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Expanding Resources for Children III

Research-Based Best Practices in Adoption by Gays and Lesbians

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***EXPANDING RESOURCES
FOR CHILDREN III:***

***RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES
IN ADOPTION BY GAYS AND LESBIANS***

Policy and Practice Perspective

October 2011

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&
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In addition to the research and policy analysis conducted by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (Brodzinsky, 2003, 2011a; Brodzinsky et al., 2011; Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2011; Howard, 2006, 2008; Pertman & Howard, 2011), including the findings from the current study, several organizations and a number of adoption scholars have been active in the past few years in developing improved standards of practice for working with gay and lesbian adoptive families. We would especially like to recognize the seminal work of the Human Rights Campaign (2009), the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (Hill, 2009; Mallon & Betts, 2005) and Gary Mallon (2006, 2011), as resources that have guided our policy analysis and practice recommendations.

Policy and Practice Perspectives are research-based publications that focus on important and timely issues in the adoption and child welfare fields. We greatly appreciate the input of all the scholars and professionals who reviewed this paper and provided research and editorial assistance. They include Dr. Scott Ryan, University of Texas at Arlington, Dr. Gary Mallon, Hunter College; Dr. Ruth McRoy, Boston College; and Dr. Abbie Goldberg, Clark University. We are especially grateful to the gay and lesbian adoptive parents who participated in this study.

Send questions and comments to info@adoptioninstitute.org.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In every region and state in America, gay fathers and lesbian mothers are raising children. For a range of reasons, not everyone in our country likes or wants to accept this reality, but it is a reality nevertheless. And it is also true that adoption – primarily of “waiting” children and youth from foster care – is one of the reasons for this growing phenomenon. The good news is that both research and experience indicate that non-heterosexual parents are bringing up their children with sensitivity and competence comparable to that of their straight counterparts and, as a result, their sons and daughters are adjusting just as well.

Nevertheless, societal stigmas relating to adoption by lesbians and gay men remain, as do institutional barriers. These impediments do not further the best interests of children; indeed, they prevent or delay permanency for many, undermining their long-term psychosocial and academic adjustment. With over 100,000 children continuing to linger in foster care, despite being legally freed for adoption, every effort must be made to find timely and permanent placements for them, as well as for all the other children, in our country and abroad, who would benefit from adoption.

To maximize the number of suitable, vetted, trained and available families for the children who need them, all adults – regardless of gender, race, marital status, income level and/or sexual orientation – should be given the same opportunity to apply and be assessed for adoptive parenthood, using the same standards and guidelines. While the majority of adoption professionals today explicitly agree with that conclusion and already accept applications from gay and lesbian applicants, many if not most acknowledge that they are unsure about the best ways of working with such clients.

In keeping with its strategic priority to conduct work that improves children’s prospects of living in safe and successful families, the Adoption Institute has conducted a four-year-long research project that culminates in the publication of this report. It reviews what is known about adoption by lesbians and gay men and presents new empirical data about their perceptions, experiences and needs as parents. Based on this knowledge, the Institute provides best-practice recommendations for improving adoption practice and for strengthening pre-adoption and post-adoption services for families headed by non-heterosexual adults.

The components of this project included an extensive review of adoption practice literature and research on gay/lesbian family life, a national survey of gay/lesbian adoptive parents, a survey of adoption agency practices (still being analyzed and not included in this report), and an edited interdisciplinary book entitled *Adoption by Lesbians and Gay Men: A New Dimension in Family Diversity* (2011a).

This report also draws from and follows up on three previous publications of the Adoption Institute in this same realm: 1). *Adoption by Lesbians and Gays: A National Survey of Adoption Agency Policies, Practices and Attitudes* (2003); 2). *Expanding Resources for Children: Is Adoption by Gays and Lesbians Part of the Answer for Boys and Girls who Need Homes* (2006); and 3). *Expanding Resources for Children II: Eliminating Legal and Practice Barriers to Gays and Lesbians Adopting from Foster Care* (2008). In addition, it is informed by the work of others, notably the Human Rights Campaign, the British Association for Adoption and Fostering and Dr. Gary Mallon of Hunter College.

Key Findings from Previous Adoption Institute Publications

The body of work conducted by the Adoption Institute on gay/lesbian adoption has produced a number of important findings that provide a context for understanding the conclusions and recommendations in this report. Among them are:

- Children growing up in lesbian- and gay-headed households show similar patterns of adjustment as those raised by heterosexuals.
- Lesbians and gay men are motivated to adopt children at significant rates, and in fact are doing so, with over 65,000 adopted children and 14,000 foster children in the U.S. residing in homes headed by non-heterosexual individuals or couples.
- Most children adopted from foster care are adopted by their foster parents; banning or hindering lesbians and gay adults from fostering or adopting will reduce the number of permanent and nurturing homes for children in need.
- At least 60% of U.S. adoption agencies accept non-heterosexual parental applicants, and almost 40% have knowingly placed children with them – meaning almost any lesbian, gay man, or same-sex couple can find a professional to work with them. About half the agencies surveyed reported a desire for staff training to work with such clients.

Major Findings of the Current Project

- Over 50% of lesbian and gay parents adopted children from the child welfare system, and 60% adopted transracially. These findings demonstrate that non-heterosexual individuals and couples are important resources for children who linger in foster care.
- "Gay-affirmative" images and information in an adoption agency's "marketing" materials – website, brochures, newsletters and recruitment documents – increase the comfort and confidence of non-heterosexuals in working with the agency and its staff.
- Over 80% of lesbians and gays report that they voluntarily shared information about their sexual orientation with their adoption workers, and most workers responded in a positive and accepting manner. *Seventy-five percent were also generally satisfied with the professionalism and competence of their workers, but fewer than half felt the same way about the workers' knowledge and sensitivity regarding LGBT issues and family life.*
- Adoptive parents reported feeling more satisfied with their experience when they were comfortable disclosing information about their sexual orientation to agency staff, received positive reactions, and obtained good pre-adoption preparation and support.
- About one-third of the adoptions by lesbians and gay men in our survey were "open," and the birth families' initial reactions upon learning of their sexual orientation were strongly positive (73%). *Interestingly, gay male couples more often reported having been chosen because of their sexual orientation than did lesbians, explaining that the birthmothers expressed a desire to remain the child's "only mother."*

- Fewer than 20% of lesbian and gay parents received any pre-adoption preparation about managing sexual orientation issues in family life, and only 13% indicated any post-adoption training in this area.
- Two-thirds of lesbians and gays identified multiple areas of unmet training needs, including those related to general parenting, children's developmental issues, helping children cope with adoption and parental sexual orientation, and race and culture issues.
- There were more similarities than differences in the adoption experiences and views of lesbians and gay men. Lesbians were more likely to adopt transracially and to be less satisfied with their pre-adoption preparation and more likely to report unmet post-adoption education and support needs than gay men.

Best-Practice Recommendations

- **Advocate to remove legal and cultural barriers for LGBT adoption**, with a particular focus on improving the prospects of “waiting” children and youth in foster care. *This includes: advocacy for the passage of “gay marriage” laws, because the social institution of marriage brings clear long-term psychological (and other benefits) to children; partnerships between adoption professionals and LGBT organizations; and the promotion of positive press coverage of gay- and lesbian-headed families.*
- **Foster positive leadership and values among adoption professionals**, including by ensuring that agency Boards and CEOs are knowledgeable about and supportive of adoption by qualified non-heterosexuals and create workplace environments, including paperwork and employee attitudes, that are also inclusive, welcoming and respectful.
- **Develop recruitment and promotional strategies that demonstrate a desire to include LGBT clients**, including on websites and in brochures, newsletters, advertisements and recruiting/marketing materials. The addition of staff members who are non-heterosexual (and are professionally qualified) can also play an important role.
- **Provide appropriate pre- and post-adoption preparation and support for LGBT clients** because such education/services can be critical to the family's stability, particularly since these parents often adopt children with complex histories (such as abuse or neglect). *Issues relating to the parents' sexual orientation should be included in preparation and support, since they are likely to play a role in the experiences of the family in general and in those of the child in particular.*
- **Provide pre-adoption preparation and support for birth families**, including information that counters misconceptions and stereotypes about gay/lesbian parents; and provide education, guidance and support to older children who are being adopted to help them decide about and adjust to their new families.
- **Support research on LGBT adoption and parenting** because these families exist throughout our country and it is incumbent on the field to ensure that their children's interests are served through establishing and promulgating best practices.

Conclusion

Each year, over 130,000 children are adopted in the United States by married couples and single adults; by parents of every color and ethnicity, by financially secure parents and ones with limited incomes; by biological family members and strangers; by individuals who have struggled with infertility and ones who could make babies but choose this course instead; and into families where there already are biological children and ones where there are not.

Although most adoptive parents are heterosexual, one of the historic changes in adoption practice over the past several decades is the growing number of children entering families with lesbian and gay parents. They are mainly girls and boys from foster care who are older or have special needs, but also domestically born infants placed by their first mothers (and sometimes fathers), and children from other countries. They are being adopted in every state and live in nearly every county in the nation, and lesbian and gay parents, like their heterosexual counterparts, are providing nurturance and life-long permanence for these children. Moreover, they are doing so with a high level of parenting sensitivity and competence, comparable to that found among heterosexual adopters. And the evidence is that their sons and daughters are adjusting just as well as those being raised by straight parents.

Until recently, relatively few guidelines existed in this area of adoption practice. In addition, insufficient research has been conducted on adoption by LGBT families or on their experiences and needs in raising their children. Best practice guidelines need to be grounded in sound theory, experienced casework and valid empirical data. The research and policy analysis of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, as well as the work of other organizations and individuals, represent important steps in developing improved ways of working with these families. As better practices are identified, validated, disseminated and utilized by well-trained professionals over coming years, the lives of many thousands of boys and girls will be improved.

EXPANDING RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN III: RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES IN ADOPTION BY GAYS AND LESBIANS

In 2004, Martin Gill and his partner became the foster parents to two African American children. The older of the two boys was 4 years at the time; his brother was just a few months old. In 2006, when the boys became legally free for adoption, Gill applied to the Florida Department of Children and Families to adopt his foster sons, but was refused on the grounds that state law prohibited lesbians and gay men from adopting children, though it permitted them to be foster parents. The family's adoption home study indicated that the boys were well cared for by Gill and his partner and were strongly attached to them. As foster parents, they were doing an outstanding job; and, had they not been gay, they would have been readily approved as adoptive parents. The law did not allow for this option, however. Believing the state's decision to be not only unfair and discriminatory, but also inconsistent with the children's best interests, Gill – with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union – filed suit. Florida's law prohibiting adoption by lesbian and gay adults had been challenged on several occasions since its enactment in 1977, but on each occasion, was upheld at trial or by the appeals court. With Gill's case, however, the outcome was different. In 2008, the trial court declared Florida's law to be unconstitutional, and the decision subsequently was upheld by the Court of Appeals in 2010. After 33 years, the country's only explicit legal ban on "gay adoption" was struck down, paving the way for two healthy, emotionally stable children to be adopted by the father who had raised them for over six years.

INTRODUCTION

Martin Gill's family story was more visible than most because it drew wide media attention, but it is just one example of the growing complexity and diversity in adoption practice and adoptive family life that has been developing for several decades (Herman, 2008; Pertman & Howard, 2011; Pertman, 2011; Russett, 2011).

In the second half of the 20th Century, adoption became an increasingly common and accepted means of forming a family in the United States, as well as in most Western countries. This shift in attitude was fueled in large part by a confluence of societal changes, including the growing awareness of children's rights and needs, the greater diversity in family structure resulting from divorce, single parenthood and interracial marriage, and the increasing willingness of people to be more open about infertility and its consequences (Cole & Donley, 1990). In fact, these changes, and others, have been described as a "revolution" in the fabric of American families in that they challenged – and altered – many of the stereotypes, perceptions and realities of what constitutes a normal and healthy family (Pertman, 2011).

The growing awareness and acceptance of adoption were highlighted in a national survey conducted by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute in 1997 and again in conjunction with the Dave Thomas Foundation in 2002 (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 1997, 2002). Results of the first survey indicated that 58% of Americans had a personal connection to adoption – that is, they, or someone close to them, either were adopted, had adopted or had placed a child for adoption, while in the second survey, the figure rose to 64%. In addition, respondents who held favorable views of adoption increased from 56% in 1997 to 64% in 2002. Five years later, the percentage of Americans expressing favorable views about adoption grew to 72% (Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, 2007).

In the context of the growing acceptance of adoption, it is significant to note that the very nature of adoptive family life also changed remarkably in the past half century (Pertman, 2000; Herman, 2008; Pertman & Howard, 2011; Russett, 2011). Newborn, healthy Caucasian infants, once the aspiration of the vast majority of prospective adoptive parent applicants, over time became less and less available for adoption. Several factors accounted for the decrease in their numbers, including the growing availability and use of contraception and abortion, as well as the decline in stigma of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and single parenthood (Pertman, 2000, Brodzinsky, Smith, & Brodzinsky, 1998). In fact, the percentage of infants born to "never married" women who were relinquished for adoption has declined dramatically, from 8.7% prior to 1973 to approximately 1% between 1996 and 2002 (Jones, 2009).

In response to the declining number of infants available for private adoption domestically, a growing number of adults began looking to alternatives to achieve their goal of becoming parents, mostly turning to children in orphanages in other nations and children in foster care in the U.S. As a consequence, the practice of "intercountry adoption" grew dramatically from the late 1980s until 2004-2005, when it peaked at nearly 23,000 placements in the United States; since then, adoptions from abroad have declined sharply, with 11,058 placements in 2010 – plus an additional 1,090 children entering on humanitarian parole visas after the Haiti earthquake (U.S. Department of State, 2010). The decrease in intercountry adoptions has been mirrored in most Western nations as "sending countries" have suspended or curtailed their adoption programs (Selman, 2009).

The highest number of adoptions by Americans today is of children from foster care. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the number of children entering the child welfare system rose

significantly, to a large extent because of the greater awareness and reporting of child maltreatment, along with the growing societal problem of drug addiction. Too often, these children lingered for years in the public system, often moving from home to home without ever gaining a nurturing and permanent family. Federal and state initiatives were subsequently implemented to deal with this problem – most notably the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 – and, as a result, the number of children adopted from care has more than tripled in the last 25 years (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

While these two laws were effective in increasing foster care adoptions, additional changes in child welfare policy and practice were needed to further the goal of reducing the number of children who lingered in state care. Among those changes, the notion of the "unadoptable" child was challenged: in the past, older children and children of color, often with diagnosable medical, psychological and/or learning problems, were considered difficult, if not impossible, to place for adoption (Cole & Donley, 1990; Pertman, 2000 & 2011). In the 1980s, however, child welfare professionals began to reconsider many of the assumptions underlying adoption practice, and started recruiting and training specific families who could understand and manage the "special needs" of these vulnerable boys and girls. This goal required social workers to re-think their ideas about what constituted a "suitable" adoptive family.

No longer were middle-class, heterosexual, Caucasian, married couples necessarily seen as the sole pool of ideal applicants. Rather, social workers began to expand their notions of "suitability" and sought to "screen in" as many qualified prospective parents as possible. This practice, which is a cornerstone of contemporary adoption policy, has resulted in the acceptance of a great many adults who, in the past, were routinely rejected or at least discouraged as adoption applicants; these include foster parents, single adults, older individuals, infertile adults, individuals from lower- and working-class backgrounds, families of color, disabled adults, and lesbian and gay individuals and couples (Brodzinsky, et al., 1998; Pertman, 2000 & 2011).

Permitting adoption by gay men and women is probably the most recent and controversial of all the changes in modern adoption policy and practice (Pertman, 2000; Boyer, 2007; Brodzinsky, 2011a; Brodzinsky, Green, & Katuzny, 2011; Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2011; Howard, 2006; Howard & Freundlich, 2008; Mallon, 2006; Mallon, 2011; Pertman & Howard, 2011). In fact, there continues to be considerable resistance to this type of placement in many parts of the country and among some legal and adoption professionals with reasons including homophobic and heterosexist attitudes among some adoption practitioners, opposition by some socially conservative politicians and organizations, and ongoing myths, misconceptions and stereotypes that exist about parenting by this group of individuals (Boyer, 2007; Mallon, 2006). Contributing to the problem is a lack of well-articulated and empirically validated guidelines about how best to work with lesbian and gay adoption applicants.¹

Although there is a growing body of professional literature on adoption by non-heterosexual adults (see Boyer, 2007; Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2011; Mallon, 2006), the development of best practice standards for working with this population requires additional information about the attitudes and procedures they encounter when they apply for adoption, how they experience the adoption process, and the types of services and supports they need, both prior to and following adoption finalization. Applying this cumulative knowledge will not only improve practice with a

¹ Publications from the Human Rights Campaign (2009), the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (Brodzinsky, 2003; Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2011; Brodzinsky, et al., 2011; Howard, 2006; Howard & Freundlich, 2008), AdoptUSKids (2010), and the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (Mallon & Betts, 2005; Hill, 2009), as well as the work by Mallon (2006, 2011), represent efforts to formulate best practice standards in this area.

specific group of prospective parents but, most importantly, is a critical step toward increasing the pool of well-prepared adults who are willing and able to meet the challenges associated with adoptive family life, especially involving the placement of children who linger in foster care, with dwindling prospects for moving into safe, permanent families (Howard, 2006; Howard & Freundlich, 2008). It was primarily in the pursuit of this latter goal that the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute embarked on this project.

This report reviews what is known about adoption by lesbians and gay men and presents new empirical data about their perceptions, experiences and needs as parents. Based on this knowledge, the Institute provides recommendations for improving practice and strengthening pre-adoption and post-adoption services for families headed by non-heterosexual adults.

THE GROWTH OF LESBIAN AND GAY ADOPTION

Legal Reforms Related to Lesbian and Gay Adoption

Adoptive parenthood has long been understood by professionals in the field not as a right, but as a privilege. While tens of thousands of individuals and couples have availed themselves of this privilege annually for generations, it was rarely available to openly gay men and women. Legislatures in some states imposed statutory prohibitions on gay/lesbian adoptions, while organizations and agencies in others erected policy barriers.

The past decade, however, has witnessed a clear shift toward statutory interpretations and/or legislative actions that support adoption by gay men and women (Appell, 2011) – or at least permit it. The two most recent examples of this change, both of which were prominently featured in the media, took place in Florida and Arkansas. In 2010, Martin Gill's case in Florida (described above) involved an appellate affirmation of a lower court decision declaring the state's ban on adoption by lesbians and gays to be unconstitutional.² The following year, in April 2011, the Arkansas Supreme Court declared the state's prohibition on adoption by same-sex (and other unmarried) couples to be unconstitutional.

