.650$.

Therefore, fail to reject this Null Hypothesis. Refer to Table 3.

Null Hypothesis 6: There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the emotional stability of the couple adopting the child from foster care.

With an alpha level of .05, the attitudes of undergraduate students towards the emotional stability of the couple was not statistically significant between the control group and the experimental group, $t(84,85) = 1.843$, $p=.178$. Therefore, fail to reject this Null Hypothesis. Refer to Table 3.

Null Hypothesis 7: There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in attitudes of undergraduate students towards the quality of parenting styles of each couple.

With an alpha level of .05, the attitudes of undergraduate students towards the quality of parenting styles was not statistically significant between the control group and the experimental group, $t(78,85) = 1.387$, $p=.242$. Therefore, fail to reject this Null Hypothesis. Refer to Table 3.

Null Hypothesis 8: There is no difference in the scores between the experimental group and control group in the likelihood the participant would place the child up for adoption in the home of the couple described.

With an alpha level of .05, likelihood the participant would place the child up for adoption in the home of the couple was not statistically significant between the control group and the experimental group, $t(84,85) = 1.177$, $p=.281$. Therefore, fail to reject this Null Hypothesis. Refer to Table 3.

Null Hypothesis 9: There is no difference in scores between religiosity and the likelihood of placing the adopted child in the home of the couple described.

With an alpha level of .05, the relationship between religiosity and likelihood of placing the child in the home of the couple was not statistically significant between the control group and the experimental group, $F(77,85) = 1.561$, $p=.215$. Therefore, fail to reject this Null Hypothesis. Refer to Table 3.

Sub-Hypotheses

The following sub-hypotheses were examined using only the experimental group. The first two sub-hypotheses were calculated using t-tests. The third sub-hypothesis was calculated using an f-test.

Sub-Hypothesis 1: There is no difference in scores between the parent's education level of the participant and overall adoption score.

With an alpha level of .05, the difference between the parent's education level and overall adoption score was statistically significant, $(31,43) = 1.836$, $p=.518$. Therefore, fail to reject this Sub-Hypothesis. Refer to Table 4.

Sub-Hypothesis 2: There is no difference in scores between gender of the participant and overall adoption attitude score.

With an alpha level of .05, the difference between gender and overall adoption attitudes was not statistically significant, $F(6,43) = .601$. $p=.941$. Therefore, fail to reject this Sub-Hypothesis. Refer to Table 4.

Table 4: F-tests of Parent's Education Level and Gender and overall Adoption Attitudes

	T value	Probability	df
Parent's education level and overall adoption attitudes	1.836	.518	31,43
Gender and overall adoption attitudes	.601	.941	6,43

Sub-Hypothesis 3: There is no difference in scores between stated religiosity of the participant and overall adoption attitude score.

Using an f-test with an alpha level of .05, the difference between religiosity and overall adoption attitude score was not statistically significant, $F(42,43) = .193$, $p=.663$. Therefore, fail to reject this Sub-Hypothesis. Refer to Table 5.

Table 5: ANOVA Religiosity and Overall Adoption Attitudes

	F	p	df
Religiosity and overall adoption attitudes	.193	.663	42,43

Summary of Results

T-tests were run to determine if there were differences between the control group and experimental group. The results showed no difference between the two group scores comparing all nine variables. Therefore, the null hypotheses were not rejected.

T-tests were run on the experimental group to see if there was a difference in attitudes between parent's education level, gender and overall attitude scores. The results showed no difference within the experimental group according to their parent's education level and overall adoption attitude. The results also showed no differences within the experimental group when comparing the participants gender and overall adoption attitude.

An ANOVA test was run to determine if there was any significance in the overall adoption attitudes and religiousness. There was no significance in religiousness and overall adoption attitudes, within the experimental group.

