

An Evaluation of College Student Attitudes toward Gay Adoption

Cassandra Chaney, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
School of Social Work, Child and Family Studies
Louisiana State University.
USA

Le'Brian Patrick, Ph.D

Assistant Professor
Sociology and Women Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Clayton State University
USA

Abstract

*Given the increasing debate regarding same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption, few studies to date have examined college student attitudes regarding this topic. This qualitative study explores the sentiments of 31 college students from a large university in the southern region of the country towards gay adoption before and after viewing the documentary *We Are Dad* (2005). The study allowed students to provide their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements provided by respondents on a public blog site who debated both sides of this issue. In addition, students responded to the following two questions during two points in time: (1) Which statement BEST describes your feelings about gay people adopting children in the foster care system? (2) After viewing *We Are Dad* (2005), which statement BEST describes your feelings about gay people adopting children in the foster care system? Analysis of the data revealed student responses to be surrounding the following three themes: (a) Support for Gay Adoption; (b) Ambivalence Regarding Gay Adoption; and (c) Disapproval of Gay Adoption. Results indicate the majority of students strongly support or support gay adoption, however, several students were strongly opposed to gay adoption. The implications of these findings for researchers and practitioners are provided.*

Keywords: Adoption; Attitudes; College Students; Foster Care; Gay; Homosexuality

Currently, homosexual partners face significant barriers when adopting a child. Many of these barriers are because most states lack legal protections to guard against favoring heterosexual parents over gays and lesbians in adoption and foster care placements, the narrowing opportunity for foreign countries to allow homosexual couples to adopt children, negative stereotypes about the quality of gay relationships, possible negative conclusions drawn about the possible complications for the child (Crawford & Solliday, 1996), as well as a culture that largely supports the belief that children need the complementary roles that mothers and fathers provide (Bradley, 2007; Johnson, 2013; Patterson, 2009; Ryan, Pearlmuter, & Groza, 2004). Given the many challenges that homosexual partners must overcome to legally adopt a child, few studies to date have examined where college students generally stand on this issue. Since an increasing number of colleges and universities have made acceptance of diversity one of its primary missions (Jenkins, 2014; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001), it is important that these professionals be aware of the unique experiences of gay couples as they transition through and exit college. Research in the areas of student attitudes and motivation, such as Gardner and Lambert's (1972) pioneering study, categorized learner's motivation into two types: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental attitudes focus on "the practical value and advantages of learning a new language," while integrative attitudes stress "a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group"(p.132).

Taking such classifications a step further, Cooper and Fishman (1977) added a third type of motivation they termed "developmental." Developmental motivation refers to motivation relating to personal development or personal satisfaction. This includes such activities as watching movies and reading books in English. Such studies on student attitudes and motivations provide reasons and ways to reach our students, not only in classrooms, but also on a larger scale beyond just studying language acquisition.

Continuing to recognize the importance of student attitudes and motivations, this study purposefully focused on college students in the south as they are generally more religious than students in other geographic regions of the country (Baunach, Burgess, & Muse, 2010). This topic is important for four reasons. First, since an increasing number of studies have found Americans are generally more accepting of homosexuality today than in former decades (Avery, Chase, Johansson, Litvak, Montero, & Wydra, 2007), it is important to examine whether college students, who are on the brink of establishing their professional careers and families, will have more favorable attitudes regarding gay adoption (Lambert, Ventura, Hall, & Cluse-Tolar, 2006). Second, since the Supreme Court ruled same-sex marriage legal in all 50 states, which includes the District of Columbia (Gorman, 2015), an increasing number of these couples have legally sought to establish their own families through foster care adoption (Berger, 2012; Cody, Farr, McRoy, Ayers-Lopez, & Ledesma, 2017; McKee, 2017; Tavernise, 2011). Third, our focus on children in the foster care system is deliberate as these children are generally placed there due to abandonment, emotional abuse, lack of supervision, medical neglect, physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse, neglect, or Failure to Thrive (McDonald & Brook, 2009). Thus, it is important to understand whether a particular subset of the population believes gay couples are good candidates to legally adopt these children. Last, given the diversity of what "family" means as well as how various individuals construct "family" (Ganong & Coleman, 2017; Strong & Cohen, 2013), it is important to examine whether college students believe same-sex couples should establish their own families by legally adopting children in the foster care system. Fundamentally, this study will examine and respond to the question: How do college students in the southern region of the country view same-sex adoption?

Review of Literature

While an abundance of literature has examined various dimensions of the LGBT subculture over the past several decades (DeHaan, Kuper, Magee, Bigelow, & Mustanski, 2013; Herek, 1988; Johansson & Andreasson, 2017; Kane, 2013; Patterson & Redding, 1996; Pierce, 2012; Rivers, 1995; Storms, 1978) with few exceptions (Crawford, & Soliday, 1996; Ollen & Goldberg, 2016), the research on heterosexual attitudes towards parenting by LGBT persons is virtually non-existent. Over time, attitudes towards homosexuality have generally moved towards greater acceptance than in prior decades. For example, during the 1970s when research increased on LGBT subject matter, Nyberg and Alston (1976) found over half of urban university graduate students (51% of the females and 62% of the males) agreed that homosexuality was wrong. In that same year, Lumby (1976) found heterosexual males were significantly more likely to fear having homosexual teachers for their children and believed that homosexuals should be locked up to protect society. Further, they believed homosexuals were high security risks in government jobs and they further thought homosexuality was a sickness that could be cured if the person engaged in sexual relations with a person of the opposite sex who had "sufficient" sexual skills.

Recent years have seen homosexuality brought to the consciousness of young people by various mass media. In their examination of the effects of the media on individual attitudes toward homosexuality, Calzo and Ward (2009) explained exposure to the media lessened the gap between male and female attitudes toward homosexuality. According to their study, the more media exposure males had, the more they moved toward flexible gender roles, which reflected a more accepting attitude toward homosexuality.

When it comes to student social support, this support is influenced by various factors, but contact has been found to have the most significant impact. In his study of the development of support for the gay community among college students, Raiz (2006) found that contact with a homosexual acquaintance was associated with increased support for rights, while having a roommate that was openly gay was associated with decreased support for rights. Also, students who believed their family and friends to be more accepting were also more supportive. Lehman and Thornwall (2010) found that female college students are more supportive than male college students toward homosexuality and the rights of LGBT persons. Also, females had more contact with homosexual friends than males; however, both males and females agreed religion has taught them that homosexuality is bad and a sin, and expressed religious skepticism on LGBT issues. It also proved that the attributes of the person produced mixed effects on persons' attitudes towards homosexuality.

Storms (1978) found that regardless of gender attributes, whether a male presented as more feminine or masculine, students were more concerned with sexual orientation. In other words, students were more upset if a man was gay or bisexual, rather than whether or not he was more masculine or feminine. In a different direction, Millham, San Miguel and Kellogg (1976) found that college males and females expressed significantly more anxiety toward same-sexed homosexuals than opposite-sexed homosexuals. So, because of the person's biological sex, the intensity of negative attitudes varied if the respondent were of the same or opposite sex.

Although, person's attitudes towards homosexuality are influenced by several factors including religious affiliation, religiosity, mass media, family, peers, a person's gender, and overall contact with homosexual individuals (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Raiz, 2006), exactly how these factors intersect with one another to form a college student's overall attitude towards homosexuality is not fully understood. More specifically, to what extent do such factors or others influence attitudes towards gay and lesbian parenting is not completely comprehensible. In an effort to bring more clarity to this area, we incorporate methods outlined in the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis to understand and measure levels of student prejudice towards same-sex parental adoption.

Sciappa, Gregg, and Hewes' (2005), Parasocial Contact Hypothesis, building on Allport's half-century older version holds that socially beneficial functions of intergroup contact may result from parasocial contact, if it is processed similarly to interpersonal interactions. More simply, parasocial contact was associated with lower levels of prejudice. Similar to that study, this research uses *We Are Dad* (2005) as parasocial media to understand student attitudinal shifts on same-sex parental adoptions.