Today, adoption by lesbian and gay *individuals* is permitted by law across the U.S., but two states exclude same-sex *couples* from adopting: Mississippi specifically bars non-heterosexual couples from doing so, while Utah applies its ban to all unwed couples (which eliminates same-sex couples because they cannot marry there). Many states also do not allow second-parent adoptions; i.e., the children of unmarried lesbian, gay or heterosexual parents cannot be adopted by the parents' partners.³ In addition, in some states and parts of the country, homophobic attitudes and practices of individual judges, attorneys, mental health and adoption professionals sometimes inhibit or prevent child placements with lesbians and gay men.

Research Findings to Parenting by Lesbians and Gay Men

Many factors contribute to the resistance to adoption by non-heterosexual adults in our country, including conservative religious and cultural beliefs that view same-gender sexual attraction as deviant and immoral (Herek, 1995), as well as institutionalized prejudice and homophobia that influence some key decision-makers involved in the process – e.g., judges, attorneys and

² Florida Department of Children and Families v. in the Matter of Adoption of X.X.G. and N.R.G., No. 3 D08-3049, 2010 WL 3655782 (Fla. Dist. Ct., App., Sept 22, 2010).

³ See Appell, 2011 for a more extensive discussion of this issue.

practitioners (Downs & James, 2006; Matthews & Cramer, 2006). There are also many stereotypes and misconceptions about gays and lesbians related to parenting, including a belief that the number who want to parent is relatively small, a perception not supported by the research. For example, 2010 Census data found over 900,000 same-sex couples in the U.S., one-fifth (22%) of whom are raising children (Gates & Cooke, 2011). This figure does not include a sizable, but unknown number of single lesbians and gays who are also parenting children, whether these parent-child relationships are a result of previous heterosexual marriages, adoption or assisted reproductive processes.

Research on gay men and lesbians who do not have children has also found that many want to become parents (Beers, 1996; Gates, Badgett, Macomber, & Chambers, 2007; Goldberg, 2010; Morris, Balsam, & Rothblum, 2000; Sbordone, 1993). Furthermore, the likelihood of an even greater percentage of lesbians and gays parenting in the future is supported by other data (D'Augelli, Rendina, Sinclair & Grossman & Rendina, 2006/2007).

Similarly, research has challenged the stereotype of gays and lesbians as individuals who lack the ability, relationship stability and/or moral values to adequately raise children. Reviews of nearly a quarter-century of research on parenting by non-heterosexual adults is extraordinarily consistent in indicating that they are just as competent and well-adjusted as their heterosexual counterparts and that the children in their households show no meaningful differences in psychological adjustment from those who grow up with straight parents (Gartrell, Peyer, & Bos, 2011; Goldberg, 2010; Patterson, 2009; Patterson & Wainright, 2011; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

Although less research has been conducted on outcomes for lesbian and gay *adoptive* families, the findings of these studies, to date, are consistent with the conclusions noted above. Specifically, research has found no differences in psychological adjustment in adopted children of lesbian, gay and heterosexual parents. (Erich, Leung, & Kindler, 2005; Erich, Leung, Kindler, & Carter, 2005; Averett, Nalavany, and Ryan, 2009; Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010a) Furthermore, one study reported no differences in the strength of attachment between adolescents and their adoptive parents, or with their peers, in these three types of families; nor did adolescent life satisfaction vary as a function of parent sexual orientation (Erich, Kanenberg, Case, Allen, & Bogdanos, 2009). In addition, quality of parenting behavior has not been found to differ among lesbian, gay and heterosexual adoptive parents (Erich et al., 2005; Erich, Leung, Kindler, & Carter, 2005; Farr et al., 2010a). In fact, research has shown that parents in all three groups show an increase in perceived parenting skill as they make the transition to adoptive parenthood, with gay men showing the greatest positive shift in parenting confidence from pre-adoption to post-adoption (Goldberg & Smith, 2009a). Post-adoption relationship satisfaction also appears to be similar among these three groups of adoptive parents (Farr et al., 2010a; Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010b), as is the extent of help they receive from their support networks (Erich et al. 2005; Erich, Leung, Kindler, & Carter, 2005; Ryan & Cash, 2004).

Shifts in Societal Attitudes and Support Related to Lesbian and Gay Families

The normalization of adoption and parenting by lesbians and gays in the U.S. has been abetted by statutes and case law of the past decade or so (Appell, 2011) – and those actions presumably have been fueled by the substantive social science research that has offered a highly positive view of these families. This rapid evolution is reflected in the growing public acceptance of households headed by lesbian and gay adults. For example, in 1996, a majority of Americans (57%) opposed adoption by lesbians and gays; by 2006, the figure had dropped to 48% (Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2006). This shift in attitudes occurred in every age group, for both men and women, and in every part of the country. Pointedly, people

under 30 were far more positive about gay and lesbian adoption (58% in favor; 38% opposed) than were older respondents, suggesting that the trend toward greater acceptance of this type of family will continue to grow. In fact, the very idea of considering same-sex couples with children as "family" is now accepted by over two-thirds (68%) of Americans – up from 54% in 2003 (Associated Press, 2010; Powell, Bozendahl, Geist, & Steelman, 2010).

The general public's backing of non-heterosexual family life is mirrored by – and perhaps is growing partly because of – the support of professionals; i.e., virtually every major U.S. medical, mental health, legal and child welfare organization concerned with the well-being of children and families has indicated its support for gay/lesbian parenting and adoption. These include, but are not limited to, the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Psychiatric Association, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Psychoanalytic Association, American Psychological Association, American Bar Association, Child Welfare League of America, National Association of Social Workers, North American Council on Adoptable Children, and Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute.

In sum, growing public and professional acceptance of lesbian/gay family life, coupled with a more favorable legal climate – as well as growing understanding that these families show similar patterns of adjustment as their straight peers – have resulted in greater interest by lesbians and gay men in adoption (Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2011; Mallon, 2006; Gates, et al., 2007). Still, some basic questions remained unanswered, including the extent of their interest, the types of adoptions they most often complete, and the nature of their pre- and post-adoption experiences.

How Prevalent is Adoption by Lesbians and Gay Men?

Efforts to develop well-articulated and comprehensive social casework and clinical practices in relation to non-heterosexual families begin with a needs assessment, including determining the extent to which lesbians and gay men adopt children. The answer to this basic question, however, is difficult to determine for a variety of reasons. First, because of continuing prejudice and stigma in society, not all the adults in question are open to all others about their sexual orientation. As a result, there probably are significant numbers of women and men who want to parent, or are parenting, adopted or foster children without identifying themselves as lesbian or gay. Second, because of discriminatory practices of some agencies, even individuals who are "out" in most areas of their lives may not share information about their sexual orientation when they apply to be foster or adoptive parents. Third, many children are adopted by single adults, who often are not asked explicitly about their sexual orientation. Fourth, many agencies – even those that readily work with lesbians and gay men – do not keep statistics on the number of children they place with non-heterosexual individuals and couples (Brodzinsky, 2003). Finally, even in confidential national surveys, information about sexual orientation often is not collected. In short, reliable figures on adoption by lesbians and gay men, including the types of adoptions they choose, simply do not exist at present.

Nevertheless, a report issued jointly by the Williams Institute and the Urban Institute provides estimates relating to adoption and foster care by gay and lesbian parents in the United States (Gates, et al., 2007). Drawing their data from Census 2000 and the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics in 2002, the researchers reported that 46% of lesbian and bisexual women (over one million individuals) had considered adoption at some point, compared to 32% of heterosexual women. In addition, non-heterosexual women were more likely to have taken steps toward adopting a child than their straight peers (5.5% vs. 3.3%). Comparable data were not available for men.

The researchers found that lesbians and gay men were raising about 65,000 adopted children – roughly 4% of all such children in the U.S. This figure does not include an additional 14,000 or so foster children estimated to live in households headed by lesbians or gays – many of whom are likely to be adopted by their foster parents. In summary, although it is not known exactly how many lesbian and gay individuals and couples are interested in adopting a child, or have done so, the number clearly is significant and appears to be rising.

To What Extent Do Adoption Agencies Work with Lesbians and Gay Men?

Gay or straight, individuals who want to adopt have two choices in most states: (1) apply through a licensed public or private agency; or (2) contact an independent professional, such as an attorney, who can facilitate a private placement. Although there is very little information about the use of independent practitioners by lesbians and gays, two national surveys have shed light on the policies and practices of public and private adoption agencies related to working with these clients. The first study, conducted by Brodzinsky, Patterson and Vaziri (2002), focused on agency placements during 1995-1996. A follow-up study by Brodzinsky and the staff of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute looked into placements during 1999-2000 (Brodzinsky, 2003; Brodzinsky, 2011a). Because the results of the two studies were very similar, only the findings of the more recent research, about placements during 1999-2000, will be highlighted here.

Data were received from the directors (or their proxies) of 309 adoption agencies – 30 public and 277 private – distributed throughout the United States. Approximately 60% of survey respondents reported that their agencies accepted adoption applications from lesbians and gay men, and 39% of the agencies had knowingly made adoptive placements with this group of applicants during the time period studied. About one in five of the respondents reported that their agencies had made outreach efforts to recruit lesbians and gays as prospective adoptive parents. Nearly half (48%) of respondents expressed a desire for their agency staff to receive training geared toward working with non-heterosexual adults.

The study also found that policies and practices related to lesbian and gay adoption were influenced by whether the agency had a religious affiliation, as well as by the agency's program mission. Public and private secular agencies, as well as those affiliated with Judaism and the Lutheran church, were significantly more likely to work with and reach out to lesbians and gays than those affiliated with Catholicism and conservative Protestant denominations. Furthermore, agencies whose primary mission focused on placing children who are older and/or have "special needs" were more likely to have policies and practices favorable to lesbian and gay prospective parents than were those focusing mainly on the placement of domestically born infants. Agencies that focused primarily on intercountry adoptions, or that had a highly mixed adoption program, fell in-between their counterparts in terms of their involvement with lesbians and gays.

In short, the data indicate that a substantial percentage of agencies are interested in working with lesbian and gay clients, perhaps even more so than is realized by the majority of the public or within the lesbian and gay community.

Are Certain Types of Adoption More Common among Lesbians and Gay Men?

Adoption success rests, in part, on the availability and utilization of appropriate pre- and post-adoption services (Brodzinsky, 2008; Smith, 2010). Given that children in various types of adoption have differing needs, their parents require different types of preparation and support; so it is important to know whether non-heterosexual adults are more likely to adopt children with

particular characteristics or from particular backgrounds. Such information would help professionals develop more effective training and support for this group of adoptive families.

As previously noted, public child welfare agencies and private agencies focusing on "special needs" placements are more likely to work with lesbians and gay men (Brodzinsky, 2003; 2011; Brodzinsky et al., 2002); they also tend to place children from the most difficult backgrounds, as well as those with the most challenging behaviors. This finding may help explain the results of other studies showing that lesbians and gay men are more likely to adopt children with developmental and/or mental health problems than are heterosexuals (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Matthew & Cramer, 2006). Whether these types of placements represent a true choice by lesbians and gays, or reflects a discriminatory practice, is open to question. One study argued that, given the history of resistance among agencies to working with LGBT clients, the tendency to match them with children who are difficult, have special needs or are "less preferred" is a form of placement bias (Kenyon, Chong, Enkoff-Sage, Hill, Mays & Rochelle, 2003).

There also is some evidence that lesbians and gays more often adopt across racial lines than do heterosexual adults. For example, recent research has found that lesbian pre-adoptive couples expressed greater openness to the idea of adopting an African American child than did "straight" adults (Goldberg, 2009; Goldberg & Smith, 2009). In addition, data from several national surveys indicated significantly more adoption of racial minority children among same-sex (47%) than heterosexual (37%) couples (Gates, et al., 2007). In addition, one study found that lesbian and gay couples were more likely to complete transracial placements than were their straight counterparts – and this was especially true for interracial couples compared to same-race couples (Farr and Patterson 2009). In discussing the issue of lesbians and gays adopting racial/ethnic minority children, two researchers argued that, given their multiple minority identities, these individuals are uniquely situated to understand and manage the challenges associated with this type of family life (Richardson and Goldberg, 2010).⁴

Although no other country from which Americans adopt openly permits its children to be placed with lesbians and gay men, it is clear that a substantial number of agencies in the United States have been involved in making such intercountry placements (Brodzinsky, 2003, 2011; Brodzinsky et al., 2002). Often, agencies have followed a "don't ask, don't tell" policy regarding their clients' sexual orientation, which can compromise effective preparation and support for non-heterosexual adoptive families (Brodzinsky, 2003, 2011a; Mallon, 2006, 2011).

In summary, regardless of the type of adoptions completed, lesbians and gay men, like their heterosexual peers, are likely to benefit from well-developed preparation and education during the adoption process, as well as ongoing support after finalization (Brodzinsky, 2008; Brodzinsky et al., 2011; Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2011; Mallon, 2006, 2011; Goldberg & Gianino, 2011). Some preparation and support is likely to focus on issues related to sexual orientation; other support, however, is likely to focus on the unique issues associated with the type of adoptions they have completed (e.g., transracial placements, open adoptions, sibling placements, etc.). Having a clearer sense of the types of adoptions most lesbians and gay men are drawn to, the reasons underlying their choices, and the type of experiences they have when they seek to adopt, is likely to help professionals design and implement the preparation, education and support services most needed by these adoptive families.

⁴ See Goldberg, 2009 for additional discussion of the motivations of lesbian and gay adults related to transracial adoption.

SURVEY OF LESBIAN/GAY ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Given the limited research on non-heterosexual adoptive families, as well as the relationship between pre- and post-adoption experiences and the long-term well-being of adoptive parents and their children (Brodzinsky, 2008; Smith, 2010), this study by the Adoption Institute sought to expand knowledge in this area by focusing on the perceptions, experiences, and needs of lesbian and gay adoptive parents, both during the adoption process and afterward.

It was our expectation that survey responses from lesbian and gay adoptive parents about their adoption experiences would allow us to define and refine the types of adoption practices likely to be most effective with this client population.⁵ We sought to accomplish these goals by surveying lesbian and gay adoptive parents about their adoption experiences. The primary questions addressed in the survey were:

- (1) What types of adoptions are most often sought by lesbian and gay adults, and why?
- (2) What are the experiences of lesbians and gay men when they seek to adopt? To what extent are they open about their sexual orientation with adoption professionals, and what are the reactions of the professionals to this information?
- (3) What type of preparation and education do lesbian and gay clients receive during the adoption process and do they feel satisfied with the services received?
- (4) What percentage of lesbian and gay adoptions are open placements and what type of response do they generally receive from birthparents?
- (5) To what extent do lesbians and gay men seek additional education and support in the post-adoption period, and in what areas of family life?
- (6) What are the perceived barriers to adoption by lesbian and gays, and what actions do these individuals believe would be most helpful in removing these barriers?
- (7) Do lesbian and gay parents differ in their adoption experiences, views and/or needs?
- (8) Are there differences between single compared to partnered lesbian and gay parents in their adoption experiences, views and/or needs?

METHODOLOGY

Sample Recruitment

To recruit lesbian and gay adoptive parents for our study, letters describing the research subjects -- experiences of lesbian and gay parents during the adoption process, as well as information regarding their post-adoption experiences, views, and needs -- were sent to a large number of adoption agencies and adoption attorneys around the country, identified from our

⁵ In addition to lesbians and gay men, non-heterosexuals also include individuals who are bisexual and transgender. However, relatively little has been written about parenting and adoption by the latter two groups (Biblarz & Stavci, 2010). Researchers and adoption agencies often co-mingle bisexual individuals with lesbians and gays, thereby making it impossible to determine their unique parenting characteristics and experiences. Furthermore, many agencies continue to be openly resistant to transgender individuals, even when they are willing to work with other non-heterosexual clients (Human Rights Campaign, 2009). Thus, recruiting sufficient numbers of bisexual and transgender adoptive parents for meaningful analyses for current research purposes was judged to be impractical. Consequently, our survey focused exclusively on lesbian and gay adoptive families.

previous research and from other sources as working with non-heterosexual clients. In addition, announcements about the research were distributed at several national and regional adoption conferences and appeared on a number of LGBT parenting websites and blogs.

Lesbian and gay adoptive parents who were interested in taking part responded in one of two ways: slightly more than half (52.5%) responded anonymously to an online survey posted on Survey Monkey and the rest (47.5%) responded to a confidential survey sent by postal service or email.⁶ Instructions for the survey emphasized that only one parent per family should fill out the questionnaire.⁷ Only families that had adopted a child who was *not* biologically related to either parent were eligible to participate in the study. Data was collected in 2009 and 2010. A total of 205 surveys were received; however, for various reasons, 47 surveys had to be excluded.⁸ Because of the various means of data collection, it was impossible to determine the sample response rate.⁹

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 158 adoptive parents, none of whom were partnered with another respondent, provided completed surveys: 83 lesbians (52.5%) and 75 gay men (47.5%). Respondents' ages ranged from 26 to 61 years, with a mean of 44.7 years. On average, women were statistically older than men (45.8 versus 43.5 years).¹⁰ The large majority of respondents were partnered (84.3% of lesbians; 84.9% of gays). Couples had been partnered for an average of 12.8 years, with a range of 3 to 30 years. There was no statistical difference in the length of partnerships for lesbians (13.1 years) and gay men (12.6 years). Ninety-six percent of the men self-identified as gay and 4% as bisexual; 94% of the women self-identified as lesbian and 6% as bisexual.

One hundred thirty-eight respondents identified as Caucasian (87.3%); 11 as Hispanic (7%), 4 as African American (2.5%), 2 as Asian (1.3%) and 3 as biracial (1.9%). Of the partnered respondents, 23% reported that they were involved in an interracial relationship; men (30.6%) were significantly more often involved in such a relationship than women (16.4%).ⁱ

Over 90% of respondents had completed at least a college degree (see Table 1), with no difference in educational level for men and women.

⁶ Although no identifying information was requested on the survey, respondents were given the option of being interviewed in a follow-up step. Those who chose to be interviewed subsequently provided an email address for contact purposes. Quotes in boxes are from the follow-up interviews as well as from narratives provided in response to some of the survey questions. All identifying information, as well as some contextual references, have been removed from the quotes so as to protect the privacy of respondents.

⁷ The research procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Boards of Florida State University and Illinois State University.

⁸ 30 online surveys were eliminated due to extensive missing data. In all of these cases, the respondent had started to complete the survey, but never finished it. An additional 10 surveys were eliminated because the respondent had adopted the biological child of their partner. Finally, seven surveys were eliminated when it became clear that the respondents were the partners of someone who had previously submitted a completed survey. Although no names were attached to the surveys, these instances were relatively easy to identify because the demographics of the adults and children exactly matched the demographics found on a completed survey that had been received either simultaneously or soon thereafter. In cases where the surveys were received simultaneously, one respondent was chosen randomly for inclusion. When the surveys were received on different days, the data from the first survey was kept and the second one was eliminated.

⁹ Preliminary analyses were conducted to determine whether the findings differed for individuals who responded through Survey Monkey and those who responded to a mailed questionnaire. Few differences were found and consequently all subsequent analyses were collapsed across method of data collection.