Summary

The intent of this project was to examine attitudes of undergraduate students towards same-sex couples adopting a child. The results of the tests of differences resulted in no difference in attitudes of overall adoption between the experimental group and control group indicated that there is no difference in attitudes between the control group and experimental group towards the overall adoption of the child. This finding may indicate a generation attitude shift that is more open to homosexual parenting and adoption.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify attitudes of undergraduate students in a social science major who may be in a position of placing children in homes for both foster care and adoption. This study, using a quasi-experimental design, examined the differences in attitudes of participants towards a heterosexual couple adopting a child and a homosexual couple adopting the same child. Attitudes of the participants towards adoption were measured using a Likert scale. Participants were asked to rate the couple they read about in the vignette on the best option for an orphan, if the parents would teach values and morals to the child, if the child would experience emotional neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse, emotional stability of the couple, and the quality of parenting the couple would provide to the child. The overall likelihood of placing the child with the couple was also measured. Comparisons were made based on variables identified in the review of literature and theoretical framework. These social cognitive variables were level of religiousness as rated by the participant, the gender of the participant, and the level of education of one parent of the participant's parents.

While all families face challenges, same-sex couples face additional barriers when starting a family. Gay and lesbian couples have to find alternative means of starting a family. Same-sex couples turn to adoption in order to become parents. These couples may encounter additional challenges when

trying to adopt or foster children. Attitudes of undergraduate students in a social science major need to be understood.

Using Social Cognitive Theory as a theoretical framework, this study looked at which variables impacted the attitudes of Family Studies undergraduate students towards same-sex adoption. According to social cognitive theory social variables are determinants of behavior and personality (Thomas, 2005). This concurs with the literature review that people can be influenced by social variables. Individuals may be influenced by their religious background and the environment from which they were raised. Other variables that may influence one's behavior are the individual's gender and the environment in which their parents raised them.

This study used a quasi-experimental approach to examine attitudes of social science undergraduate students towards adoption. The investigation was composed of two different vignettes each of which had shown strong reliability in previous research (Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, & Jordan, 1999; Crawford & Solliday, 1996). Differences in attitudes of undergraduate students between a heterosexual and homosexual couple adopting a child ward of the state was examined. The control group in this study consisted of students that read a vignette about a heterosexual couple. The experimental group of students read the same vignette but with names changed to two males to reflect a homosexual couple. The survey was distributed to three different undergraduate Family Studies classes, Fall 2009.

There were eight null hypotheses and three sub-hypotheses. The null hypotheses compared the participants vignette answers from each group. The researcher ran t-tests for the eight null hypotheses to determine if there was a difference between the groups. The researcher ran additional tests of difference on the sub-hypotheses for parent education, gender, and level of reported religiousness within the experimental group. The results indicated that there were no differences in attitudes of these undergraduate students towards adoption due to these variables.

Findings

The results of this study showed no differences between the experimental group and control group in attitudes towards adoption. This differed from previous research that showed differences in attitudes (Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, & Jordan, 1999; Crawford & Solliday, 1996). Crawford and Solliday (1996) found prejudices among undergraduate students when placing a child into the home of same-sex couples. Their study consisted of 97 undergraduate students enrolled in undergraduate psychology classes from a small Midwest college. Crawford, et. al. (1999) also found differences in attitudes towards gay parenting and same-sex couples adopting a child. This study included 388 psychologists from across the United States. The differences in this study and previous studies may indicate a difference in attitudes towards homosexuals adopting. Currently, individuals may be more open minded to homosexuality in general or towards homosexual couples raising children. This may reflect a national trend towards more positive views towards homosexuality.

The results of this study showed no differences in overall attitude scores within the experimental group when examining the participants' parent's education level, the participants' gender and the participants' self reported religiosity. Literature suggests that these three variables may influence peoples attitudes towards same-sex couples adopting. Less-educated Americans tend to be more skeptical towards adoption and men are more skeptical than women. Rhodes et al. (2003) report that the higher an individual's education is the more open they are to adoption. Wegar (2000) reported women in general have a more positive attitude about adoption than men. Religion can have either a positive or negative impact on a person's attitude towards same-sex couples adopting. The findings of this study indicate these participants have little prejudices against same-sex couples adopting. This may indicate that these participants are in an environment that has a positive view towards homosexuality and gay parenting.

Areas of Future Research

The results of this study suggest the need for further research. A more in-depth study could explore social cognitive variables beyond those looked at in this study. More questions about how much knowledge and contact individuals have with homosexual couples could provide more information on the attitudes of these students. This information may influence, negatively or positively, how the participants feel about same-sex couples adopting a child.