Despite attitudes moving in a positive direction towards the acceptance of homosexuality, negative attitudes surrounding homosexual parenting still remain strong. Also, investigations into gay and lesbian parenting that has been conducted looks at lesbian mothers who became mothers in a heterosexual relationship. There are a number of reasons why much of the previous research examined lesbian mothers. One of the reasons why previous research used only lesbian mothers is due to convenience. Another reason lesbian mothers have been studied is because of the positive stereotypes generally associated with them and the negative stereotypes associated with gay fathers (Blake, Carone, Raffanella, Slutsky, Ehrhardt, & Golombok, 2017; Davies, 2004; Herek, 2002).

Past research has found two prominent explanations as to why people are opposed to homosexual couples raising children; negative stereotypes about the quality of gay relationships and the possible negative conclusions drawn about the possible ramifications for the child (Crawford & Solliday, 1996). Sampling 97 Midwestern college students, Crawford and Solliday (1996) found that students believed that homosexual parents would create a dangerous environment for the child, create a more insecure home, to be more emotionally unstable, and to be less likely to be awarded custody of the child than heterosexual couples. Mistaken beliefs by the general public about the relationships of homosexual parents with their children include such ideas that homosexual parents are more likely to molest their children and rear homosexual children (Berlang, 2013; Crawford & Solliday, 1996). However, there has been research to discredit such arguments. Crawford and Solliday (1996) found that pedophilia involving an LGBT parent is essentially nonexistent, and a later study conducted by Brodzinsky (2003) found no link between homosexual parenting and child molestation. Moreover, they indicate the sexual orientation of the parents is not an important factor on the sexual orientation of the child and there is no significant difference in the social abilities of children with homosexual parents compared to the children of heterosexual parents (Brodzinsky, 2003; Crawford & Solliday, 1996).

In addition, Crawford and Solliday (1996) sought to expand the understanding of factors associated with derogatory attitudes toward homosexual parenting in order to understand how the public's negative responses prevent homosexual couples from adopting children. A survey of adoption agencies concerning adoption and homosexual couples supports the relationship between attitudes toward homosexual couples, adoption and religion. A survey of adoption policies, practices and attitudes found a significant difference in the acceptance of adoption applications from homosexuals as a function of the agency's religious affiliation (Brodzinsky 2003). In a more general sense, Ellis, Kitzinger, and Wilkinson (2002), in a study on gay and lesbian human rights, found that fewer than half of respondents (43.4%) agreed that lesbian and gay couples should have all the same parenting rights as heterosexuals.

Theoretical Frameworks

We use multiple theoretical perspectives to investigate how these students construct and alter meanings of family. Applying multiple frameworks provides for an in depth explanation of the impact of a film that features gay foster care parents on student understandings of LGBT families and their viability to create nurturing environments for children. In addition to feminist theories of families, we draw on themes from symbolic interactionism (constructionism) and phenomenology.

Lesbian and gay families are defined by the intimate, enduring interaction of two or more people who share a same-sex orientation (e.g. a couple) or by the enduring involvement of at least one lesbian or gay adult in rearing a child (Allen & Demo, 1995; Blake et al., 2017). Research has confirmed that gay and lesbian couples, like their heterosexual counterparts, have relationships with brothers, sisters, parents, grandparents, children and grandchildren, extended and chosen kin, and in many cases, other gay, lesbian, and heterosexual individuals (Patterson, 2013).

In constructing new ways of analyzing social structure and human experience, feminist theorists have argued for the integrative lens of race, class, gender, and now, sexual orientation in understanding the construction of families (Andersen & Hill Collins, 1994; Demo & Allen, 1996; Ganong & Coleman, 2017). A phenomenological study lends itself well to the study of families, because when used in conjunction with symbolic interactionism can be descriptive or interpretive which helps researchers understand experiences through the descriptions and stories people tell about their lives. In particular, phenomenology's focus on memories, images and the meaning these have for participants (Lopez & Willis, 2004) is especially beneficial when understanding college student's attitudes regarding adoption of children in the foster care system by gay couples.

We Are Dad (2005) documents the lives of a gay couple who are pediatric AIDS nurses that become foster parents to HIV+ infants and decide to challenge Florida laws against gay adoption. By exploring the dynamics of this couple's life experiences with adoption restrictions and examining student sentiments towards gay and lesbian parenting, both prior to and after viewing the film, we find the chosen theoretical framework optimal to analyze student responses to the film and the meanings these responses hold for what constitutes families. Moreover, such frameworks tease out student positions on gay and lesbian families.

Method

Sample. Participants in the study were 31 undergraduate students from a social science class at a large university located in the southern region of the country. The class was comprised of 29 women (94%) and two men (6%). In terms of race, 29 students (94%) were Caucasian American, one female student (3%) was African-American, and one female student (3%) was Asian-American. The participants ranged from 20-31 years; the mean age was 22 years; and the average amount of education was 15.3 years. Eighteen participants (58%) were juniors and thirteen participants (42%) were seniors. Twenty six participants (84%) were single, never married; four students (13%) were married, and one student was engaged (3%). The average length of marriage was three years. Three participants (.9%) had one child that was 3 years of age or younger. All students (100%) self-identified as Christian. Eighteen participants (58%) were reared in two-parent homes, while 13 participants (42%) were reared in single-parent homes. All participants had annual incomes less than \$10,000 dollars. The identity of all participants was protected through pseudonyms.

Research Design. This study implemented a qualitative approach to more deeply understand college students' attitudes towards gay adoption. To identify the themes that emerged from the written interviews, all narrative responses were content analyzed using grounded theory and an open-coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). In keeping with open-coding techniques, no a priori categories were imposed on the narrative data. Instead, themes were identified from the narratives. In order to clearly abstract themes from the written responses, words and phrases were the units of analysis. Identifying the themes involved three steps.

The first step involved *individually* reading each comment with the purpose of identifying the most salient themes, and examining how the themes presented answered the question of interest. The second step involved re-examining all responses, keeping track of emerging themes, assigning words and symbols to each coding category, providing definitions for emerging themes, and examining how the themes presented were specifically related to student attitudes toward gay adoption (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The last step involved establishing reliability of the themes.

To assess the reliability of the coding system developed by the first author, a list of all codes and their definitions along with the written responses was given to the second author who then coded the written responses based on this pre-determined list of codes. After a 100% coding reliability rate was established between the first and second author, it was determined that a working coding system had been established. Most important, this time intensive method was thorough, greatly minimized the likelihood of researcher bias influencing the findings presented, and ensured that only the most salient themes were identified and highlighted in this paper.

Procedure. In an effort to not influence student responses to the research questions that guided this study, students were not advised they would watch the documentary *We Are Dad* (2005). In addition, before completing both surveys, students were advised that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers to the survey and that the first author was interested in their opinion on this topic. Students were given the following directive: “For your daily writing assignment tomorrow (Tuesday, April 23, 2013), please read both responses to the below question: Should Homosexual People Be Allowed to Legally Adopt Children? Then, provide a minimum 8 sentence, TYPED, written response to this question. In particular, discuss: (a) your personal view regarding this question and why you feel the way that you do; (b) the potential advantage for the adopted parents and children; (c) the potential disadvantage to the adopted parents and children; (d) your opinion regarding why this topic is such an emotionally-charged one.”

In the second portion of this study, to determine student attitudes regarding gay people adopting children in the foster care system during two time points (before and after viewing the documentary *We Are Dad*, 2005)¹, students were given a survey and asked to check their response to this question: *Which statement BEST describes your feelings about gay people adopting children in the foster care system?* The following statements were offered: (a) I am very much opposed to gay people adopting children in the foster care system; (b) I am somewhat opposed to gay people adopting children in the foster care system; (c) I do not oppose or support gay people adopting children in the foster care system; (d) I support gay people adopting children in the foster care system; and (e) I very much support gay people adopting children in the foster care system.

