

# Social work students' comfort with gay and lesbian families

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SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS' COMFORT WITH  
GAY AND LESBIAN FAMILIES

by

JEN ACKERMAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Social Work  
in the College of Health and Public Affairs  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida  
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Ana Leon

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## **Abstract**

Despite recent advancements in legislation and policies regarding gay and lesbian Americans, negative attitudes and perceptions toward this population still exist. Anecdotal information from social work classroom interactions suggests that biases against gays and lesbian families may exist among those being trained as helping professionals. This study examined social work student comfort with gay and lesbian families. The researcher used an exploratory-descriptive research design, with a sample of 85 Bachelors level social work students (BSW) and Masters level social work students (MSW) who completed the 52 item online questionnaire related to gay and lesbian parenting. The findings from the research suggest the presence of a statistically significant relationship between students' attitudes towards gays and lesbians and students' comfort level with same sex parents. The researcher discusses the significance of the study and the implications for social work practice and education.

I would like to dedicate this Honors in the Major Undergraduate Thesis to all the struggling LGBT youth throughout this country. My passion for this subject is driven by the need for progress. I believe there is no effort too small to bring about change and I firmly believe that true equality is possible, hang in there.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Statement of the Problem**

Discrimination in the United States is commonly experienced by many individuals perceived to be “different” in mainstream society. Discrimination against any minority can lead to many problems for that specific group. When an entire group of people are denied rights that others take for granted, it can cause lasting psychological and emotion damage for the individual as well as for the society as a whole (House, Van Horn, Coppeans & Steplemen, 2011). Gays and lesbians in the United States are often on the receiving end of discrimination and prejudice. According to a 2011 report from the Williams Institute of UCLA, there are approximately four million American adult citizens who identify as gay or lesbian. This makes up about 3.3 percent of the population, and out of that 3.3. percent, 1.1 are female and 2.2 are male (Gates & Cooke, 2011). The Williams Institute estimates that there are about 111,033 same sex couples currently raising biologically related children under the age of 18 and about 535, 431 same sex couples raising children that are not their “own” (Gates & Cooke, 2011).

Throughout the country, state governments are addressing discriminatory practices against this population more than ever. Within every state in the country, there are organizations forging different battles within the realms of employment protection, housing protection, legal marriage and adoption policy for the gay and lesbian population. On the federal level, gay and lesbian issues remain present with policies such as “Defense of Marriage Act,” and recently repealed “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,” (Stone & Ward, 2011). The Defense of Marriage Act or “DOMA,” is a federal law defining marriage as between one man and one woman. Don’t Ask Don’t Tell was a federal law that prohibited any men and women serving in the military from

being open about their homosexuality (Stone & Ward, 2011). Currently one of the most controversial issues affecting this population have to do with marriage and parenting rights (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). This includes different interpretations among the states on recognized marriage and state by state adoption laws (Gates, Badgett, Macomber & Chambers, 2007).

Throughout the country views, laws and policies still discriminate against gays and lesbians as parents (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Utah and Mississippi are two states that specifically prohibit same sex couples from adoption, while Michigan indirectly restricts gay and lesbian couples with a policy that only allows legally married couples to adoption (Gates, Badgett, Macomber & Chambers, 2007). As recently as 2010, Florida was also a state that specifically excluded gay and lesbian couples from adoption. However in October of 2010, the ban on allowing homosexuals to adopt was lifted (Kunerth, 2010). The majority of states in the country allow same sex couples to adopt, and continued support from the Obama Administration has brought the importance of gay and lesbian equality to the public forefront (Gates, Badgett, Macomber & Chambers, 2007) (Gast, 2012).

The challenges for gay and lesbian parents wishing to have children do not, however, end with discriminatory views (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Despite progressive moves socially and politically to help decrease discrimination, when it comes to parenting issues, the gay and lesbian population faces other complications in reaching their parenthood goals. Typically this population has to seek alternative ways to start or expand their families as men and women in same sex couples cannot reproduce without outside assistance. Another struggle for same sex parent households is the lack of legal protection ensuring that parents in a same sex household

who are not biologically related to the child have the same basic rights as heterosexual parents (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). For instance, in the case of a death, an accident of the biological parent or separation from the biological parents, the non-biological same sex parent is legally vulnerable to losing custody of the children. Typically since there is no recognized marriage, adoption and guardianship are both options to remedy this threat (Ritenhouse, 2011). However both of these options are time consuming, can be expensive and must be pursued before any death or accident occurs (Patterson & Riskind, 2010).

Current debate focuses on whether or not gays and lesbians are capable or should be allowed to parent children, including fostering and adopting children (Hicks 2005). While the obstacles have not stopped countless families from forming, it has no doubt slowed the process for many more.

It is clear that opinion within the political and social realms of society there is still a dominant demonstration of negative views on gays and lesbians as parents (Hicks, 2005). These segments throughout society continue to be a push for equality in all forums for this population including within legislation, policy, tolerance and acceptance. Social work, a profession built on embracing diversity, also strives to support this population. In general, social workers are taught to treat clients and populations equality and to challenge dominant institutions in society, such as heterosexism (Swank & Raiz, 2010). In theory this support is supposed to extend to gays and lesbians in the role of parents. However this general support does not guarantee that all professional social workers are going to accept and recognize gay and lesbian parents. Some research indicates that many professionals fail to overcome their personal biases and thus do not provide the best possible service to clients (Swank & Raiz, 2010).

The literature indicates that gender and education are reliable predictors of attitudes towards this population as a whole, however there is limited research that examines social work students' attitudes toward this population as parents (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009). This research will utilize an exploratory descriptive research design to examine whether university social work students feel comfortable with gay and lesbian families. In this case comfort level refers to openness, willingness, and capacity to work with this specific part of the population. The researcher will utilize the findings to identify and discuss implications for social work education and practice.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Gays and Lesbians in American Culture**

The gay and lesbian rights movement has steadily progressed since the birth of the movement in 1969, sparked in New York during the Stonewall Riots (Vejar, Oravec & Hall, 2011). Before the Stonewall Riots, the gay and lesbian rights movement mainly consisted of a small number of men and women activists. In 1951 the Mattachine Society was created and five years later in 1956 the Daughters of Bilitis appeared (Hall, 2010). Founded by Henry Hay in Los Angeles, the Mattachine Society was an organized activism group that started by holding discussion based focus groups and eventually began to get involved with local public relations and legal policies. While the Mattachine Society was an all male organization, the Daughter of Bilitis began in San Francisco and was an all female organization (Hall, 2010). The Daughter of Bilitis regularly joined with the Mattachine Society to stage protests and demonstrations opposing the blatant discrimination against gays and lesbians that was taking place at the time. These were the first two national gay and lesbian organizations fighting for equal rights (Hall, 2010). In 1969 the Stonewall Riots took place in New York City's Greenwich Village at the Stonewall Inn. The riot commenced because the bar patrons rallied against the police during a raid and this act instrumental in transforming the battle for gay and lesbian rights from a small number of activist organizations, to a nationwide protest for tolerance (Hall, 2010). The entire incident brought gay and lesbian rights to the forefront of history and it marks when this population joined together to end intolerance.

Sexuality is slowly becoming less taboo of a topic in the United States and is discussed openly in a variety of settings ( Ellis , Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2003). More research studies now

exist that examine general perceptions and attitudes toward the gay and lesbian population. These studies have ranged from general attitudes (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009) to perceptions on specific issues such as gays and lesbians in the institution of marriage or gays and lesbians in family functions (Johnston, Moore & Judd, 2010).

Discrimination towards the gay and lesbian population is very prominent in the United States. Anti-gay and lesbian crimes are the fastest growing reported hate crimes to date (Wallenberg, Anspach & Leon, 2011). Despite large strides in ending outright anti-gay and homophobic actions, homophobia has become institutionalized, often hidden under the guise of tolerance (Vejar & Oravecz, 2011). Gays and lesbians continue to face social and legal barriers when it comes to ordinary milestones in their lives, for example legal marriage or parenting (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). However, once considered an illness, being gay or lesbian has come a long way within public perception in some areas (Vejar, Oravecz & Hall, 2011).

In 1952 the American Psychological Association published its first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-I) (Drescher, 2010). Within the pages of listed mental disorders, homosexuality was present and described as a “sociopathic personality disturbance.” In 1968 homosexuality was updated to be classified as a “sexual deviation,” in the DSM-II. By the 1970’s the APA was bombarded with protests by medical professionals as well as gay and lesbian rights activists (Drescher, 2010). Finally in December of 1973 the APA board voted to remove homosexuality from the DSM as an illness, and was replaced by two more homosexual-related “illnesses.” In 1987 with the then latest version of the DSM, the DSM-III-R, homosexuality was finally regarded in terms of the Theory of Normal Variation and was no longer listed as any type of illness or disease. The Theory of Normal Variation regarded

homosexuality as a natural deviation from heterosexuality, an occurrence that could be compared to being born left-handed (Drescher, 2010).

The removal of homosexuality from the DSM was a considerable victory for the gay and lesbian rights movement. With homosexuality no longer regarded as an illness or medical condition, professionals, including social workers, adopted the normal variant view. The acceptance of the Theory Normal Variation within the medical profession gave the population the validation needed to continue their plight for equality (Drescher, 2010). Currently belief in the concept that homosexuality is a disease is no longer held by helping professionals in social work, psychiatric or health care. However this has not prevented certain civil rights from being withheld or from discomfort existing around gays and lesbians among the general public (Patterson & Riskind, 2010).

For example, the specific issue of gays and lesbians parenting children and forming family units is a topic that is becoming more prevalent (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). As the age for “coming out” about one's sexuality is decreasing and more young men and women confront their sexuality at a younger age, the likelihood that gay and lesbian men and women will become parents increases (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). The gap between heterosexual men and women expressing a desire to become parents is closing in (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Statistically, 52% of gay, childless men, versus 67 % of heterosexual, childless men have expressed a desire for children. This compared with 41% of childless, lesbian women expressing a desire to have children with 53% of childless, heterosexual women indicating the same, illustrates that as time goes on, this population's wish to form their own families will continue to increase (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Thus knowing common attitudes and comfort levels with gays and lesbians as



parents will provide great insight in how to help gay and lesbian headed families as well as ways to help the general population embrace this growing alternative family configuration (Maney & Cain, 1997).

Gays and lesbians forming their own families, a tradition previously perceived as acceptable only for heterosexual couples, still draws many different reactions and feelings (Hicks, 2005). There has been substantial research to disprove the various claims against gay and lesbian parenting (Hicks, 2005). There is evidence that suggests children raised by same- sex parents are not more likely to identify as gay or lesbians themselves, or any more likely to be confused about their gender role, than children raised by heterosexual parents (Hicks, 2005). There is also research that indicates that a social, cognitive, or developmental difference between children raised by gay or lesbian parents and children raised by heterosexual parents does not exist (Hicks, 2005).

In this time of social progress, the gay and lesbian community is vulnerable not only to homophobia but also the relatively new concept of homo-negativity. Modern homo-negativity is the belief that much of the outright harmful discrimination towards the gay and lesbian community has ceased and any marginalization still felt by this population is due to their own actions (Morrison, Speakman & Ryan, 2009). Camilleri and Ryan (2006) point out there is a difference between homophobia and homo-ignorance in society. This new term and concept (homo-negativity) illustrates the complexities and changes that have taken place over time in society. Homophobia is now an umbrella term with many variants underneath it. As opinion of the gay and lesbian population continues to evolve, the related concepts also evolve.

## **General Perceptions and Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Population**

Steadily the stigma behind homosexuality is decreasing as the media portrays more diverse characters (for example *Will & Grace*, *Glee*, *the Rachel Maddow Show*) and politically laws throughout the country change in favor of the population (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Currently there is no country in the world where gays and lesbians have exact equal human rights as their heterosexual counterparts (Morrison et al., 2009). There are still many legal barriers, as well as, social intolerance for this population that create challenges in everyday living for gays and lesbians. One of those challenges that will be addressed through this research proposal is the opposition to gays and lesbians as parents (Patterson & Riskind, 2010) .

Herek (1987) categorized four functions of homophobic attitudes that explain perceptions of this population. Experimental or schematic, social expressive, defensive and value expressive are the classes of homophobic attitudes. An experimental or schematic view of gays and lesbians is based on contact or relationships with individuals of that population. A social expressive perception originates from the perceptions of peers, companion groups or larger social peer groups. The defensive approach is the result of an internal instinct to alleviate one's own anxieties caused from thinking about this population. And the value expressive perception comes from one's personal belief system, which includes religiosity and spirituality (Pennington & Knight, 2010). These four classes offer different reasons for where personal perceptions of gays and lesbians come from. It has also been suggested that sexism can also be found as a factor correlated with one's views on homosexuality (Rye & Meaney, 2010). The correlation between sexist attitudes and predicted homo-negativity stems from the concept that identifying as gay or lesbian is a gender role violation. Those who strongly subscribe to traditional gender roles are

more likely to also subscribe to sexist attitudes or beliefs. Because of this strong belief in gender roles, homosexuality is also often viewed as a large violation and therefore is wrong (Rye & Meaney, 2010). Various studies found that gender is a prominent predictor of negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009 ; Rye & Meaney, 2010; Ellis, Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2008). One study suggests that men are more likely to have negative perceptions of the population because of their strong investment in masculinity (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009). Other predictors of general perceptions and attitudes of this population are demographic characteristics such as, individual belief systems, contact with the population and faith denomination (Swank & Raiz, 2010). These details about an individual can often work as predictors of their perceptions when based on previous studies linking certain characteristics to either positive or negative perceptions. Swank and Raiz (2010) note that female, white and younger individuals have been found to more positively perceive gays and lesbians. Ellis and colleagues (2008) found that males, those of an ethnic minority and those with a strong religious affiliation are the most likely to hold negative attitudes, and it was found that attitudes toward gays were more negative than lesbians (Ellis et. al 2008).