¹⁰ For ease of reading, all statistical test information will be excluded from the text, but is in the endnotes.

Table 1: Highest Educational Degree Attained

	RESPONDENTS' EDUCATION*				
	HS/GED	AD	BA	MA	DD
Female	6 (7%)	2 (2%)	28 (34%)	32 (39%)	15 (18%)
Male	6 (8%)	0 (0%)	21 (28%)	30 (40%)	18 (24%)

* HS/GED = High School Diploma or GED; AD = Associates' Degree; BA = Bachelor's Degree; MA = Master's Degree; DD = Doctoral Degree or equivalent (Ph.D., M.D. or J.D.)

On average, respondents were secure financially, with family incomes (combined for two-parent families) ranging from \$13,000 to \$1,300,000 (mean = \$163,286; median = \$130,000). Men (\$212,380) reported far higher family incomes than women (\$115,467).ⁱⁱ Finally, respondents were geographically diverse, residing in 33 states and several Canadian provinces.

Survey Description

The survey consisted of 90 questions covering a wide range of issues, including the following (see Appendix A for a complete copy of the survey questions):

- (1) demographic characteristics of the family (respondent, second parent, last child adopted);
- (2) the source and type of adoptions the respondent had completed;
- (3) reasons for choosing a specific adoption source and the manner in which the adoption source managed information about the client's sexual orientation;
- (4) whether the respondent had ever been rejected for adoption and, if so, the reasons why;
- (5) promotional and recruitment methods used by the adoption agency, attorney or facilitator and whether these methods influenced the respondents' views of the adoption source;
- (6) type of preparation and education received during the adoption process and whether the services met the family's needs;
- (7) experiences with the birth family;
- (8) experiences of bias during the adoption process;
- (9) extent of satisfaction with the adoption process
- (10) education and support services received in the post-adoption period and the perceived adequacy of the services; and
- (11) perceived barriers to adoption by lesbians and gay men and actions that could be taken to remove them.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Nature of Adoptive Placements

Respondents reported adopting from 36 different states (most often California, New York, Massachusetts and Texas) and 14 other countries (most often Guatemala, Vietnam, China and Russia). About 42% of parents reported adopting one or more children through a public child welfare agency, 38% from a private agency placing domestically born infants, 23% from a private agency placing children from abroad, and 5% through an attorney or independent facilitator.¹¹ There was no statistical difference between women and men in their use of public agencies, private agencies placing domestically born infants or adoption attorneys/facilitators. Lesbians were more likely to have completed an intercountry adoption than gay men (31.3% versus 18.7%).ⁱⁱⁱ Finally, the vast majority of agencies chosen by lesbians and gay men had no known religious affiliation (84.2%); of the 16% of faith-based agencies that were utilized, 5% were affiliated with Judaism, 4.4% with Catholicism, 4.4% with the Lutheran Church, 6% with the Baptist Church and .6% with the Mormon Church.

When asked their reasons for choosing to work with a specific type of professional (e.g., adoption agency, attorney or facilitator), parents provided a range of explanations, including:¹²

"We wanted an agency where we would feel safe ... where we knew that they were supportive of lesbians and gays adopting children ... our good friends had adopted from the same agency two years ago and they had a very positive experience ... it gave us confidence that we would too" [lesbian mother of a 6-year-old transracially placed child]

- adoption source/professional was known to be gay-friendly (51.2%)
- wanting a particular type of child or adoption; for example, an older child, a foster child, or a child from another country (47.5%)
- reputation of the agency/professional (40.6%)
- adoption source/professional recommended by others (28.7%)
- personal knowledge of the agency or adoption professional (15.5%)
- lower cost of the adoption -- in the case of child welfare placements (14.4%)
- legal reasons (4.4%)
- other reasons (15.1%)

There were no statistical differences in the reasons provided by lesbians and gay men for choosing to work with specific types of adoption professionals.

Parents reported adopting from 1-9 children, either as an individual or couple: 98 respondents adopted a single child (62%); 47 adopted two children (29.7%); six adopted three children (3.8%); and 7 adopted four or more children (4.4%). There was no statistical difference in the total number of children adopted by men and women. Lesbians (65.1%) were slightly more likely to adopt as individuals – either because they were single or because state law did not allow for second parent adoption – than were gay men (49.3%).^{iv}

¹¹ Because some respondents adopted more than one child, from different sources, the total percentage across the four adoption categories exceeds 100%.

¹² Because respondents provided more than one reason for choosing a specific type of adoption source, the total percentage across the range of explanations exceeds 100%.

Legal Knowledge and Second Parent Adoptions

When asked whether the state they lived in permitted adoption by non-heterosexual adults, either as individuals or as a couple, 135 parents responded affirmatively (85.4%), 11 in the negative (7.0%), and 12 were unsure (7.6%). Interestingly, of the 11 respondents who indicated "no" to this question, 5 were misinformed; that is, their states did allow adoption by lesbians and gay men, either as individuals and/or as couples.

Of those adoptive parents who were partnered, 71% had completed a second parent adoption.¹³ The most common reason for not doing so was that their states did not permit it. There was no difference between lesbian- and gay-headed households related to second parent adoptions.

Characteristics of Most Recently Adopted Child

To simplify our analyses of the types of children adopted by lesbians and gays, we asked respondents to address a series of questions related to *their most recently completed adoption*.

At the time of placement, the children adopted most recently ranged in age from newborn to 17 years, with a mean of 27 months. Table 2 shows that over two-thirds of the children were placed for adoption prior to 2 years of age. There was no statistical difference in the mean age of children placed with lesbians or gay men. In contrast, children adopted by single adults (53.4 months) were significantly older than children adopted by couples (21.9 months).^v

Table 2: Age of Children at Time of Adoptive Placement (months)

Placement Age	Birth	12-Jan	13-24	25-36	37-48	49-60	61-72	73-214
	27.20%	28.50%	12.00%	7.60%	7.60%	4.40%	2.50%	10.10%

As Table 3 indicates more males (57.6%) than females (42.4%) were adopted,¹⁴ and lesbians were significantly more likely to adopt girls than boys (59% vs. 41%), while gay men were more likely to adopt boys (75.7% vs. 24.3%). Single parents and couples did not differ statistically in their adoption of girls and boys.

Table 3: Gender of Children Adopted by Lesbians and Gay Men

Respondent Gender	Child Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Female	49	34	83
Male	18	56	74
Total	67	90	157

¹³ This finding is based only on surveys completed by mail or email. Unfortunately, the question was inadvertently left out of the online survey.

¹⁴ One respondent did not report the gender of his child.

Respondents identified 31.6% of their children as Caucasian, 21.5% as African American, 15.2% as Hispanic, 10.1% as Asian, 20.3% as biracial and 1.3% as "other." There were no statistical differences between lesbians and gay men or between single and partnered adoptive parents in the racial status of their children.

The percentage of adoptive placements that were transracial (defined as the child's race being different from *both* of the parents' races) was 60.1%. Lesbians were significantly more likely to have adopted transracially than were gay men (68.7% vs. 50.7%). Furthermore, of all the transracial adoptions completed, 60% were by lesbians and 40% by gays.^{vi15}

A separate analysis was conducted to determine whether transracial placements were more likely to occur when couples were interracial as opposed to same-race. Results indicated a difference in the percentage of transracial adoptions completed by these two groups (interracial couples: 51.7%; same-race couples: 61.7%).

Half (50.6%) of the most recently adopted children came into their families from the child welfare system. In addition, 57% were described as having one or more special needs: emotional problems (35.4%); educational difficulties (29.7%); behavioral problems (28.5%); physical problems (21.5%) and sibling group (16.5%). There were no statistical differences in the extent or type of special needs issues among children adopted by lesbians or gay men (see Table 4).

Table 4: Child Welfare Adoptions and Children with Special Needs (%)

	Lesbians	Gay Men
Child Welfare Adoptions	47	54.7
Member of Sibling Group	14.5	18.7
Physical Problems	24.1	18.7
Behavioral Problems	28.9	28
Emotional Problems	42.2	28
Educational Problems	31.3	29.3
One or More Special Needs	60.2	53.3

Awareness of and Response to Adoption Recruiting Methods

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of various outreach procedures that their adoption service provider (i.e., agency, attorney, and/or facilitator) used to recruit gay and lesbian prospective parents. The most common method identified was word of mouth (73.4%), followed by seminars/workshops targeting non-heterosexual prospective parents (33.5%), recruitment through LGBT advocacy groups and organizations (27.8%), advertisements in LGBT publications (20.3%) and various other means (15.2%).¹⁶

Although only a minority of parents (28.5%) had seen images or descriptions of same-sex couples in one or more of their provider's advertisements, virtually all who did (97.3%) were

¹⁵ Because other researchers (Farr & Patterson, 2009) investigating adoption among lesbian and gay parents have defined a transracial placement as one in which the child is of a different race from either one or both of his/her parents, we conducted an additional analysis of this issue using their definition. For this analysis, 70.3% of all adoptions involved a transracial placement. Furthermore, no differences in transracial adoption were noted between lesbians and gay men.

¹⁶ Because respondents could offer more than one response, the total percentage across different types of outreach methods exceeds 100%.

positively influenced by this outreach method, perceiving the professionals they were working with as being open and affirmative to adoption by gays/lesbians. Some parents recalled seeing other kinds of diverse families in promotional materials – 30.4% had observed images or descriptions of single women and men and 44.9% were aware of images or descriptions of diverse families in the marketing materials. Images and descriptions in promotional materials of family diversity (83.1%) and of single men and women (75%) also produced positive reactions in respondents. There were no significant differences in lesbians' or gays' awareness of these outreach methods or in their responses to them.

In summary, the results suggest that when adoption agencies and other professionals clearly acknowledge their support for adoption by non-heterosexual adults in their promotional materials, lesbians and gay prospective adoptive parents experience greater comfort and confidence in working with them.

Managing Information about Sexual Orientation

The survey explored whether parents disclosed their sexual orientation in the adoption application or home study process before being asked for this information and whether the professionals questioned them directly about sexual orientation during the adoption process.

The vast majority of adoptive parents reported having voluntarily disclosed information about their sexual orientation at some point (84.2%); lesbians and gay men were equally open about this information. Respondents who were partnered were significantly more likely to voluntarily share this information (88.7%), compared to single parents (56%).^{vii} Parents who adopted domestically (89%) were significantly more open about their sexual orientation than parents who adopted from another country (70%).^{viii}

Slightly more than half of respondents (55.1%) noted that one or more adoption professionals directly asked about their sexual orientation. There were no statistical differences in being asked about this information for lesbians and gay men, for partnered and un-partnered individuals or for parents who adopted domestically and from other countries.

Asked about the adoption professionals' reactions to their sexual orientation, parents reported mostly encouraging responses, but others as well:¹⁷

- positive and accepting (76.6%)
- mixed response, with adoption workers and other professionals showing some initial reservations, but eventually becoming accepting (10.1%)
- increased strategizing related to decision-making about what to share in the home study documents and how to handle information about the applicant's partner (17.1%)
- increased focus on legal issues, particularly related to state or country of origin restrictions on gay/lesbian adoption, second parent adoptions, and protecting the parent-child relationship when second parent adoption was impossible (12.7%)

"Their website and other materials showed same-sex families and mixed race families ... it made all the difference ... we knew this was the place for us ... they would understand us and support us"
[Lesbian adoptive parent in an interracial relationship]

¹⁷ Because respondents occasionally reported more than one response by adoption professionals, the total percentage across different types of reactions exceeds 100%.

- greater scrutiny of applicants, with resistance and lack of respect on the part of professionals, although ultimately allowing the adoption to proceed (4.4%)
- rejection of adoption application (2.5%).

There were no significant differences in how professionals responded to lesbian and gay adoption applicants, or to partnered compared to single parents, in relation to sexual orientation.

When asked if they had ever been rejected for adoption, 33 parents (20.9%) responded affirmatively. There were no differences in adoption rejection rates for lesbians and gay men, or for partnered and unpartnered applicants.

Parents who reported having been rejected for adoption on one or more occasions were asked the reasons for their rejection. A number of explanations were offered, including:¹⁸

- perceived prejudice of adoption professionals (72.7%)
- adoption agency did not work with non-heterosexuals (45.5%)
- state legal restrictions (15.2%)
- perceived gender bias, for men only (12.1%)
- history of mental health problems (6.1%)
- single parent (3.0%)
- never told/uncertain (6.1%)

"No one came right out and said we won't accept you because you're queer, but I could tell ... being a single man ... being a single gay man ... c'mon ... there were too many questions about whether I really knew what I was getting into ... too little eye contact by the people at the agency ... if I was a single woman it wouldn't have happened" [Gay male parent who subsequently adopted from foster care]

When asked directly whether they believed their sexual orientation played a role in the adoption rejection, 87.9% responded affirmatively. There were no statistical differences between lesbians and gay men in their belief that sexual orientation was a key factor in the decision. Partnered and single parents also provided similar explanations for being rejected.

In general, most lesbians and gay men were quite open about their sexual orientation during the adoption process, although less so when applying to adopt from another country. The vast majority experienced a positive and accepting attitude regarding their sexual orientation from their adoption professionals.

Perceived Bias during the Adoption Process

Parents were asked whether they experienced any form of bias or discrimination on the part of various individuals during the adoption process – e.g., attorneys, judges, social workers, agency support staff, other agency professionals and birth family members. Respondents reported experiencing bias from the following:^{ix}

- other agency professionals (20.9%)
- birth family members (16.5%)
- agency support staff (14.6%)
- adoption social workers (13.9%)
- judges (8.2%)

¹⁸ Because respondents could provide more than one answer, the total across explanations exceeds 100%.

- adoption attorneys (5.7%)
- any of these sources (48.4%)

Nearly half of the respondents reported experiencing bias from one or more professionals or birth family members during the adoption process. There were no significant differences in the experience of bias/discrimination for lesbians and gay men, or for partnered and single parents.

Pre-Adoption Preparation and Education

Survey respondents identified the below specific types of preparation and education they received during the adoption process regarding the impact of adoption on the child and family.

- individual discussions and preparation with an adoption worker (90.5%)
- group meetings with other adoptive parents (72.8%)
- attendance at adoption seminars, workshops, or conferences (67.7%)
- assigned adoption readings (56.3%)
- exposure to adoption videos and DVDs (39.9%)
- web-based adoption courses (10.1%)
- other instructional methods (15.8%)

Most respondents reported receiving multiple types of preparation – two methods (14.6%), three (19.6%), four (27.2%), five (18.4%), six (8.9%) and seven (.6%). Only two respondents (1.3%) indicated receiving no pre-adoption preparation or training and 13 parents (8.2%) reported receiving preparation through a single method.

When asked whether any of the pre-adoption training focused on issues related to sexual orientation, only 29 parents (18.6%) responded affirmatively. There were no differences in the types of preparation and education received during the adoption process by lesbians and gay men, including whether sexual orientation issues were addressed. Partnered applicants received similar types of preparation and education as did single parents, with one important exception: Parents in couples (21.5%) were significantly more likely to receive preparation and education related to sexual orientation issues compared to single parents (3.8%).^x

Of the less than 20% of parents who received some preparation and training related to sexual orientation, they noted the following specific areas that were the focus of instruction:¹⁹

- parenting issues in lesbian and gay family life (76%)
- talking with children about sexual orientation (41.4%)
- managing sexual orientation issues during the adoption process (27.6%)
- managing sexual orientation issues in the school (24.1%)
- raising a LGBT child (20.7%)

There were no differences for lesbians and gay men related to the areas covered in their sexual orientation training.^{xi}

When asked whether the training they received adequately prepared them to meet their child's and family's needs regarding adoption-related issues, only 61.4% of parents responded affirmatively. Men (76%) were significantly more satisfied with the pre-adoption training than were women (50.6%).^{xii} Single and partnered parents were equally satisfied with their training.

¹⁹ Because respondents could provide more than one response, the total percentage across the different areas of training exceeds 100%.

The areas mentioned most frequently by survey respondents who indicated dissatisfaction with the adequacy of their pre-adoption preparation and education were:

- parenting issues related to adoption (71.2%)
- sexual orientation issues (59.3%)
- impact of adoption on children (44.1%)
- specific disabilities related to children (39%)
- attachment issues in children (33.9%)
- race and cultural issues (33.9%)
- loss and grief issues (32.2%)
- parenting LGBT children (5.1%)
- coping with attitudes and reactions of lesbian and gay peers who are not parents (5.1%)

There were no significant difference between lesbians and gay men, or between partnered and single parents, in relation to unmet pre-adoption training needs, with two exceptions: Women (46.3%) reported a greater desire for pre-adoption training related to attachment issues than did men (5.6%), and single parents (87.5%) reported a greater desire for training related to sexual orientation issues than did parents who were partnered (54.9%).

Parents who adopted across racial lines, as opposed to those who adopted within race, expressed a greater need for training related to adoptive parenting issues (78.4% vs. 55.5%), the impact of adoption on children (51.2% vs. 27.8%) and race and cultural issues (46.3% vs. 5.6%).^{xiii} In addition, parents adopting through the child welfare system indicated a greater need for training related to specific child disabilities (53.8% vs. 27.2%) and raising LGBT children (11.5% vs. 0%) than did other adopters.^{xiv}

Relationship with Birthparents

Parents were asked a series of questions about their involvement with their children's birthparents, including whether: (1) they had been chosen by the birthparents, (2) they had met them prior to the adoption, (3) there was any ongoing contact with birth family members and (4) the birthparents knew about their sexual orientation and, if so, their reactions.

About one-third of respondents (32.1%) indicated they had been chosen by the birthparents as the adoptive family; 37% indicated they had met one or both birthparents prior to adoption; 34% reported ongoing contact with the birthparents or other birth family members after adoption; and 38.5% said the birthparents knew of their sexual orientation. There were no differences between lesbians and gay men in their relationships with birth families.

When asked how parents and other birth family members reacted to learning about their sexual orientation, 73.3% of respondents reported a very positive and accepting attitude; 20% reported initial resistance, followed by gradual acceptance; 1.7% indicated a negative response and 5% said the issue was not a topic of discussion. Gay men (92.3%) reported a more positive *initial*

"When we first decided to adopt, we attended a kind of informational meeting at the attorney's office ... with others who were thinking of adopting ... we were told that almost all birthparents today choose the families for their babies ... we worried that as lesbians we wouldn't be chosen ... the attorney reassured us ... yet we were surprised by how warm, friendly and accepting she was when we met her ... and her family too ... there has never been any issue about our being gay"
[Lesbian mother who adopted a newborn baby]

response by birthparents than did lesbians (58.8%).^{xv} However, when initial acceptance was combined with *eventual* acceptance (i.e., resistance, followed by gradual acceptance), there was no statistical difference for gays and lesbians in terms of birthparents' positive/accepting response to their sexual orientation (96.1% for men; 91.2% for women). Gay men more often reported they were specifically chosen by birthparents because of their sexual orientation than did lesbians (34.6% vs. 5.8%)^{xvi} -- in the majority of these cases, the men indicated the birthmother expressed a desire to be her child's "only mother."²⁰

Respondents who were partnered reported being more often chosen by birthparents than single parents (35.8% vs. 15.3%);^{xvii} however, no other significant differences were found between these groups in terms of their relationship with birthparents. In addition, there were no statistical differences in the relationships with birthparents for interracial adoptive families compared to interracial families.