After viewing the documentary *We Are Dad* (2005), students were given a slightly different worded survey and asked to check their response to this question: *After viewing We Are Dad (2005), which statement BEST describes your feelings about gay people adopting children in the foster care system?* The following statements were offered: (a) I am very much opposed to gay people adopting children in the foster care system; (b) I am somewhat opposed to gay people adopting children in the foster care system; (c) I do not oppose or support gay people adopting children in the foster care system; (d) I support gay people adopting children in the foster care system; and (e) I very much support gay people adopting children in the foster care system. This phase of the study was anonymous as the participants were instructed not to put their name on either survey.

Findings

Grounded theory analysis of the qualitative data revealed three emergent themes: (a) Support for Gay Adoption; (b) Ambivalence of Gay Adoption; and (c) Disapproval of Gay Adoption. The “*Support for Gay Adoption*” theme was words and/or phrases related to gay adoption as non-discriminatory, promoting equality, parenting as a right that should be afforded everyone regardless of sexual orientation, and because it moves children from the foster care system, is good for society. The “*Ambivalence of Gay Adoption*” theme was words and/or phrases related to psychological and/or emotional uncertainty regarding whether gay adoption was good for the family and society. The “*Disapproval of Gay Adoption*” theme was words and/or phrases related to gay adoption and gay marriage as an affront to heterosexuality, counter to personal religious values, and the cause of the disintegration of the family.

Research Question 1: **What were student attitudes regarding gay adoption before viewing the documentary?**

¹ *We Are Dad* (2005) is a 71-minute documentary directed by Michael Horvat that examines Roger Croteau and Steven Lofton, a gay couple who are pediatric AIDS nurses and become foster parents to infants who are HIV positive, and decide to challenge the State of Florida's law banning adoption by gay people. The movie features the perspectives of individuals in various organizations that support and do not support gay adoption.

15 students “very much support gay people adopting children in the foster care system,” 5 students “support gay people adopting children in the foster care system,” 5 students “do not oppose or support gay people adopting children in the foster care system,” 5 students were “very much opposed to gay people adopting children in the foster care system,” and one student supported two choices (“do not oppose or support” and “somewhat opposed”).

Research Question 2: What were student attitudes regarding gay adoption after viewing the documentary?

17 students “very much support gay people adopting children in the foster care system,” 9 students “support gay people adopting children in the foster care system,” 4 students were “very much opposed to gay people adopting children in the foster care system” and one student supported two choices (“do not oppose or support” and “support”).

Research Question 3: To what extent do students agree or disagree with the statements made on a public blog regarding gay adoption?

Support for Gay Adoption. The results indicate 18 participants (17 females and one male, or 58%) supported gay adoption. Furthermore, four subthemes related to support for gay adoption emerged. In general, participants that supported gay adoption had positive experiences with and/or perceptions of homosexual couples, believed parental quality should not be contingent on sexual orientation, believed adoption was beneficial for children in the foster care system, and believed that gay adoption is non-discriminatory and promotes equality.

Positive Perception of Homosexual Couples. Three female participants based their support for gay adoption on positive personal experiences with members of this population or a positive media perception of a celebrity gay couple. In regards to the former, Laura wrote: “Personally, I feel that homosexual people should be allowed to legally adopt. My opinion has formed over the years as I have met and became great friends with some homosexual people. I have found them to be no different, in any way, than any of my other friends (other than who they are attracted to).” In contrast to Laura that has become “great friends with some homosexual people,” Angela’s opinion regarding gay adoption has been shaped by a gay person within her family that adopted two children in the foster care system. She provided the following comment:

“In this debate about homosexual people being allowed to legally adopt children, I will always be on the “yes” side. I believe that we do not have the right to deny anyone a family. Children of same-sex parents can be just as successful as children with heterosexual parents. Personally, I see this because my aunt is a homosexual and she and her partner have adopted and raised two beautiful boys. These adopted children get the advantage of having and being a part of a family they could have never had. They will be cared for by people who truly want them.”

Like Laura and Angela, Crystal also had a positive view of homosexuals and even referenced a high-profile celebrity gay couple that she believed would make “excellent parents.” She wrote:

“YES! I completely agree that homosexual people should be allowed to legally adopt children. As with anyone who wishes to adopt a child, they must go through rigorous applications and testing to see if they are suitable. So, if the homosexual person passes these tests and completes these applications, then yes they should be allowed! To be honest, I know several homosexual couples who would be better parents than some heterosexual couples. For example, Ellen DeGeneres and her partner Portia, would be excellent parents. I fervently hope that this becomes a reality for homosexual couples in the future.”

Adoption Should Not Be Based on Sexual Orientation. Four participants based their support for gay adoption on the belief that a couple’s character or parenting abilities should not be based on sexual orientation. To support this, Angelina wrote, “I feel that homosexuals should be allowed to adopt. I think that they are just as capable if not more capable of being parents than some straight couples.” Another student by the name of Gina provided this comment: “My personal view on this debate is that homosexual people should be allowed to legally adopt children. I feel this way because a person’s sexuality is no determinant of his character or parenting abilities.” Another student extended Angelina and Gina’s comments by adding that many heterosexual couples abuse their children, and in some cases, same-sex couples may be more ready than heterosexual couples to be parents. Rita wrote: “I think that same sex couples should be able to adopt. People are people.

Who are we to say that two men or two women wouldn't be fit to be parents when there are times that "normal" couples abuse their children and so on. I think that same sex couples may be more ready to be parents because they have to work so hard to be able to adopt." The comments made by Angelina, Gina, and Rita were further reiterated by Brenda, who provided the following extended commentary:

"My personal view is that I believe ANY couple should be allowed to legally adopt a child; just because a couple happens to be a same sex couple, does not make them any less fit to be a great parent. There are plenty of same sex couples out there who want to be parents and find it difficult to legally adopt while there is a large number of heterosexual couples, or single parents who have children unintentionally. If a couple (same sex or not) has the desire to become parents, I believe they should be allowed to do so; I do not believe that one's sexual orientation is an indicator of how well one can parent."

Gay adoption benefits children in the foster care system. Five participants based their support for gay adoption on the belief that gay adoption is good for children, and particularly those in the foster care system. Marcia wrote: "I personally believe that homosexual people should be able to adopt children for the simple reason that those children may not be adopted by anyone else. They certainly do not care about the sexual orientation of their parents if it means they are to be loved and moved out of the foster care system." In support of Marcia, another female by the name of Rachel also believed that gay adoption is in the best interests of children and that in some cases, homosexual parents can be better than heterosexual parents. Rachel provided this view:

"Reading the debate about homosexual people being allowed to legally adopt made me a little uneasy. The "no" column made me very angry. It made me so sad to read so many negative comments that were made regarding the homosexual life style. My personal opinion regarding whether they should be allowed to adopt is that they should. I believe a loving, caring, comforting, supporting home is what's best for children and I believe children can have that in a homosexual parent home. In many cases, homosexual partners rear their children better than heterosexual parents."

Other participants believed that children fare better when they are reared in a home in which love and support are provided by two parents. A female by the name of Nicole expressed herself in this way:

"I agree with the yes side of this debate stating that homosexuals should be allowed to legally adopt children. I agree with this side because I feel that children are much better off living with two loving parents than in the foster care system. The children would benefit from this legal adoption because instead of having to live in a home with many children with only a few "parents" to tend to all of them or switching from home to home, they will have a stable environment with two parents who will love and support them and be there whenever the child needs rather than when they are not busy with another child. The parents will benefit because they will not have to do the very expensive and risky process of in vitro fertilization. This process is very tedious and not always successful which can be heartbreaking for couples that depend on it as their only means of having a child."