This study looked at a heterosexual couple and a same-sex couple consisting of two men to adopt a child. The researcher did not look at a lesbian

couple as potential parents. People may have different attitudes towards two women in a relationship than two men in a relationship. The gender of the child up for adoption may have given different results if it were a girl instead of a boy. Prior research has shown some people might be more apprehensive to place a girl into the home of a male couple instead of a female couple (Perrin, 2002).

Future studies, with a larger sample size, could ask about their sexual orientation as this was considered by the researcher to have been overly intrusive. This information may have an outcome of being more open-minded to the idea of same-sex couples adopting.

This study also did not look at how often the participant has had exposure to homosexuality. Previous studies have shown that if a person is exposed to homosexuality either through friends, family or other social activities, there seems to be less homophobia (Brooks & Goldberg, 200; Mallon, 2004).

Research on attitudes towards same-sex adoption could be useful in changing policies on this matter and a further look into the financial benefits of placing children that are ward of the state into homes of same-sex couples. A larger, more inclusive study might be needed. Individuals that are placed in positions working to place children in homes will have to follow state laws. Some state laws create barriers for same-sex couples to foster and/or adopt. The policies need to be examined and changes need to be made.

There is still much to learn concerning which variables influence people's attitudes on this topic. Social Cognitive Theory explains how cultural and/or environmental factors can sway a person's attitude in a positive or negative way.

Knowing what environmental factors influence a person's attitudes could help to provide a framework for educating professionals in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study was a beginning in understanding attitudes of undergraduate students in Family Study courses at the University of New Mexico towards adoption. It is important to conduct research on alternative families because many professionals will be working with homosexual families. The quality of service for same-sex couples and their families depends upon well skilled professionals.

Some religions provide a social network for portraying positive and negative attitudes towards homosexuality in which their members carry these same views. Education could provide another option for members carrying the same negative or positive attitudes.

With knowledge of attitudes towards same-sex couples adopting, negative or positive, classes can better prepare students to discuss such topics. Education on homosexuality is key to opening the idea of placing children in homes of same-sex couples. Previous research has examined attitudes of undergraduate students but variables such as parental education has not been studied.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. IRB Approval

Appendix B. Demographics Form

Appendix C. Couples Rating Questionnaire: Control Group

Appendix D. Couples Rating Questionnaire: Experimental Group

Appendix E. Permission Letter from Isiaah Crawford, PhD

Appendix F. Consent Form

Appendix G. Code Sheet



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW MEXICO

Main Campus Institutional Review Board

Human Research Protections Office

MSC08 4560

1 University of New Mexico~Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001

<http://hsc.unm.edu/som/research/HRRC/>

15-May-2009

Responsible Faculty: Pamela Olson

Investigator: Melissa Gaa

Dept/College: Individual Family Comm Educ IFCE

SUBJECT: IRB Approval of Research - Modification

Protocol #: 09-086

Project Title: Attitudes Towards Adoption

Type of Review: Expedited Review

Approval Date: 14-May-2009

Expiration Date: 13-May-2010

The Main Campus Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved the above referenced protocol. It has been approved based on the review of the following:

1. IRB Application received 041309
2. Protocol received 031009
3. UNM consent form v050809
4. Demographic Questionnaire received 041309
5. Ratings Questionnaires received 022009

Consent Decision:

Signature waived; requires written statement about research

HIPAA Authorization Addendum not applicable

When consent is required, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator (PI) to ensure that ethical and legal informed consent has been obtained from all research participants. A date stamped original of the approved consent form(s) is attached, and copies should be used for consenting participants during the above noted approval period.

As the principal investigator of this study, you assume the following responsibilities:

Renewal: Unless granted exemption, your protocol must be re-approved each year in order to continue the research. You must submit a Progress Report no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date noted above.

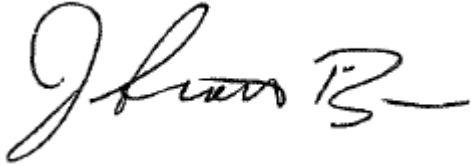
Adverse Events: Any adverse events or reactions must be reported to the IRB immediately.

Modifications: Any changes to the protocol, such as procedures, consent/assent forms, addition of subjects, or study design must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval.

Completion: When the study is concluded and all data has been de-identified (with no link to identifiers), submit a Final Report Form to close your study.

Please reference the protocol number and study title in all documents and correspondence related to this protocol.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Scott Tonigan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a distinct "B" at the end.