One of the most powerful predictors that influence a positive attitude towards gays and lesbians is the presence of relationships or contact with these individuals as well as a developing lenience to gender roles and avoidance of authoritarianism (Swank & Raiz, 2010). Exposure to the population or individuals in the population is known to reduce personal stigma against gays and lesbians (Swank & Raiz, 2010). Since perceptions of gays or lesbians are often tied to the belief that homosexuality disrupts gender roles, lenience to gender roles generally means that an individual does not subscribe to the belief that homosexuality is a violation. When it comes to

supporting the civil rights of this population, one study found that those who have previous or constant contact with the community are most likely to contribute support (Morrison et al., 2009). Herek also asserts that positive social interactions between an individual and a gay man or lesbian woman are correlated with positive attitudes toward the population. Herek proposed that these interactions were organized into a bigger part of the individual's knowledge structure. If an individual has had positive interactions and experiences, this is what prepares them for future interactions and experiences, thus the individual has a more positive perception of the population. Therefore a negative interaction with the population can lead to a negative perception of the population (Herek, 1987).

### **Significance of University Student Perceptions**

There has been evidence found to suggest men and women enrolled in higher education classes tend to have a more open mind and are more likely to be tolerant and accepting of social issues (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009). However negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians, among students still remain (Wallenberg, Anspach & Leon, 2011). One study with a sample of 165, found that university students were more likely to find a household with same-sex grandparents to be less unified and less likely to resolve arguments (Vejar, Oravecz & Hall, 2011). After reading one of two different scenarios, the participants completed a survey. The survey asked about student perceptions of families' unity or solidarity. This study implied that these students did not feel gay or lesbian families were as fit as heterosexual families to function as a unit (Vejar, Oravecz & Hall, 2011). Gender is a common predictor among student's attitudes toward gays and lesbians (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009).

One study suggests male students, over female students, are more likely to disagree over gay or lesbian “lifestyle,” and are less likely to support gays and lesbians gaining access to more equal rights (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009). This study was comprised of a sample of 551 college students. These students were chosen using a convenient sampling design and those who participated responded to a survey. The survey measured student attitudes toward gays and lesbians and asked questions on a likert scale, for example “ Lesbians are more masculine than other women.” The results in this study indicated that male students were less willing to socialize with lesbians or gays, than female students. These findings are especially important among students who will enter social work (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009).

Some Feminist and Queer theory exists that proposes stigma for gays and lesbians is naturally linked to matters of gender identities, heterosexism and male privilege. The concept behind these theories is that identifying as gay or lesbian can be regarded as a disturbance to “mainstream” gender roles (Swank & Raiz, 2010). Intolerance towards gays and lesbians is not the first consequence that challenging traditional gender roles raises for a community. Swank and Raiz (2010) suggest that the authoritarianism behind gender roles and the reinforced obedience to them, cause a disassociation between those who identify as gay or lesbian and those who do not. This suggestion assumes that men and women who identify as gay or lesbian do not obey gender roles and subscribe to gender roles with more leniency, causing a divide between heterosexuals and homosexuals (Swank & Raiz, 2010). The Jenkins, Lambert and Baker (2009) study also investigated whether there was significant difference between black students and white students at the Midwestern University, and their likelihood to be support of gay or lesbian issues (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009). With 551 usable responses, the results did indicate a

significant difference between the two racial groups, however it was found that the individuals participation and attendance with religious events is a stronger predictor of an individual's attitudes toward the gay and lesbian population (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009).

Herek reports an association between religious affiliation and attitudes or perceptions of gays and lesbians. As apart of the Self-Expressive function of homophobia, individuals construct their perceptions or attitudes by referencing their belief system and the gay and lesbian population becomes an instrument to express their values. These individuals base their personal opinions only on their subscribed religious and/or family values (Herek, 1987). The age of university students has been suggested to influence perceptions towards gays and lesbians and it was found that increased age correlated with an increase in positive attitudes towards this population (Ellis et al., 2003; Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009; Schellenberg, Hirt & Sears 1999).

Diversity courses taken by university student can also impact perceptions toward this population. One study found that after a sample of 108 students took a diversity course they showed a heightened understanding of how privilege and certain advantages promote inequality for the gay and lesbian population. The design for this study was a pre-test, post-test that measured changes in “heterosexual privilege awareness,” “prejudice against lesbians,” “prejudice against gay men,” and “support for same sex marriage,” for the students after the diversity course was completed (Case & Stewart, 2010). Swank and Raiz (2010) found that the major students choose can also indicate perceptions for the individual. Their study of 575 undergraduate social work students from 12 different programs in the nation, indicates that a comparison among undergraduate social work students, Masters social work students and

undergraduate psychology students, the psychology students were the most receptive to the gay and lesbian population (Swank & Raiz, 2010). This study also found that students who value compliance to the stereotypical images of femininity and masculinity within mainstream American society are often the students who are the least likely to have positive attitudes toward gays and lesbians (Swank & Raiz, 2010).

Some research has examined the general attitudes towards gays and lesbians by university or college students because the student population is the considered to be the next generation that will be taking over (Vejar, Oravec & Hall, 2011). However, there has not been much research conducted on how college or university students feel on specific social issues in regard to this population, and even less studies investigating how social work university students feel about gays and lesbians. Many students currently enrolled in higher education classes and course work, are apart of the Y Generation, born between 1982 and 1991 (Vejar, Oravec & Hall, 2011). This generation is thought to have mixed feelings toward gays and lesbians because the subject as a whole has become less taboo during the adolescent stages of their lives. For many young adults in the Y Generation it is common to have contrasting opinions on social and political issues, when compared to their parents or guardians. This is the generation that is thought to break free from the traditional ideals that for so long dictated common perceptions and attitudes (Vejar, Oravec & Hall, 2011). It is essential to know how comfortable and open the student population is to the idea of gays and lesbians parenting, because as the years go on, this is the group that will become future policy and decision makers (Vejar, Oravec & Hall, 2011). As the Y Generation replaces those in the helping professions, specifically social workers, a study on student perceptions' on gays and lesbians parenting will offer insightful knowledge on

what the future might hold on a legal and social front for this population. It is urgent concern to research further into how social work students feel about this specific issue because it can offer insight into what might happen in the future with policy or social trends within micro or macro communities, and can also illustrate current attitudes on the subject while students are still being educated (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009).

Another reason to examine how comfortable social work students are with gay and lesbian families is because it very likely that during clinical practice social workers will come into contact with these alternative families. It is imperative that future social workers confront and work through any personal biases before working with clients or communities because if these issues are not dealt with then social workers risk further marginalizing or oppressing gay and lesbian clients. Personal negative biases against the gay and lesbian population can prevent high quality service delivery by hindering a clinician's empathy or professional insight (Logie, Bridge & Bridge, 2007).

This study will provide some insights on the influence of higher education on social work student attitudes. Within social work education there is an extensive emphasis on cultural competence and the ability to work with diverse clients and populations. As the age of gay and lesbian youth coming out, decreases, it is projected that the number of same sex couples parenting will increase (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). This projection is immensely important for social work students and the social work profession because it can greatly impact clients and families in need of assistance or social services.



## **Discussion of Relevant Theory**

Throughout history there were three main theories that have influenced the perceptions of gays and lesbians (Drescher, 2010). The Theory of Normal Variation classifies being gay or lesbian as a natural occurrence. This theory views homosexuality as random assignment from birth, much like being left handed. There are no negative or positive affiliations with being gay or lesbian and it regarded as normal. The Theory of Pathology views a homosexual identity much like that of disease. Here homosexuality is a defect from the normal (heterosexuality) and an individual with these defects is perceived to have something very wrong with him/her (Drescher, 2010). Those who subscribe to this theory have a strong belief that gays and lesbians are immoral and contemptible. The last theory regarding perceptions of homosexuality is the Theory of Immaturity. This theory rests on the foundation that being homosexual is a temporary phase for adolescents and is normal during the exploration of an eventual heterosexual identity. Adults, who never identified as heterosexual and still experience homosexual tendencies, are in a state of arrested development. These theories are important because they influence how the general public, including university social work students perceive homosexuality (Drescher, 2010).

Parenthood is one of the most universal and highly valued experiences of American adults homosexual or heterosexual (Riskind & Patterson, 2010). The theories explaining attitudes toward gays and lesbians provide the underpinnings of the resistance to allowing this population to serve as parents (Hicks, 2005). Some consider the concept of gays and lesbians entering parenthood to be challenging the conventional hetero-normative notions of family (Goldberg, 2007). Gay parenting can also be interpreted as a further disruption of the belief system that a

real family is comprised of one man, one woman and the biological children they conceived together (Rye & Glenn, 2010). This concept of the nuclear family can be traced back to the Religious Coping Theory where many homo-negative perceptions can come from. Based on the existing Coping Theory, the Religious Coping Theory asserts religious based themes that are a significant part of the mechanics of coping (Trevino, Desai, Lauricella, Pargament & Mahoney, 2012). When an individual is trying to understand an event or circumstance in life an important interaction takes place between that event and the individual's personal beliefs and values. Under the Religious Coping Theory, an individual turns to their belief system to help make sense of the event. With many fundamental or Christian religions, there is an ingrained reservation against the gay and lesbian community because of a belief that this population is violating certain values, and many times an individual's personal response to this population is based on the opinion of their larger collective religion (Trevino, Desai, Lauricella, Pargament & Mahoney, 2012). Most notably organized religions that have fundamentalist values or conservative Christian ideologies, are more likely to consider gay and lesbian parented families a violation because homosexuality in general is regarded a sin or unnatural (Trevino, Desai, Lauricella, Pargament & Mahoney, 2012). Those who identify as gay or lesbian are thought of as unnatural or sinners because of the biblical scripture that sanctions procreation as only for reproduction. This is the basis for most negative attitudes or perceptions against the gay and population based on religious affiliation or values (Trevino, Desai, Lauricella, Pargament & Mahoney, 2012).

Other common arguments against gays and lesbians having children is the belief that the children will also come out as gay or lesbian, the children will not understand gender, or that it is simply unfair to the child to have gay or lesbian parents because of possible estrangement from

peers (Hicks, 2005). These points continue the concept that gays and lesbians are not “normal,” and therefore will not raise “normal,” children (Hicks, 2005). Camilleri and Ryan (2006) identified two focal areas of concern that are brought up in opposition to the gay and lesbian community parenting. The first is the “qualitative nature of homosexual relationships,” and the second is what the consequences are for children raised by gays and lesbians (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006). What the researchers meant by “qualitative nature of homosexual relationships,” is lifestyle choices that opponents of the gay and lesbian population find questionable or deviant, for example having intimate, sexual relations with members of the same sex or engaging in long term relationships with members of the same sex. So it is common those opponents of gays and lesbians parenting first disapprove of the individual’s sexuality and secondly disapprove children being raised so closely exposed to homosexuality because of the “consequences.” These consequences include the common belief that being gay or lesbian is a learned or caught trait and thus children in this type of family would have no choice but to also be gay or lesbian (Rye & Meaney, 2010; Pennington & Knight, 2010). The fear behind this concept, that sexuality is merely picked up from one another, is at the root of many of the arguments against this population (Rye & Meaney, 2010). Also known as the Contagion or Corruption theory, this notion of the viral nature of homosexuality originated from the belief that homosexuals “preyed” on the innocent and took advantage of those vulnerable to contamination of their “soul,” (Knauer, 2000). This theory came about in the 1920s and was fostered by James Douglas. Douglas’ theory started in London, but it did not take long to spread to the United States through John Summer of the Society of Suppression of Vice (Knauer, 2000).

Since the thought is that sexuality can be changed so easily, many in the heterosexual population may fear or feel threatened by the gay and lesbian population (Rye & Meaney, 2010). This can and often times leads to negative perceptions and attitudes toward the population as whole, as well as on the specific issue of gays and lesbian being parents (Rye & Meaney, 2010). Some opposed to gays and lesbians having children believe that the population has an ulterior motive for parenthood and simply want to blend into hetero-normative society, which opponents find self-serving (Pennington & Knight, 2010). Those who believe this recognize heterosexual privilege and assume that gays and lesbians are after retaining that privilege and use children to do that (Pennington & Knight, 2010).