The aforementioned comments were reiterated by another female student who also believed that gay adoption was beneficial for children, that an individual's parenting ability should not be based on sexual orientation, and the denial of gay couples to adopt as "ignorant." Brittany provided this lengthy narrative to express her feelings:

"I believe that gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to adopt children. There is not enough information to provide that a homosexual couple will raise a child any better or worse just because of sexual orientation. The way I see it, is that if children are in need of adoption, why would we want to stop them from being able to be raised in a two-parent, loving home? If the couple is not married, I could see where problems would arise if they were to break up, but the same situation would go for a heterosexual couple with adopted children. Homosexuality does not make a parent better or worse, it is how people treat and raise their children. To say the gay people cannot adopt is ignorant. Why wouldn't our society want less children on the streets, just because the parents may be of the same sex? We, as a community, need to move past subjects like these and on to things of much greater importance like young Russian men blowing up marathons and whatnot."

Gay Adoption Promotes Equality and Ends Discrimination. Eight participants (seven females and one male) based their support for gay adoption on the belief that the denial of adoption to gay couples does not promote equality and is a form of discrimination against these couples.

Interestingly, several students framed their opinions on the ‘equal rights’ that should be granted to all couples. The aforementioned sentiment was shared by Amelia when she wrote: “In my opinion, homosexual people should be allowed to legally adopt children. I feel that homosexual people should have the same rights as heterosexual people to adopt children because, who is it to say just because a person decides to be in a relationship with someone of their same sex they cannot be fit parents?” Amelia’s view was supported by Natalie, another female who wrote: “I think that anyone should have the right to adopt children as long as they are a good choice to be parents. There are way too many children in need to homes to turn away homosexual couples and not allowing them to have the opportunity to be parents.” Another female by the name of Nicole used the word “equality” to articulate her support for gay adoption and gay marriage. She provided the following comment: “My personal view regarding the question of if homosexual people should be allowed to legally adopt children is that they should. Homosexuals are like heterosexual couples who can’t have a baby so why should they not be allowed a baby, because they’re the same sex? I also am pro homosexual marriage for the same reason: equality.” In support of Amelia and Natalie, Lisa used the term “equal rights” to describe her feelings on this topic. She wrote:

“I believe that homosexual individuals should be allowed to legally adopt children. They are just as equal as heterosexuals and should have equal rights. They are also able to raise and guide their children the same way as any heterosexual couple would. Homosexuals are not able to conceive a child, so being able to legally adopt is an advantage to them to be able to raise their own children. Adopting a child is an easier way to be able to call a child “yours” without actually conceiving. If homosexuals are able to adopt they would be able to experience the joy of raising a child. However, the child will be raised in a different home environment than what God intended us to. I think this may be a disadvantage to the child. On the other hand, it depends on how the child is raised by the parents and the values and goals that the parent presents to the adopted child.”

Jodi, a female who identifies as gay, strongly supports gay adoption and used the term “fundamental right” to describe the desire of gay couples to marry and have children. She wrote:

“Should lesbian and gay individuals be allowed to adopt children? YES! This is a very sensitive subject for me considering I have been in a same-sex relationship for going on ten years. Danielle and I want to have children and although we have not fully researched adoption options, we would like to adopt one day. It’s our fundamental right to marry and procreate. There is no research to date that suggests that parents from gay and lesbians are detrimental to a child and no research that states a child will become gay or lesbian themselves. We are just like everyone else. We want a chance to live a healthy life and have children who we love, nurture, and raise into good productive citizens.”

Several participants used the word “discrimination” when referring to the denial of gay couples to adopt children. For example, Thomas wrote: “I feel homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children. This allows more children who are currently awaiting adoption a better chance of gaining parents, increases their tolerance, and with enough time, will weaken discrimination. Overall, it benefits society.” Interestingly, another participant also used the word “discrimination” to describe her feelings toward the denial of gay couples to adopt children. Iris wrote the following:

“In my opinion, homosexual couples should be allowed to legally adopt children because a person’s sexual orientation/gender doesn’t determine their parenting effectiveness. According to research, children have a better chance of normal, healthy development with the influence of an adult figure present within their first three years of life. This doesn’t indicate that a certain sex determines quality of parenting, so forbidding homosexual couples to adopt is definitely a form of discrimination and it isn’t fair at all.”

To further extend the comments provided by Thomas and Iris, one female advanced the view that all couples should be treated equally, there should be an end to discrimination, and that everyone should be treated with love. Jennifer provided this very lengthy and comprehensive narrative to express her feelings:

“Reading these responses and hearing what some of these people are saying about homosexuals is absolutely disgusting me. I’m a Christian and I fully believe that homosexuals should be able to adopt children. Study after study says that there is no difference being raised in a heterosexual environment. I think some of the disadvantages could potentially be things such as being criticized in school and in public but I do believe that if the parents instill value and morals into the child at a young age then it would be fine. So many families and children go through other things that could potentially be brought up and looked upon yet they have children still. The sad thing is, is this gives Christians such a bad reputation. Saying that “God hates gays” is completely wrong. I believe that everyone is equal and should be treated that way, not discriminated. Also, there are so many orphans out there needing homes and needing unconditional love and I believe homosexual or heterosexual couples can give that to them. Yes the children might face different prejudices growing up but ultimately all they need is love and care from their parents. People could argue about this all day long but at the end of the day I believe everyone needs to be treated equally and treated with love. This topic has stirred up so much strife in our nation and I think it needs to be put to an end.”

Disapproval of Gay Adoption

The narrative data revealed eight participants (seven females and one male, or 26%) of participants disapproved of gay couples adopting. Like the participants that were uncertain about how they felt about gay adoption, the majority of these participants disapproved of gay adoption due to their belief in God, what the bible says about homosexuality, their religious faiths, as well as views were informed by God, the bible, and their religious faiths, and heterosexuality. To illustrate this, Barry said, “I do not feel gay people should adopt children because men and women bring certain unique qualities to parenting that two men or two women could never provide.” Like Barry, Karly believed: “In my personal opinion I do not think homosexual people should be allowed to legally adopt children. I feel this way because I think that children should have a male and a female figure in their life. I believe that this is the way God intended for children to be raised.” Barry and Karly’s viewpoints almost mirrored that of Karen who said: “In my opinion, I do not think it should be legal for homosexual people to adopt children. As I am an individual who has been raised with Christian views, my religious beliefs definitely play a part in the reason I feel this way. I do not think it was God’s intentions for homosexual people to get married or for them to have children, which is above all else the most important aspect of all decisions.” Like Karly and Karen, Octavia described the rearing of children by heterosexual couples as the way “it was intended to be.” She wrote:

“My personal view regarding this question is based on the traditional views that children are to be brought up between the unions of heterosexual couples. That is how it was intended to be and it is the only way to naturally procreate. This is not always the case and today we are seeing many couples of the opposite sex forming perfectly adequate lives and raising children. Research has shown that children that are brought up in a same sex home fare just as well as children who are raised by heterosexual couples.”

Like the aforementioned women, Tara also believes in heterosexuality:

“Personally, I don’t think people should be allowed to legally adopt children. I am a strong Catholic and as a faith, we believe solely in heterosexuality, as it is stated in the bible. Each child, in my opinion, deserves a loving mother and father, not two moms or two dads. Although adoption is a potentially good thing for homosexual couples, I just don’t think it is morally right. The biggest advantage for a homosexual couple to adopt is that they would be able to have children and raise them, since it is biologically impossible for two females or two males to reproduce. It could be an advantage on the child’s part because they may be more open to the idea of homosexuality, which is looked down upon by many.”