As might be expected, relationships with birthparents varied as a function of the type of placement source. Parents who completed adoptions through private agencies and attorneys, compared to other means, more often were chosen by birthparents (68.7% vs. 4.5%), more often met the birthparents prior to adoption (59.7% vs. 20.2%), had greater ongoing contact with birth families (52.2% vs. 20.2%) and were more often involved with birthparents who knew about their sexual orientation (58.2% vs. 23.5%).^{xviii} Parents who completed adoptions through the public child welfare system, compared to other means, were significantly less likely to be chosen by birthparents (10% vs. 47.8%).^{xix} As might be expected, lesbians and gays who adopted internationally were the least involved with birthparents – i.e., they were less often chosen by birthparents, compared to parents who adopted through other means (0% vs. 40.3%), less often met the birthparents prior to adoption (5.4% vs. 47.1%), had less post-adoption contact with birthparents and other birth relatives (10.8% vs. 41.2%) and were less often involved with birthparents who knew about their sexual orientation (8.1% vs. 47.9%).^{xx}

In summary, a sizable minority of lesbians and gay men (about one-third of the total sample) were involved in adoptions that can be considered open, with virtually all of these individuals and couples experiencing a positive and accepting attitude from birth families, if not immediately at the time of placement, then gradually as the parties got to know one another; this figure increased to over 50% for respondents who adopted through private agencies and attorneys.

Satisfaction with Adoption Provider Experience

Adoptive parents responded to a series of 13 questions focusing on the extent of their satisfaction with their relationship and work with their adoption workers. Each question was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). From these questions, two general areas were identified through factor analysis:²¹ satisfaction with the professionalism and competence of the adoption worker (11 questions) and satisfaction with the worker's knowledge of LGBT issues (2 questions).^{xxi} Table 5 describes the individual questions composing each factor.

²⁰ In other cases, birthparents chose a gay or lesbian family because of a personal connection to a LGBT individual (e.g., family member or friend). In addition, one lesbian couple reported that they were chosen by the birthfather because he wanted to be his child's "only father."

²¹ Factor analysis is a statistical technique that allows one to group together a number of variables (e.g., satisfaction scale items) based upon a common underlying meaning. In this way, multiple scale items can be reduced to a smaller number of variables that have a more general meaning. Each respondent's score for Factor 1, Satisfaction with the Adoption Worker's Professionalism and Competence, is the average score for the first 11 items noted in Table 5; the score for Factor 2, Satisfaction with the Adoption Worker's Knowledge of LGBT Issues, is the average score for the last two items noted in Table 5.

In general, most adoptive parents were much more satisfied with the professionalism and general competence of their adoption worker (mean = 4.09) than with the worker's knowledge of LGBT issues (mean = 3.39).^{xxii} On average, about three-quarters (73.5%) of parents were either satisfied or very satisfied with each of the areas of the adoption worker's professionalism and competence that were measured by the scale. In contrast, fewer than half of the parents (47.2%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the worker's knowledge of LGBT issues.

Table 5: Items in Adoption Provider Satisfaction Scales^{xxiii}

Scale Items
Overall relationship with the adoption worker ^a
Level of respect shown by adoption worker ^a
Adoption worker's level of involving client (and partner) in setting goals ^a
Professionalism of adoption worker ^a
Ethics of adoption worker ^a
Responsiveness of adoption worker to client's questions and concerns ^a
Adoption worker's knowledge of adoption paperwork and process ^a
Adoption worker's knowledge of clinical adoption-related issues ^a
Adoption worker's level of concern for the adopted child ^a
Adoption worker's handling of problems in the adoption process ^a
Adoption worker's concern for client's family ^a
Adoption worker's knowledge of LGBT issues ^b
Adoption worker's knowledge of LGBT parenting issues ^b

^a Factor 1: Satisfaction with Adoption Worker's Professionalism and Competence

^b Factor 2: Satisfaction with Adoption Worker's Knowledge of LGBT Issues

Although there was no statistical difference in the level of satisfaction with the worker's overall professionalism and competence for lesbians and gay men (mean = 3.98 vs. 4.21), lesbians were significantly less satisfied than gays in relation to the worker's knowledge of LGBT issues (3.10 vs. 3.69).^{xxiv} Parental satisfaction was unrelated to the child's age at the time of adoption, the partnered status or age of the adoptive parents or the type of adoption (domestic, intercountry or from the child welfare system; in-racial or transracial). In contrast, parents whose children have special needs expressed less satisfaction with the worker's knowledge of LGBT issues (mean = 3.08 vs. 3.71), but not less satisfaction with the worker's professionalism and competence, than did parents whose children did not have special needs.^{xxv}

Parents' satisfaction with adoption providers was also related to their comfort in disclosing information regarding their sexual orientation, to the reactions from professionals to this information and to their pre-adoption preparation and support. Those who were more comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation were significantly more satisfied with their worker's knowledge about LGBT issues compared to those who initially withheld this information (mean = 3.52 vs. 2.59).^{xxvi} There were no differences between these two groups, however, in

"It's been difficult to find professionals who know about both LGBT families and adoption" [Lesbian adoptive mother]

satisfaction with the worker's level of professionalism and competence.

Furthermore, when parents received a positive and accepting response in relation to disclosure of their sexual orientation, they were more likely to experience satisfaction with the adoption worker's overall professionalism and competence (mean = 4.16 vs. 3.70) and their knowledge of LGBT issues (mean = 3.56 vs. 2.89) than if the initial response was mixed or negative.^{xxvii} Parents who reported no perceived bias by any of the adoption professionals during the adoption process also expressed significantly greater satisfaction with the overall professionalism and competence of the worker (mean = 4.25 v 3.90), as well as with the worker's knowledge of LGBT issues (mean = 3.65 v 3.12), than parents who experienced some degree of bias.^{xxviii} Finally, parents who were satisfied with their pre-adoption preparation and support were more satisfied with their worker's professionalism and competence (mean = 4.21 vs. 3.92) and knowledge of LGBT issues (mean = 3.54 vs. 3.16) than were parents who were dissatisfied with their adoption preparation.^{xxix}

In summary, the vast majority of lesbian and gay adoptive parents were reasonably satisfied with their adoption workers, although much less so regarding knowledge of LGBT issues. Furthermore, the experience of bias by one or more of the adoption professionals undermined the level of parental satisfaction during the adoption process.

Post-Adoption Training

Respondents were asked whether they had received any post-adoption training and, if so, its source, the topics covered, and whether issues related to sexual orientation and its impact on the child and family were addressed.

Fewer than half of the parents (42.7%) had received any adoption education and training after completing their adoptions. Lesbians and gay men were equally likely to have availed themselves of available post-adoption training. In addition, there were no statistical differences in post-adoption training for single parents versus partnered parents, families adopting within race versus transracially, families with children who had special needs versus those who did not, families that adopted from the child welfare system versus from other sources, and families that adopted domestically versus internationally.

For parents who had post-adoption training, 41% received at least part of it from their original placement source (e.g., agency, attorney, facilitator), 30% through consultations with individual adoption professionals, 53% through local adoption workshops, 33% through regional/national workshops or conferences and 35% through a variety of other sources (e.g., online courses, DVDs, readings, etc). Over 95% of respondents who received some post-adoption training utilized two or more means of furthering their education about adoptive family life.

Only 12.7% of parents received any post-adoption training related to sexual orientation and its impact on the child and family. Lesbians and gays were equally likely to have received such training, with the following topics most often covered:²²

- LGBT parenting issues (80%)

²² Because parents sometimes received training in more than one area, the total percentage across the different training topics exceeds 100%.

- helping children cope with parental sexual orientation (80%)
- coming out to children (55%)
- managing sexual orientation issues with the child's school (50%)
- advocating for your child in different contexts (30%)
- parenting LGBT children (20%)

Overall, post-adoption training was not readily available to these families through their providers and the education that was received seldom involved issues related to sexual orientation.

Unmet Education and Training Needs

Respondents were asked what additional education and support, if any, they currently required to meet their children's and family's needs (see Table 6). Nearly two-thirds (64.6%) reported current unmet needs, of which the most common areas identified were: advice regarding specific parenting issues (29.1%), understanding children's developmental issues (25.3%), helping children cope with adoption (27.2%), helping children cope with parental sexual orientation (24.7%), race and cultural issues (22.2%) and parent support groups (21.5%).²³ Approximately one-third (35.4%) of parents reported that they had no current unmet needs, although many noted that they expected to have them as their children grew older.

In most areas, lesbians and gay men were quite similar in the help they currently needed, except with understanding children's developmental issues, help in working with birth families, and race and cultural issues, areas in which lesbians expressed a greater desire for additional education, training, and/or support (see Table 6).^{xxx}

There were no statistical differences in current unmet training and support needs for single versus partnered parents, parents who adopted domestically compared to internationally privately versus publicly or for in-racial versus transracial adoptive families, with three exceptions. Parents who had adopted transracially, expressed more of a current need for education and support related to racial and cultural issues (46% vs. 0%), as well as help in discussing family diversity with their children (28.4% vs. 7.1%).^{xxxii} In addition, parents who adopted from the child welfare system, expressed a greater need for peer group support (41.8% vs. 23.4%), psychotherapy for their children and/or family (29.1% vs. 14.9%), and various other services and supports (18.2% vs. 4.3%).^{xxxiii} Furthermore, parents who adopted children with one or more special needs, compared to those without, more often expressed a need for peer group support (40% vs. 23.8%), help in understanding their children's developmental issues (51.7% vs. 21.4%) and psychotherapy for their children and/or family (31.7% vs. 14.3%).^{xxxiii}

"We have needed a lot of help with our children over the years ... all of them have had issues to deal with ... we expected some problems, but not the extent of what has occurred ... I don't think we were adequately prepared to understand what can happen to kids when they are abused and neglected ... haven't had good luck with some of the therapists we worked with" [Lesbian mother of three siblings adopted from foster care]

²³ Because parents often identified more than one unmet training need, the total percentage across the different categories of training exceeds 100%.

Table 6: Respondents with Unmet Education and Training Needs (%)

Area of Unmet Need	Overall	Lesbians	Gay Men
None	35.4	37.3	33.3
Peer support group	21.5	21.7	21.3
Specific parenting strategies	29.1	32.5	25.3
Understanding child's developmental issues**	25.3	33.7	16
Helping child cope with sexual orientation issues	24.7	22.9	26.7
Helping child cope with adoption issues	27.2	32.5	21.3
Finding gender models for child	4.4	2.4	6.7
Referral sources	19	21.7	16
Help with working with the birth family*	7	10.8	2.7
Explaining adoption to children	15.8	16.9	14.7
Talking with children about parents' sexual orientation	19.6	22.9	16
Race and cultural issues*	22.2	27.7	15.7
Talking with children about family diversity	15.2	15.7	14.7
Psychotherapy and other treatment for child/family	14.6	15.7	13.3
Respite care	4.4	6	2.7
Other educational/training needs	7.6	6	9.1

*p<.05; **p<.01

In summary, nearly two-thirds of respondents reported one or more unmet post-adoption training and support needs. Female and male parents were mostly similar in these needs, although a few differences emerged. As expected, families adopting through the public system, and those whose children had special needs, reported greater desire for understanding of their developmental problems, as well as support from other parents and professionals.

Perceived Barriers to Lesbian and Gay Adoption

Respondents offered a wide range of opinions in response to a question asking their views of the barriers to adoption by non-heterosexual adults.²⁴

- domestic (state) legal restrictions (33.5%)
- international (country of origin) legal restrictions (20.9%)
- societal stereotypes related to LGBT adults (36.7%)
- poor professional training related to LGBT issues (35.4%)
- prejudice of adoption workers and other professionals (33.5%)
- inadequate support for LGBT adoptive families (28.5%)
- discriminatory agency policies (31.6%)
- religious affiliation of adoption agencies (12%)
- inadequate outreach to LGBT community (13.9%)

²⁴ Because respondents often identified more than one barrier, the total percentage across these different areas exceeds 100%.

- high cost of adoption (8.2%)
- prejudice of birthparents (7%)

There were no statistical differences in the perceived barriers for lesbians versus gay men, single versus partnered parents, those adopting transracially versus within race, and parents with children who had special needs versus those who did not. In contrast, parents adopting from the child welfare system, as opposed to other sources, were significantly more likely to mention societal stereotypes (46.3% vs. 26.9%) and prejudicial attitudes of adoption workers (42.5% vs. 24.3%).^{xxxiv} As would be expected, parents adopting from other nations, as opposed to adopting domestically, more often viewed international legal restrictions as a barrier (67.5% vs. 5.1%); they also more often mentioned domestic legal restrictions (47.5% vs. 28.8%), but less often mentioned prejudicial attitudes of adoption workers (15% vs. 39.8%) as barriers.^{xxxv}

When asked what actions could be taken to reduce the barriers to adoption by non-heterosexual adults, respondents noted the following:²⁵

- improved training for adoption professionals (48.7%)
- change domestic adoption laws (34.2%)
- change international (country of origin) adoption laws/regulations (11.4%)
- promote positive stories about LGBT adoption in the media (29.1%)
- more openness in society by LGBT adoptive families (27.2%)
- improved outreach to the LGBT community by adoption agencies (25.3%)
- advocate for better informed adoption agency policies (12%)
- more LGBT adoption agency staff (5.7%)
- other actions (24.1%)

There were no statistical differences in recommended actions by lesbians versus gay men, single versus partnered parents, parents adopting transracially versus within race, parents adopting internationally versus domestically, parents adopting from the child welfare system versus other adoption sources, and parents whose children had special needs versus those who did not, with two exceptions. As expected, parents who adopted from abroad more often recommended changing international law or country-of-origin adoption regulations than did parents who adopted domestically (40% vs. 1.7%). In addition, parents who adopted children with special needs more often recommended advocating for changes in adoption agency policies than did other parents (18.8% vs. 5.1%).^{xxxvi}

Finally, respondents provided the following suggestions when asked what could be done to reach out to and encourage gay and lesbian adults to adopt children:²⁶

- promote lesbian/gay adoption through the media (47.5%)
- educate non-heterosexual adults about adoption (42.4%)
- promote adoption through LGBT organizations (34.8%)
- improve the adoption process for LGBT individuals (30.4%)
- promote positive stories about non-heterosexual adoption (27.8%)
- foster greater word of mouth about adoption in the LGBT community (19%)
- develop support groups for lesbian and gay adoptive families (16.5%)
- change laws governing adoption by LGBT adults (15.8%)

²⁵ Because respondents often identified several actions to remove barriers from LGBT adoption, the total percentage across these different areas exceeds 100%.

²⁶ Because respondents often identified more than one outreach strategy, the total percentage across these different recommendations exceeds 100%.

- reduce the cost of adoption (7.6%)
- develop mentoring programs for lesbian and gay adopters (6.3%)
- reduce internalized homophobia among LGBT adults (4.4%)

There were no differences in recommendations for outreach strategies as a function of adopters' gender, single versus partnered or family racial status. Parents who adopted through the child welfare system, were more likely to suggest promoting adoption through LGBT organizations (45% vs. 24.3%), educating LGBT adults about adoption (51.3% vs. 33.3%) and improving the adoption process for LGBT individuals/couples (37.5% vs. 23.1%).^{xxxvii} In addition, parents who adopted children with special needs, compared to other parents, were also more likely to recommend promoting adoption through LGBT organizations (50% vs. 19.2%), educating LGBT individuals about adoption (50% vs. 34.6%) and promoting positive stories about lesbian and gay adoptive family life in the media (35% vs. 20.5%).^{xxxviii}

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In order to better serve the interests of children adopted by lesbian and gay parents, data from a national sample of such parents were collected to better understand their views, experiences and needs during the pre-adoption and post-adoption periods. The survey garnered a moderately large, geographically diverse sample of non-heterosexual adults. That a sizable number of gay men completed the survey, in addition to lesbians, is important because data on their experiences related to parenting and adoption are less available in the social science literature. Furthermore, although our sample is significantly skewed toward Caucasian and economically secure adoptive parents – and hence the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to lesbian and gay adoptive families of color, nor to those who are less-well-off financially – it does represent the majority of non-heterosexual adults who are currently adopting children in the United States (Gates et al., 2007). Moreover, the fact that we also have data on a sizable number of interracial lesbian and gay adoptive parents provides an ability to further generalize from our findings.

What Type of Adoptions Do Most Lesbian and Gay Men Complete?

The survey data suggest that non-heterosexual adults are adopting children from all over the United States and from many countries around the world, consistent with other data showing that over 60% of adoption agencies across the country are open to working with lesbian and gay prospective parents, including many that make intercountry placements (Brodzinsky, 2003, 2011a; Brodzinsky et al., 2002). Moreover, previous data indicate that 85% of agencies focusing primarily on placing older and special-needs children from the foster care system -- the largest group currently being adopted in the United States today -- have an affirmative policy about working with non-heterosexual individuals and couples.

With regard to domestic adoptions, the survey data indicate that most lesbians and gay men (88%) work with adoption agencies in the course of adopting a child, with a smaller percentage working with attorneys and private facilitators. It should be understood, however, that for any particular adoption, applicants often work with more than one type of professional – e.g., an attorney or facilitator may match the adoptive parents with a woman who has decided to relinquish her child for adoption, and an agency may conduct the home study.

For those adopting through agencies, the vast majority of lesbians and gays choose either a

public child welfare agency focusing on placing older and special needs children or a private agency whose mission is the placement of infants and young children from the U.S. Fewer than a quarter of respondents chose to work with agencies placing children from abroad, likely due to the restrictions associated with intercountry adoptions for non-heterosexuals.

Three reasons dominate the specific choice of an adoption source for most lesbians and gay men (see also, Downing, Richardson, Kinkler & Goldberg, 2009). First and foremost, these adults look for an agency or professional known to be "gay friendly" (51.2%). They also are concerned about the general reputation of the adoption source (40.6%), which is probably related not only to the perceived professionalism and ethics of the professionals, but also their willingness to be affirmative in relation to adoption by non-heterosexuals. In many cases, this information is likely to come from the experience of others who have successfully worked with a particular agency or professional, and, as a result, have recommended them to other prospective parents; in some cases, lesbians and gay men may have had previous positive experiences themselves with the agency or professional; and, in still other cases, information about the practitioner's positive attitudes about lesbian/gay adoption may have come from promotional or recruiting materials.

