

**Considerations Relating to the
Placement of Children in
Gay/Lesbian Foster and Adoptive Homes**

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BAY AREA SOCIAL SERVICES CONSORTIUM (BASSC)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Considerations Relating to the Placement of Children
in Gay/Lesbian Foster and Adoptive Homes

This study draws upon data from the social science and legal literature, interviews with Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA) staff, and a focus group of gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents to examine whether lesbian and gay foster and adoptive placements serve the best interests of children. Specifically, the study attempts to address the following questions:

1. How does placement in a gay/lesbian foster or adoptive home impact the psychological, behavioral, and social development of children?
2. Does the psychosexual development of children in gay/lesbian placements differ from that of children in heterosexual placements? If differences do exist, how do they affect the psychological, behavioral, and social development of children in gay/lesbian placements?
3. Is there a relationship between parent homosexuality and child sexual molestation?
4. What are the social and public issues raised by placing children into gay/lesbian foster and adoptive homes?

We review each of the research questions as addressed by the findings presented in the literature in addition to reports from key SSA staff and a focus group of gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents.

Impacts of Placement on Child's Psychological, Behavioral, and Social Development

Since no significant studies have been conducted on children raised in gay/lesbian planned families including foster and adoptive homes, this study draws on research on gay/lesbian biological parenting. Recent research (Higgins, 1989; Tasker & Golombok, 1995, Golombok et al., 1983)

shows that a parent's homosexuality does not negatively affect the psychological or behavioral development of children. Higgins (1989) found no significant differences in self-esteem between children of lesbian mothers and children of heterosexual mothers. When investigating anxiety, depression and consequent contact with a health care professional, Tasker & Golombok (1995) found no significant differences between children raised by lesbian mothers and those raised by heterosexual mothers. In looking at emotional difficulties, behavioral difficulties, and hyperactivity, Golombok et al. (1983) reported no significant differences between children of lesbian mothers and those of heterosexual mothers. However, children raised by heterosexual mothers were found to experience more psychiatric problems and to have been referred to a psychiatric clinic more than were children raised by lesbian mothers.

Research indicates that, especially during early adolescence, children may face some social stigma if they are perceived as having parents who are "different" (Sullivan, 1995). Several studies (Lewis, 1980; Golombok et al., 1983; Green et al., 1986; Miller, 1979) found that in spite of the problems (e.g., teasing, shaming) experienced by children of gay/lesbian parents, they still appeared to be as well-adjusted socially as their peers. Lewis (1980) reported that children of lesbians experienced some conflicts because of homophobia and their family composition, but all expressed pride in their mother's courage in being lesbian. When investigating the ability to be social and the quality of their relationships with peers, Golombok et al. (1983) found no significant differences between children of lesbian mothers and those of heterosexual mothers. Green et al. (1986) studied sons and daughters of lesbians and heterosexual women and found no significant differences in the rating of their popularity with other children. Miller (1979) showed that gay fathers exercise discretion when revealing their sexual orientation so as not to expose their children to homophobic harassment.

In examining family and peer relationships, Tasker & Golombok (1995) found that young adults from lesbian family backgrounds were no more likely to remember general teasing or bullying by their peers than were those from heterosexual family backgrounds. For those who did report such hostility, there was no group difference in the recollected seriousness of the episode. With regard

to teasing about their sexuality, those from lesbian families were more likely to recall having been teased about being gay or lesbian themselves. This was especially true for boys from lesbian backgrounds. However, the groups did not differ with respect to the proportion who had been teased about their family background or mother's lifestyle. In addition, of the 18 participants whose friends knew about their mother's lesbian identity, five received negative responses from friends.

SSA staff interviewed for this study spoke about the potential impact of placements with gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents on a child's emotional and social well-being. Most reported that children with severe medical and behavioral problems are often placed with a gay/lesbian family. The majority expressed that lesbian and gay foster and adoptive parents provide an invaluable community resource in that they are willing to accept children with a broader range of difficulties. Many spoke to the strengths of those gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents and their ability to care for such difficult children. Several staff expressed concern about the availability of supportive resources in the community to assist these children with possible social problems stemming from homophobia.

Gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents who participated in the focus group shared their experiences parenting the "high demand" children placed in their homes and tending to their medical, behavioral, and other needs. Several parents spoke about the homophobic attitudes that they and their children have encountered with the educational, medical, legal, and social services systems. A few shared the specific messages that they offer their children, (e.g., to honor and respect differences; "being gay/lesbian is not a big deal") to counter these harmful attitudes and assist them with building a sense of social well-being.

Impacts of Placement on Child's Psychosexual Development

Findings from studies that have investigated the issue of whether a child raised by a gay/lesbian parent will develop a similar sexual identity indicate that a child does not become gay or lesbian by being raised by or living in an environment with a gay or lesbian parent (Bigner & Bozett,

1989; Patterson, 1992). Components of the issue of psychosexual development that have been examined include gender identity (i.e., the subjective sense that one is male or female), gender-role behavior (i.e., sex-type behaviors that are culturally ascribed to either males or females), and sexual orientation (i.e., sexual partner preference) (Steckel, 1987; Tasker & Golombok, 1995).

Research demonstrates that the gender identity development of children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers is consistent with their biological sex (Kirkpatrick et al., 1981; Green et al., 1986; Golombok et al., 1983). Studies that have examined gender-role behavior (Green et al., 1986; Kirkpatrick et al., 1981; Golombok et al., 1982; Hoeffler, 1980) generally show no differences between children raised by gay or lesbian parents and children raised by heterosexual parents. Green et al., (1986) looked at the children's favorite games, toys and activities and asked about their preferences for adult roles. Findings showed that boys in both groups chose toys and activities and spoke of future jobs that were typically masculine while girls exhibited a wider range of choices. Daughters of lesbians were found to be less traditionally feminine in their dress, interested in more physical activities, and significantly more likely to choose traditionally masculine jobs than were daughters of heterosexuals.

Studies exploring the connection between a gay/lesbian parent's sexual orientation and their children's show no relationship (Miller, 1979; Bozett, 1982; Bozett, 1989; Gottman, 1990; Higgins, 1989; Golombok et al., Tasker & Golombok, 1995). In their study, Tasker & Golombok (1995) did not find any significant differences in the sexual attraction of children raised by lesbian mothers or heterosexual mothers. However, of the young adults who did report a same gender attraction, six from lesbian families as compared to none of those from heterosexual families reported acting on these feelings.

SSA staff and focus group participants provided few direct comments on the issue of the psychosexual development of children raised in gay/lesbian foster and adoptive homes. Most staff expressed their professional opinion that the needs of the child and the strengths and experience of the prospective parents are the most important variables to consider when placing a child. Staff

expressed concern about the availability of resources in the community to assist foster parents who have a lesbian or gay child placed in their home.

Gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents in the focus group commented that the critical medical, psychological, and behavioral needs of their children take precedence over the issue of sexual orientation. One focus group couple stated that they were interested in only foster parenting gay/lesbian youth. They felt that they had the life experience to help these children with identity issues and social stigma.

Parenting and Child Sexual Molestation

Several studies have investigated whether gay parents are more likely than heterosexual parents to sexually molest their children or to engage in inappropriate sexual displays in front of children. Results from general studies on molestation show that there is no connection between homosexuality and child molestation (Groth, 1978). In fact, research shows that the majority of child sexual abuse cases involve a heterosexual male abusing a young female (Patterson, 1992; Gebhard et al., 1965; Meiselman, 1978; Groth & Birnbaum, 1978). A recent Child Welfare League of America report (Sullivan, 1995) indicates that 90 percent of all pedophiles are heterosexual males. No empirical studies have been conducted on sexual abuse of children by lesbian mothers (Tasker & Golombok, 1995).

In conducting a study of parenting behaviors of self-identified gay and non-gay men, Bigner & Jacobsen (1989) found that gay fathers are similar to non-gay fathers in their overall parenting abilities and skills. However, gay fathers were less willing to show affection to their partner in their child's presence than were non-gay fathers.

One SSA staff member spoke to the issue of the perceived link between gay male parenting and pedophilia. Her impression was that child sexual molestation was perceived as a problem by legal professionals in the courts more so than by employees of the SSA. None of the focus group participants addressed the issue of parenting and child sexual molestation.