The opinion that children should be reared by a mother and a father was promoted by Elizabeth who wrote:

“I do not think that homosexuals should be allowed to adopt children because I believe that every child deserves a mother AND a father. Same sex relationships do not provide the necessary environment to raise children. Mothers and fathers provide unique health for a child. Most adoptive children have experienced previous abandonment trauma and therefore need a stable environment with a mother and a father. Numerous studies show that children who are raised without a father and a mother have a significantly harder time in life. In addition, homosexual relationships tend to be unstable. I really see no potential advantage for the adopted children or parents.”

In support of the views advanced thus far, Nancy believes homosexuality is a symptom of an ‘accept everything’ culture. She provided the following perspective:

“A part of me wants to say yes and a part of me wants to say no, but there seems to be more reasons why I will say no to this question rather than why I would say yes. Being that we are living in a society nowadays that accepts everything that comes their way, homosexuality is one of those. However, religious beliefs aside, why should a person or a couple be given the right to adopt a child when they could conceive of one if they wanted to, and if they couldn’t then maybe they weren’t meant to have children. After all, if things are difficult to accomplish it usually means because there’s something wrong going against what is right. Children who need to be adopted have been through enough already, why put them in a home with 2 moms or 2 dads to confuse them about life even more. Like we have learned in class, children who come from a 2 parent household turn out far better than those who do not, and never once is a “2 parent household” defined as homosexual parents, it’s defined as a mother and a father.”

Ambivalence Regarding Gay Adoption

Qualitative analysis of the narrative data revealed five females (16%) were ambivalent or uncertain regarding how they felt about gay adoption. Interestingly, one participant believed that children fare better when they are reared in a male-female headed household and problems could result if a child is reared by two opposite-sex parents. Furthermore, the ambivalence of two participants regarding gay adoption was based on the Bible and/or their religious values. In regards to the former, Sarah wrote:

“The question states: “Should homosexual people be allowed to legally adopt?” I lean both ways. I do not agree with it fully but I do not disagree with it fully. I believe homosexuals should be allowed to adopt because they are just like anybody else. They want a family and they are capable of raising a child. There are so many children out there in the foster care program and adoption program that need to be adopted and loved. As long as they have a functional and stable home and are making good money, they should be allowed to adopt. In agreeing with the no, I believe children need to be raised in a house with both a mother and a father. If it is two men and they have a girl, the child might not be raised the same if they had a mother in the house. If there are two mothers and they have a boy, they will both have a male figure to influence them. If children grow up in a homosexual home, children will most likely bully them because they have two dads or two moms.”

Contrastingly, God, the Bible, and religious values were foundational arguments articulated by two female participants. To illustrate this, Celeste wrote:

“After reading the material I still have no idea how I feel about this topic. There is that one side of me that says if there are good people out there willing to adopt a child that obviously no one else wants then let them adopt them. The fact that it happens to be a same sex couple should hold no weight in the adoption. However, there is the other side of me that was brought up learning what the bible says about men that are lovers of men and women that are lovers of women. In my opinion, the reading begs the question if where was no religion and no bible would there even be a debate about whether or not gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to adopt.”

Like Celeste, Sheila also values religion, but feels the need to make a distinction between how different “believers” feel about this topic. Sheila expressed herself in this way:

“I have a very conflicted view on this issue. In one sense, from a perspective of equality and justness, I feel that Gays have every right to adopt and have the capability to raise healthy, happy children who grow into responsible, productive citizens in society. In another sense, my sense of religious responsibility, the part that comes from society and the perspective of eternal salvation, urges me to share the gospel and discourage same sex relationships. We know that children will model after their parents and in turn this creates a value for freedom of choice in sexual orientation, which creates another generation that is lost from God. I feel a sadness and stress and conflict on this topic. To be honest, I have not educated myself to the best of my ability about what my God is truly telling me on this issue vs. what other believers are saying. At best I have tried to discern, which believers are being understanding vs. the radical.”

While Yvette believes that the love that children receive from their parents is important, she also promoted and “nurturing” and “protective” qualities that mothers and fathers bring to the parenting experience. She provided this extended narrative of her feelings:

“It is hard for me to decide on a side in the situation of gays and lesbians being able to adopt. In the end I think what is best for the child is what needs to be considered. Some of the time I am pulled toward the “yes” argument because if a child grows up believing that they have two moms and two dads and loves them both dearly then it would be a shame to see that child get ripped away from one of them if another dies and the other is not allowed to take care of them anymore. But I am pulled toward the “no” argument because I do feel that children should be raised by a mother and a father because these two genders are what naturally create a child so are they not supposed to be present as the two main caregivers? It is good to have the nurturing mother and the protective father, although I am not saying that gays and lesbians cannot provide both nurturing and protective qualities. In the end, my gut tells me that I am on the “no” side mainly because I do not feel there is enough evidence to prove that children who grow up in a gay household turn out the same way as children with both a mother and a father and I am not concerned about the child’s well-being.”

Like the others, Helen was also conflicted on how she felt about gay adoption. She provided this lengthy narrative to articulate her feelings:

“I have no problem with homosexual relationships because who am I to judge someone else who is doing what makes them most happy. With that being said, the question of should homosexual people be allowed to legally adopt children was one that was very hard for me to answer. On the one hand, if a couple is willing to take a child in as one of their own they should be able to do that. Homosexual couples can provide love just like any heterosexual couple and love is love no matter what form it comes in. These children are probably in an orphanage or in a foster home without any sense of belonging. They dream of having someone to love them and I feel like it is not my place to stop them from having someone to love them just because the people just so happen to like the same gender. On the other hand, children can be so cruel. In most cases, when the child’s classmates find out that he has “two daddies” they will use that as ammunition to tease and bully him about. Bullying is a serious epidemic and severe cases can lead to suicide. Less serious cases can also be extremely traumatic to a child. Another thing is that these children won’t have a model of a male/female relationship in their life.”

Discussion

This mixed-method study relied on both quantitative and qualitative approaches to determine how 31 college students from a large university in the southern region of the country feel about gay adoption before and after viewing the documentary *We Are Dad* (2005). The overwhelming majority of college students in this study believed same-sex couples should be allowed to legally adopt children. Results in the current study have made a substantial contribution to the current scholarship related to college students’ attitudes regarding homosexuality as well as the right of these individuals to become the legal parents of children in the foster care system. More directly, this study accomplished this by identifying the attitudes of a group of college students.

The results of this study revealed a slight increase (from 49% to 55% and 16% to 29% respectively) in the number of students’ that “very much support” or “support” gay people adopting children in the foster care system” after viewing a documentary that chronicled the challenges of a featured couple. In addition, and related to the increased support of gay couples adopting, there was a slight decrease (from 16% to 13%) in the number of students who “very much opposed to gay people adopting children in the foster care system” gay people adopting. Interestingly, although one student agreed with both statements (“do not oppose or support”), after viewing the documentary, this student’s position changed from “somewhat opposed” to “support.”

The Contact hypothesis, and/or its successor the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis are especially useful theoretical frameworks to analyze the changing attitudes of students, as well as begin to address challenges between intergroup relations between heterosexual persons and the LGBT community. The United States is characterized by a range of different groups that co-exist, whether peacefully or not, and that primarily advocate for equal treatment under its legal system. Since the rights of LGBT persons is an area that is constantly debated (Murphy, 2011; Schumm, 2012), it is important that scholars further examine this issue.

By having students view the documentary *We Are Dad*, (2005) we introduced them to an environment that challenged normative notions of family and what constituted suitable parents and homes for the well-being of children. When observing the results, we see similarities between students changing attitudes towards gay and lesbian parents and observed intergroup relations that social psychologists have studied when observing other different social groups interacting with one another (e.g., Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001; Brewer & Miller, 1984; Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004). A pivotal contribution to this arena was made by Allport (1979), who proposed the “Contact Hypothesis.”