Regarding the latter point, one of the potentially important findings of our study is that when lesbian and gay prospective parents observe images or descriptions of same-sex couples, single women and men, and diverse families on the adoption source's website or in their promotional/outreach materials, they feel much more open and comfortable working with these professionals. This finding reinforces the importance of agencies being as clear as possible in their mission and policy statements, website descriptions, advertising, and recruiting efforts about their position on adoption by LGBT adults.

Other lesbians and gay men, like their heterosexual peers, choose a specific adoption source because of a desire to adopt a particular type of child or to have a particular type of adoption arrangement – for example, an infant, an older child, a child of color, a sibling group, a child from a specific country or an open adoption (Downing et al., 2009). For some individuals and couples, this means applying to the public child welfare system or to a private agency that makes special needs placements because these sources are more likely to be successful in matching the family with an older child, a child of color or a sibling group. For other prospective parents, the choice is an agency, attorney or facilitator who is better

"Our agency was well known in the area for working with sexual minorities ... it was an easy choice for us" [Lesbian adoptive mother]

"We wanted an open adoption ... it seemed to fit us ... it was what we believed in and what we thought was best for our child" [Lesbian adoptive mother]

able to match the family with an infant or young child, which often means taking on the issues and responsibilities associated with open adoption. For other lesbians and gay men, the choice is an agency that focuses on international placements -- a decision that comes with a cost.

Because no "sending" country officially permits adoption by non-heterosexuals, lesbians and gay men must apply as single parents and conceal their sexual orientation from the authorities in the child's country of origin. In many cases, agencies in the United States, even though they may know or suspect that a client is lesbian or gay, choose to ignore this information, utilizing a "don't ask, don't tell" policy during the home study (Mallon, 2006; 2011). Such an approach to working with lesbian and gay adoptive parents may well lead to a successful placement but, too often, without the preparation and training that would be provided if the clients and the agency

were able to be more open about sexual orientation issues.

Over 50% of the children most recently adopted by respondents came from the public child welfare system, with 57% of these youngsters displaying one or more special needs. Furthermore, 60% of these children were of a different race than either of their adoptive parents. These findings provide additional support for the conclusion that lesbian and gay adoptive parents often adopt children with developmental and mental health problems, as well as children of a different race – perhaps even at higher rates than heterosexual adoptive parents (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Farr & Patterson, 2009; Gates et al., 2007; Goldberg, 2009; Goldberg & Smith, 2009b; Matthews & Cramer, 2006). On the other hand, our data did not support previous research (Farr & Patterson, 2009) showing that transracial placements are more common among interracial, compared to same-race, same-sex couples.²⁷

That non-heterosexual adults often adopt children who are older at the time of placement, have more developmental and mental health problems, and are from another race raises questions about the extent of challenge they encounter in parenting their children, as well as about the personal and interpersonal factors that more often lead to placement stability and parenting satisfaction. Research with straight adoptive parents has shown a correlation between parental adoption satisfaction, placement continuity, and a variety of child demographic variables and pre-placement experiences. For example, prenatal adversity, older age of the child at time of placement, multiple foster care moves, history of neglect and abuse, presence of significant psychological problems, and/or orphanage life have all been found to increase parenting stress, reduce satisfaction with the adoption decision, and increase the risk for placement disruption (Barth & Berry, 1988; Mainemer, Gilman & Ames, 1998; McKay, Ross, & Goldberg, 2010; Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010; Viana & Welsh, 2010). In contrast, increased social support has been found to reduce parenting stress in non-adoptive (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Fagan, Bernd, & Whiteman, 2007) and adoptive families (Smith, 2010; Viana & Welsh, 2010).

A recent study sheds light on some of the predictors of parenting stress among gay adoptive fathers (Tornello, Farr and Patterson, 2011). Although the average level of parenting stress for these men was normative and well below clinical levels, there was considerable variability in parenting stress among them. Parents who had older children, a greater number of children and less social support from friends and family reported higher levels of parenting stress. Older age of the child at the time of placement and placement from the foster care system were also associated with increased parenting stress. So, too, were several factors associated with gay identity; specifically, fathers who reported more stigma sensitivity and identity uncertainty about being gay, as well as less identity disclosure and more difficulty in understanding their identity, also experienced greater stress in parenting their children. These results highlight the importance of helping non-heterosexual adoptive parents develop the knowledge and skills to meet their parenting challenges, strengthen their support system as a way of managing everyday parenting stress, and work toward greater self-acceptance as a basis for building healthy family relationships and supporting their children's emotional well-being.

²⁷ The difference in findings, however, may be due to different definitions of transracial placement. In the Adoption Institute study, a transracial placement was defined as one in which the child was of a different race from *both* adoptive parents; in contrast, in the Farr and Patterson study, transracial adoption was defined as one in which the child was of a different race from *at least one* parent. The problem with the latter definition is that all interracial couples would automatically be classified as adopting across racial lines (unless the child was biracial and born to birth parents who were the same races as the adoptive parents); hence, the finding in the Farr and Patterson study appears to be an artifact of the way transracial adoption is defined.

Managing Sexual Orientation Information during the Adoption Process

One of the most important issues in working with LGBT prospective adoptive parents is creating an environment in which they feel affirmed and respected. To a great extent, this issue is tied to the ability of clients to openly and comfortably share information about their sexual orientation (Mallon, 2006; 2011).

In the current study, the vast majority of parents (84.2%) voluntarily disclosed their sexual orientation during the adoption process, even before being asked about this issue. Partnered parents were more likely to do so than single parents, which is understandable because there is little chance of remaining closeted when applying to adopt as a same-sex couple. In contrast, given that single-parent adoptions are quite common among heterosexuals (Pakizegi, 2007), an adoption application from an unpartnered adult would not automatically convey information about the applicant's sexual orientation. Thus, single lesbians and gay men are more likely to be successful remaining closeted, if they so choose -- which is likely the case when they are adopting from another country.

Over half of the respondents also reported that one or more adoption professionals inquired directly about their sexual orientation during the application and/or home study process. Whether voluntarily sharing information about one's sexual orientation or providing it in response to direct questions, over three-quarters of parents reported receiving a positive and accepting response from professionals. For another 10%, the initial reaction suggested some reservations on the part of the professionals, although parents reported that eventually they felt reasonably well accepted. Some parents noted that additional strategizing about the adoption, typically related to managing sexual orientation issues in the home study, or an increased focus on legal issues related to state or international regulations governing gay/lesbian adoption, was a consequence of revealing their sexual orientation (see also Mallon, 2006, 2011).

Only a very small percentage of respondents (6.9%) said they received increased scrutiny, with accompanying resistance and lack of respect from the adoption professionals, or an outright rejection by the agency. Undoubtedly, the low rate of overt resistance or rejection is a function of the parents generally being selective in choosing the professionals with whom they worked -- either by applying to practitioners known to be "gay friendly" or using recommendations from others who had a positive experience with a specific adoption resource.

It is significant to note that the willingness of parents' to disclose their sexual orientation to adoption professionals, even before being asked, was related to greater satisfaction with the professionals' knowledge about LGBT issues. Furthermore, receiving a positive and accepting response from adoption workers in relation to disclosure of sexual orientation was also related to parents' satisfaction with the process, both in terms of the perception of the worker's overall professionalism and competence and their knowledge of LGBT issues. These findings reinforce the importance of creating a "gay friendly" climate, so lesbians and gay men can feel comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation (Mallon, 2006; 2011). When they feel at ease doing so, not only will they feel affirmed in their identity, but their satisfaction with the application and preparation process will be substantially enhanced.

"When we called the agency and asked about adopting, we right away told them that we were a gay couple ... it didn't matter to them ... so when we met with our worker, it just wasn't an issue ... she asked questions about us ... how long we were together, whether we were married, whether we were out to our families and co-workers ... those sorts of things ... she made it easy to talk about ourselves and our life"

[Gay adoptive father]

Experiencing Bias during Adoption

Although they generally chose adoption sources known to be "gay friendly" or with good reputations for working with non-heterosexual parents, nearly half of lesbians and gay men (48%) experienced bias from one or more workers with whom they interacted, or from one or more birth family members. Perceptions of bias reduced parental satisfaction with the adoption worker and the process. Unfortunately, our data do not shed light on the nature of the bias experienced by respondents (see Matthews & Cramer, 2006 and Goldberg et al., 2007 for more information on the experience of bias by lesbian and gay adopters). Nevertheless, this finding suggests that agencies and other professionals need to become better educated about working with LGBT clients in order to create a sensitive and gay-affirming environment (Brodzinsky et al., 2011; Human Rights Campaign, 2009; Mallon, 2006, 2011; Mallon & Betts, 2005). Adoption professionals also need to educate birthparents about lesbian and gay family life so as to counter prevailing misconceptions, stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes that could interfere with a placement or with relationships between the adoptive and birth families after adoption.

Are Lesbian and Gay Parents Satisfied with their Adoption Experience?

Experiencing satisfaction during the adoption process depends on many factors, including but not limited to whether the pre-adoptive parents feel welcomed and respected by the adoption professionals, whether their needs are taken into account, and whether the professionals are perceived to be ethical, knowledgeable and competent. Our data show that nearly three-quarters of lesbian and gay parents were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their adoption worker's professionalism and competence, but fewer than half were satisfied with the worker's knowledge of LGBT issues. Taken together, these two findings suggest that although most professionals are adequately trained in relation to the adoption process, they lack sufficient expertise and sensitivity in relation to LGBT issues and family life -- a conclusion also reached by others (Brodzinsky et al., 2011; Goldberg & Gianino, 2011; Human Rights Campaign, 2009; Mallon, 2006, 2011). In turn, their lack of knowledge and sensitivity can undermine the confidence and perceived support experienced by lesbian and gay adoptive parents.

The importance of empathic and well-trained professionals who are able to create an LGBT-affirmative environment is underscored by other findings of our study – specifically, that lesbians and gays are more satisfied with their adoption experience when they are comfortable revealing information about their sexual orientation to professionals and when the response they receive is positive and accepting. In contrast, experiencing bias on the part of one or more of the adoption professionals, as well as inadequate pre-adoption preparation and training by them, leads to a reduction in parents' adoption satisfaction. These findings are consistent with other research and social casework data suggesting that experiencing a professional environment characterized by sensitivity, respect, support and affirmation reduces stress and conflict for lesbian and gay adoption applicants and leads to greater satisfaction and feelings of well-being during the process (Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2007; Human Rights Campaign, 2009).

In summary, lesbian and gay parents' satisfaction with the adoption process is tied to their caseworker's overall professionalism, competence, sensitivity and knowledge, not only in relation to adoption and child welfare issues, but also their knowledge about LGBT issues. These data reinforce the need for both broad-based training of adoption professionals and more specific training related to the unique issues associated with the experiences of non-heterosexual individuals and families (see Brodzinsky, 2008; 2011a; Goldberg & Gianino, 2011; Human Rights Campaign, 2009; Mallon, 2006, 2011; Mallon & Betts, 2005; Hill, 2009).

Open Adoption among Lesbian and Gay Adopters

Although there is a substantial literature on open adoption among heterosexual adopters (Gross, 1997; Grotevant, 2000; Grotevant & McRoy, 1998; Wolfgram, 2008), few such studies exist for lesbian and gay families. Drawing on national survey data, however, Brodzinsky (2003, 2011) found that of those adoption agencies making placements with non-heterosexual adults, 15% reported that, on one or more occasions, birthparents had requested placement of their children with a lesbian or gay family. In addition, in a recent qualitative study involving 15 lesbian couples, 15 gay male couples and 15 heterosexual couples, Goldberg, Kinkler and Richardson (2011) found both similar and different motivations for open adoption in relation to the adopters' sexual orientation. A sizable number of individuals in all three groups expressed support for open adoption because they believed it was in the best interests of the child.

On the other hand, heterosexual adoptive parents, as opposed to lesbian and gay adults, more often chose open adoption because they believed it was their only viable route to parenthood, insomuch as relatively few private agencies currently make closed placements and birthparents increasingly are seeking ongoing information about, and contact with, the child they placed for adoption. In contrast, lesbians and gay men were often drawn to open adoption because the philosophy underlying this practice encourages them to be forthcoming about their sexual orientation, which they experience not only as more honest, but also affirmative of their identity and sense of self (see also Downing et al., 2009; Goldberg, et al., 2007).

In the current study, about one-third of all lesbians and gay men had completed an adoption in which they either had met one or both of the birthparents and/or had an ongoing relationship with them. Open adoptions were more common for parents who adopted through private agencies or attorneys than through public agencies, a pattern also found among heterosexual adoptive parents (Vandivere, Malm, & Radel, 2009). In fact, nearly 60% of lesbians and gays who adopted through private agencies or attorneys reported meeting their child's birthparents and over 50% indicated that they had ongoing contact with them. These findings are consistent with qualitative data reported by Downing et al. (2009), who noted that 60% of the gay men in their study chose to pursue private domestic open adoption. They also are similar to figures reported for more representative samples of adoptive families who work with private agencies across the United States (Gee, Natsuaki, Martin, Leve, Neiderhiser, Shaw, Villareal, Scaramella, Reid, & Reiss, 2008; Vandivere et al., 2009).

As would be expected, lesbian and gay parents who adopted children from abroad were the least likely to be involved in open adoptions, although our data suggest that a small percentage of these individuals – between 5% and 10% -- had met members of the birth family during the process and/or had post-adoption contact. The latter finding reinforces the belief that open adoption arrangements are possible when adopting from abroad and that prospective parents – including gays and lesbians – need education and support in understanding how best to connect their children to their origins (Brodzinsky, 2005; Hawkins, Beckett, Rutter, Castle, Colvert, Groothues, Kreppner, Stevens, & Sonuga-Barke, 2007) and to manage contact with the birth relatives, regardless of where they live. Given that more and more internationally placed adoptees are returning to their native countries to explore their heritage, and sometimes making contact with birth family and others from their past (Ponte, Wang, & Fan, 2010; Tieman, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2008), this type of preparation and support is clearly needed.

Over one-third of all respondents reported that one or both of the birthparents also knew of their sexual orientation. Importantly, nearly three-quarters of these parents reported a very positive and accepting response on the part of birthparents; and another 20% indicated that initial resistance or reserve was eventually followed by acceptance. This finding runs counter to

prevalent mythology that birthparents are unwilling to place their children with lesbians or gay men and/or have difficulty working with them in the post-adoption period (see also Brodzinsky, 2003, 2011a; Brodzinsky, et al., 2002; Downing et al., 2009; Goldberg, et al., 2011).

One of the more interesting findings of our study related to open adoption was that a number of respondents indicated that they were specifically chosen by birthparents because of their sexual orientation. In some of these cases, birthparents had family members or friends who were lesbian or gay and, consequently, felt quite positive about such a placement for their child. In other cases, especially for families headed by gay men, it was because the birthmothers wanted to be the only "mother" in their child's life – a finding also reported by Goldberg et al. (2011). These results indicate that agencies, and others who facilitate adoptions, should not discount the possibility that lesbians and gay men may actually be the *preferred* choice of some birthparents or, at the very least, a likely option.

In summary, our data suggest that a sizable percentage of lesbian and gay parents – especially those who adopt through private agencies or attorneys – are motivated to meet and maintain contact with their children's birth families. Indeed, they may be drawn to open adoption because it encourages them to be forthcoming about their sexual orientation, thereby reducing adoption-related stress and affirming a positive sense of self. In addition, their ability to enter into mutually supportive, ongoing relationships with birth families may be enhanced by the relative ease with which they incorporate non-biological kin into their sense of family (Oswald, 2002; Goldberg et al., 2011). Adoption professionals working with women and men considering adoption for their children need to educate them about the positive attitudes of many lesbian and gay men toward open adoption.

Pre- and Post-Adoption Preparation, Education and Support

Research and social casework practice have shown that pre- and post-adoption preparation, education and support are associated with greater satisfaction with adoption among parents, as well as better placement stability and adjustment for all family members (Brodzinsky, 2008; Smith, 2010). Such training and support not only provide parents with appropriate information about adoption in general, but also about the child's and family's unique circumstances (e.g., prenatal exposure to alcohol/drugs; orphanage life; history of neglect/abuse; transracial placement; open adoption, LGBT issues, etc.). They also foster more realistic expectations for parents, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to meet their children's needs. This is especially true for families who adopt across racial lines, older children, and children with more challenging

"There isn't much available in the way of services in our part of the state ... and I can't imagine that they know much about families like ours"

[Lesbian mother of two internationally placed adopted children]

"She told us that she wanted an open adoption and to have occasional contact with her son ... she also admitted that she chose us because then she wouldn't have to share him with another mother"

[Gay adoptive father]

medical, behavioral, emotional or educational problems (Smith, 2010). Given that lesbians and gay men often adopt these types of children, it is important to know whether they are receiving the types of preparation and training that will support successful placements.

Our data suggest both good and bad news regarding the preparation and training of non-heterosexual adoptive parents. On the positive side, with the exception of two respondents, all lesbian and gay

parents reported some preparation and education during the adoption process, most often through multiple methods and from multiple sources. In fact, over 75% of respondents reported receiving preparation and training from three or more different methods/sources. This finding is in keeping with best practice recommendations suggesting that adoptive parent preparation should be a multi-method, multi-source process (Brodzinsky, 2008).

The most common preparation method reported by respondents involved individualized discussions with the adoption worker, followed by group meetings with other adoptive parents, attendance at adoption seminars, workshops or conferences, and assigned readings. Less common was the utilization of adoption-related videos, DVDs, and web-based courses. Increasingly, the latter methods of preparation and training are becoming well accepted as an adjunct means of educating prospective adoptive parents about the realities of adoption in general, and some of the unique issues and challenges associated with specific types of adoption.²⁸ Furthermore, the latter methods are especially important for families – including those headed by lesbians and gays – who live in more rural areas and/or where there are fewer professional resources for direct pre- and post-adoption education and support.

Our study found that slightly more than 60% of lesbians and gay men indicated that the pre-adoption training they received adequately prepared them to meet their child's and family's needs. This result is slightly higher than the findings reported by Brooks, Kim, and Wind (2011). In their research, 54% of lesbian and gay adoptive parents, and 44% of heterosexual ones, reported feeling "well" or "very well" prepared for adoption by the professionals who worked with them. While these results provide some support for the belief that most lesbian and gay families are receiving appropriate preparation, the fact that between one-third to one-half of the families in these two studies believed their pre-adoption training was inadequate – including over 50% of the heterosexual parents in the Brooks et al. study – suggests that professionals need to reconsider the nature and extent of education and support offered to prospective parents during the adoption process. This is especially true given that non-heterosexual adults frequently adopt children across racial lines and from backgrounds of social adversity. To make such placements without appropriate preparation and support, whether with lesbians, gays or straight parents, is not only inconsistent with the needs of children and families but in our opinion, is also professionally unethical (Brodzinsky, 2008; Smith, 2010).