Lesbian and gay families may be viewed as alternative by society, but when compared to heterosexual families they are not inherently different (Hicks, 2005). Hicks (2005) found that children raised by lesbian and gay parents, did not live their lives dictated by restrictive traditional gender roles, which can be viewed a positive attribute. Another study found the following strengths of gay and lesbian families: aptness to nurture creativity, encouraging relationships, defiance of gender roles, dependable unity, adaptability, stability, and a deep sense of satisfaction from life (Johnston, Moore & Judd, 2010). This study had a sample of 167 respondents and used the Self- Report Family Inventory instrument which evaluated member's self perception of their family functioning. Johnston believes that gay and lesbian families have their own, very unique strengths and a resiliency within their own rights. In a qualitative study out of 46 interviewed adult children of at least one LGB parent, found that adults, who were raised in same sex households, believed they were more tolerant and open minded, and exercised more flexibility with ideas about gender and society because of how they were raised (Goldberg,

2007). This may be because gay and lesbian parents are assuring and open with respect to their children about sexuality and may be more responsive to matters surrounding their children's sexual maturation within gender (Goldberg, 2007). Many of the participants in the sample of this study felt that having gay or lesbian parents nurtured their capacity to embrace differentiation within people and to welcome diversity, as well as increased their consciousness and awareness of homophobia and heterosexism within society and culture (Goldberg, 2007). Some adult participants reported feelings of defensiveness and inclination to protect their own families from any homo- negativity around them because of that increased consciousness (Goldberg, 2007). A few of the adults with lesbian mothers, reported a desire to speak out in favor of gay rights because they regarded their parents orientation only as a political issue (Goldberg, 2007). According to the youth interviewed, they showed more favorable attitudes toward sexual minorities than children by heterosexual parents, and often times felt they had more gay and lesbian friendships (Goldberg, 2007). A study of 61 individuals found that children raised in gay or lesbian headed households, were more likely experiment in same sex relationships, however a large majority of the sample still felt they were heterosexual (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006).

The concepts behind heterosexism and homophobia, as they relate to parenting, are often brought up to counter the arguments against gays and lesbians parenting, (Rye & Meaney, 2010). Homophobia is generally defined as trepidation or an apprehension about being near or around gays or lesbians. It is not actually regarded as a traditional “phobia,” but more of an anxiety that is caused by gays and lesbians (Martinez, Barsky & Singleton, 2011). Heterosexism is the systematic assumption that any sexuality that is not heterosexual is deviant or abnormal. It places heterosexuals above any other sexuality and deems homosexuality as inferior (Martinez, Barsky

& Singleton, 2011). Goldberg believes that sexuality and gender are not “fixed categories,” but are constantly fluctuating and therefore cannot be put into any boxes (Goldberg, 2007). Since the primary function of a family is the socialization of people in the family, sexuality is something that needs to be discussed because it is a part of life. Children, raised by homosexuals or heterosexuals, will learn the norms of gender and what is expected or assumed from each gender. However children with lesbian parents may grow up with an enlighten concept of sexuality because lesbian mothers may be more likely to openly discuss sex and reproduction as separate entities, which leaves room for the child to accept other types of sexuality other than heterosexuality (Cohen & Kovalanka, 2011). When heterosexual parents simply assume their children to also be heterosexual, it can lead to confusion and a misunderstanding of other sexualities in the future for the child (Cohen & Kovalanka, 2011). If a child is raised having been instilled with hetero-normative values and assumptions, when older, that child is likely to continue to perpetuate heterosexist attitudes. This happens because the child is not socialized to diversity within sexuality (Cohen & Kovalanka, 2011).

## **Importance/rationale for study**

Cultural competence and appreciation for diversity is an essential part of the social work curriculum and thus the practice education of future social workers. Social work education includes a wide variety of diversity classes offered and often mandated. However, it cannot be assumed that these classes completely reform previous beliefs and values of enrolled students. The profession of social work opens up clinicians to various populations and countless types of clients. This is why there is such an emphasis on embracing diversity and a call for social workers to always further their knowledge base content about the clients they serve. This commitment to diversity is why this research study is important. This research intends to examine how comfortable university social work students are with gay and lesbian families. Same sex headed households are becoming more and more common, and with the rise of these non-traditional family configurations, comes the need for social workers to leave schools of social work with as little bias as possible in regards to gay and lesbian parents. This study aims to investigate how future social workers feel about working with gay and lesbian families. The implications of this study are significant at the micro, mezzo and macro levels of social work.

### **Micro**

The individual in the gay and lesbian population is deeply impacted by the issues within the population as a whole. Gays and lesbians are more likely to engage in suicidal and non-suicidal self-harm than heterosexual men and women (House, Van Horn, Coppeans & Stepleman, 2011). This likelihood is increased with lower education levels, a younger age, and a lower income level (House et al., 2011). It is important for mental health purposes that there be

tolerance and acceptance for this population socially and politically. One study found that the lack of civil rights for this population and the battle that is currently going on for certain civil rights, has caused stress and other mental health difficulties for some men and women within the population (House et al., 2011). On the micro level the individual in this population is more likely than a heterosexual to engage in substance abuse. This is important information for any minority being marginalized from society, because it can result in mental and physical health complications (House et al., 2011).

When it comes to gays and lesbians as parents on the micro level, it is most important that any individual within the population should feel like they have the choices and resources to start a family and have children (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Research has shown that for many men and women, having children is closely tied to their identity (Rye & Meaney, 2010). This evidence is true for heterosexual men and women as well as gays and lesbians (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). It should be considered dangerous to deny a person their right to have children, especially when there are certain legal barriers or social obstacles that prevent a person or couple from pursuing that specific desire (House et al., 2011).

For future social workers, there are many different roles a social worker can play, an advocate being a main one. Within the ideologies of social work, is the call to advocate for those who being mistreated or for those who cannot advocate for themselves. Social workers are to demand justice in a society of injustice and to support equality, whether that is in the macro, mezzo or micro forum. That said, gays and lesbians becoming parents should not be looked at as a political statement, but that of human beings fulfilling their right and desire to parent (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). To know how comfortable university social work students are with gay and



lesbian families would be valuable, because that insight could indicate future trends or political moves when those students become working professionals and policy makers (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009). For social workers, some of these students could be future clinicians or future clients. There has been little research conducted on student comfort levels with gay and lesbian families. While numerous studies completed on general attitudes toward the population exist, there is a scarcity of research on parenting. Better understanding is needed as social work students are expected to be culturally sensitive and competent. As a social worker, advocating for the rights and privileges of this population should be a priority. Many studies (Goldberg, Kinkler & Hines, 2011; Hicks, 2005; Vejar, Oravec & Hall, 2011; Patterson & Riskind, 2010; Pennington & Knight, 2010) have indicated that same sex couples, are just as capable of raising children in society. It is crucial to understand if social work students are resistant in accepting gays and lesbians in the role of parenting.

### **Mezzo**

The mezzo level on this topic concerns communities, potential families and agency work. It was recently found that lesbians are just as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to have children (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Despite the complexities for this population, having children is an interest of many (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). As the social acceptance of gays and lesbians as parents increases, as it has been, the number of men and women in this population that have children, whether adoptive or biologically, will likely increase as well (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). When it comes to adopting transracial or in-racial children for same-sex couples, these couples are less likely to be impacted by the social stigmas attached to adoption (Rye &

Meaney, 2010). This can be seen as a strength for gay and lesbian couples because their status in a sexual minority strengthens their resiliency (Johnston, Moore & Judd, 2010).

It is essential to social work education that we examine further future social workers' comfort with gay and lesbians families because as more gay and lesbian families develop, there are some that will need social services. The mezzo level also pertains to agency work, and it can be beneficial to know if the future clinicians in these agencies are going to be prepared to work with these families and be able to provide the best service possible.

## **Macro**

On the macro level, policies restricting gays and lesbians their opportunities to parent are evident in our government. On a federal, state and local level there are various legal barriers that make starting a family more difficult for gays and lesbians and there is also a lack of laws protecting these families (Pennington & Knight, 2011). This institution sets the tone for how gay and lesbian parents are treated within the education system and even the health care system. It is crucial that new laws and policies reflect the growing acceptance for this population and more importantly for their families. Future social workers need to be aware and knowledgeable about legislation so they can effectively combat institutionalized discrimination and prejudice against gays and lesbians.

The most significant part of this study on the macro level is the implications for higher education. The researcher anticipates that the results of this study will help schools of social work to examine their curriculum to ensure that students are presented with opportunities to learn more about this population. If the study finds that social work students are not accepting of gays and lesbians as parents, this has implications for emphasis in diversity courses, curriculum, the

possibility of developing new courses or integration of gay and lesbian content with family focused courses. If this study finds negative perceptions, it can also be an indication that students are not properly working through their personal biases and are not taking the formal steps to become self aware. This will hopefully encourage educators to consider ways to help students work through those biases. The implications of this study could have significance for the social work profession. Researching university, social work student's comfort with gay and lesbian parents will lead to insight about future social workers and their abilities to be effective agents of change in society.

## Focused Research Questions

Over Arching Research Question: What are the perceptions of social work students in regard to their comfort in working with gay and lesbian families?

Ha #1: The more positive the social work student's attitude towards gays, the more comfortable students are with same sex parent families.

*Ho #1: There is no relationship between the social work student's attitude towards gays, and student comfort with same sex parent families.*

Ha #2: The more positive the social work student's attitude towards lesbians, the more comfortable students are with same sex parent families.

*Ho #2: There is no relationship between the social work student's attitude towards lesbians, and student comfort with same sex parent families.*

Ha # 3: There will be a difference in student comfort with same sex parent families between male and female social work students.

*Ho # 3: There is no relationship between male and female social work students in terms of comfort with same sex parent families.*

Ha # 4: There is a relationship between Bachelor level social work student and Master level social work student in their comfort with same sex parent families.

*Ho # 4: There is no relationship between Bachelor level social work students and Master level social work students and their comfort with same sex parent families.*

Ha # 5: The more social work students interact with gays and lesbians the more comfortable they will be working with same sex parent families.

*Ho #5: There is no relationship between social work student interactions with gays and lesbians and their comfort with same sex parent families.*

## Methods

### Design

This research utilized an exploratory-descriptive design that utilized an online survey, “Social Work Students' Comfort with Gay and Lesbian Families,” (a modified version of the Gay and Lesbian Parenting Questionnaire or GLPQ compiled by Maney and Cain) with 52 items total (see appendix C). The study sought to answer research questions about the relationships between the variables listed below (age, gender, class standing, etc.) and university social work student’s comfort with gay and lesbian families. The study can help by contributing to the existing limited professional knowledge base. This study tested five hypotheses related to the relationships between the independent and dependent variables of (1) attitudes towards gays in general, (2) attitudes towards lesbians in general, (3) social work student gender, (4) social work student program (BSW or MSW) and (5) student’s perceptions of interactions with gay and lesbian community and the dependent variable of comfort with gay and lesbian families.

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INSERT TABLE 1

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### Measurement/Instrumentation

The researcher used a 52 item modified version of the Gay and Lesbian Parenting Questionnaire (GLPQ), developed by Maney and Cain (1997). The original questionnaire was used in a study that examined pre-service elementary school teacher’s attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. This study utilized the “Attitudes Toward Gay Men” scale, “Attitudes Toward Lesbian Women,” scale and “Comfort When Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families,” scale.

These subscales each had 10 questions and these answers of these questions were summed to reach an overall score for each respondent. The scores of each subscale ranged from 10 to 90, the higher the score more positive the attitude the respondent had toward gay men, lesbian women and the more comfort the respondent felt working with sex same families. The researcher decided on this measurement tool since the questions generally apply to social work students and there does not appear to be a data collection tool that more accurately measures social work student's comfort with gay and lesbian families. It should be noted that the first part of this instrument consists of two subscales that separately measure heterosexual attitudes towards gays and lesbians regardless of whether they are parents or not. This researcher decided to keep these components since attitudes towards gays and lesbians may influence student comfort with gay and lesbian families. Overall, each subscale within the questionnaire demonstrated good reliability separately. The two subscales that measure attitudes towards gays and lesbians are from Herek's Attitudes towards Lesbians and Gay Man scale which has an overall reliability coefficient of .90. This part is comprised of 20 Likert scale questions, 10 questions regarding gay men ( $\alpha = .77$ ) and ten questions regarding lesbian women ( $\alpha = .89$ ). All responses are presented in a Likert scale format. Though Likert scales are generally five data points, these subscales were comprised of nine data points. Examples of questions include "homosexual males should be allowed to adopt," and "female homosexuality is a sin," (Maney & Cain, 1997).

The second part of the questionnaire titled Comfort When Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families, received an estimate of .91 from Cronbach's alpha reliability scale. It is measured on a nine point Likert scale, the response options for these questions ranged from "very uncomfortable," to "very comfortable". The maximum total score for this subscale is 90

points ” (Herek, 1988). It was anticipated that the 9 point responses on both parts one and two of the questionnaire would need to be collapsed for statistical testing. Higher scores on this subscale also reflected a higher level of comfort in interacting with gay and lesbian families, while a lower overall score reflected a lower comfort in interactions. A sample question includes “How comfortable would you feel asking a homosexual parent(s) questions about their family structure?” This section was developed by Maney & Cain (1997). While this researcher also used the third section of the questionnaire, "Knowledge About Homosexual Relationships", it was recognized that due to the low reliability estimate for this true/false section, only descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies were provided (Maney & Cain, 1997). This part of the questionnaire had the lowest reliability coefficient- it received an alpha coefficient of .52 after a KR-20 reliability analysis. It is comprised of 10 true/false questions, for example “Gay fathers are not as effective parents as are heterosexual fathers,” (Maney & Cain, 1997). The fourth and final section of this questionnaire is the general information sheet that includes demographic information on the sample (gender, age, year standing).