Allport (1979) examined the origins of intergroup prejudice and developed several influential policy recommendations to improve intergroup relations. He proposed that the best way to reduce hostility between groups was to bring them together. However, he argued that contact alone was not enough for positive attitude change. He qualified his argument with conditions that were important to the reduction of intergroup hostility and stereotypes. These conditions included that each group in the contact situation should have equal status, experience a cooperative atmosphere, work on common goals, have institutional support, be made aware of group similarities and differences, have positive expectations and that the members of the conflicting groups perceive each other as typical members of their group (Allport, 1979; Hewstone & Brown, 1986).

Although Allport’s hypothesis, as well as other theorists that have discussed the contact hypothesis (Brown, Brown, Jackson, Sellers, & Manuel, 2003; Crisp & Turner, 2009; Dividio, Eller, & Hewstone, 2011; Mazziotta, Mummendey, & Wright, 2011; Wright, 2009) within the context of face-to-face contact, our study results highlight the need that this theory extend to include education on other groups as well. All the conditions of Allport’s theory are present in our study, namely: (1) students gained a better understanding of their privilege, while simultaneously learning about the unequal rights of LGBT persons when it comes to adoption; (2) the classroom fostered a safe space for students to voice their opinions and respect one another despite differences of opinions on the subject matter; (3) the common goal between what the students want and the gay parents in the film was the well-being of the children; (4) the professor and associated researchers supported and valued student opinions as well as the views of the documentary subjects; (5) both prior to and more keenly after the film students became aware of the similarities and differences between themselves and the gay parents in the documentary; and (6) positive resolutions were searched and hoped for as a result of viewing and discussing this issue. The major difference between Allport’s work and our work, which is modeled from both Allport’s and Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes’s (2005) work, is that the two groups are not necessarily face-to-face. However, like Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes, we did not see this as a limitation of our study, but rather an important feature as showing this documentary allowed students to learn more about the out-group prior to interacting in a hostile manner towards that group based on prior learned stereotypes and assumptions. Furthermore, our work distinguishes itself from Schiappa et al’s (2005) work because it goes beyond the focus of language learning to understand parasocial interaction as an influence on social distance and prejudice.

Fundamentally, the results of our study reflect changing attitudes regarding the adoption of children in the foster care system by gay parents through intergroup/parasocial contact. In particular, showing the students the documentary acted as a form of parasocial contact. Re-examining the contact hypothesis, Batson, Polycarpou, Harmon-Jones, Imho, Mitchener, Bednor, Klein and Highberger (1997) revealed empathy for a member of a stigmatized out-group can result in more favorable attitudes towards the out-group as a whole. Although the contact hypothesis usually involves face-to-face contact, as stated earlier, showing this video was a form of contact between the students and gay parents.

In their model of de-categorization, Brewer and Miller (1984, 1988) build on the original contact hypothesis, by proposing that the goal of contact is a non-category-based interaction. A major consequence of category-based interaction involves the tendency to depersonalize members of an out-group who are treated as if they are part of a homogeneous or undifferentiated category. In order to achieve more harmonious relations, they argue that respective group memberships need to be made less salient during contact, the boundaries between groups less rigid, and social relations more interpersonally oriented. Essentially, the documentary *We are Dad* (2005) made boundaries less rigid by humanizing a gay couple and focusing on their ability to care for their adopted children rather than their sexuality. The couple was “de-categorized” from their sexuality and placed in a category of adoptive parent by students. Therefore, as willing parents, they are seen as more favorable by students.

In the later stages of this work, we found that students who provided statements that supported gay adoption generally based their views on three things: (1) the belief that sexual orientation is distinctly different from a couple's ability to be good parents; (2) personal experiences with gay couples; and (3) the belief that adoption is a fundamental right of all gay couples, these couples should be discriminated against and determinations of parenting should be based on equality. Interestingly, although these students were from the south, which played a part in the selection of participants for this study, the rationales for these student's beliefs differed. In particular, while religion and morality were important to the students that disapproved of gay adoption, capability and legality were central to the students that supported gay adoption.

Overall, the findings herein support those of previous studies in which college students have greater support for members of the gay community (Raiz, 2006). Since positive attitudes of a few participants regarding gay adoption of children in the foster care system were based on one individual seeing a family member (gay aunt) successfully parent "two beautiful boys" or another student personally developing friendships with gay couples, students with this level of face-to-face contact may have, over time, developed greater empathy for the plight of these couples than students that disapproved or were skeptical of the adoption of children in the foster care by gay couples (Howe, 2013). Furthermore, it seems that direct and in some cases even indirect contact with gay couples can positively alter the perceptions of college students regarding the adoption of children in the foster care system by gay individuals. A particularly noteworthy finding that extends the contact hypothesis offered by Alport (1979) was the student that mentioned television talk show host and comedienne Ellen DeGeneres and her partner Portia. While this student has not in all likelihood personally met DeGeneres or her partner, or interacted with these women for any length of time, she has obviously observed qualities in these women that she believed would make them "excellent parents." Thus, in this case, not directly meeting DeGeneres or her partner yet indirectly interacting with them via several television (e.g., talk show; interviews; comedy performances, etc.) and printed (articles) venues has led her to have a more positive and empathetic view of this couple, which may invariably extend to non-celebrity couples like Roger Croteau and Steven Lofton, who were featured in *We Are Dad* (2005).

Interestingly, several college students used the word "loving" to refer to the types of homes that are best for children. Thus, for these young men and women, love should take center stage in the lives of these children and not the sexual orientation of the parents. Furthermore, direct or indirect contact with gay couples may have invariably motivated several college students to support the adoption of children in the foster care system by gay parents because doing so is an "equal rights" issue. Fundamentally, because these students do not see where the sexual orientation of parents has anything to do with their ability to parent, "equality" necessitates that gay couples have the same rights as heterosexual couples in regards to adoption. Due to their greater empathy for the challenges experienced by gay couples (Howe, 2013), students that stressed the equality that should be granted these couples may be less likely to discriminate against individuals based on sexual orientation, and may have less conservative views regarding sexual orientation (Howe, 2013).

Conversely, students that disapproved of gay adoption of children in the foster care system did so on the grounds that heterosexuality is the proper context in which to rear children as men and women bring "certain unique qualities" to parenting that gay couples cannot provide, self-identified as highly religious, and actively resisted the 'accept everything' mindset that permeated society. Since many conservative religious organizations generally condemn homosexuality, these students may be less likely to increase their level of contact with gay couples, and may in some cases, have willingly abstained from associating with couples who were gay. Thus, it seems that the contact offered in *We Are Dad* (2005) gave these students the opportunity that they would not otherwise seek, to learn about the challenges experienced by a gay couple that desire to not only adopt children, but those with special needs.

On the other hand, there are two reasons why students may have been ambivalent regarding the adoption of children in the foster care by gay parents. For one, although these students are strongly religious, and value heterosexuality, as social science majors, they have more knowledge about the multiple challenges that children in the foster care system experience than students in the "hard sciences." Because of this knowledge, these students may find it hard to reconcile their religious values against those of children in the foster care that would benefit from a stable parent home. In addition, students that were conflicted regarding this issue may find it hard to accept that children be allowed to age out of the foster care system than be cared for by couples that want to adopt them. Although they may disagree with homosexuality in general and gay adoption in particular, they may see the well-being of children as a bigger issue than the sexual orientation of the parents.

Taken together, students that disapproved or were skeptical of gay adoption most likely had less contact with gay couples, which may reinforce or reaffirm negative stereotypes of these couples offered by the primary individuals in their social circles (e.g., family, friends, or church members).