Although most families who adopt children receive some type of pre-adoption preparation and support, on the negative side, many do not have access to, or utilize, such services after placement. Yet, post-adoption services are viewed by most professionals as critical for successful child integration and placement stabilization, as well as for the emotional well-being of all family members (Brodzinsky, 2008; Smith, 2010). This is especially true for those adopting children with special needs or across racial/ethnic lines. As already noted, lesbians and gay men are more likely to adopt these types of children than are heterosexual adults. Yet our data suggest that only slightly over 40% of respondents received any post-adoption services. Unfortunately, the survey findings shed little light on the reasons for the lack of such support, though it is clear that the availability of affordable and accessible post-adoption services represents an ongoing challenge for the adoption field. It is probably safe to conclude that this is also true regarding services provided by LGBT-competent adoption and mental health providers (Goldberg & Gianino, 2011). What we can say is that the lack of training does not appear to be related to a lack of interest in adoption education and support; in fact, two-thirds of our respondents reported wanting more post-adoption training and support in one or more areas, including: adoptive parenting issues; understanding children's developmental issues; helping

²⁸ The web-based training courses offered by Adoption Learning Partners are good examples of this current trend in adoption education (www.adoptionlearningpartners.org).

children cope with adoption and parental sexual orientation; race and cultural issues and parent support groups.

As would be expected, parents who adopted across racial lines, as opposed to those who adopted within race, more often desired additional training related to racial/cultural issues, as well as help in discussing family diversity with their children. In addition, parents who adopted from the child welfare system and those with special needs children expressed the greatest desire for additional peer support for themselves, help in understanding their children's developmental issues and clinical interventions for their children. Finally, the importance of post-adoption services was reinforced even by those respondents who reported no current unmet training needs. Despite being satisfied with their existing knowledge and support, a sizable percentage of these respondents also indicated that they expected to have additional needs for adoption-related information and support as their children got older.

Other research also has focused on the availability and utilization of supports for gay and lesbian adoptive parents. Brooks and colleagues (2011) and Ryan and Brown (2011) have reported that these families typically had access to and utilized a wide range of pre- and post-adoption supports and services. In fact, they found that these families are quite similar to heterosexual adoptive families in the types of services they need, have available to them, use and view as being helpful. They also found some differences. Interestingly, lesbian and gay adopters were more likely than their straight counterparts to report that a particular support or service was *available*. As the authors noted, this finding suggests a high level of motivation and tenacity on the part of lesbian and gay parents in seeking out services for their families – even in the face of frequently encountered institutional and societal prejudice and discrimination. It also speaks to a high level of resilience in these families (Ryan & Brown, 2011).

"We couldn't do a second parent adoption because it's not allowed here. So we talked with an attorney before we adopted about how to ensure that the relationship between our children and my partner was protected" [Lesbian adoptive mother]

Brooks and colleagues also reported that gay/lesbian adoptive parents more often indicated needing legal advice compared to straight parents. This finding is consistent with legal barriers that continue to exist in many states related to gay and lesbian adoption, including co-parent and second parent adoption

(Appell, 2011). It also is related to the inability of same-sex couples to marry in most states. Marriage brings with it a host of legal entitlements, including Social Security, inheritance, health insurance, and access to parental care, siblings and extended family if the couple separate, divorce or one parent dies. In families in which an adopted child has a legal tie to only one parent because the couple cannot marry and the state in which they live does not allow joint or second parent adoption, the other parent has no legal standing in relation to the child, who in turn is not guaranteed access to, and financial support from, that parent (Appell, 2011). Thus, lesbians and gays seeking to adopt are well advised to understand their legal parental rights and, when necessary, to assertively consider the types of plans necessary to protect the child's relationship with the non-legal parent (see also Boyer, 2007).

Of particular importance in our study was the finding that fewer than 20% of applicants received any preparation or training related to LGBT issues during the adoption process; moreover, nearly 60% specifically felt this area was missing in their pre-adoption training. In some cases, the lack of such preparation undoubtedly reflected the reluctance of applicants – particularly those who were un-partnered – to reveal their sexual orientation during the adoption process. In fact, whereas nearly 90% of partnered lesbians and gays voluntarily shared information about

their sexual orientation with one or more adoption professionals, only 56% of single respondents did so. As a result, significantly fewer single parents (3.8%) than parents in couple relationships (21.5%) received pre-adoption preparation related to sexual orientation issues.

In other cases, the absence of such training may well reflect the discomfort or lack of competence of professionals in talking about sexuality and sexual orientation (Mallon, 2006, 2011). Consistent with this theory, only about half of respondents reported the professionals they worked with asked about sexual orientation. Moreover, fewer than half felt satisfied with their adoption worker's competence related to LGBT issues. The latter finding is in keeping with other research and scholarly writings suggesting that many mental health professionals, and presumably adoption workers as well, have limited knowledge about LGBT issues, often lack appropriate diversity sensitivity, and need better training in this area (American Psychological Association, 2000; Crawford, McLeod, Zambori, & Jordan, 1999; Green, Murphy, & Blumer, 2010; Green, Murphy, Blumer, & Palmanteer, 2009; Human Rights Campaign, 2009).

The bottom line is that a dearth of appropriate LGBT competence among professionals is likely to result in fewer acceptable community resources for non-heterosexual families, as well as decreased motivation to use those that are available. If so, this pattern may partly explain why only one-sixth of respondents in our survey reported receiving any post-adoption training and support related to LGBT family life, despite the fact that nearly one-third of lesbians and over one-fifth of gay men identified this area as a current unmet educational need.

In summary, our results reinforce the importance of adoption professionals receiving broader education in diversity issues, including information and experiential training relevant to working with LGBT applicants.²⁹ If the professionals do not have the relevant training and are uncomfortable or insensitive in talking about LGBT issues, they are likely to have difficulty meeting their clients' needs not only during the adoption process but also as the children move through later developmental phases – e.g., managing information about parental sexual orientation during the adoption process; preparing older children for placement with LGBT adults; talking with children about parental sexual orientation and helping them cope with homophobic teasing; managing information about parental sexual orientation beyond the family (e.g., with extended family, neighbors, peers and teachers); and raising a LGBT child.

Perceived Barriers to Adoption

Providing more homes for children who need them through efforts to remove barriers to adoption and parenting by lesbians and gay men necessitates input from those who have the greatest stake in this process – namely, non-heterosexual who seek to form families through adoption. Data from our respondents reveal a wide range of ideas about the primary barriers to adoption, as well as ways of removing them.

"When I heard about the decision in Florida I shouted for joy ... but more has to be done, especially in other countries ... not being able to be open when I adopted my daughter from China was difficult for us ... I had to apply as a single parent and travel there by myself ... they might have suspected that I was lesbian but no one said anything and I certainly didn't either" [Lesbian mother of an 11 year old girl adopted from China]

²⁹ Although our study focused only on the experiences of lesbian and gay adoptive parents, it is important to emphasize that as more and more openly bisexual and transgender individuals apply to adopt children, it is critical that the training of adoption professionals also includes working with these two groups of adults (see Brodzinsky et al., 2006; Human Rights Campaign, 2009).

Three themes dominated respondents' perceptions of barriers to LGBT adoption. First, negative social stereotypes related to non-heterosexuals, coupled with prejudice and inadequate training of adoption professionals and discriminatory agency policies, were seen as major roadblocks. In fact, improved training for professionals was viewed by nearly 50% of respondents as the best way of removing these barriers and facilitating a more supportive and affirming process. Non-heterosexual adults also viewed promoting more positive stories about LGBT adoption in the media as a good way of countering the social stereotypes about adoption and parenting.

Many respondents also expressed concern about the legal and regulatory restrictions, both in this country and abroad, that either prevented or discouraged LGBT individuals and couples from adopting children. Taking actions to overturn such laws in the United States, as well as to educate the authorities in other countries as a means of changing their adoption laws and regulations, were viewed as extremely important by a sizable percentage of respondents (see Appell, 2011 for further discussion of the legal impediments to adoption by lesbians and gays in the U.S.). The recent successful challenges to state bans on adoption by LGBT adults in Florida and Arkansas have provided encouragement to those seeking to remove all legal barriers to adoption for non-heterosexuals, especially related to joint and second parent adoptions.

Finally, inadequate support for LGBT adoptive families and insufficient outreach to the LGBT community, were also perceived as significant barriers to adoption by non-heterosexual adults. To surmount them, respondents suggested promoting more openness in society about lesbian and gay families, including more positive stories in the media. They also suggested that better outreach to LGBT organizations and improved education about adoption for the LGBT community would not only help to remove barriers, but also encourage more adoption for children who need families.

Similarities and Differences in Adoption by Lesbians and Gay Men

One of the goals of our research was to determine whether lesbians and gay men have different adoption goals, different perceptions about adoption and/or different adoption experiences. Overall, there were more similarities than differences between these groups of adopters. Specifically, lesbian and gay male respondents: had adopted the same number of children; had children of similar ages; were equally likely to have a child with special needs; adopted from similar sources; were equally aware of relevant state laws pertaining to LGBT adoption; were equally willing to share information about their sexual orientation and experienced the same level of support in response to this information; experienced similar levels of bias during the adoption process from professionals and birthparents; received the same type of pre- and post-adoption training and support; had similar views about unmet training needs; were equally like to have met their child's birthparents; had similar views about the barriers to adoption for non-heterosexuals; and had similar perceptions about their adoption worker's overall professionalism and competence.

Some significant differences also emerged between these two groups.³⁰ First of all, households headed by gay men were substantially more financially secure than those headed by lesbians (\$212,380 v. \$115,467, respectively). Although this finding may be explained, in part, by gender differences in salaries, it is also clearly a function of the fact that more women than men adopted as single parents, which restricts the household income to one salary.

³⁰ Given the large number of comparisons made between these two groups, the reader should be cautious in interpreting the findings.

There were also group differences in the adoption of boys and girls. Whereas lesbians were more likely to adopt girls, gay men were more likely to adopt boys. This pattern could represent a gender preference on the part of both groups of adoptive parents and/or a tendency for adoption professionals to match children's gender with the gender of non-heterosexual adults. Research on single heterosexual adoptive parents does suggest a greater propensity to adopt children of the same gender (Pakizegi, 2007; Shireman & Johnson, 1976).

Lesbians were more likely to have adopted across racial lines than gay men. Although this finding potentially suggests greater interest or motivation for transracial adoption among lesbians, another explanation for this finding is also possible. In our study, transracial adoption was defined as having a child who was of a different race from *both* parents. Given that gay men were more likely to be part of an interracial couple, and lesbians more likely to be single parents, the higher rate of transracial adoption among lesbians could very well be an artifact of demographic differences in the composition of lesbian and gay households.

Generally, lesbian parents were less satisfied with their pre-adoption preparation and support and expressed more current unmet training needs than did gay men. Specifically, they believed they needed more pre-adoption information and support about attachment issues and identified a number of post-adoption areas for which they needed more information and training, including understanding children's developmental issues, working with birthparents, and racial and cultural issues. They also expressed less satisfaction with their adoption worker's competence related to LGBT parenting and family life. It is unclear, however, whether these differences represent unique needs of lesbians compared to gay men or simply gender differences in the willingness of women versus men in acknowledging the need for, and utilizing, professional help. Other research supports this belief that women more readily acknowledge the need for help and more often seek it out than do men (Chandra & Minkovitz, 2006).

Finally, gay men reported experiencing a higher level of *initial* acceptance by birthparents than lesbians, although there was no difference in their *eventual* acceptance by these individuals. The former finding probably is a result of birthmothers more often having specifically chosen gay men as the adoptive parents because of their desire to be their child's "only mother." Although lesbians were just as likely to have met their child's birthparents as gay men, and were just as likely to have remained in contact with them, they may have experienced some initial hesitancy in the birth mother's decision because of uncertainty about "sharing" the maternal identity with another woman, or most often, two other women. Given that they experienced the same level of *eventual* acceptance by birthparents as did gay men, this initial hesitancy or reluctance, to the extent that it existed, evidently did not prove to be a barrier for adoption.

In summary, our data suggest that the adoption experiences of lesbians and gay men are more similar than different and more positive than not. Furthermore, some of the group differences found may have to do more with gender issues than with sexual orientation issues. Regarding the latter, adoption practitioners need to be careful not only about stereotyping their clients in relation to sexual orientation, but also in relation to gender.

Similarities and Differences in Adoption for Single and Partnered Lesbian/Gay Parents

A final goal of our research was to determine whether non-heterosexual adoptive parents who were partnered had similar or different adoption experiences from those who were single. First, it is important to note that 84% of lesbian and gay male respondents were partnered. This finding does not mean, however, that both adults were the children's legal adoptive parents. In some cases, state laws prevented the second parent from adopting. When confronting this

situation, professionals need to ensure that the couple is fully aware of the implications of their legal status in relation to their children, including how to protect the non-legal parent's relationship with the child in case the couple separate, divorce or the legal parent dies. This may require a referral to an attorney with experience in adoption and family law.

Our data suggest more similarities than differences in the experiences and perceptions of partnered and unpartnered lesbian and gay adoptive parents. Both groups were equally satisfied with their pre- and post-adoption preparation, as well as the competency of their adoption worker. They also perceived similar levels of bias during the adoption process. Furthermore, they had similar views regarding the barriers to LGBT adoption and the best ways of reducing those barriers and encouraging other non-heterosexual adults to adopt children.

On the other hand, unpartnered lesbian and gay parents were more likely to adopt older children than were same-sex couples. Whether this pattern represents a differential choice on the part of these adults or a selection bias on the part of adoption professionals is unclear. In the past, single heterosexual parents seeking to adopt children often experienced skepticism, and, at times, outright resistance, from adoption professionals (Pakizegi, 2007; Shireman & Johnson, 1976). This may account for the fact that they more often were matched with children who had special needs – and who generally were older – than were couples. Single lesbians and gay men may encounter a similar selection bias.

Single lesbian and gay clients were also less likely to voluntarily share information about their sexual orientation than were same-sex couples. Moreover, they were less likely to be offered preparation and training regarding sexual orientation's role in adoption issues, although they more often identified this area as an unmet training need than did same-sex couples. These findings highlight several important points.

First, in choosing to withhold information about one's sexual orientation – which obviously is easier for a single lesbian or gay male than for individuals in coupled relationships – there is less chance that adoption professionals will offer preparation and support that is extremely important for both current and future LGBT adoptive family life.

Second, the decision to withhold such information by adoption applicants – even if they believe it best served their needs at the time it was made – may subsequently be viewed by them as having compromised their adoption preparation. For example, as their children get older and they begin to confront the need to share sexual orientation information with them, as well as to help them cope with the homophobic reactions of others, lesbian and gay parents may well recognize that the preparation and training they received was inadequate to meet their ongoing parenting responsibilities.

Finally, our findings highlight the importance of creating a welcoming and LGBT-affirmative environment so that prospective parents feel safe, respected and supported. When encountering this type of reception, gays and lesbians are much more likely to share information about their sexual orientation and, consequently, receive the type of preparation that will better serve their needs and the needs of their children. The complication for many unpartnered

"When I first adopted as a single parent, no one asked about my sexual orientation and I really didn't think it was anyone's business ... I have a partner now and last year we adopted together ... they didn't have to ask ... it was obvious we were a couple ... we talked with our worker about some of the challenges of being lesbian parents and how we've handled some of the teasing my older daughter has experienced"

[Lesbian mother of two adopted children]

lesbian and gay adults, especially those who seek to adopt from abroad, is that the authorities in sending countries are unlikely to be supportive of the adoption if they know the prospective parent is not heterosexual. Thus, even if the agency is warm and welcoming to LGBT clients, and routinely makes placements of domestically born children with them, single parents and the adoption professionals working with them face a serious dilemma. If applicants are open and forthcoming with adoption professionals about their sexual orientation, they are likely to experience greater self-affirmation and self-respect, as well as maximize the chances of receiving appropriate guidance and training related to LGBT adoptive family life. They also run the risk, however, of being rejected by the agency for an intercountry placement.

Agencies that make intercountry placements face their own quandaries when confronted with applicants they know or believe are lesbian or gay. Should they assertively explain their policies regarding facilitating intercountry adoptions with non-heterosexuals, as well as the sending countries' policies on this issue, even before the clients have an opportunity to come out to them? This approach allows the prospective parents the choice of either being open about their sexual orientation or withholding information about it. On the other hand, if agencies are already aware that clients are lesbian or gay, should they simply ignore the information in the home study report? Or, upon finding out about the clients' sexual orientation, should they reject the application and counsel the prospective parents to adopt domestically or refer them to another agency that might work with them?

As Mallon (2011) has noted, adoption workers have a number of ways of writing home study reports, including what has been referred to as the "don't ask, don't tell" approach. These alternatives represent a significant ethical predicament for adoption agencies; i.e., if the needs of children are to come first, then increasing the number of qualified parental applicants improves the prospects for finding more families for boys and girls lingering in orphanages or in foster care. But ethical agencies also want to respect their state laws and policies, as well as the regulations and customs of sending countries (Brodzinsky, 2003, 2011a). Furthermore, agencies may have clear policies regarding this tension, but individual workers may not always follow those policies, further complicating the issue. The bottom line is that intercountry adoption with lesbian and gay adults is complex, and there has been very little discussion about the most appropriate ways of confronting the ethical and practice issues involved.

Limitations of the Study

All research has limitations, and our study is no exception. As in almost all social science research, the individuals who responded to our survey represent a convenience sample. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to all lesbian and gay adoptive parents. In fact, our sample is significantly skewed toward Caucasian and financially secure families, so the findings may not represent the experiences, beliefs and views of adoptive families of color and those who are less affluent. On the other hand, our sample is generally representative of most lesbians and gay men who are currently adopting children in the United States (Gates et al., 2007). It is also important to emphasize that our sample was moderately large, geographically diverse, and included both lesbians and gay men, as well as within-race and interracial couples and families – all of which provides additional generalizability for our findings.

In the absence of a comparison group of heterosexual adoptive families, we also do not know whether the experiences, beliefs and views of our sample are unique to them, or whether they are also generalizable to adoptive families per se. This comparative approach was not the focus of the current study, although it certainly should be considered in future research. So, too, should the adoption and parenting experiences of families headed by bisexual and transgender

individuals, on whom we did not focus in this study. As noted by Biblarz and Savci (2010), there are few studies on these two groups of parents. Furthermore, the Human Rights Campaign (2009) has emphasized the ongoing resistance of adoption agencies toward transgender prospective parents and the need to provide distinct training about this group for adoption professionals. As transgender individuals become more open in society, form families and raise children, including those who are adopted, it will be important to understand their experiences, challenges and needs.

Since we used a cross-sectional design, we also cannot address issues related to changes in the experiences, beliefs and views of lesbian and gay adoptive parents across the family lifecycle. Still, we expect that these parents, like their heterosexual counterparts, would experience different challenges and have different needs as their children move through different developmental stages (Brodzinsky, 2011b; Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2003; Brodzinsky et al., 1998). We also are unable to address questions related to adoptive parent experiences and the adjustment of their children in this study. Both of these questions are important and deserve attention in future research.