**J. Scott Tonigan, PhD
Chair
Main Campus IRB**

* Under the provisions of this institution's Federal Wide Assurance (FWA00004690), the Main Campus IRB has determined that this proposal provides adequate safeguards for protecting the rights and welfare of the subjects involved in the study and is in compliance with HHS Regulations (45 CFR 46).

Appendix C

Case Vignette

John and Kim are a loving couple who are not able to have their own children and have now decided to adopt. They have been together for 12 years and own a three bedroom home in a fashionable section of the city. John is an accountant and has been with his firm for 13 years. He is regarded by his superiors as being an excellent employee and hard worker. His colleagues find him to be supportive, trustworthy, and a good friend. Kim is a real-estate broker and has established her own company, which she maintains out of their home. Over the last five years she has developed a successful business and is well regarded by her business colleagues and neighbors. There is no history of psychiatric illness, substance abuse, legal or financial problems in either of their lives. Both John and Kim feel they are financially and emotionally equipped to be parents. John and Kim's parents are excited about the idea of becoming grandparents. All four of them are looking forward to baby-sitting and providing as much support as they can to John and Kim.

John and Kim met Kevin, a five year old boy who is an orphan and ward of the state, through their volunteer activity with a local social service agency. All three of them seem to get along very well and Kevin has enjoyed spending extended weekends at John and Kim's home. Kevin now states that he would like to live with them. John and Kim have considered the ramifications of making this decision and they feel they are ready and can provide Kevin with a loving home. Subsequently, they have begun the process of seeking his formal adoption.

Please turn to the other side
and complete the Questionnaire

Ratings of the Couple

1. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents the extent to which you feel adoption is the best option for an orphaned, five year old child in the custody of the state.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Best Option Very Worst Option

2. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents your belief that the couple described in the vignette will be able to teach the child appropriate values and raise a morally responsible child.

1 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Little or No Confidence Very Confident

3. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents the level of concern you have about the child experiencing emotional neglect

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Concerned Not Concerned at All

4. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents the level of concern you have about the child experiencing physical abuse.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Not Concerned at All Very Concerned

5. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represent the level of concern you have about the potential for the child to experience sexual abuse.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Unlikely Very Likely

6. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents how emotionally stable you believe this couple to be.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Emotionally Stable Very Emotionally Unstable

7. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents the quality of parenting you believe this couple would provide the child described in the vignette.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Good Very Bad

8. If you were in the position to make a recommendation regarding the disposition of this child, please circle the number that best represent the likelihood that you would recommend the couple be given custody of the child.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Unlikely Very Likely

9. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents your religiousness.

1 2 3 4 5 6
 Very Religious Not Religious At All

Thank you for participating in our study.

Appendix D

Case Vignette

John and Ken are a loving couple who are not able to have their own children and have now decided to adopt. They have been together for 12 years and own a three bedroom home in a fashionable section of the city. John is an accountant and has been with his firm for 13 years. He is regarded by his superiors as being an excellent employee and hard worker. His colleagues find him to be supportive, trustworthy, and a good friend. Ken is a real-estate broker and has established his own company, which he maintains out of their home. Over the last five years he has developed a successful business and is well regarded by his business colleagues and neighbors. There is no history of psychiatric illness, substance abuse, legal or financial problems in either of their lives. Both John and Ken feel they are financially and emotionally equipped to be parents. John and Ken's parents are excited about the idea of becoming grandparents. All four of them are looking forward to baby-sitting and providing as much support as they can to John and Ken.

John and Ken met Kevin, a five year old boy who is an orphan and ward of the state, through their volunteer activity with a local social service agency. All three of them seem to get along very well and Kevin has enjoyed spending extended weekends at John and Ken's home. Kevin now states that he would like to live with them. John and Ken have considered the ramifications of making this decision and they feel they are ready and can provide Kevin with a loving home. Subsequently, they have begun the process of seeking his formal adoption.

Please turn to the other side
and complete the Questionnaire

Ratings of the Couple

1. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents the extent to which you feel adoption is the best option for an orphaned, five year old child in the custody of the state.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Best Option Very Worst Option

2. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents your belief that the couple described in the vignette will be able to teach the child appropriate values and raise a morally responsible child.