Limitations of the Current Study

Although this study extends the scholarly dialogue related to same-sex adoption, the limitations of this study should be noted. For one, the small sample size makes it difficult to determine whether college students as a group generally support same-sex adoption. However, due to the similarity of these students to the general population of college students, their responses give primary indication that student attitudes are changing and the use of parasocial contact is one way of impacting attitudes, especially in contemporary times where technological advances has made access to the world so efficient, speedy, and rampant. Also, as the study lacked gender and racial diversity, this further limit the findings presented herein. This too does not become a major issue because so many colleges are focused on increasing diversity in classrooms (educators, as well as students), attitudes are sure to bleed over as Allport found with face-to-face interaction increasing between different groups on college campuses. Furthermore, as the participants were college students in a social science field that focuses on family dynamics, their collective knowledge of what “family” is and what “family” looks like may be different from college students in other fields of study. In other words, being a college student in a social science field gives students a deeper knowledge of what children and families need to grow and thrive than students that do not have this basic knowledge. This limitation to is minimal as the social sciences are among the top areas that college students are pursuing degree, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2013). This means that if this study were to be pursued quantitatively at the national level, the social sciences would create a large enough and diverse enough sample to be representative for college-aged students.

The findings of a recent study (Holland, Matthews, & Scott, 2013) further bear this out as in addition to being female, having more liberal Christian traditions, a non-Christian faith, being non-religious, as well as self-identifying as LGBT, students in the College of Arts and Sciences were generally more tolerant of the LGBT population. In addition, and related to the earlier point, since the students had annual incomes in the \$10,000 and below range, the current sample lacked socioeconomic diversity. Furthermore, since most of the participants in our study did not have children, one must also be cautious when extending the findings of this study to college students with children, who are within and outside of the age group of this sample of college students. However, in spite of these limitations, this study is the first to quantitatively and qualitatively examine how a group of college students feel about same-sex adoption. The findings do not create generalizability with regards to how all college students view same-sex adoption, however, they do suggest greater acceptance of diverse family forms. In addition, these findings provide empirical support for the contact hypothesis in increasing positive social relations between the heterosexual and LGBT community.

Directions for Future Research

There are four ways that future studies can expound upon the findings that have been presented here. First, future research should seek the perspectives of a more diverse group of college students. Through exploring the views of college students who represent different ages, races, majors, marital and parental statuses, geographic regions, religions, and socioeconomic levels, future research may reveal more varied themes than the ones presented in this study. Second, future studies should explore the “unique qualities” that college students believed gay and heterosexual couples bring to the parenting experience. In particular, such an analysis would reveal those characteristics that are similar or dissimilar between gay and heterosexual couples. Third, as one female in the class identified as gay, we urge future work in this area to explore how gay college students feel about gay adoption as well as the U.S. Supreme Court’s recent ruling on gay marriage. Since this female has been in a “same-sex relationship for going on ten years,” it is important to examine the types of stability that these couples in relatively stable relationships, like their heterosexual counterparts, bring to the parenting experience, as well as how this largely invisible subset of the gay population feel about marriage and adoption. Last, the findings in this study beg scholars to conduct longitudinal studies that chart changes (approval, disapproval, or skepticism) of gay adoption over time. We believe conducting a cross-time analysis is important as the participants in this study were on average 22 years of age and their opinions on this topic may remain stable or change over time.

Conclusion

In light of the recent decisions made by the U.S. Supreme Court regarding the constitutionality of marriage (Gorman, 2015), we are confident that greater attention will be given to the implications of this decision for the right of gay couples to adopt children in the foster care system. The findings of our study indicate that in the south, a geographical region in which students are generally more religious than in other regions of the country, capability and legality motivated students to support gay adoption while morality and religion moved other students to disapprove of gay adoption. Furthermore, students that were skeptical of gay adoption were no doubt conflicted by what is best for children, their moral and religious values, a desire that gay parents have the same rights as their heterosexual counterparts, and that the parenting of gay couples, not their sexual orientation, take center stage. It is our hope that the findings in this study will further the scholarly dialogue regarding gay adoption as well as the needs of children in the foster care system, and more specifically, the short and long-term effects of these decisions for gay couples and the children that are in their care.

References

- Allen, K. & Demo, D. (1995). The families of lesbians and gay men: A new frontier in family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 111-27.
- Allport, G. W. (1979). *The Nature of Prejudice*, 25th ed. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books Publishing, L.L.C.
- Allport, G. W. (1979). *The nature of prejudice* (25th anniversary edition). Reading, MT: Addison-Wesley.
- Andersen, M., & Hill Collins, P. (1994). *Race, class, and gender: An anthology*, 2nd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Avery, A., Chase, J., Johansson, L., Litvak, S., Montero, D., & Wydra, M. (2007). America's changing attitudes toward homosexuality, civil unions, and same-gender marriage: 1977-2004. *Social Work* 52(1), 71-79.
- Batson, C., Polycarpou, M., Harmon-Jones, E., Imho, H., Mitchener, E., Bednor, L., Klein, T. & Highberger, L. (1997). Empathy and attitudes: can feelings for a member of a stigmatized group improve feelings toward the group? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 105-118.
- Baunach, D. M., Burgess, E. O., & Muse, C. S. (Jan/Feb 2010). Southern (dis)comfort: Sexual prejudice and contact with gay men and lesbians in the south. *Sociological Spectrum*, 30(1), 30-64.
- Berger, D. (April 12, 2012). Breaking down barriers so foster kids can find a family. Retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/12/us/cnnheroes-wing-kovarik-gay-adoption>
- Berlang, L. N. (2013). Prejudices, stereotypes and other "crap:" Countering misconceptions and normative assumptions around sexuality and gender in LGBTQ-themed young adult novels.
- Blake, L., Carone, N., Raffanella, E., Slutsky, J., Ehrhardt, A. A., & Golombok, S. (2017). Gay fathers' motivations for and feelings about surrogacy as a path to parenthood. *Human Reproduction*, 32(4), 860-867.
- Bowen, A. M., & Bourgeois, M. J. (2001). Attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students: The contribution of pluralistic ignorance, dynamic social impact, and contact theories. *Journal of American College Health*, 50(2), 91-96.
- Bradley, R. R. (2007). MAKING A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A MOLEHILL: A LAW ANDECONOMICS DEFENSE OF SAME-SEX FOSTER CARE ADOPTIONS. *Family Court Review*, 45(1), 133-148. doi:10.1111/j.1744-1617.2007.00133.x
- Brewer, M., & Miller, N. (1984). Beyond the contact hypothesis: Theoretical perspectives on desegregation. In N. Miller & M. B. Brewer (Eds), *Groups in contact: The psychology of desegregation* (pp. 281-302). Orlando, FL: Academic Press. ----- (1988). Contact and co-operation: When do they work? In P. Katz & D. Taylor (Eds), *Eliminating racism: Profiles in controversy* (pp. 315-326). New York: Plenum Press.
- Brodzinsky, D. (2003). Adoption by lesbians and gays: A national survey of adoption agency policies, practices, and attitudes. Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. Retrieved from: <http://www.adoptioninstitute.org>.
- Brown, K. T., Brown, T. N., Jackson, J. S., Sellers, R. M., & Manuel, W. J. (2003). Teammates on and off the field? Contact with Black teammates and the racial attitudes of White student athletes. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 33, 1379-1403.