Despite these and other limitations, the current study represents a significant step forward in the research on lesbian and gay adoptive family life. It contributes new insights into gay and lesbian adopters' attitudes, beliefs, and experience in relation to adoption and provides an empirical foundation for developing and refining best practice standards in this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the latest data available, over 408,000 children were in foster care, with more than 107,000 of these boys and girls legally freed for adoption but continuing to linger in the system because of insufficient numbers of families willing or able to adopt them (U.S. Children's Bureau, 2011). Long-term foster care is detrimental to children's emotional well-being and undermines their future opportunities. To better serve these children, we must do everything possible to increase the pool of available caring and capable adults who can make a lifelong family commitment to them and ensure that their medical, psychological, social, spiritual and educational needs are met.

The current findings, as well as our past research and policy papers (Brodzinsky, 2003, 2011; Brodzinsky et al., 2011; Brodzinsky et al., 2002; Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2011; Howard, 2006; Howard & Freundlich, 2008) and the work of others (Goldberg, 2010; Goldberg & Gianino, 2011; Human Rights Campaign, 2009; Mallon, 2006, 2011; Mallon & Betts, 2005) indicate that qualified lesbians and gay men make good adoptive parents, are motivated to take on this responsibility and should be considered along with their heterosexual counterparts. Like all prospective parents, LGBT adults, whether they are adopting children from the public welfare system, from private agencies, or through independent adoption practitioners, need to be treated with respect and dignity, and to receive the appropriate preparation, education and support -- pre- and post-adoption -- that will increase the prospects for permanence for these children and strengthen their family connections. To achieve these aims, the Adoption Institute offers the following recommendations.

Advocate to Remove Legal and Cultural Barriers for LGBT Adoption

Adoption agency policies and practices derive for the most part from the laws of the states in which they operate, and in some cases, from faith-based and community-based values. In regard to intercountry adoption, they are also governed by U.S. federal immigration law, the

Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, and the laws, regulations, values and customs of sending countries. As noted previously, these factors often pose barriers to adoption by non-heterosexual individuals and couples. Given that so many children live in institutionalized or temporary settings – and are in need of safe, permanent families – greater efforts should be directed toward removing the legal, political and cultural barriers to LGBT adoption that continue to exist in many states in our country and around the world. These efforts should include:

- **Promote an interdisciplinary approach to LGBT adoption advocacy**
Adoption is a complex social service practice embedded in an even more complicated array of mutually influencing systems – e.g., cultural mores, governmental bodies, domestic and international law, child welfare agencies, medical and psychological health care systems, educational systems and so forth. A multi-systemic perspective is therefore necessary to understand the adjustment of adoptive families, regardless of the sexual orientation of the parents. Similarly, in advocating for changes in policy and practice, including the removal of barriers to LGBT adoption, an interdisciplinary approach that appropriately acknowledges and respects the complexity and diversity of this family form is likely to be more successful than any single perspective by itself.
- **Promote more effective strategies for removing barriers to LGBT adoption**
The reasons for ongoing resistance to LGBT adoption are complex and, consequently, require a multi-faceted advocacy approach. Decision-making by lawmakers, judges, adoption attorneys, guardian *ad litem*s, caseworkers and mental health professionals are often values-driven. As a result, rational arguments based only on social science research data highlighting the strengths of LGBT families and their children are unlikely to be sufficiently persuasive in changing many people’s opinions (Brodzinsky et al., 2011). A more successful advocacy approach may be to combine this information with an emphasis on fundamental principles of American democracy, including the concepts of justice, fairness and equality. In any event, the needs of children who do not have permanent families, rather than the rights of adults, must be paramount as a matter of ethics and best practice (Howard, 2006, 2008; Pertman & Howard, 2011).

Furthermore, Gates et al. (2007) have emphasized an economic incentive for supporting LGBT adoption – namely, that it is less expensive than requiring states to recruit, train, and support additional heterosexual foster parents for those youngsters who require continued out-of-home care, as well as less expensive than having children reside in temporary and/or congregate care facilities. The argument that society benefits financially (as well as in many other ways) when “waiting” children move into loving, permanent families should be a powerful one, especially during tough economic times.

Developing effective advocacy strategies for nondiscrimination in adoption also would be enhanced by a better understanding of the motives underlying those individuals who are on opposite sides of the same-sex adoption debate. Recent research by Russell (2011) has begun to explore different motives for advocating for LGBT rights, and a similar approach would benefit advocates for equal rights in adoption.

- **Focus on the needs of children who continue to linger in foster care**
Tens of thousands of children in the child welfare system are legally freed for adoption each year, but remain in foster care because of insufficient numbers of families available to adopt them. Most of these boys and girls live with heterosexual foster parents, but about 14,000 currently reside with lesbian or gay foster parents (Gates, et al., 2007).

Removing legal and community-based barriers to LGBT adoption, and allowing these adults to be assessed and certified as suitable parents in the same way as heterosexual applicants, will hasten achieving permanency for thousands of these “waiting” children (Brodzinsky et al., 2011; Howard, 2006; Howard, 2008; Mallon, 2006, 2011).

The needs of children can (and should) also be the focus when advocating for passage of state laws related to joint and second-parent adoptions, as well as marriage. When the state does not allow children to have a legal connection to both parents, their emotional well-being potentially is compromised because they often are ineligible for various benefits and rights connected to the non-legal parent – for example, inheritance, Social Security survivors and disability benefits, health insurance and the right to sue for wrongful death of the parent. The non-legal parent may also encounter difficulty in medical and educational decision making for their children, which can further put these youngsters at risk. Furthermore, LGBT couples are also deprived of various tax benefits because the federal government does not recognize marriage between same-sex couples, thereby potentially undermining the financial security of the family.

In short, passage of state laws allowing adoption by non-heterosexuals, including through joint and second-parent adoption, as well as marriage, are in the best interests of children needing loving, nurturing homes. These laws will increase the stability of the family system, ensure continuity of relationships between the children and both parents, and provide greater economic, educational and medical security (see Movement Advancement Project, 2011 for a comprehensive assessment of the impact of current federal and state laws and societal stigma on the rights and needs of LGBT families).

- **Advocate for the passage of gay marriage laws**

Marriage promotes relationship stability for heterosexual adults compared to cohabitation, and consequently leads to healthier long-term psychological adjustment for children (Bulanda & Manning, 2008; Goodman & Greaves, 2010; Manning, Smock, & Majunda, 2004). If the well-being of children is to be paramount, then there is reason to expect that the marriage of their parents – including when they are gay or lesbian – will further the same objective (see Fingerhut, Riggle & Rostosky, 2011 for an analysis of the social and psychological implications of same-sex marriage). At the time of this report’s publication, however, only six states (Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, New Hampshire and New York), plus the District of Columbia, allow LGBT individuals to marry. Ten other states offer legal recognition for same-sex relationships through civil unions or domestic partnerships (California, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, New Jersey, Nevada, Rhode Island, Washington and Wisconsin).

Promoting the legalization of gay marriage throughout the country would not only create greater stability in these families – for example, see the research by Balsam, Beauchaine, Rothblum and Solomon (2008) on the impact of civil unions on relationship stability among same-sex couples – but would very likely foster a more “normalized” view of them by the public. Over time, children in gay led families presumably would benefit because they would be less stigmatized, taunted and discriminated against. Furthermore, positive public opinion regarding LGBT family life and adoption could be influential for state legislators considering new laws affecting adoption by gays/lesbians, including those related to second-parent adoption. In fact, this pattern was clearly evident in Spain several years ago. In response to growing public support for gay rights, the Spanish Parliament passed legislation legalizing gay marriage in 2005; the right of

LGBT Spanish citizens to adopt children then legally followed.

- **Partner with community, state, regional and national LGBT organizations**

Understanding the best strategies for achieving reform related to LGBT adoption is likely to be enhanced by creating strong partnerships between adoption professionals and key human rights and LGBT organizational stakeholders at the community, state, regional and national levels. The experiences of these organizations in advocating for other LGBT rights and needs will undoubtedly lead to more sophisticated and politically informed approaches for addressing the barriers to LGBT adoption.

- **Promote positive stories about LGBT adoptive families in the media**

Although over two-thirds of American citizens currently view same-sex couples with children as a "family," (Associated Press, 2010; Powell et al., 2010), a significant minority does not. These minority views undoubtedly play an important role in the ongoing political debate about LGBT marriage and adoption. Media campaigns that promote visible and positive stories about LGBT individuals, couples, marriage and family life, including those families formed through adoption, could increase positive public sentiment about these issues, which in turn could impact positively on LGBT adoption. The findings of our survey suggest that many lesbian and gay adoptive parents view media campaigns as a potentially effective means of removing barriers.

- **Develop advocacy partnerships with LGBT organizations in other countries**

Barriers to intercountry adoption by LGBT adults exist in virtually all sending countries. These legal barriers are strongly influenced by religion, cultural mores and politics. There has been very little written in the adoption literature about strategies for advocating for adoption reform in these countries. One possible approach is for advocacy organizations in the receiving countries to partner with human rights and LGBT organizations and advocates in the sending countries. The latter groups are likely to have greater knowledge of the religious, cultural, and political barriers to adoption by LGBT adults in their own country than the professionals in the receiving countries. In turn, this knowledge could lead to more effective strategies for removing the barriers to LGBT intercountry adoption.

Foster Positive LGBT Leadership and Values among Agencies and Other Professionals

Policies and practices among adoption professionals, particularly at agencies, are effective to the extent that there is strong leadership guiding their work and a clear set of organizational values upon which the work is based. To increase the pool of potential parents for children by supporting adoption by qualified LGBT adults, an agency should:

- **Ensure that its Board of Directors and CEO are Knowledgeable and Supportive**

An LGBT-affirmative environment begins with the attitudes, beliefs and experiences of the agency's Board of Directors. These individuals delineate the organization's mission, policies and values. Agencies should take steps to ensure that those guiding their agency's policies are supportive of inclusiveness. In recruiting new members, Boards should specifically address LGBT adoption in the selection process and should be open to recruiting new members who themselves are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

In most organizations, Executive Directors/CEOs are responsible, along with supervisory personnel, for translating the agency's mission and values into actionable policies and

practices. Determining the ways in which adoption programs are defined, developed, executed and supported are all part of the leader's responsibility. Agencies that want to work with LGBT clients must ensure that their heads support this type of placement, are motivated to carry out appropriate policies, have the knowledge to do so, and have the capacity and willingness to ensure that others in the organization are also LGBT-affirmative and competent in their day-to-day practices.

- **Ensure that the Mission Statement – and the Workers – also Align**

An agency's mission statement and organizational values set the tone for the policies that determine adoption practice. The agency's leadership must ensure that the mission statement, organizational values and policies are clearly supportive of adoption by all qualified adults and focus on "inclusiveness." An agency's policies should be clear in their antidiscrimination intent and should include language focusing on sexual orientation, gender identity, family composition and marital status (as well as race and other attributes).

Adoption decisions should never be the sole responsibility of the caseworker who conducts a family's home study. This is especially true in working with LGBT clients, where a worker's misconceptions, stereotypes and prejudices could undermine the agency's affirmative policy related to LGBT adoption. In short, all adoption decisions should be reviewed by supervisors. In turn, agencies should ensure that their employees are supportive of LGBT adoption and have the training and experience to provide proper supervision to those conducting assessments and training.

Create an Atmosphere that is Welcoming and Respectful

Prospective parents' decisions to adopt are often fraught with anxiety and uncertainty for many reasons, not the least of which is that it requires an assessment by, and the permission of, others – an experience not usually shared by biological parents (Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988; Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). Although contemporary practice emphasizes the educative and supportive role of the home study, it continues to be experienced by most applicants as "evaluative," wherein they – usually wrongly – believe any misstep on their part could lead to rejection by agency personnel, birthparents or authorities from sending countries. This perception is particularly held by LGBT applicants (Herek, 1995). Consequently, in seeking to become a family through adoption, these individuals and couples are looking for a safe, respectful and supportive environment. In fact, our data suggest that in choosing their adoption source, lesbian and gay respondents most often looked for an agency, attorney and/or facilitator that was seen as "gay friendly," had a good reputation, was recommended by others they trusted or was already known to them. To create a positive environment, agencies should:

- **Develop LGBT-affirmative recruitment and promotional strategies**

Even before coming to an adoption agency, most prospective parents will have heard about it or examined some of its promotional materials. Consequently, agencies must ensure that their websites, brochures, newsletters, advertisements and other recruiting/marketing materials clearly describe and visibly represent their support for LGBT adoption. For example, in our study, lesbian and gay parents reported that when they saw written and visual representations in recruiting and marketing material affirming the agency's positive position on adoption by LGBT adults, single men and women, and families of diversity, they were far more confident and at ease working with the agency.

Among the first things prospective parents see when they enter an agency are posters and pictures representing adoptive families. Agencies need to ensure that the images portrayed represent the full range of clients and children they serve – or want to serve.

Because word of mouth remains a common means by which all prospective parents first become aware of adoption programs, it is important that agencies reach out to LGBT community organizations and parent groups. Having a presence at LGBT events, advertising in relevant publications, having flyers on bulletin boards in venues frequented by the gay community, becoming a member of LGBT listservs, and getting to know key stakeholders are all ways of promoting the agency's affirmative position on adoption by individuals and couples who are LGBT. They are also ways of increasing the likelihood that this population will feel welcomed and respected when applying to adopt.

- **Consider recruiting LGBT staff**

As the need for new professional and support staff arises, agencies should consider recruiting individuals who are openly lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. The presence of these individuals increases the likelihood that the agency will have an LGBT-affirmative environment and that clients will truly feel welcomed and respected. This recommendation, however, should not be interpreted as suggesting that non-heterosexual clients should only be assessed or approved by LGBT workers. The professionalism, sensitivity and competence of agency personnel are more important than their sexual orientation. Data from our study supports this conclusion. While looking for a "gay friendly" environment, and being positively influenced by an agency's written and visual representations of its support for LGBT adoption, relatively few respondents suggested that personnel hiring was a primary way of removing barriers and/or encouraging non-straight individuals to adopt children. In the words of one respondent:

It was much more important that our worker respected us as human beings and understood us ... that she had no problem placing a child with two lesbians ... we didn't care that she wasn't gay ... maybe for some people that would be important but it wasn't for us.

- **Ensure LGBT-affirmative paperwork**

The adoption process involves a great deal of paperwork that can frustrate even the most motivated prospective parents. When LGBT applicants encounter documents that are gender oriented (e.g., mother, father) or heterocentric (e.g., married, unmarried), they may question the inclusiveness of the agency's policies and practices or, at the least, may feel less welcomed and accepted. Consequently, agencies should consider using gender-neutral language (e.g., parent 1, parent 2), as well as language that reflects the legal realities for LGBT individuals in their state (e.g., married, civil union, domestic partnership, committed partnership, un-partnered) in their applications, home study forms and other documents distributed to clients.

- **Ensure clients' rights and privacy**

Being forthright about sexual orientation with agency personnel does not necessarily mean prospective parents are open about the subject with everyone they know. Because the home study frequently involves background checks, references and/or contact with key people in the clients' lives, it is important that adoption workers thoroughly review with prospective parents the way in which protected information will be used by the agency and guarantee that everything possible will be done to respect the

rights and privacy of these individuals (Mallon, 2011).

In addition, LGBT applicants should be clearly informed at the beginning of the adoption process about the nature of the home study, the agency's requirements for adoption, the uncertainty in the waiting period and procedures for filing grievances. Regarding the last point, unexpected delays in the matching process, difficulties with paperwork and/or problems in working with specific personnel could be perceived by LGBT individuals as a reflection of homophobia and discrimination. In such circumstances, they need to feel empowered and supported in seeking answers regarding their concerns.

Promote LGBT Sensitivity and Competence among Agency Staff & External Consultants

Creating a welcoming, respectful environment and providing appropriate services can only be accomplished when agency personnel are sufficiently sensitive to the needs of non-heterosexual clients and have the competence and motivation to work with them. To achieve these goals, agencies should:

- **Ensure that Directors, managers and staff receive appropriate training**
All agency staff from the director to line workers and support staff must be sufficiently knowledgeable and sensitive about LGBT issues and family life so as to create a respectful and affirmative environment for prospective adopters. Every interaction with agency personnel is potentially a supportive and affirmative experience for LGBT clients, or conversely, one that heightens their uncertainty, wariness, and doubt about the agency's ability to understand them and meet their needs. Consequently, it is critical that all agency personnel receive LGBT cultural competence training that begins with a self-assessment of attitudes, biases and misconceptions associated with non-heterosexuals, followed by comprehensive training related to LGBT adoptive family life³¹. This training should be mandatory for all staff, and they should be encouraged to periodically update training through attending conferences, workshops, and other educational venues related to LGBT issues and family life.
- **Ensure that workers receive appropriate training in related topics**
Our current findings, and those of others (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Farr & Patterson, 2009; Gates et al., 2007; Goldberg, 2009; Goldberg & Smith, 2009b; Mathews & Cramer, 2006), suggest that lesbians and gay men often adopt across racial lines, as well as older children with special needs. They also value open adoption and frequently seek this type of placement (Downing et al., 2009; Goldberg et al., 2011). These types of adoptions pose additional challenges and, consequently, require more intensive pre-adoption preparation and post-adoption support (Brodzinsky, 2008; Smith, 2010).
- **Ensure that external consultants have appropriate LGBT-affirmative training**
Many agencies rely on outside consultants, trainers and therapists to assess, prepare, support and treat adoptive families. It is imperative that such agencies make sure these professionals support LGBT-adoption and have the sensitivity and training to provide respectful and affirming services to their clients. They should assure that these professionals also are competent in working with LGBT clients. Agencies should get feedback from their clients about the services provided by these professionals (as well as their own staffs).

³¹ The work of the Human Rights Campaign reports an important step in this area.

Provide Appropriate Pre-Adoption Preparation and Support for LGBT Clients

The preparation, education and support of prospective parents are critical to placement stability and to the emotional well-being of all family members (Brodzinsky, 2008; Smith, 2010). These services not only foster realistic expectations, but also give parents the knowledge and skills necessary to meet their children's needs. Providing appropriate pre-adoption services is all the more important today because of the complexity of adoptive family life (Brooks, Simmel, Wind, & Barth, 2005; Pertman, 2011) and the growing number of children who enter their families after early adversities (e.g., prenatal exposure to drugs and alcohol; prenatal and postnatal malnutrition; neglect and/or abuse; multiple foster care moves; exposure to domestic violence and/or parental psychopathology; orphanage life). These children are at substantially higher risk for physical, psychological, social and academic difficulties than their peers (Barth & Berry, 1988; Barth & Needell, 1996; Brooks & Barth, 1998; Gunnar & Kertes, 2005; Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010; Rutter, 2005; Smith & Howard, 1999). As already noted, lesbian and gay adults often adopt these "at risk" children. Consequently, agencies should:

- **Ensure comprehensive preparation, education and services**

Ideally, pre-adoption preparation and support should be a multi-method, multi-source process (Brodzinsky, 2008) involving individual meetings between the adoption worker and prospective parents, as well as group meetings with other adopters. In individual sessions, professionals typically explore the motivations, expectations, desires and histories of the clients and prepare them for the circumstances and needs of the child matched with them. Also discussed in individual meetings are various issues related to sexual orientation. In addition, professionally led meetings with other prospective parents can be particularly useful for normalizing the adoption experience, providing peer support, education about general adoption issues, and building understanding of some of the unique issues confronting specific types of adoptive families (e.g., transracial placements, special needs placements, open adoptions, LGBT adoption, etc).