Social and Public Issues

Gay and lesbian families are a growing segment of American society (Green & Bozett, 1991). As many as three million gay fathers and five million lesbian mothers are believed to live in the United States, parenting an estimated 14 million children (Sullivan, 1995). Research focusing on the psychological and emotional health of these parents (Sullivan, 1995; Green et al., 1986) and their ability to parent (Harris & Turner, 1986; Miller, 1979; Riddle, 1978; Bigner & Jacobsen, 1989; Bigner & Jacobsen, 1992; Scallen, 1981) offers a wealth of evidence confirming that non-clinical groups of gays and lesbians are no different than their heterosexual counterparts.

In contrast to the concerns surrounding foster and adoptive placements with lesbian and gay parents, many of the SSA staff highlighted the strengths that these parents bring to their foster and adoptive children. These strengths included: psychological stability, sensitivity, educational accomplishments, financial security, strong support systems, and the ability to use resources. In addition, staff spoke about the willingness of gays/lesbians to parent children with severe disabilities and multiple needs. The major theme that emerged from the interviews with SSA staff was the importance of the appropriateness of the placement for the child and the abilities of the parents independent of their sexual orientation.

Some of the reasons offered by focus group participants for wanting to become foster and adoptive parents matched the sentiments expressed by SSA staff. Many stated that they had much to share with a child: a stable, committed, loving relationship; emotional maturity and psychological stability; a comfortable home; financial resources; their own biological children; and extended support systems. One couple shared that their personal experience as lesbians in a homophobic society would be invaluable in foster parenting lesbian or gay youth. Most focus group participants agreed that the fact that they are gay or lesbian is not as important as the quality of parenting that they are able to provide to their children.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study begins to address the issue of gay and lesbian foster and adoptive parenting by reviewing the social science literature on gay and lesbian biological parenting and the legal literature, and conducting interviews with key staff of the Santa Clara County Social Service Agency and a focus group of gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents in the county.

Social science research focusing on the psychological and emotional health of gay/lesbian parents and their ability to parent showed that homosexual parents have at least equal parenting abilities as do heterosexual parents. Furthermore, research found that a parent's sexual orientation does not negatively affect the psychological, behavioral, or psychosexual development of their children. Research indicated that, especially during early adolescence, children may face some social stigma if they are perceived as having parents who are "different." Results from studies on child sexual molestation showed that there is no connection between homosexuality and child sexual abuse.

Social service agency staff reported that gays/lesbians are a viable resource for foster and adoptive parenting and should be recruited to care for the difficult children waiting for placement in the county. Many staff recounted the numerous strengths (e.g., psychological stability, financial security, strong support systems) inherent in the gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents with whom children have been placed in the county.

Focus group participants provided insights about gay/lesbian foster care and adoption. Many talked about the care that they provide to their children, the informal supports available in the community to assist them, and some of the homophobia that they and their children have encountered. Focus group participants agreed that the fact that they are gay/lesbian is not as important as the quality of parenting that they are able to provide to their children.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1 - Informal policies that support gay/lesbian foster care and adoptive placements need to be incorporated into the written policies and procedures of agencies.

There is no evidence showing that gay/lesbian families are detrimental to their children. The implications of the research point to the need for equal scrutiny of homosexual and heterosexual applicants by judges, probation officers, child welfare workers, and therapists when considering the placement of children. There is the need to develop official written policies for gay/lesbian foster care and adoptive placements.

In light of the fact that there is little written legislation which addresses the placement of children in lesbian and gay foster and adoptive homes, the most judicious and socially responsible approach for determining the appropriateness of such placements is a case by case analysis based on the needs of the child and the abilities of the prospective parents to meet these needs.

Recommendation #2 - Education about gay/lesbian families should be offered to human service and legal professionals.

The study supports the need for continued education and training for social service and legal professionals (attorneys, judges, and family court personnel) on the issue of alternative lifestyles and family constellations.

Recommendation #3 - Children placed in gay/lesbian families (as well as their parents) need to be provided with pre- and post-placement services and supports.