- Calzo, J., & Ward, L. (2009). Media exposure and viewers' attitudes toward homosexuality: evidence for mainstreaming or resonance? *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 53(2), 280-299.
- Cody, P. A., Farr, R. H., McRoy, R. G., Ayers-Lopez, S. J., & Ledesma, K. J. (2017). Youth perspectives on being adopted from foster care by lesbian and gay parents: Implications for families and adoption professionals. *Adoption Quarterly*, 20(1), 98-118.
- Cooper, R. L., & Fishman, J. A. (1977). A study of language attitudes. In J. A. Fishman, R. L. Cooper, & A. W. Conrad (Eds.), *The spread of English*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Gardner, R., & Lambert, W. (1972). *Attitudes and motivations in second language learning*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.
- Crawford, I., & Soliday, E. (1996). The attitude of undergraduate college students toward gay parenting. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 30(4), 63-77.
- Crisp, R. J., & Turner, R. N. (2009). Can imagined interactions produce positive perceptions? Reducing prejudice through simulated social contact. *American Psychologist*, 64(4), 231-240.
- Davies, M. (2004). Correlates of negative attitudes toward gay men: Sexism, male role norms, and male sexuality. *Journal of Sex Research*, 41(3), 259-266. doi: 10.1080/00224490409552233
- DeHaan, S., Kuper, L. E., Magee, J. C., Bigelow, L., & Mustanski, B. S. (2013). The interplay between online and offline explorations of identity, relationships, and sex: A mixed-methods study with LGBT youth. *Journal of Sex Research*, 50(5), 421-434.
- Dovidio, J. F., Eller, A., & Hewstone, M. (2011). Improving intergroup relations through direct, extended and other forms of indirect contact. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 14, 147-160
- Demo, D., & Allen, K. (1996). Diversity within lesbian and gay families: Challenges and implications for family theory and research. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 13, 415-434.
- Ellis, S., Kitzinger, C., & Wilkinson, S. (2002). Attitudes toward lesbians and gay men and support for lesbian and gay human rights among psychology students. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 44, 121-138.
- Ganong, L., & Coleman, M. (2017). Gay and lesbian couples in stepfamilies. In *Stepfamily Relationships* (pp. 111-124). Springer US.
- Goldberg, A. E., Black, K., Sweeney, K., & Moyer, A. (2017). Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Adoptive Parents' Perceptions of Inclusivity and Receptiveness in Early Childhood Education Settings. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 31(1), 141-159.
- Gorman, M. (June 26, 2015). Gay Marriage Is Legal in All 50 States: Supreme Court. Newsweek. Retrieved from: <http://www.newsweek.com/supreme-court-gay-marriage-legal-all-50-states-347204>
- Herek, G. (1988). Heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men: Correlates and gender differences. *Journal of Sex Research*, 25(4), 451-477. doi:10.1080/00224498809551476.
- Herek, G. M. (2002). Gender gaps in public opinion about lesbians and gay men. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 66(1), 40-66. doi: 10.1086/338409
- Hewstone, M., & Brown, R. (1986). Contact is not enough: An intergroup perspective on the 'Contact Hypothesis'. In M. Hewstone, & R. Brown (Eds.), *Contact and conflict in intergroup encounters*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Holland, L., Matthews, T. L., & Schott, M. R. (2013). "That's so gay!" Exploring college student's attitudes toward the LGBT population. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 60(4), 575-595.
- Horvat, M. (March 3, 2005). We Are Dad - Documentary. Retrieved from: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0447538/>
- Howe, D. (2013). *Empathy: What it is and why it matters*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jenkins, Y. M. (Ed.). (2014). *Diversity in college settings: Directives for helping professionals*. Routledge.
- Johansson, T., & Andreasson, J. (2017). Gay fatherhood. In *Fatherhood in Transition* (pp. 139-162). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Johnson, R. S. (September 10, 2013). A same-sex couple's struggle to adopt. Retrieved from: <http://hub.jhu.edu/magazine/2013/fall/gay-couple-adoption>
- Kane, M. D. (2013). Finding "Safe" Campuses: Predicting the presence of LGBT student groups at North Carolina colleges and universities. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 60(6), 828-852. doi:10.1080/00918369.2013.774837

- Lambert, E. G., Ventura, L. A., Hall, D. E., & Cluse-Tolar, T. (2006). College students' views on gay and lesbian issues: Does education make a difference? *Journal of Homosexuality*, 50(4), 1-30.
- Lehman, M., & Thornwall, M. (2010). College students' attitudes towards homosexuality. *Journal of Student Research*, 1, 118-138.
- Lopez, K. A., & Willis, D. G. (2004). Descriptive versus Interpretive Phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(5), 726-735.
- Lumby, M. (1976). Homophobia: The quest for a valid scale. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 2, 39-47.
- Mazziotta, A., Mummendey, A. & Wright, C. S. (2011). Vicarious intergroup contact effects: Applying social-cognitive theory to intergroup contact research. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 14, 255-274.
- McDonald, T., & Brook, J. (2009). Typologies of children in foster care for reasons other than abuse or neglect. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 3(4), 391-408. doi:10.1080/15548730903347861
- McKee, K. (2017). The politics of adoption and fostering in the United States. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 36(2), 94-98.
- Millham J., San Miguel, C., & Kellogg, R. (1976). A factor-analytic conceptualization of attitudes toward male and female homosexuals. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 2, 3-10.
- Murphy, T. F. (2011) Same-sex marriage: Not a threat to marriage or children. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 42, 288-304.
- Nyberg, K., & Alston, J. (1976). Analysis of public attitudes toward homosexual behavior. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 2, 99-107.
- Ollen, E. W., & Goldberg, A. E. (2016). Parent-child conversations about legal inequalities in gay-and lesbian-parent families in Florida. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 12(4), 365-385.
- Paolini, S, Hewstone, M., Cairns, E., & Voci, A. (2004). Effects of direct and indirect cross-group friendships on judgments of Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland: The mediating role of an anxiety-reduction mechanism. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 770-786.
- Paolini, S., Hewstone, M., Cairns, E., & Voci, A. (2004). Effects of direct and indirect cross-group friendships on judgments of Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland: The mediation role of an anxietyreduction mechanism. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 770-786.
- Patterson, C. (2009). Children of lesbian and gay parents: Psychology, law, and policy. *American Psychologist*, 64(8), 727-736.
- Patterson, C. J. (2013). Family lives of lesbian and gay adults. In *Handbook of Marriage and the Family* (pp. 659-681). New York: Springer US.
- Patterson, C. J., & Redding, R. E. (1996) Lesbian and gay families with children: Implications of social science research for policy. *Journal of Social Issues*, 52, 29-50.
- Pierce, Y. (2012). PUT THE TOWN ON NOTICE: SCHOOL DISTRICT LIABILITY AND LGBT BULLYING NOTIFICATION LAWS. *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform*, 46(1), 303-347.
- Raiz, L. (2006). College students' support of rights for members of the gay community. *Journal of Poverty*, 10(2), 53-75.
- Rivers, I. (1995). The victimization of gay teenagers in schools: Homophobia in education. *Pastoral care*, 13, 35-41.
- Ryan, S. D., Pearlmuter, S., & Groza, V. (2004). Coming out of the closet: Opening agencies to gay and lesbian adoptive parents. *Social Work*, 49(1), 85-95. doi: 10.1093/sw/49.1.85
- Schieppa, E., Gregg, P., & Hewes, D. (2005). The Parasocial Contact Hypothesis. *Communication Monographs*, 72(1), 92-115
- Schumm, W. R. (2012). Methodological decisions and the evaluation of possible effects of different family structures on children: The New Family Structures Survey (NFSS). *Social Science Research*, 41, 1357-1366.
- Should Homosexual People Be Allowed To Legally Adopt Children? Retrieved from:
<http://www.debate.org/opinions/should-homosexual-people-be-allowed-to-legally-adopt-children>

- Storms, M. (1978). Attitudes toward homosexuality and femininity in men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 3, 257-263.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory, procedures, and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Strong, B., & Cohen, T. F. (2013). *The marriage and family experience: Intimate relationships in a changing society* (12th ed). Cengage Learning.
- Tavernise, S. (June 13, 2011). Adoptions by Gay Couples Rise: Despite Barriers. Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/14/us/14adoption.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>
- Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource* (3rd ed). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). Digest of Education Statistics, Chapter 3.
- Whitt, E. J., Edison, M. I., Pascarella, E. T., Terenzini, P. T., & Nora, A. (2001). Influences on student's openness to diversity and challenge in the second and third years of college. *Journal of Higher education*, 172-204.
- Wright, S. C. (2009). Cross-group contact effects. In S. Otten, T. Kessler & K. Sassenberg (Eds.), *Intergroup relations: The role of emotion and motivation* (pp. 262–283). New York, NY: Psychology Press.