The latter type of preparation is particularly relevant for LGBT families because of their propensity for adopting children of color, older children, and children with special needs (Brooks & Goldberg, 2001; Farr & Patterson, 2009; Gates et al., 2007; Goldberg, 2009; Goldberg & Smith, 2009b; Matthews & Cramer, 2006). Assigned readings, attendance at community and regional adoption seminars (which often include sessions devoted to LGBT issues), and adoption-based DVDs and internet courses can also be helpful for preparing pre-adoptive parents – and thereby helping their children. Our data suggest that nearly all LGBT adoptive parents are receiving at least some pre-adoption preparation and support, typically through multiple individuals and/or methods.

When agencies do not have the financial or staffing resources to provide preparation and training, they should ensure that a referral is made to another organization or external consultant. They also should work to ensure that these outside organizations and consultants are supportive of LGBT adoption. Given the complexity of adoption practice today – especially since the majority of children were abused, neglected (therefore placed into foster care) or institutionalized (in orphanages abroad) – making placements without adequately supporting them is not only unprofessional, but also unethical (Brodzinsky, 2008). Yet again, the needs of the child must truly come first.

- **Ensure that LGBT clients are respected and supported in group preparation**

Because of societal stigma and prejudice, LGBT clients may not always be respected and accepted by other prospective parents in orientation meetings and training groups

run by the agency or by external consultants, whatever the agency's policies and practices. By creating an atmosphere in which family diversity is not only accepted but embraced, and by being assertive about the agency's antidiscrimination policies in orientation meetings and group trainings, agencies can reduce the possibility of prejudicial comments by others, as well as feelings of marginalization on the part of their LGBT clients. In the event that such comments do arise, it is the responsibility of the agency to address them forthrightly.

Although not always possible, agencies should consider developing groups specifically for non-heterosexual prospective parents, or creating a mentoring program in which they can benefit from the experience and support of existing LGBT adoptive families. These preparation methods should increase the likelihood that LGBT clients will feel respected and accepted and, most important, will increase their understanding of how to best help their children deal with any issues relating to parental sexual orientation.

- **Ensure that sexual orientation issues are in pre-adoption preparation**

Although virtually all LGBT adoptive parents in our study received some pre-adoption preparation and support related to adoption issues, fewer than 20% received any guidance or education in understanding how to manage sexual orientation issues with their children. Moreover, this area was viewed as a significant unmet pre-adoption training need by the respondents. Consequently, it is important that agencies directly address issues related to sexual orientation in the home study, as well as in the preparation and education offered to LGBT clients (see also Mallon, 2011). Some of the key issues to be addressed include:

- how sexual orientation will be represented in the home study report;
- the extent to which clients are "out," and with whom;
- the support of extended family, neighbors, co-workers, and the community, in general, related to sexual-minority issues;
- talking with the child about parental sexual orientation;
- helping the child cope with prejudice, homophobic comments and behavior;
- legal issues related to parental sexual orientation (e.g., protecting the parent-child relationship, as well as children's rights, when one parent is unable to adopt the child because of state laws precluding second-parent adoption) (Appell, 2011).
- referral to LGBT-affirmative community resources

To ensure that all clients feel respected and supported in discussing their sexual orientation and its potential impact on their children, agencies must create an "LGBT-affirmative" environment and have LGBT-competent leadership, frontline personnel and support staff. By doing so, agencies can increase the likelihood that non-heterosexual prospective parents will feel more satisfied with the adoption process, more affirmed as individuals and parents, more confident in the professionalism and competence of their adoption workers and more confident in their ability to meet their children's needs.

When agencies do not have the expertise to address parenting issues related to sexual orientation, it is their responsibility to ensure that LGBT clients are referred to another organization or community professionals who can provide the necessary training.

- **Develop partnerships with LGBT community resources**

Agencies can strengthen their competence and provide better services to their clients by being knowledgeable about LGBT community resources and developing strong

partnerships with them. Being aware of web-based resources for LGBT parents and families will also help to meet their clients' needs. This is especially true for agencies and/or families that are in areas in which appropriate community resources are limited. Increasingly, internet resources and other forms of distance education are being used by professionals and the public when local resources are inadequate or inaccessible.

Although many families reside in large metropolitan areas where adoption, mental health and LGBT supports are plentiful, a sizable number of families live in less populated areas (Gates et al., 2007; Gates & Cooke, 2011; Gates & Ost, 2004). In fact, recent findings from Census 2010 indicate the top three states in which same-sex couples are most likely, on a proportional basis, to be raising children are Mississippi, Alaska, and Wyoming (Gates, personnel communication, August 26, 2011). This demographic pattern underscores the importance of agencies working with LGBT parents to be sophisticated about distance education and web-based resources.

- **Support LGBT families in developing relationships with birthparents**

The Adoption Institute's study, as well as other research (Brodzinsky, 2003, 2011; Brodzinsky et al., 2002; Downing et al., 2009; Goldberg et al., 2011), indicate that many lesbian and gay adoptive parents are interested in open adoption and often seek to enter into such arrangements with their children's birth families. Consequently, adoption professionals can assist LGBT adults by preparing and supporting them in their choice of open adoption. Any prospective parents considering open adoption need to understand and affirm their children's connection to two families -- the one that gave them life and the one that is raising them (Grotevant and McRoy, 1998; Brodzinsky 2005, 2011; Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). They may also need help in understanding the best ways of developing ongoing, collaborative relationships with their children's birthparents and extended family (Grotevant, 2009; Grotevant, Ross, Marchel, & McRoy, 1999), especially in light of continued stigma and prejudice regarding non-heterosexuals (Herek, 1995; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009), which could challenge such relationships.

Provide Pre-Adoption Education and Support for Birth Families and Older Children

Contrary to some existing beliefs, our data and the research of others indicate that some birthparents are not only willing to place their children with lesbians and gays, but, in fact, sometimes may prefer to do so (see also Brodzinsky et al, 2002; Brodzinsky, 2003, 2011; Downing et al., 2009; Goldberg et al., 2011). Furthermore, more and more older children from the child welfare system are being placed with these families and are adjusting well to their new homes. Given these realities, agencies should:

- **Provide birthparents with preparation, education and support**

LGBT adoption has only recently "come out of the closet," not only among professionals, but also with the public. In fact, it is likely that most people, including those women and men who are considering placing a child for adoption, do not know the extent to which non-heterosexual adults are interested in adopting and doing so (Gates et al., 2007). Agencies that work with these adoptive families need to include them in the range of options that are offered to women and men placing their children for adoption.

In doing so, professionals should emphasize the potential parenting strengths of LGBT families and the potential benefits of placing children with these individuals, including

their interest in open adoption and the fact that their own experiences with prejudice can bolster their ability to help children cope with personal and societal challenges. Given that virtually all birthparents are likely to be part of the heterosexual mainstream, it is important that their adoption preparation also includes information that counters the prevailing myths, misconceptions and stereotypes about LGBT adults and families. Agencies can also be helpful to birth families involved in open placements by supporting their evolving relationships with LGBT families after the adoption takes place.

- **Provide preparation and support for older children**

Research suggests that public child welfare agencies and private agencies focusing on placing children with special needs are often the most supportive of LGBT adoption (Brodzinsky, 2003, 2011; Brodzinsky et al., 2002). They also are the type of agencies that most often work with older youth in need of permanent families. Yet there is very little written about the best way to prepare older children for placements with LGBT parents. As Brodzinsky and colleagues (2011) noted, there is virtually no empirical data on children's beliefs and understanding about sexual orientation that could guide the preparation process. Yet, it is important that such preparation be offered and that older children receive education, guidance and support in deciding about and adjusting to their new families. Furthermore, when there is resistance to such a placement, adoption workers need to understand the best ways of addressing it.

Provide Appropriate Post-Adoption Education and Support for LGBT Families

Because most challenges of family life do not occur during the home study or initial post-placement period, but during the many years in which children are growing up, it is critical for all adoptive families to have access to affordable and competent post-adoption services (Brodzinsky 2008; Smith, 2010) to enhance placement stability and foster better adjustment. There are many barriers to the provision and/or utilization of such services, however, including lack of staffing and financial resources, inadequately trained personnel, lack of appropriate service guidelines, inaccessibility of services and lack of receptivity on the part of adoptive parents (Brodzinsky, 2008). In fact, the provision of well-developed, competent, affordable and accessible post-adoption services remains a significant issue in the adoption field. Consequently, agencies should:

- **Develop appropriate post-adoption services or refer clients to others**

Our data suggest that fewer than half of respondents availed themselves of post-adoption services, even though many had children with one or more special needs or whose children were of color. Both types of placements are more likely to pose unique challenges for parents, who could benefit from periodic professional support. Agencies therefore must develop and provide appropriate, accessible post-adoption education and support for their clients – and, if they cannot, they have a professional and ethical responsibility to ensure that clients are referred to organizations or individuals who can provide them. Our data also suggest that lesbian and gay families frequently desire, but do not receive, post-adoption education and support related to managing sexual orientation issues with their children. Agencies need to provide such services as part of their post-adoption program or offer appropriate referrals.

- **Develop collaborative relationships with competent mental health professionals**

Because adopted children are at greater risk for psychological problems compared to their non-adopted peers (Juffer & van IJzendoorn, 2005; Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010;

van IJzendoorn & Juffer, 2006; Wrobel & Neil, 2009), it is important that adoptive parents have access to mental health professionals who understand the psychology of adoption, especially related to older children and those with special needs, those in transracial placements, and those who have experienced early adversity. Clinicians also need to be affirmative of LGBT adoptive families and appropriately trained to work with them. To best serve the post-adoption needs of their clients, agencies must develop good working relationships with these clinical professionals (see Goldberg & Gianino, 2011 for a more in-depth examination of the clinical issues in working with LGBT adoptive families).

Support Research on Adoption and Parenting

Whatever one thinks about adoption by non-heterosexual adults, the reality is that it is taking place every day, so it is incumbent on the field to ensure that their children's interests are served as well as possible – and that means we must establish and promulgate best practices. There is still much to be learned about what they should look like, in preparing parents and in supporting them after adoption (Brodzinsky et al., 2011). To deepen our knowledge in this area, additional research is needed on adoption by sexual minorities, including by those who are bisexual or transgender. Adoption agencies and others who facilitate adoption placements are uniquely situated to help with this research.

Consequently, agencies should develop collaborative relationships with adoption researchers, most of whom do not have direct experience in assessing, preparing, training and approving prospective adoptive parents or in educating and supporting them in the post-adoption period – and therefore do not necessarily understand the issues and questions facing the professionals and the families. Collaboration between adoption professionals and researchers will help to refine the empirical questions addressed by these investigators and make the subsequent data more useful for practitioners and the families they serve. In turn, researchers need to help agencies and other professionals understand the type of client information that would be useful to collect during pre-adoption and post-adoption periods. If agencies developed more comprehensive and uniform data on their clients, including information on sexual orientation, it would be easier for researchers to address the most relevant issues of the day.

CONCLUSION

Each year, over 130,000 children are adopted in the United States by married couples and single adults; by parents of every color and ethnicity, by financially secure parents and ones with limited income; by biological family members and strangers; by individuals who have struggled with infertility and ones who could conceive but choose this course instead; and into families where there already are biological children and ones where there are not.

Although most adoptive parents are heterosexual, one of the historic changes in adoption practice over the past several decades is the growing number of children entering families with lesbian and gay parents. They are mainly girls and boys from foster care who are older or have special needs, but also domestically born infants placed by their birth mothers (and sometimes fathers), and children from other countries who have been institutionalized. They are being adopted in every state and live in most cities. Lesbian and gay parents, like their heterosexual counterparts, are providing love, nurturance, stability and life-long permanence for these children. Moreover, they are doing so with a high level of parenting sensitivity and competence,

comparable to that found among heterosexual adopters. And the evidence is that their sons and daughters are adjusting just as well as those being raised by heterosexual parents.

Yet there remain considerable societal stigmas about, and continuing institutional barriers to, adoption by lesbians and gay men. The stigmas and barriers do not further the best interests of children. They prevent or delay permanency for many, undermining their long-term psychosocial and academic adjustment. With tens of thousands of children continuing to linger in foster care, despite being legally freed for adoption, every effort must be made to find timely and permanent placements for them, as well as for all the other children, in our country and abroad, who would benefit from adoption. To maximize the number of suitable, vetted, trained and available families for the children who need safe and permanent homes, all adults – regardless of gender, race, marital status, income level and/or sexual orientation – should be given the same opportunity to apply and be assessed for adoptive parenthood, using the same standards and guidelines.

Many if not most adoption professionals, however, continue to be unsure about the best way of working with non-heterosexual clients. Until recently, relatively few guidelines existed in this area of adoption practice. In addition, almost no research has been conducted on adoption by LGBT families or their experiences and needs in raising their children. Best practice guidelines need to be grounded in sound theory, experienced casework and valid empirical data. The research and policy analysis of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, as well as the work of other organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign and the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, represent important steps in developing improved ways of working with these families. As better practices are identified, validated, disseminated and utilized by well-trained professionals over coming years, the lives of many tens of thousands of boys and girls will be enhanced. They will benefit enormously, as will society as a whole.

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ⁱ $\chi^2(1) = 3.83, p < .05$

ⁱⁱ $t(150) = 4.01, p < .001$

ⁱⁱⁱ $\chi^2(1) = 3.34, p < .07$

^{iv} $\chi^2(1) = 4.98, p < .05$

^v $t(154) = 3.82, p < .001$

^{vi} $\chi^2(1) = 5.33, p < .05$

^{vii} $\chi^2(1) = 16.4, p < .001$

^{viii} $\chi^2(1) = 8.08, p < .005$

^{ix} Three respondents chose not to fill out this section

^x $\chi^2(1) = 4.48, p < .05$

^{xi} Because of small cell size, a comparable analysis examining the relationship between areas of sexual orientation training in partnered versus unpartnered parents could not be conducted.

^{xii} $\chi^2(1) = 10.62, p < .001$

^{xiii} $\chi^2(1) = 3.85, p < .05; \chi^2(1) = 2.79, p < .10; \chi^2(1) = 9.29, p < .005$; respectively

^{xiv} $\chi^2(1) = 4.32, p < .05; \chi^2(1) = 4.01, p < .05$; respectively

^{xv} $\chi^2(1) = 8.47, p < .005$

^{xvi} $\chi^2(1) = 8.12, p < .005$

^{xvii} $\chi^2(1) = 3.98, p < .05$

^{xviii} $\chi^2(1) = 72.26, p < .0001; \chi^2(1) = 25.51, p < .0001; \chi^2(1) = 17.47, p < .0001; \chi^2(1) = 19.35, p < .0001$; respectively.

^{xix} $\chi^2(1) = 24.16, p < .0001$

^{xx} $\chi^2(1) = 15.81, p < .001; \chi^2(1) = 20.97, p < .0001; \chi^2(1) = 11.60, p < .001; \chi^2(1) = 18.88, p < .0001$, respectively

^{xxi} The 13 questions were subjected to a principal component factor analysis, with varimax rotation. The analysis yielded two factors -- the first, identified as satisfaction with the professionalism and competence of the adoption worker, consisted of 11 questions and accounted for 73.14% of the variance; the second, identified as satisfaction with the adoption worker's knowledge of LGBT issues, consisted of two questions and accounted for an additional 8.67% of the variance.

^{xxii} $t(150) = 8.16, p < .001$

^{xxiii} Factor 1 scores: overall relationship with the adoption worker (.89), level of respect shown by adoption worker (.79), adoption worker's level of involving client and partner in setting goals (.73), professionalism of adoption worker (.89), ethics of adoption worker (.89), responsiveness of adoption worker to client's questions and concerns (.85), adoption worker's knowledge of adoption paperwork and process (.80), adoption worker's knowledge of clinical adoption-related issues (.64), adoption workers level of concern for the adopted child (.79), adoption worker's handling of problems in the adoption process (.81), adoption worker's concern for client's family (.82); Factor 2 scores: adoption worker's knowledge of LGBT issues (.91), adoption worker's knowledge of LGBT parenting issues (.93)

^{xxiv} $t(149) = 1.34, p > .05; t(150) = 2.72, p < .01$, respectively

^{xxv} $t(150) = 2.92, p < .01; t(149) = .15, p > .05$, respectively

^{xxvi} $t(150) = 3.06, p < .005$

^{xxvii} $t(139) = 1.95, p < .05; t(139) = 2.19, p < .05$; respectively

^{xxviii} $t(149) = 2.10, p < .05; t(147) = 2.44, p < .01$, respectively

^{xxix} $t(149) = 1.64, p < .10; t(149) = 1.65, p < .10$, respectively

^{xxx} $\chi^2(1) = 6.55, p < .01; \chi^2(1) = 4.07, p < .05; \chi^2(1) = 3.33, p < .05$, respectively

^{xxxi} $\chi^2(1) = 19.30, p < .0001; \chi^2(1) = 5.25, p < .05$; respectively

^{xxxii} $\chi^2(1) = 3.87, p < .05$; $\chi^2(1) = 3.30, p < .05$; $\chi^2(1) = 4.74, p < .05$; respectively
^{xxxiii} $\chi^2(1) = 3.44, p < .05$; $\chi^2(1) = 9.48, p < .005$; $\chi^2(1) = 3.79, p < .05$; respectively
^{xxxiv} $\chi^2(1) = 6.35, p < .01$; $\chi^2(1) = 5.83, p < .01$; $\chi^2(1) = 6.90, p < .01$; respectively
^{xxxv} $\chi^2(1) = 70.43, p < .0001$; $\chi^2(1) = 4.68, p < .05$; $\chi^2(1) = 8.26, p < .005$; respectively
^{xxxvi} $\chi^2(1) = 43.42, p < .0001$; $\chi^2(1) = 6.93, p < .01$; respectively
^{xxxvii} $\chi^2(1) = 7.42, p < .01$; $\chi^2(1) = 5.19, p < .05$; $\chi^2(1) = 3.85, p < .05$; respectively
^{xxxviii} $\chi^2(1) = 16.48, p < .0001$; $\chi^2(1) = 3.83, p < .05$; $\chi^2(1) = 4.13, p < .05$; respectively