The inherent differences in gay/lesbian families need to be acknowledged so that the children can feel free to communicate any potential difficulties in addressing issues related to social stigma received from friends, classmates, and neighbors. Part of the assessment process for gay/lesbian foster and adoption placements needs to focus on the ability of the prospective family to help the child with appropriate responses should such rejection occur.

Recommendation #4 - Further research needs to be conducted on the issues of lesbian/gay foster care and adoption.

This is a preliminary and exploratory review of the issues pertaining to gay and lesbian foster/adoptive placements. Additional empirical research is needed on this issue, especially longitudinal studies which would track the experiences of these children over time.

Special issues to consider in future research include: Are the early adolescent child's wishes being taken into consideration if s/he does not want a placement with a gay/lesbian family? Are the young child's wishes taken into consideration in determining future placements if s/he becomes attached to gay/lesbian foster parents? Are the gay/lesbian child's wishes taken into consideration in determining potential placements in gay/lesbian families?

The basic goal of child welfare is to guarantee safety. The scientific evidence shows that placements with gay/lesbian families are just as safe as those with heterosexual families. Another critical goal of child welfare is to promote permanent lifetime relationships when children cannot go home. If gay/lesbian caregivers are willing and able to provide for these children, we should not deny them an opportunity for permanence. Potential loving and competent adoptive and foster caregivers need not be excluded from receiving consideration for parenting the increasing numbers of children needing placement solely on the basis of sexual orientation.

Since there is no scientific evidence in the literature showing that gay/lesbian families are detrimental to a child's development and there exists a receptive pool of prospective gays/lesbians interested in fostering or adopting the large number of children waiting for placement, gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents are a valuable community resource.

Considerations Relating to the Placement of Children in Gay/Lesbian Foster and Adoptive Homes

Section I. Purpose of the Study

This study was requested by administrative court judges and county social service administrators in Santa Clara and Alameda Counties, California out of concern for children who are or could be placed in foster or adoptive homes in which a parent is gay or lesbian. The study examines social science and legal literature on biological and created (i.e., foster and adoptive) families and includes original research in order to provide guidance to counties in developing and implementing sound, effective practices that serve the best interests of children. The study was sponsored by the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency and conducted by the Research Response Team of the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) under the auspices of the Center for Social Services Research in the University of California at Berkeley's School of Social Welfare.

Section II. Introduction

The United States has experienced a sharp increase in the number of children in foster care over the last decade. In 1982 there were approximately 262,000 children in foster care and by 1993 that number had jumped to 428,000. Today it is estimated that as many as 500,000 children are in foster care (P.L. 103-382). Many of the children who receive foster care services are or could be candidates for adoption services. Of children in foster care in 1990, for example, approximately 69,000 had a goal of adoption. Another 20,000 children in care were legally free to be adopted but had no case plan goal of adoption (Bussiere, 1995). Currently, an estimated 35,000 children are waiting for an adoptive placement. An additional 70,000 to 85,000 children will very likely need adoption services in the near future (Sullivan, 1995).

While the number of children in need of foster or adoptive homes is growing, there is widespread recognition that the pool of foster and adoptive parents is dwindling and that recruitment efforts

have not been overwhelmingly successful (Ricketts, 1991), especially on behalf of children and families of color.¹ Consequently, children spend an average of two years and eight months in foster care before they are adopted (Bussiere, 1995). Studies (Barth, Courtney, Berrick, & Albert, 1994; Children's Defense Fund, 1993; Maximus, Inc., 1984; Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1993) indicate that African American children wait longer to be adopted than other children.

To increase the pool of prospective foster and adoptive parents, Congress recently passed the Howard Metzenbaum Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994 or *MEPA* (P.L. 103-382). The legislation mandates the recruitment of families who reflect the ethno-racial backgrounds of available children, as well as parents who can raise children from those backgrounds, yet it prohibits agencies receiving federal funds from delaying or denying a foster or adoptive placement based solely on the ethno-racial background of a child or prospective parent.