1 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Little or No Confidence Very Confident

3. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents the level of concern you have about the child experiencing emotional neglect

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Concerned Not Concerned at All

4. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents the level of concern you have about the child experiencing physical abuse.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Not Concerned at All Very Concerned

5. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represent the level of concern you have about the potential for the child to experience sexual abuse.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Unlikely Very Likely

6. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents how emotionally stable you believe this couple to be.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Emotionally Stable Very Emotionally Unstable

7. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents the quality of parenting you believe this couple would provide the child described in the vignette.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Good Very Bad

8. If you were in the position to make a recommendation regarding the disposition of this child, please circle the number that best represent the likelihood that you would recommend the couple be given custody of the child.

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6
 Very Unlikely Very Likely

9. On the rating scale below, please circle the number that best represents your religiousness.

1 2 3 4 5 6
 Very Religious Not Religious At All

Thank you for participating in our study.

Appendix E

From: "Isiaah Crawford" <ICRAWFO@luc.edu>
Subject: Fwd: Case Vignette & Ratings
Date: Mon, 14 Jan 2008 12:40:32 -0600
To: <mgaal@unm.edu>



Hello, Melissa:

Thanks for your interest in our work. The Couples Rating Questionnaire and one of the vignettes from the study you reference is attached to this message. If you deem them to be helpful, please feel free to use them for your project.

Good luck,

Isiaah Crawford, Ph.D.
Dean - College of Arts & Sciences
Loyola University Chicago

Dr. Crawford,

I am a graduate student in the Family Studies Department at the University of New Mexico. I am starting my thesis project and am interested in studying gay parenting. My plan for my thesis is to look at attitudes of undergraduate students studying in fields where they may later encounter dealing with these types of families. I found your article The Attitudes of Undergraduate College Students Toward Gay Parenting published in 1996 and was wondering if I could see the vignettes that were handed out to the students from your study and also look at your Couples Rating Questionnaire you made. If you wouldn't mind I would also like permission to use your measures in my study.

I appreciate your time.

Thank you,
Melissa Gaa

>>> Ada Steenken 9/21/2005 11:55:16 AM >>>
as requested

 **Attachment:** Case Vignette & Ratings.doc (31Kbytes)

University of New Mexico
Informed Consent Cover Letter for Anonymous Surveys

STUDY TITLE
Attitudes Towards Adoption

Melissa Gaa from the Department of Individual, Family & Community Education, and Pamela Olson, PhD. from Individual, Family & Community Education are conducting a research study. The purpose of the study is to examine attitudes towards adoption. You are being asked to participate in this study because the researchers are looking at social science major students for this study.

Your participation will involve filling out a demographics form, reading a vignette and answering questions about what you have just read. The survey should take about 10 minutes to complete. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. There are no names or identifying information associated with this survey. The survey includes questions such as how you feel about the couple you have read about adopting a child. You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. The risks involved in participating in this study are about the same as those involved in participating in the discussions in this class. All data will be kept for less than one year in a locked file in Dr. Olson's office and then destroyed. Your grades in this class will in no way be affected by participating or choosing not to participate in this study. You may quit the study at any time without penalty.

The findings from this project will provide information on attitudes of adoption. If published, results will be presented in summary form only.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Melissa Gaa at mgaal@unm.edu or call Pamela Olson at (505)277-5550. If you experience any discomfort you may contact AGORA Crisis Center at (505) 277-3013. If you have questions regarding your legal rights as a research subject, you may call the UNM Human Research Protections at (505) 277-0067.

By returning this survey in the envelope provided, you will be agreeing to participate in the above described research study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Gaa
Attitudes Towards Adoption

Protocol#09-086
Version Date: 05/08/09

Appendix G

Code Sheet

ID:	From 1 – 87
Gender:	1 = Male 2 = Female
Age:	Recorded as actual
Age Group:	Group one 18 – 23 years old Group two 24 – 32 years old Group three 33 and above
Undergraduate Major:	Group one Family Studies Group two Psychology/Sociology Group three Other
Ethnicity:	Group one Caucasian Group two Hispanic/Latino Group three Other
Religious Affiliation:	Group one Christian Group two None Group three Other
Background:	Group one Middle Income Group two Low Income Group three High Income
Parent Education:	Group one 1 – 4 Group two 5 – 6