The researcher kept the different sections of the original instrument but made some minor changes. The instrument similar to the original one had 52 questions, of which 12 elicited demographic information. Responses to parts one and two of the questionnaire are formatted in a nine point Likert scale format with responses ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’. The third section uses ‘True/False’ responses. The researcher communicated with both creators of the subscales "Attitudes Towards Gays and Lesbians," and "Gay and Lesbian Parenting Questionnaire," prior to beginning research and obtained approval to use these



instruments. Modifications to the instrument including rephrasing the following questions to make them relevant to social work students: (Bold Questions are the revised items)

Q-21 How comfortable would you feel being interviewed by a homosexual parent(s) regarding your familiarity with gay and lesbian families?

Q-21 How comfortable would you feel being questioned by a homosexual parent(s) regarding your familiarity with gay and lesbian families?

Q-22 How comfortable would you feel being interviewed by a homosexual parent(s) regarding the school's curriculum about family issues and sexuality?

Q-22 How comfortable would you feel being interviewed by a homosexual parent(s) regarding your perceptions on sexuality?

Q-25 How comfortable would you feel during a parent/teacher conference with the homosexual parent(s) of your student?

Q-25 How comfortable would you feel during a meeting with the homosexual parent(s) of your client?

Q-27 How comfortable would you feel if a student's information card were returned noting co-dads or co-moms?

Q-27 How comfortable would you feel if a client's consent for treatment/services form was signed noting co-dads or co-moms?

Q-28 How comfortable would you feel intervening with a "bully" who is teasing a student of a homosexual parent(s)?

Q-28 How comfortable would you feel intervening with a "bully" who is teasing a client of a homosexual parent(s)?

Q-30 How comfortable would you feel interacting with a homosexual parent(s) at school functions (picnics, field trips, etc.)?

Q-30 How comfortable would you feel interacting with a homosexual parent(s) during a family session?

Q-42 How old are you at this time? (Write your present age in the space provided below)

\_\_\_\_\_ YEARS OLD

Q-42 How old are you at this time? (please circle one)

18-21	22-25	26-29	30-33	34-37	38-41
42-45	46-49	50-53	54-57	58-61	62-65

Q-43 What is your race/ethnicity?

- 1 African American or Black
- 2 American Indian, Alaskan native, or Native Hawaiian
- 3 Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander
- 4 Mexican American/Chicano
- 5 Puerto Rican
- 6 Other Latino
- 7 White/Caucasian
- 8 Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Q-43 What is your race/ethnicity?

- 1 African American or Black**
- 2 Caribbean Black**
- 3 American Indian, Alaskan native, or Native Hawaiian**
- 4 Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander**
- 5 Mexican American/Chicano**
- 6 Puerto Rican**
- 7 Dominican**

- 8 Cuban
- 9 Other Latino
- 10 White/Caucasian
- 11 Mixed Descent ( Indicate in text box below)

Q-45 What is your major?

- 1 ELEMENTARY AND KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION
  - 2 EXERCISE SCIENCE OR KINESIOLOGY: TEACHER PREPARATION
  - 3 HEALTH EDUCATION
  - 4 NURSING
  - 5 REHABILITATION SERVICES EDUCATION
  - 6 SECONDARY EDUCATION
  - 7 SPECIAL EDUCATION
  - 8 URBAN EARLY AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
  - 9 VOCATIONAL INDUSTRIAL EDUCATION
  - 10 OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY):\_\_
- 

Q-45 What program are you currently enrolled in?

- 1 Bachelors of Social Work, Junior Year
- 2 Bachelors of Social Work, Senior Year
- 3 **Masters of Social Work, First Year**
- 4 **Masters of Social Work, Second Year OR Advanced Standing**

Q-47 Have you taken any classes, other than this one, which included discussions of gay and lesbian parenting?

- 1 NO
- 2 YES

**Q-47 Have you taken or are you currently taking any courses, which include or included major discussions (where at least 1 full class session) was devoted to the topic of gay and lesbian PARENTING?**

- 1 **No**
- 2 **Yes**

Q-48 Have you taken any classes, other than this one, which included discussions of homosexuality?

- 1 NO

2 YES

**Q- 48 Have you taken or are you currently taking any courses which include or included discussions on how to work with individuals who identify as homosexual (where at least 50% or 7 class sessions of the course) content is primarily on homosexuality)?**

**1 No**  
**2 Yes**

Q-49 Do you know a gay male or lesbian who is currently parenting a child?

1 NO--SKIP TO Q-51  
2 YES

**Q- 49 Do you know a gay male or lesbian individual who is currently parenting a child?**

**1 No (Skip question #50 & go ahead to question #51)**  
**2 Yes (Please answer question #50 below)**

Furthermore the 12 demographic questions on the modified version of the instrument reflect the addition of 3 questions not included in the original measurement. One on identified religious affiliation, one on perceived influence of religious affiliation, and one on frequency of interactions with gay and lesbian population.

Added Questions: Q-46 What is your religious affiliation?

1 No Religious Affiliation  
2 Christian  
3 Catholic  
4 Protestant  
5 Jewish  
6 Lutheran  
7 Baptist  
8 Islamic  
9 Buddhist  
10 Other (Please indicate in Text Box below)

Q-51 How much would you say your religious/spiritual beliefs influence how you feel about homosexuality?

- 1 I have no religious/spiritual beliefs whatsoever at this time
- 2 My religious/spiritual beliefs do not influence at all how I feel about homosexuality
- 3 My religious/spiritual beliefs somewhat influence how I feel about homosexuality
- 4 My religious/spiritual beliefs absolutely influence how I feel about homosexuality

Q-52 How often would you say you interact with the gay or lesbian population?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Occasionally
- 4 Often

This overall data collection instrument has been mildly modified to better fit the requirements for the study of social work students' perceptions of gays and lesbians as parents. Questions number 21,22,25,27,28,30,42,43,45, 47,48 and 49 have been slightly reworded to be more applicable to social work students, but the essence of the question has not been changed. This questionnaire was converted to an online survey through Qualtrics.com and was made accessible only by a link.

### **Scoring**

The first section of the questionnaire based on Herek's Attitudes Towards Gays and Lesbians Scale, consisted of two subscales that are presented on a nine point scale with a total score of 90 maximum points on each subscale. , The response options ranged from "strongly disagree," to " strongly agree". Scoring for each subscale was reached by summing scores across items (Herek, 1988). Within the ATG and ATL subscales reverse scoring was implemented. This means that certain items on the subscale were inverted during the data clean up phase. The answered selected for these specific questions were reversed. For example if a respondent answered a "1" or "Strongly disagree," on a specific item, during the data clean up this was reversed to actually be a "9" or "Strongly Agree." In this process a "2" actually represented an

“8”, a “3” actually represented a “7” and so on. Reverse scoring was implemented because it obstructs a respondent’s ability to direct a specific outcome for the survey. It was also implemented because the original subscales that were used in this research already had them built in, so as to not modify the subscales scoring systems, the reverse scoring was kept. The following questions from the ATG and ATL subscales had to be reversed before summing to calculate an overall score.

“Attitudes Toward Gay Men”

- Q-2 I think male homosexuals are disgusting
- Q-3 Male homosexuals should not be allowed to teach school
- Q-4 Male homosexuality is a perversion
- Q-6 If a man has homosexual feelings, he should do everything he can to overcome them
- Q-8 Homosexual behavior between two men is just plain wrong
- Q-9 The idea of male Homosexual marriages seems ridiculous to me

“Attitudes Toward Lesbian Women”

- Q-11 Lesbians just can't fit into our society
- Q-13 Female homosexuality is detrimental to society because it breaks down the natural divisions between the sexes
- Q- 15 Female homosexuality is a sin
- Q-16 A growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in American morals
- Q-18 Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions
- Q-19 Female homosexual behavior is an inferior form of sexuality compared to heterosexual behavior

Q-20 Lesbians are morally sick

## **IRB & Protection of Study Participants**

The researcher was granted official Institutional Review Board approval from the University of Central Florida in November 2012. Data for this study was collected through an anonymous online survey posted through Qualtrics software application. Participation in this study was anonymous and voluntary. Individual identities of the participants were not revealed and all findings were reported in aggregate format.

The informed consent form did not require a signature or any other identifier from participants (see appendix B).



## **Sampling Plan/Recruitment of Participants**

The sampling technique utilized was a sample of convenience. At the time of research there were 311 students enrolled in the University's BSW program and 359 students enrolled in the MSW program. In collaboration with the office staff, an invitational email requesting participation with the online survey was sent to all 670 BSW and MSW students (see appendix A). In order to comply with FERPA legislation and to protect the identity of the students invited to participate, the researcher did not have any access to information on the students. Instead the researcher asked the office staff to send an email containing an invitation to participate to the students. The invitational email contained important information on the study and provided potential participants with a link to the survey via Qualtrics. The link directed those participants interested in considering the participation in the study to the informed consent. If participants decided to take part in the study, they then continued on to the survey.

## **Ethical Considerations**

There were no anticipated ethical considerations. Questions asked solicited general opinions and students were not asked to reveal sensitive information. However, it was possible that this study may have generated uncomfortable feelings for some participants. For example, it may have caused uncomfortable feelings for gay and lesbian participants that are unsure or not open about their sexuality. It may also have caused uncomfortable feelings for those participants who, in general, are uncomfortable with matters of sexuality.

If for any reasons participants felt uncomfortable during any point of the survey they could immediately terminate their participation. Furthermore, the researcher listed on the informed consent form the following resources with accompanying telephone, email and address information.

University of Central Florida Counseling Center

EQUAL (registered student organization, LGBT affiliated)

LGBTQ Services

## **Data Collection Strategy**

After the BSW and MSW office staff agreed to assist the researcher in recruiting student participants, the researcher and her thesis committee chair set up participant recruitment procedures with the office staff. The researcher and her committee chair shared an overview and purpose of the study with the Bachelors of Social Work Advisor and with the Masters of Social Work Program Assistant. Additionally, the invitational email to students was sent to the two staff members for distribution to students. At no point during the study did the researcher know which students volunteered for participation. Upon receiving the email participants were asked to read the informed consent and if they decide to participate, they continued on to the data collection tool. During the Spring 2013 semester a reminder email to all students was sent reminding them of the research opportunity. The reminder stressed the voluntary nature of participation in the study.

The data on Qualtrics.com was not accessible by anyone other than the researcher and thesis chair. Proper features were set up via Qualtrics to ensure that the information was anonymous and that only those individuals who were sent the link would be able to participate in the study.

The data collection phase began after IRB approval had been granted. Data collection began in Mid Fall of 2012. The researcher recognized that collecting data in the middle of the Fall semester would be challenging. Therefore, to allow those students who because of holidays and end of semester exams had not had time to consider the survey, recruitment of participants continued until Mid Spring 2013. Once the data collection period was over, results were downloaded from Qualtrics.com by the researcher onto an excel spread sheet .

## **Data Management Strategy**

All downloaded anonymous data was recorded by the researcher on a secured, pass-word protected university computer and on a laptop that only the researcher and her Thesis Committee Chair had access to the data. The researcher developed a codebook (See Appendix D) to organize the data and SPSS was used for data entry and analysis. All data was first cleaned to ensure accuracy and those questions not answered or difficult to decipher responses were marked as 'missing' in SPSS.

## **Data Analysis**

The researcher used a .05 level of significance in SPSS for testing the hypotheses stated earlier in this thesis. The researcher originally anticipated that descriptive analyses such as frequencies and inferential analyses such as chi square tests were going to be used in the data analysis. However during analysis frequencies, T-Tests, correlations, cross tabs, scatterplots and chi-squares were all statistical tests completed.

### **Recoding**

During the data clean-up phase of the research the answers from six items on the survey were recoded within the SPSS data analysis programming. This step was done to either simplify the data collected or condense the questions with many possible answer choices. During the data clean up phase it was clear that the responses were spread out too widely for analysis and since there were similarities in the scores they were combined and recoded. Within the three subscales “Attitudes Toward Gay Men,” “Attitudes Toward Lesbian Women,” and “Comfort When Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families,” the total scores from each respondent were entered as their own items. Each subscale was made up of 10 questions, the scores from each questions were summed to reach an overall score for reach respondent. Every respondent who participated in the study had an overall score for all three subscales ranging from 10 (negative) to 90 (positive). Once these scores were summed and put into SPSS, they were further recoded into “Less Liberal,” and “More Liberal.” -The scores ranging from 10 to 77 were recoded into a 1, or “Less Liberal,” Label and scores ranging from 78 to 90 were recoded into a 2, or “More Liberal,” Label. This was done for each of the three subscales. Within the SPSS programing

there was data for the original scores (ranging from 10-90) and the recoded collapsed scores (“less liberal,” “more liberal”).

The next item recoded was the Race/Ethnicity demographic question. The questions “What is your race/ethnicity?” had 11 possible choices “African American/ Black,” “Caribbean Black,” “American Indian, Alaskan Native, Or Native Hawaiian,” “Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander,” “Mexican American/ Chicano,” “Puerto Rican,” “Dominican,” “Cuban,” “Other Latino,” “White/Caucasian,” or “Mixed Descent (indicate in text bow below).” African American/ Black,” and “Caribbean Black,” were recoded into category 1, African/ Caribbean American Black. “American Indian, Alaskan Native, Or Native Hawaiian,” was dropped from the collapsed due to no respondents choosing it. “Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander,” was recoded in to category 2, Asian/ Asian American. “Mexican American/ Chicano,” “Puerto Rican,” “Dominican,” “Cuban,” and “Other Latino,” were all recoded into category 3, Latino. “White/Caucasian,” was recoded in category 4, White/Caucasian. And “Mixed Descent (indicate in text bow below),” was recoded into category 5, Of Mixed Descent.

The next item recoded was “What program are you currently enrolled in?” The possible choices for this question were “Bachelors of Social Work, Junior Year,” “Bachelors of Social Work, Senior Year,” “Masters of Social Work, First Year,” or “Masters of Social Work, Second Year OR Advanced Standing.” “Bachelors of Social Work, Junior Year,” and “Bachelors of Social Work, Senior Year,” were recoded into category 1, Bachelors of Social Work (BSW). And “Masters of Social Work, First Year,” and “Masters of Social Work, Second Year OR Advanced Standing,” were recoded into category 2, Masters of Social Work (MSW).

The last item recoded was the question “What is your religious affiliation?” The possible answer choices were “No Religious Affiliation,” “Christian,” “Catholic,” “Protestant,” “Jewish,” “Lutheran,” “Baptist,” “Islamic,” “Buddhist,” or “Other (Please indicate in Text Box below).” The answer “No Religious Affiliation,” was recoded into category 1, No Religious Affiliation. The answers “Christian,” “Catholic,” “Protestant,” “Lutheran,” and “Baptist,” were all recoded into category 2, Christian. “Jewish,” was recoded into category 3, Jewish. “Islamic,” was recoded into category 4, Islamic. “Buddhist,” was dropped from the collapsed due to no respondents selecting it. And all ““Other (Please indicate in Text Box below),” answers were recoded into category 5, Other.

All the data from the True/ False questions , which came from the “Knowledge about Homosexual Relationships,” section, was also reserved within the SPSS program. On the original research survey questions 31- 40 were True/ False questions with the coding 1= False and 2= True. In SPSS these questions were recoded so 1=True and 2= False. This was done to follow protocol for research studies. This recoding was also done for questions 47, 48, and 49. On the original survey these Yes/No questions were coded to be 1=No and 2= Yes. These answers were recoded so 1=Yes and 2= No, again to follow research protocol.

## Results

### Description of Sample

Frequencies are reported describing the eighty-five total (n=85) students, 49 Bachelor level Social Work students and 36 Masters level Social Work who voluntarily participated in this study. Students (see table 2). Only twelve students were male (14.1 %), while the majority of students were female, 73 in total (85.9 %). Out of the 85 respondents, 46 (54.2 %) individuals were between the ages of 18-25, 26 respondents (30.6 %) reported their age between 26-45 years and 13 respondents (15.4 %) ages of 42- 65 years (see table 2). The majority (63.5%, n=54) of respondents identified as White/Caucasian, 9.4 % (n=8 ) of respondents identified as African American or Caribbean American, 20% (n = 17) identified as Latino, 1.2% (n= 1 )identified as Asian American, and 5.9 % identified as being from a Mixed Descent. In terms of religious affiliation, 21 respondents (24.7 %) reported having no religious affiliation, the majority or 56.5% (n =21) identified their affiliation as Christian ; Within the Christian denomination 15.3% (n= 13) students identified as Catholic, 2.4 % (n=2) as Baptist, 1.2% (n= 1) as Lutheran , and 37.6% (n = 32) as general Christian (see table 2) . Four respondents (4.7 %) answered, Jewish, one respondent (1.2 %) answered Islamic and 11 respondents (12.9%) answered other (see table 2).

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INSERT TABLE 2

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Additional questions were included at the end of the GLPQ to further gain insight into the characteristics of the respondents. Two of them had to do with educational content and diversity courses. Out of the 85 respondents from the sample, 28 individuals (32.9 %) answered, “Yes,”



and 57 individuals (67.1 %) answered, “No,” to the question “have you taken or are you currently taking any courses, which include or included major discussions (where at least 1 full class session) was devoted to the topic of gay and lesbian parenting?” (See table 3). The next question asked “Have you taken or are you currently taking any courses which include or included discussions on how to work with individuals who identify as homosexual (where at least 50% or 7 class sessions of the course content is primarily on homosexuality)?” The majority of respondents answered, “No,” (n=56; 65.9 %), and 29 individuals (34.1 %) answered, “Yes,” (see table 3).

The next two questions inquired about respondent exposure to gay and lesbian parents. Thirty-six respondents (42.4 %) answered, “Yes,” and 49 respondents (57.6 %) answered, “No,” to the question “Do you know a gay male or lesbian individual who is currently parenting a child?” The next question asked about the sexual orientation of the parents. Seven respondents (8.3 %) answered that the parents were gay men (single and in a relationship), 25 (29.5 %) answered the parents were lesbian women (single and in a relationship). The rest of the sample (62.3 %) answered other or not applicable (see table 3).

The question “how much would you say your religious/spiritual beliefs influence how you feel about homosexuality?” was asked to gauge how much the students felt spiritual or religious beliefs influence their attitudes toward gays and lesbians (see table 3). Out of the 85 respondents from the sample, 15 respondents (17.6 %) answered, “I have no religious/ spiritual beliefs whatsoever at this time,” 37 respondents (43.5 %) answered, “My religious/ spiritual beliefs do not influence at all how I feel about homosexuality,” 16 respondents (18.8 %) answered, “My religious/ spiritual beliefs somewhat influence how I feel about homosexuality,”

15 respondents (17.6 %) answered, “ My religious/ spiritual beliefs absolutely influence how I feel about homosexuality.” Two individuals (2.4 %) did not answer this question.

The last item on the survey inquired about frequency of interactions between students and gay or lesbian individuals, one respondents (1.2 %) answered they Never interact, 12 respondents (14.1 %) answered they rarely interact, 17 respondents (20.0 %) answered they Occasionally interact and 55 respondents (64.7 %) answered they often interact (see table 3).

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INSERT TABLE 3

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## **Hypotheses**

Out of the five hypotheses tested a total of 3 were found to have statistically significant relationships between the variables, these included hypothesis number 1, 2, and 5. Hypothesis number 3 and 4 were not found to have statistically significant relationships.

Hypothesis-1: The more positive the social work student’s attitude towards gays, the more comfortable students are with same sex parent families.

Within this hypothesis the “Attitude” score was treated as the independent variable and the “Comfort” score was treated as the dependent variable. Both of these are quantitative variables with no absolute zero and were measured at the Scale Level. A Pearson’s Correlation (one-tailed) test was used to analyze whether or not there was a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The mean score for the “Attitudes toward Gays” (ATG) subscale was 79.33, while the mean for the “Comfort with Gay and Lesbian Parents” was 76.81. Based on the Pearson’s Correlation (one-tailed) test there was a statistically significant positive relationship between social work student attitude toward gay men and level of comfort when

working with gay and lesbian parents ( $n=85$ ;  $p=.01$ ;  $Rho=.38$ ). The results indicate that as a student's ATG score increases (becomes more positive), their Comfort level when working with same sex families score will also increase (become more positive) (see table 4).

Hypothesis-2: The more positive the social work student's attitude towards lesbians, the more comfortable students are with same sex parent families.

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INSERT TABLE 4

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Within this hypothesis the "Attitude" score was again treated as the independent variable and the "Comfort" score was again treated as the dependent variable. Both of these are quantitative variables with no absolute zero and were measured at the Scale Level. A Pearson's Correlation (one-tailed) test was used to analyze whether or not there was a relationship between the two variables. The mean score for the "Attitudes Toward Lesbians" (ATL) subscale was 79.88, while the mean for the "Comfort with Gay and Lesbian Parents" was 76.81. Based on the Pearson's Correlation (one-tailed) test there was a statistically significant positive relationship between social work student attitude toward lesbian women and level of comfort working with gay and lesbian parents ( $n=85$ ;  $p=.01$ ;  $Rho=.40$ ) (see Table 5). Results indicated that as a student's ATL score increases (becomes more positive), their Comfort level when working with same sex families score will also increase (become more positive).

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INSERT TABLE 5

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Hypothesis-3 There will be a difference in student comfort with same sex parent families between male and female social work students.

Within this hypothesis student gender was a categorical variable The comfort when interacting with gay and lesbian families score was a quantitative variable with a range of 10-90 and no absolute zero, however, to statistically test the relationship between biological sex and student comfort level when working with same sex families, the comfort level scores were recoded into two categories, “less liberal,” and “more liberal.” The scores ranging from 10 (most negative) to 77 were recoded into “less liberal,” the scores ranging from 78 to 90 (most positive) were recoded into “more liberal.” This recoding was done because the distribution of scores was spread out too widely and did not allow for good statistical testing. The researcher did reach out to the two originators of the “Comfort When Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families,” to identify a specific cut off to group the scores, however there was no previous cut off in place. Because there was no official cut off in place, the grouping of 10-77 and 78-90 was chosen at face validity using the best judgment possible to secure that the scores were evenly distributed. From there, the recoded comfort level when working with same sex families scores and the biological sex data were tested using a Cross Tab square. This test was used because both variables were measured on the ordinal level. The results from the cross tab (see table 6) found that 28 females and 4 males scored “less liberal” on their comfort level when working with same sex families scores, while 45 females and 12 males scored “more liberal” on their comfort level when working with same sex families scores.

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INSERT TABLE 6

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Hypothesis-4 There is a relationship between Bachelor level social work student and Master level social work student in their comfort with same sex parent families.

Bachelors level and Masters level was treated as the independent variable and again comfort level when working with same sex families scores was treated as the dependent variable. To statistically test the relationship between Bachelors level Social Work students, Masters level Social Work students and student comfort level when working with same sex families, the comfort with same sex parent families score was recoded into ordinal level categories, “less liberal,” and “more liberal.” Responses to the students’ program were Bachelors of Social Work, Junior Year; Bachelors of Social Work, Senior Year; Masters of Social Work, First Year; Masters of Social Work, Second Year OR Advanced Standing. After the recoding of the dependent variable, the comfort level when working with same sex families recode was measured at the ordinal level. This is why a Chi-Square test was used to analyze if there was a statistically significant different between the two education levels and their comfort level when working with same sex families scores. The test results support the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between social work student’s program enrollment and student comfort with gay and lesbian families. However a cross tab was completed with the program recode and the comfort with working with gay and lesbian families recoded. The cross tab showed that there were more “more liberal,” Master level students as compared to the “less liberal,” Masters level students. As for Bachelor level students, the “more liberal,” and “less liberal,” scores were more spread out (see Table 7). As the year of study increases for the students, their comfort when working with same sex parent families also increases.

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INSERT TABLE 7

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Hypothesis- 5 The more social work students interact with gays and lesbians the more comfortable they will be working with same sex parent families.

The first variable “frequency of interactions,” was the independent variable measured at the ordinal level (never, rarely, occasionally & often). Student comfort level when working with same sex families, the dependent variable measured at the ordinal level consisted of recoded scores ‘more liberal’ and ‘less liberal’. Since the variables were measured at the ordinal levels, a Spearman’s Correlation (1-tailed) test was conducted to analyze the potential relationship. The relationship between the variables was statistically significant at the .01 level (n=85; p=.007; Rho=.264) (see table 9). There is a positive correlation between the frequency of interactions and student comfort when working with same sex families. The results showed that as frequency of interactions increase, comfort level when working with same sex families scores increase.

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INSERT TABLE 8

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## Discussion

The findings from this research study indicate that there is a strong relationship between social work student's attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women and their comfort level when working with same sex families in the future. Both hypotheses one and two show a statistically significant relationship between student attitudes toward gays and lesbian and student comfort levels with same sex families. This means that as the positive student attitudes toward gays and lesbians increases, the comfort level when working with same sex families also increases. Subsequently as the negative student attitudes toward gays and lesbians increases, the comfort level when working with same sex families' decreases. This is important because it confirms that social work student attitudes' can influence their professional output in clinical practice. If personal attitudes towards the gay and lesbian population are correlated with comfort levels when working with the population professionally then it can concluded that students may carry their attitudes into their future social work careers.

Also statistically significant was the relationship between the frequency of interactions between social work students with the gay and lesbian community and their comfort level with working with same sex families (hypothesis # 5). This is extremely important because it provides evidence to the concept that exposure and interactions increase comfort level when working with same sex families. The more students interact with the population, the more they felt comfort working with them in a professional setting. Since this is true can be suggested that social work curriculum would benefit from having student's work directly with the gay and lesbian community, possibly within service learning settings, to increase interactions and therefore increase comfort level when working with same sex families. Out of the 85 students that

voluntarily responded to the online survey, only 29 answered “Yes,” to the question asking “Have you taken or are you currently taking any courses which include or included discussions on how to work with individuals who identify as homosexual (where at least 50% or 7 class sessions of the course) content is primarily on homosexuality)?” Fifty- six students answered “No,” to that question. This means more than half of the entire sample had not participated in a diversity course where the gay and lesbian population was at least half of the content. This indicates that if more students were exposed to courses with gay and lesbian family content, the overall “Comfort level when working with gay and lesbian families,” score might increase.

Surprisingly there was no statistically significant relationship found in this study between social work student gender and comfort when working with gay and lesbian families (hypothesis # 3). This was surprising because so much of the former research has concluded that there is a statistical difference between how males and females felt or interact with gays and lesbians (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009 ; Rye & Meaney, 2010; Ellis, Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2008). In the cross tabulation test between student gender and comfort when working with gay and lesbian families, it was found that the males from this sample were actually “more liberal,” than the females. Based on the numbers, 33.3% of males ranged in the “less liberal,” point range, while 38.4% of females ranged in the “less liberal,” point range. This finding contradicts many former studies that found females to be the more liberal or accepting gender when it comes to gay and lesbian population. It should be noted that this outcome could simply have developed because of the large discrepancy between the number of females who participated in the study (n=73) and the much smaller number of males (n=12). This large gap between genders may be the reason for the surprising outcome.



There was no statistically significant relationship found between social work program (BSW and MSW) and comfort when working with gay and lesbian families (hypothesis # 4). Within the sample from the study the majority of students were Bachelors level students (n=49) and the minority was Masters level students (n=36). It was thought that the more education a student had within the social work field, the more comfortable they would be with gay and lesbian families. This was not statistically significant, however, according to the cross tabs it appears that education does make a difference between the Bachelors level and Masters level student, and the continuation of education on gay and lesbian content should be championed. At the Masters level students should be learning the clinical ins and outs of social work practice at a much more detailed level than Bachelors level students.

## **Limitations/ Challenges**

There were a few challenges and limitations that came up in this study. The first is the sample size anticipated was not reached. Similarly to mail surveys, participation completion rates are known to be lower when online data collection tools are implemented in place of face-to-face data (Yegidis, Weinbach & Myers, 2011). The second challenge was the mere length of the data collection tool. The final questionnaire had 52 items and this may have deterred participation because of time requirements. The third challenge to this study was the limitation related to modifications in the data collection tool that may have affected the fidelity of the measurement. Various questions and directions needed to be reworded to make sense in terms of social work students as opposed to pre-service elementary school teachers. However, given the scarcity of research and data collection tools on this topic, this measurement appeared to be the best one. Additionally, one must recognize that the questionnaire was a self-report tool and therefore may have some subjectivity. It is always possible that students responded in the way that they thought was 'socially acceptable' and perhaps not their true response. This may especially apply in the social work field because of the liberal nature of the field. Another limitation in this research was the lower number of male students. Since the overwhelmingly majority of respondents were female, one did not access any differences due to gender. It is a limitation perhaps brought on by the nature of the social work field which is predominantly female. Also the majority of students who responded to the survey identified as "White/Caucasian." . The last additional challenge was the non-probability sampling technique that was utilized. Since a sample of convenience was used, the researcher cannot make generalizations from the study to other BSW and MSW programs elsewhere.

## **Implications**

### **Practice**

The findings of this research indicate the direct correlation between social work student's attitudes and their comfort when working with gay and lesbian families. It is known that despite the complexities for this population, having children is an interest of many individuals regardless of sexual orientation. Consequently, as society progresses the number gay and lesbian families that will need assistance or help will also increase (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Thus, it is imperative that future social workers feel comfortable and capable when working with this specific type of family. Although there are not fundamental differences in values between a homosexual or heterosexual family, there are very specific differences in the challenges that are faced by each family. This research provides evidence that attitudes toward this community are directly correlated with comfort in working with this community. Future social workers need to be prepared for future practice and need to be equipped to not only provide the correct resources for the population, but also to properly empathize with their future gay and lesbian clients. The actual practice within social work is the fundamental core for the entire field. It is the social workers in the field, working on the micro and mezzo levels that have the most direct contact with clients. It is detrimental to the future of the social work field that newly educated social workers are comfortable and therefore able to effectively and properly cater to gay and lesbian families as their clients. There are a few changes that can be made for Social Workers currently in practice to further their knowledge and comfort level for these specific family units. During clinical placement or internship, supervisors should strive to discuss gay and lesbian content and

issues with students. Case studies with gay and lesbian families can also be used to help students during practice.

## **Education**

As noted previously, there are many different roles a social worker can take on. Gays and lesbians becoming parents should not be looked at as a political statement, but that of human beings fulfilling their right and desire to parent (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). It is important to know how comfortable university social work students are with gay and lesbian families because that insight could indicate future trends or political moves when those students become working professionals and policy makers (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009). For social workers, some of these students could be future clinicians or future clients. This research has been done to add to the little research conducted on student comfort levels with gay and lesbian families. It is pertinent to better understand social work student attitudes since one would expect social work students to be culturally sensitive and competent. Cultural competency and a commitment to diversity are at the foundation of social work. During higher education social work courses it is necessary to make sure that the correct values and concepts are being instilled in future workers. If there is a break in the system at the educational level, that needs to be address swiftly. Based on this research study is appears that the educational system for this sample is effective. A majority of the students scored in the more positive ranges for the three subscales, “Attitudes Toward Gay Men,” “Attitudes Toward Lesbian Women,” and “titled Comfort When Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families.” Out of the 85 students from the sample, 2 (2.4 %) individuals answered, “true,” while 83 (97.6 %) answered “false,” to the statement “Gay fathers are not effective parents as are heterosexual fathers.” This illustrates the overwhelming positivity of the

respondents. In the larger sense of this research, it is imperative to understand if social work students are resistant in accepting gays and lesbians in the role of parenting. This study supports the theory that most social work students are not resisting gays and lesbians in the role parenting. It is essential that future social workers embrace the future increase in diverse types of families to better help and support these populations. Schools of Social Work all around the country and even internationally need to dedicate entire classes and courses to gay and lesbian families and their specific challenges/ strengths. Dedicating class time for social work students increases exposure to the population and also ensures that this content is included, thus students reach competence in this area. There should also be a no tolerance rule in social work classrooms when it comes to discrimination or bigotry between students with the gay and lesbian population. Gay and lesbian case studies should also be used to expose students to these types of family units.

The research completed in this study was done to examine general attitudes towards gays and lesbians and the comfort level of students in working with same sex parent families and to also find out if they felt comfortable working with these families in the future. This specific research was done with students because of the importance on cultural competence within the social work field, but also to lend more knowledge about university students and their attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Previously there has not been specific research conducted on the topic of comfort with social work students and gay and lesbian families. This is vital research because as the number of gay and lesbian families increases, so will a need for social workers to assist these families in practice. The research findings in this study lend evidence to the fact that social work as an educational career choice produces culturally competent students, specifically in the realm of gay and lesbian families.

If this study is to be conducted again it is recommended that a larger and random sample of social work students be used. If a random sample is used then future researchers will hopefully have more males that take part in the study. Also a random sampling will also help create a more representative sample for the population and allow for generalizability. Lastly is recommended that future researchers add incentives for potential respondents to increase the respondent survey return rate. This could include but is not limited to gift cards rewards or extra credit for students.

## **Conclusions**

The overall findings of this study provide additional support that social work students tend to have a liberal stance or high acceptance rate with diversity, specifically gay and lesbian families. The data collected from the 85 respondents gives a glimpse of a student population with a general positive attitude toward gay men, positive attitude toward lesbian and a very comfortable outlook on working with future gay and lesbian families. This research was conducted to gain insights on the perceptions of social work students. Student perceptions of the gay and lesbian population can reflect their exposure to diversity in the classroom and thus these insights can then be used to make changes in the gay and lesbian content within diversity courses and social work curriculum. Social work is a profession built on cultural competency and social justice, this study was conducted to measure knowledge and attitudes related to working with gay and lesbian individuals.

## **Appendix A: Invitational Email to Students**



**To whom it may concern:**

My name is Jen Ackerman and I am completing my Honors in the Major Undergraduate Thesis under the supervision of Dr. Ana Leon. My research topic is social work student's' comfort with gay and lesbian families. I am emailing you today to ask for your assistance in the data collection process of my research. Through Qualtrics.com a 52 item questionnaire has been compiled to collect information on student perceptions from undergraduate and graduate level social work students.

You are receiving this email because you were randomly selected to receive an invitation to participate in this study. Sixty students from each program will be invited to participate. In compliance with FERPA legislation and to protect the identity of those students that will be invited to participate, I will not have any information on the randomly selected students.

Instead, the social work office staff has agreed to send out this email to those randomly selected students. The staff will not reveal to me any information on who was invited to participate. This study is anonymous which means that once you complete the survey no one including the researcher will know your identity or be able to track your survey responses to you. Participation in this study is also voluntary and you will not receive any compensation for participating in the study. However, as in other research your participation will help to further explore an important topic. It is anticipated that the survey should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

Should you wish to participate please go to the link below. There you will find an informed consent with more information on the study and the actual survey on Qualtrics.

Thank you for considering taking time out of your day to read this and I look forward to working with you if you decide to assist this research study.

- Jen Ackerman

## **Appendix B: Informed consent**

**Please read this consent form carefully before deciding whether you wish to participate in this study. To participate in this study you must be at least 18 years of age.**

University of Central Florida  
School of Social Work

Researchers at the University of Central Florida (UCF) study many topics. To do this we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. You are being invited to take part in a research study which will include about 120 people. You can ask questions about the research. You have been asked to take part in this research study because you are a social work student at the University of Central Florida. You must be 18 years of age or older to be included in the research study.

This research is being conducted by Jennifer Ackerman, a BSW social work student who is conducting the study for the Honors in the Major Undergraduate Thesis Program. I will be primarily responsible for collecting the data, but since I am undergraduate student, I will be closely supervised by my Thesis Chair and mentor, Dr. Ana M. Leon.

**Study Title:** Social Work Students' Comfort with Gay and Lesbian Families

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to investigate social work student's comfort level with gay and lesbian individuals in the role as parents. Although there is a fair amount of research looking at general opinions toward the gay and lesbian community, there is limited research that has been done on the specific opinion of gays and lesbians as parents. University students represent a portion of that general public; they also represent the newest generation of voters and public policy influencers.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:** You will be asked to complete an **52** item survey that will ask you questions about your opinions regarding gays and lesbians as parents and will also ask you general questions about yourself. The survey will take about **20** minutes to complete, and since it is an anonymous survey, you are asked to **NOT** include your name or any other information that will personally identify you.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. There is no penalty if you choose not to participate, and you have the right to terminate your participation at any point during the study without penalty. You can terminate your participation by not completing the survey. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions in the survey, you may leave them blank. You can begin the survey and then decide that you do not wish to complete it. Participation in this survey does not affect any grades or course grades.

**Location:** You will be directed to a Qualtrics.com link to complete the survey.

Participation Time Required: **The general information form and survey will require approximately 20 minutes to complete.**

**Risks:** The questions in the survey are asking about your opinions. There is no anticipated risk to you by answering the survey questions. However, should you feel uncomfortable after completing the survey or wish to talk to someone about any uncomfortable or personal feelings you have after participating in the study, you may seek assistance at the UCF Counseling Center. The Counseling Center is located on the UCF main campus in Building 27, the phone number is (407) 823-2811 and the link is <http://counseling.sdes.ucf.edu/>. LGBTQ Services is another a resource on the main Orlando campus of UCF. Located on the third story of the Student Union, room 304 A. The phone number is (407) 823-1027 and the link to their website is <http://lgbtq.sdes.ucf.edu/>. EQUAL is a student-registered organization that meets on the main Orlando campus at UCF every Tuesday night during the fall and spring semesters. Locations vary but can we found on the link <http://www.equalucf.org/eq/>.

**Benefits:** As a research participant you will not benefit directly from this research, except to maybe acquire additional knowledge about the research process. Your participation will help us further understand perceptions about gays and lesbians as parents. You will not be compensated for your time in completing this survey or for participating in the study.

**Confidentiality/Anonymity:** This study will be anonymous. You are reminded not to include any information that may identify you on the survey. There will be no identifying information collected in the survey that can link your survey responses to your identity. Only Jennifer and Dr. Leon will have access to the data. The completed surveys will be kept by Jennifer in a locked file cabinet at home for the IRB required 3 year period. All findings from the study reported by the researchers in any papers, or publications will be reported in aggregate/group form and individual responses will not be identified.

**Who should you contact if you have any questions about this study?**

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: **Jen Ackerman**, BSW Student, UCF School of Social I Work at [ackerman.jen@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:ackerman.jen@knights.ucf.edu) or **Dr. Ana M. Leon**, LCSW, Thesis Chair and mentor, School of Social Work, P O Box 163358, University of Central Florida, Orlando Fl , 32816-3358.

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:** Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

By completing this survey, you give the researcher permission to report your responses anonymously in the final manuscript of her Honors in the Major thesis paper to be submitted to the Honors College as part of her course work. By submitting a completed survey you are also agreeing to participate in this study and verifying that you are at least 18 years of age.

Please retain this form for your records. Thank you for your participation.

## **Appendix C: Gay and Lesbian Parenting Questionnaire**

**THE GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTING QUESTIONNAIRE (modified) (Maney & Cain, 1997).**

We appreciate your voluntary participation in our assessment of social work student's attitudes toward (1) homosexuality, (2) social work student's comfort with gays and lesbians as parents and, (3) homosexuals who are parents.

**Directions**

1. **ALL OF YOUR RESPONSES ARE ANONYMOUS. TO MAINTAIN YOUR ANONYMITY, PLEASE DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME OR IDENTIFICATION NUMBER ON THIS FORM.**
2. For all questions, please circle the number which best represents your response.

**Terminology**

The following terms and definitions are used in this study.

**Sexual Orientation**: refers to an identity to which one of the sexes is sexually attracted. Homosexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality are terms used to identify one's sexual orientation.

**Bisexuality**: refers to an attraction to both same- and opposite-sex partners.

**Heterosexuality**: refers to an attraction to an other-sex partner.

**Homosexuality**: refers to an attraction to a same-sex partner.

**Family**: refers to a single parent; a primary parent, plus that parent's partner, who is also considered a parent of some sort, but not fully a mother or father; two equal mothers, or two equal fathers, with no one else having a parental role; one or two mothers plus one or two fathers sharing parenting. The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines a family as "anyone living in a nuclear family, living with a spouse, living with minor children, living with unrelated children, and living with a same sex partner."

**Homosexual parenting**: refers to the parental functions of one or two parents with a homosexual orientation "gay or lesbian parent(s)" who are involved in a functional parental relationship with one or more children.



**The purpose of this study is to assess social work students' attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexuals who are parents. Questions 1 through 20 deals with your attitudes toward male and female homosexuals. Please circle the number that best represents your attitude toward gay men and lesbians.**

	Strongly Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Uncertain		Somewhat Agree		Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-1 Male homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-2 I think male homosexuals are disgusting.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-3 Male homosexuals should <b>not</b> be allowed to teach school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-4 Male homosexuality is a perversion.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-5 Male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in human men.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

	Strongly Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Uncertain		Somewhat Agree		Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-6 If a man has homosexual feelings, he should do everything he can to overcome them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-7 I would not be too upset if I learned that my son were a homosexual.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q- 8 Homosexual behavior between two men is just plain wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-9 The idea of male homosexual marriages seem ridiculous to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-10 Male homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that should not be condemned.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-11 Lesbians just can't fit into our society.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

	Strongly Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Uncertain		Somewhat Agree		Strongly Agree
Q-12 A woman's homosexuality should not be a cause for job discrimination in any situation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-13 Female homosexuality is detrimental to society because it breaks down the natural divisions between the sexes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-14 State laws regulating private, consenting, relating homosexual behavior should be loosened.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-15 Female homosexuality is a sin.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-16 A growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in American morals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-17 Female homosexuality in itself is no problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

	Strongly Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Uncertain		Somewhat Agree		Strongly Agree
Q-18 Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-19 Female homosexual behavior is an inferior form of sexuality compared to heterosexual behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-20 Lesbians are morally sick.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

**Questions 21 through 30 deals with how comfortable you would feel, as a social worker when interacting with child clients of gay or lesbian parent(s), or with the child's gay or lesbian parents. Please circle the number that best represents your level of comfort.**

	Strongly Uncomfortable		Somewhat Uncomfortable		Uncertain		Somewhat Comfortable		Strongly Comfortable
Q-21 How comfortable would you feel being questioned by a homosexual parent (s) regarding your familiarity with gay and lesbian families?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-22 How comfortable would you feel being asked by a homosexual parent (s) regarding your perceptions on sexuality?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

	Strongly Uncomfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Uncertain	Somewhat Comfortable	Strongly Comfortable				
Q-23 How comfortable would you feel asking a homosexual parent (s) questions about their family structure?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-24 How comfortable would you feel asking a homosexual parent (s) questions about homosexuality?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-25 How comfortable would you feel during a social work school meeting with the homosexual parent (s) of your client?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-26 If there was a child on your caseload who has a homosexual parent (s) how comfortable would you feel addressing any issues the child raised with you on gay and lesbian family structures?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

	Strongly Uncomfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Uncertain	Somewhat Comfortable	Strongly Comfortable				
Q-27 How comfortable would you feel if a client's consent for treatment/services form was signed noting co-Dads or co-Moms?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-28 How comfortable would you feel intervening with a "bully" who is teasing a child about his homosexual parent (s)?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-29 When meeting with homosexual parents, how comfortable would you feel not knowing which parent is the biological or the adoptive parent?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Q-30 How comfortable would you feel interacting with a homosexual parent (s) during a family session?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Questions 31 through 40 will assess your knowledge about homosexual relationships and parents who are gay or lesbian. Please circle "1" if your response is "False" or "2" if your response is "True."

Q-31 A child who is exposed to a homosexual person at an early ages (e.g., parent or teacher) is more likely to become homosexual than heterosexual.

- 1 FALSE
- 2 TRUE

Q-32 Most children accept gay and lesbian parenting in "a matter of fact" way.

- 1 FALSE
- 2 TRUE

Q-33 Homosexual partners always enact the stereotypical active "male," or passive "female" roles.

- 1 FALSE
- 2 TRUE

Q-34 Children of lesbian mothers are different in terms of self-esteem than children of a heterosexual mother.

- 1 FALSE
- 2 TRUE

Q-35 The lifestyles (i.e., decision making, household chores, etc.) of homosexual couples are as equally varied as the lifestyles of heterosexual couples.

- 1 FALSE
- 2 TRUE

Q-36 Approximately one-third of lesbians and one-fourth of gay men are parents.

- 1 FALSE
- 2 TRUE

Q-37 Gay fathers are not as effective parents as are heterosexual fathers.

- 1 FALSE
- 2 TRUE

Q-38 Although same-sex marriages are not legally recognized, many homosexual couples are in significant, long term relationships.

- 1 FALSE
- 2 TRUE

Q-39 Homosexual partners in a relationship engage in sexual behaviors (e.g., touching, kissing, caressing) similar to those of heterosexual couples.

- 1 FALSE
- 2 TRUE

Q-40 In a love relationship between two partners, when differences occur, they are more commonly associated with gender rather than with one's sexual orientation.

- 1 FALSE
- 2 TRUE

**The last series of questions are on general information. Please Choose a response that best represents you.**

Q-41 What is your gender?

- 1 FEMALE
- 2 MALE

Q-42 How old are you at this time? (please circle one)

- |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 18-21 | 22-25 | 26-29 | 30-33 | 34-37 | 38-41 |
| 42-45 | 46-49 | 50-53 | 54-57 | 58-61 | 62-65 |



Q-43 What is your race/ethnicity?

- 1 AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK
- 2 CARIBBEAN BLACK (not including Puerto Rico)
- 3 AMERICAN INDIAN, ALASKAN NATIVE, OR NATIVE HAWAIIAN
- 4 ASIAN, ASIAN AMERICAN, OR PACIFIC ISLANDER
- 5 MEXICAN AMERICAN/CHICANO
- 6 PUERTO RICAN
- 7 DOMINCAN
- 8 CUBAN
- 9 OTHER LATINO
- 10 WHITE/CAUCASIAN (not of Hispanic or Latino decent)
- 11 MIXED DECENT (Indicate in Text Box Below):

Q-44 What program are you currently enrolled in?

- 1 Bachelors of Social Work Junior Year
- 2 Bachelors of Social Work Senior Year
- 3 Masters of Social Work First Year
- 4 Masters of Social Work Second Year OR Advanced Standing

Q-45 How would you identify your sexual orientation?

- 1 ASEXUAL
- 2 BISEXUAL
- 3 HETEROSEXUAL
- 4 HOMOSEXUAL
- 5 OTHER (Indicate in Text Bow Below):

Q-46 What is your religious affiliation?

- 1 No Religious Affiliation
- 2 Christian
- 3 Catholic
- 4 Protestant
- 5 Jewish
- 6 Lutheran
- 7 Baptist
- 8 Islamic
- 9 Buddhist
- 10 Other (Indicate in Text Box Below):

Q-47 Have you taken or are you currently taking any courses, which include or included major discussions (where at least 1 full class session) was devoted to the topic of gay and lesbian PARENTING?

1. NO
2. YES

Q-48 Have you taken or are you currently taking any courses which include or included discussions on how to work with individuals who identify as homosexual (where at least 50% or 7 class sessions of the course) content is primarily on homosexuality)?

1. NO
2. YES

Q-49 Do you know a gay male or lesbian individual who is currently parenting a child?

1. NO (Skip question #50 & go ahead to question #51)
2. YES (Please answer question #50 below)

||-----> Q-50 (IF YES) Is (are) the parent(s):

1. A GAY MALE
2. A LESBIAN
3. TWO GAY MEN
4. TWO LESBIANS

5. OTHER (Indicate in Text Box Below):\_\_\_\_\_

Q-51 How much would you say your religious/spiritual beliefs influence how you feel about homosexuality?

1. I have no religious/spiritual beliefs whatsoever at this time
2. My religious/spiritual beliefs do not influence at all how I feel about homosexuality
3. My religious/spiritual beliefs somewhat influence how I feel about homosexuality
4. My religious/spiritual beliefs absolutely influence how I feel about homosexuality

Q-52 On a weekly basis, how often would you say you interact with gay or lesbians individuals?

1. NEVER
2. RARELY
3. OCCASIONALLY
4. OFTEN

**Thank you very much for participating in this gay and lesbian parenting research study.**

## **Appendix D: Research Codebook**

Label	Variable	Code	Level
Attitudes Toward Gay Men Subscale	ATG Subscale	Total ATG Score Point Range 10-90	Scale
Attitudes Toward Gay Men Recoding	ATG Recode	1-77= Less Liberal 78-90= More Liberal	Ordinal
Attitudes Toward Lesbian Women Subscale	ATL Subscale	Total ATL Score Point Range 10-90	Scale
Attitudes Toward Lesbian Women Recoding	ATL Recode	1-77= Less Liberal 78-90= More Liberal	Ordinal
Comfort Level with Gay and Lesbian Parents Subscale	Comfort Level Scale	Total Comfort Level Score Point Range 10-90	Scale
Comfort Level with Gay and Lesbian Parents Recode	Comfort Recode	1-77= Less Liberal 78-90= More Liberal	Ordinal
Male homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children.	Question 1	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
I think male homosexuals are disgusting.	Question 2	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
Male homosexuals should <b>not</b> be allowed to teach school.	Question 3	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
Male homosexuality is a perversion.	Question 4	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree	Ordinal

		5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	
Male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in human men.	Question 5	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
If a man has homosexual feelings, he should do everything he can to overcome them.	Question 6	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
I would <b>not</b> be too upset if I learned that my son were a homosexual.	Question 7	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
Homosexual behavior between two men is just plain wrong.	Question 8	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
The idea of male homosexual marriages seem ridiculous to me.	Question 9	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree	Ordinal

		8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	
Male homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that should <b>not</b> be condemned.	Question 10	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
Lesbians just can't fit into our society.	Question 11	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
A woman's homosexuality should <b>not</b> be a cause for job discrimination in any situation.	Question 12	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
Female homosexuality is detrimental to society because it breaks down the natural divisions between the sexes.	Question 13	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
State laws regulating private, consenting, relating homosexual behavior should be loosened.	Question 14	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal

Female homosexuality is a sin.	Question 15	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
A growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in American morals.	Question 16	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
Female homosexuality in itself is no problem.	Question 17	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions.	Question 18	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
Female homosexual behavior is an inferior form of sexuality compared to heterosexual behavior.	Question 19	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal



Lesbians are morally sick.	Question 20	1= Strongly Disagree 2= Strongly Disagree 3= Somewhat Disagree 4= Somewhat Disagree 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Agree 7= Somewhat Agree 8= Strongly Agree 9= Strongly Agree 99= Unknown	Ordinal
How comfortable would you feel being questioned by a homosexual parent (s) regarding your familiarity with gay and lesbian families?	Question 21	1= Very Uncomfortable 2= Very Uncomfortable 3= Somewhat Uncomfortable 4= Somewhat Uncomfortable 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Comfortable 7= Somewhat Comfortable 8= Very Comfortable 9= Very Comfortable 99= Unknown	Ordinal
How comfortable would you feel being asked by a homosexual parent (s) regarding your perceptions on sexuality?	Question 22	1= Very Uncomfortable 2= Very Uncomfortable 3= Somewhat Uncomfortable 4= Somewhat Uncomfortable 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Comfortable 7= Somewhat Comfortable 8= Very Comfortable 9= Very Comfortable 99= Unknown	Ordinal
How comfortable would you feel asking a homosexual parent (s) questions about their family structure?	Question 23	1= Very Uncomfortable 2= Very Uncomfortable 3= Somewhat Uncomfortable 4= Somewhat Uncomfortable 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Comfortable 7= Somewhat Comfortable 8= Very Comfortable 9= Very Comfortable 99= Unknown	Ordinal
How comfortable would you feel asking a homosexual parent (s) questions about homosexuality?	Question 24	1= Very Uncomfortable 2= Very Uncomfortable 3= Somewhat Uncomfortable 4= Somewhat Uncomfortable 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Comfortable 7= Somewhat Comfortable 8= Very Comfortable 9= Very Comfortable 99= Unknown	Ordinal
How comfortable would you feel during a social work school meeting with	Question 25	1= Very Uncomfortable 2= Very Uncomfortable 3= Somewhat Uncomfortable	Ordinal

the homosexual parent (s) of your client?		4= Somewhat Uncomfortable 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Comfortable 7= Somewhat Comfortable 8= Very Comfortable 9= Very Comfortable 99= Unknown	
If there was a child on your caseload who has a homosexual parent (s) how comfortable would you feel addressing any issues the child raised with you on gay and lesbian family structures?	Question 26	1= Very Uncomfortable 2= Very Uncomfortable 3= Somewhat Uncomfortable 4= Somewhat Uncomfortable 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Comfortable 7= Somewhat Comfortable 8= Very Comfortable 9= Very Comfortable 99= Unknown	Ordinal
How comfortable would you feel if a client's consent for treatment/services form was signed noting co-Dads or co-Moms?	Question 27	1= Very Uncomfortable 2= Very Uncomfortable 3= Somewhat Uncomfortable 4= Somewhat Uncomfortable 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Comfortable 7= Somewhat Comfortable 8= Very Comfortable 9= Very Comfortable 99= Unknown	Ordinal
How comfortable would you feel intervening with a "bully" who is teasing a child about his homosexual parent (s)?	Question 28	1= Very Uncomfortable 2= Very Uncomfortable 3= Somewhat Uncomfortable 4= Somewhat Uncomfortable 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Comfortable 7= Somewhat Comfortable 8= Very Comfortable 9= Very Comfortable 99= Unknown	Ordinal
When meeting with homosexual parents, how comfortable would you feel not knowing which parent is the biological or the adoptive parent?	Question 29	1= Very Uncomfortable 2= Very Uncomfortable 3= Somewhat Uncomfortable 4= Somewhat Uncomfortable 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Comfortable 7= Somewhat Comfortable 8= Very Comfortable 9= Very Comfortable 99= Unknown	Ordinal
How comfortable would you feel interacting with a homosexual parent (s) during a family session?	Question 30	1= Very Uncomfortable 2= Very Uncomfortable 3= Somewhat Uncomfortable 4= Somewhat Uncomfortable 5= Uncertain 6= Somewhat Comfortable 7= Somewhat Comfortable	Ordinal

		8= Very Comfortable 9= Very Comfortable 99= Unknown	
A child who is exposed to a homosexual person at an early age (e.g., parent or teacher) is more likely to become homosexual than heterosexual.	Question 31	1= True 2= False 99= Unknown	Nominal
Most children accept gay and lesbian parenting in "a matter of fact" way.	Question 32	1= True 2= False 99= Unknown	Nominal
Homosexual partners always enact the stereotypical active "male," or passive "female" roles.	Question 33	1= True 2= False 99= Unknown	Nominal
The self-esteem of children of lesbian mothers is different than the self-esteem of children with a heterosexual mother.	Question 34	1= True 2= False 99= Unknown	Nominal
The lifestyles (i.e., decision making, household chores, etc.) of homosexual couples are as equally varied as the lifestyles of heterosexual couples.	Question 35	1= True 2= False 99= Unknown	Nominal
Approximately one-third of lesbians and one-fourth of gay men are parents.	Question 36	1= True 2= False 99= Unknown	Nominal
Gay fathers are not effective parents as are heterosexual fathers.	Question 37	1= True 2= False 99= Unknown	Nominal
Although same-sex marriages are not legally recognized, many homosexual couples are in significant, long-term relationships.	Question 38	1= True 2= False 99= Unknown	Nominal
Homosexual partners in a relationship engage in sexual behaviors (e.g., touching, kissing, caressing) similar to those of heterosexual couples.	Question 39	1= True 2= False 99= Unknown	Nominal
In a love relationship between two partners (whether homosexual or heterosexual), when differences occur, they are	Question 40	1= True 2= False 99= Unknown	Nominal

more commonly associated with gender rather than with one's sexual orientation.			
What is your biological sex?	Gender	1= Female 2= Male 99= Unknown	Nominal
How old are you at this time?	Age	1= 18-21 2= 22-25 3= 26-29 4= 30-33 5= 34-37 6= 38-41 7= 42-45 8= 46-49 9= 50-53 10= 54-57 11= 58-61 12= 62-65 99= Unknown	Interval
What is your race/ethnicity?	Race/ Ethnicity	1= AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK 2= CARIBBEAN BLACK (not including Puerto Rico) 3= AMERICAN INDIAN, ALASKAN NATIVE, OR NATIVE HAWAIIAN 4= ASIAN, ASIAN AMERICAN, OR PACIFIC ISLANDER 5=MEXICAN AMERICAN/CHICANO 6= PUERTO RICAN 7= DOMINICAN (Dominican Republic) 8= CUBAN 9= OTHER LATINO 10= WHITE/CAUCASIAN (not of Hispanic or Latino origin) 11= MIXED DESCENT (Indicate in textbox below) 99= Unknown	Nominal
What program are you currently enrolled in?	Program	1= Bachelors of Social Work Junior Year 2= Bachelors of Social Work Senior Year 3= Masters of Social Work First Year 4= Masters or Social Work Second Year <b>OR</b> Advanced Standing 99= Unknown	Nominal
How would you identify your sexual orientation?	Sexual Identity	1= Asexual 2= Bisexual 3= Heterosexual 4= Homosexual 5= Other (Indicate in textbox below) 99= Unknown	Nominal

What is your religious affiliation?	Religion	1= No Religious Affiliation 2= Christian 3= Catholic 4= Protestant 5= Jewish 6= Lutheran 7= Baptist 8= Islamic 9= Buddhist 10= Other (Indicate in textbox below) 99= Unknown	Nominal
Have you taken or are you currently taking any courses, which include or included major discussions (where at least 1 full class session) was devoted to the topic of gay and lesbian PARENTING?	Diversity Course	1= Yes 2= No 99= Unknown	Nominal
Have you taken or are you currently taking any courses which include or included discussions on how to work with individuals who identify as homosexual (where at least 50% or 7 class sessions of the course) content is primarily on homosexuality)?	Homosexual Content	1= Yes 2= No 99= Unknown	Nominal
Do you know a gay male or lesbian individual who is currently parenting a child?	Gay Parent	1= Yes (Please answer question #50 below)No (Skip question #50 & go ahead to question #51) 2= No (Skip question #50 & go ahead to question #51) 99= Unknown	Nominal
If you responded YES to question # 49 above, indicate the sexual orientation of the parent (s):	Gay Parent Orientation	1= A gay male 2= A lesbian 3= Two gay men 4= Two lesbians 5= Other (Indicate in textbox below) 6= Not applicable 99= Unknown	Nominal
How much would you say your religious/spiritual beliefs influence how you feel about homosexuality?	Religious Influence	1= I have no religious/spiritual beliefs whatsoever at this time 2= My religious/spiritual beliefs do not influence at all how I feel about homosexuality 3= My religious/spiritual beliefs somewhat influence how I feel about homosexuality	Nominal

		4= My religious/spiritual beliefs absolutely influence how I feel about homosexuality 99= Unknown	
On a weekly basis, how often would you say you interact with gay or lesbians individuals?	Interactions	1= Never 2= Rarely 3= Occasionally 4= Often 99= Unknown	Ordinal

## Tables

**Table 1 Variable/ Operationalization**

Variable	Operationalization	Measurement	Type
Comfort with gay and lesbian families (dependent variable)	Total score of responses to questions on part II of the Gay & Lesbian Parenting Questionnaire (GLPO)	Part III of GLPQ Survey	Scale
Attitudes toward gay men	Total score of responses to questions on Part I of the survey, questions 1-10	Part I of GLPO Survey	Scale
Attitudes toward lesbian women	Total score of responses to questions on Part 1 of the survey, questions 11-20	Part II of GLPO Survey	Scale
Gender (independent variable)	State of being male or female (with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones)	Category within general information form (Please chose one: Female Male)	Nominal
Program: BSW or MSW (independent variable)	Whether student is in the Undergraduate or Graduate program	Category within general information form (ex: Please chose one: BSW Student MSW Student)	Nominal
Perceptions of interactions with gay & lesbian community (independent variable)	Perceived amount of interactions with individuals of the gay and lesbian community	Category within general information form (Q-52 ) How often would you say you interact with the gay or lesbian population?	Ordinal
Religion (Demographic variable)	Particular system of faith	Category within general information form (ex: Please chose one: Christian Catholic Protestant Jewish)	Nominal

Race/ Ethnicity (Demographic variable)	Race/ethnicity as identified by the participant	Category within general information form (ex: please chose from one of the following: White African American Latino (a) Etc.)	Nominal
Sexual orientation (Demographic variable)	Individual's self-identification attraction toward members of the same, opposite, or both genders	Category within general information form ( ex: Please chose one: Heterosexual Homosexual Bisexual Other)	Nominal
Student perceptions Of religious influence (Demographic variable)	Perceived influence of Religious affiliation	Question within general Information form (ex.: I have no religious/spiritual beliefs whatsoever at this time. My religious/spiritual beliefs do not influence at all how I feel about homosexuality. Etc.)	Ordinal
Age of student (Demographic variable)	Chronological age (measured in years) that an individual has been alive	Category within general information form (ex: Please chose one of the following Age : 18-21 22-25 etc. )	Interval

**Table 2 Frequencies of Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants (n=85)**

		Frequency	Percentage
Biological Sex	Female	73	85.9
	Male	12	14.1
			100
Age Intervals	18-21	23	27.1
	22-25	23	27.1
	26-29	8	9.4
	30-33	5	5.9
	34-37	3	3.5
	38-41	4	4.7



	42-45	6	7.1
	46-49	4	4.7
	50-53	1	1.2
	54-57	5	5.9
	58-61	1	1.2
	62-64	2	2.4
			100
Race/ Ethnicity	African/ Caribbean American	8	9.4
	Asian/ Asian American	1	1.2
	Latino	17	20
	White/Caucasian	54	63.5
	Mixed Descent	5	5.9
			100
Social Work Program	Bachelors in Social Work (BSW)	49	57.6
	Masters in Social Work (MSW)	36	42.4
			100
Sexual Identity	Bisexual	7	8.2
	Heterosexual	68	80
	Homosexual	4	4.7
	Other	6	7.1
			100
Religious Affiliation	No Religious Affiliation	21	24.7
	Christian	48	56.5
	Jewish	4	4.7
	Islamic	1	1.2
	Other	11	12.9
			100

**Table 3 Frequencies of Additional Characteristics of Study Participants (n=85)**

Survey Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Have you taken or are you currently taking any courses, which include or included major discussions (where at least 1 full class session) was devoted to the topic of gay and lesbian PARENTING?	Yes	28	32.9
	No	57	67.1
			100
Have you taken or are you currently taking any courses which include or included discussions on how to work with individuals who identify as homosexual (where at least 50% or 7 class sessions of the course) content is primarily on homosexuality)?	Yes	29	34.1
	No	56	65.9
			100
Do you know a gay male or lesbian individual who is currently parenting a child?	Yes	36	42.4
	No	49	57.6
			100
If you responded YES to question # 49 above, indicate the sexual orientation of the parent (s):	A gay male	6	7.1
	A lesbian	6	7.1
	Two gay men	1	1.2
	Two lesbians	19	22.4
	Other	3	3.5
	Not applicable	50	58.8

			100
How much would you say your religious/spiritual beliefs influence how you feel about homosexuality?	No religious affiliation	15	17.6
	Does not influence	37	43.5
	Somewhat influence	16	18.8
	Absolutely influence	15	17.6
	Unknown	2	2.4
			100
On a weekly basis, how often would you say you interact with gay or lesbians individuals?	Never	1	1.2
	Rarely	12	14.1
	Occasionally	17	20
	Often	55	64.7
			100

**Table 4 Hypothesis # 1 Pearson's Correlation test results of Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Comfort Level when Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families (n=85)**

		ATG	COMFORT
ATG	Pearson Correlation	1	.377**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	85	85
COMFORT	Pearson Correlation	.377**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	85	85

**Table 5 Hypothesis #2 Correlation test results of Attitudes Toward Lesbian Women and Comfort Level when Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families (n=85)**

		ATL	COMFORT
ATL	Pearson Correlation	1	.400**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	85	85
COMFORT	Pearson Correlation	.400**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	85	85

**Table 6 Hypothesis # 3 Cross tabulation test results of Student Biological Sex and Comfort Level when Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families (n=85)**

		COMFORT Recode		Total
		Less Liberal	More Liberal	
Biological Sex	female	28	45	73
	male	4	8	12
Total		32	53	85

**Table 7 Hypothesis # 4 Crosstabulation results of Student Program Enrollment recoded data and Comfort Level when Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families recoded data (n=85)**

		COMFORT Recode		Total
		Less Liberal	More Liberal	
SOW Recode	BSW	20	29	49
	MSW	12	24	36
Total		32	53	85

**Table 8 Hypothesis # 5 Spearman's Correlation test results of Student Interactions with Gay and Lesbian Individuals and Comfort Level when Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families recoded data (n=85)**

			Comfort Recode	Interactions
Spearman's rho	Comfort Recode	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.264
		Sig. (1-tailed)		.007
		N	85	85
	Interactions	Correlation Coefficient	.264	1.000
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.007	
		N	85	85

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