By prohibiting discrimination based on ethno-racial affiliation, MEPA could result in an increase in the number of children who are placed transracially, i.e., with a family of a different ethno-racial background than their own. This alternative for finding homes for children of color is, and has been for more than two decades, the source of considerable controversy. Nonetheless, transracial placements are now considered-- in the eyes of the law and by many adoption workers, researchers, and policy-makers-- to be consistent with the best interests of children. Proponents of the practice maintain that it increases the placement opportunities for children of color. Support for the practice has been fortified by findings from empirical studies (Bagley, 1993; Brooks & Barth, 1994; Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1982; Simon, Altstein & Melli, 1994; Vroegh, 1993) which generally indicate that the emotional and behavioral development of children adopted transracially are not harmed by their transracial adoption experience.

¹ A disproportionate number of children in foster care are of color. Of children with an adoption goal in 1990, 44% were Caucasian, 43% were African American, and 7% were Hispanic (Bussiere, 1995).

Problem

Another controversial alternative for finding foster and adoptive homes for children of color, as well as for Caucasian children, is placing them in gay or lesbian families. While some of the controversy over such a practice may be a function of discrimination against homosexuals, much of it is due to uncertainty about the impact on foster and adoptive children of being raised by gay or lesbian parents.

Many children in foster care and/or those who are waiting for an adoptive placement have been bruised by physical and/or emotional neglect and abuse. The effects of such treatment may be ameliorated by an immediate and stable placement in a foster home or secure and permanent placement in an adoptive family. The effects of maltreatment, however, may be difficult to overcome in a gay/lesbian placement if such placements entail challenges and problems that generally do not exist in non- gay/lesbian placements. To date, no empirical studies have examined either the impact on children of gay/lesbian foster or adoptive placements or how gay/lesbian placements compare to heterosexual placements. Findings from studies (See McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1993) on the long-term effects of foster care, in general, indicate that adults who spent time in foster care attained lower levels of education, experience more behavioral problems, and had poorer mental health than the general population. It is unclear, though, whether these outcomes are due to maltreatment experienced prior to placement or to the placement(s) themselves. Similarly, research on grown adoptees indicates that teenage adoptees receive more psychological counseling than their peers (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1990) and are more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, have trouble with the police, be disruptive in school, and suffer from depression and anxiety than their peers (Benson, Sharma & Roehlkepartain, 1994). Thus, foster children and adoptees appear to be at greater risk for emotional and behavioral problems than children raised by their biological parents.

Research Questions

This study was conducted in response to the paucity of data on gay and lesbian foster and adoptive families. Aims of the study include exploring the development and well-being of children raised in gay/lesbian foster and adoptive homes and determining the viability of gay men and lesbians as foster and adoptive parents. Specific questions addressed in the study include:

1. How does placement in a gay/lesbian foster or adoptive home impact the emotional, behavioral, and social development of children?
2. Does the psychosexual development of children in gay/lesbian placements differ from that of children in heterosexual placements? If differences do exist, how do they affect the emotional, behavioral, and social development of children in gay/lesbian placements?
3. Is there a relationship between parent homosexuality and child sexual molestation?
4. What are the social and public issues raised by placing children in gay/lesbian foster and adoptive homes?

Section III. Method

Data for this study come from three sources: (1) social science and legal literature, including studies on biological families in which a parent is gay or lesbian; (2) semi-structured interviews with staff from a Social Services Agency (SSA) who are involved in foster and/or adoptive placements; and (3) a focus group of gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents.

The Social Science and Legal Literature

No significant studies to date have been conducted on children raised in gay/lesbian foster or adoptive families. There does exist, however, some literature on children raised by gay/lesbian

biological parents. Thus, it is to this parallel literature that this study turns to draw inferences about the impact on children of being raised in gay/lesbian foster and adoptive families. Other relevant and scholarly literature (e.g., law reviews, professional articles and books) supplement the literature on gay/lesbian biologic families.

Social science and legal literature were identified through various sources, including: searches of electronic databases; references to gay/lesbian publications and organizations; references to foster/adoptive parent publications and organizations; contact with gay/lesbian professionals and researchers; and contact with child welfare services professionals and researchers.

Staff Interviews

Participants

Interviews were conducted with 10 key staff from the Santa Clara County (SCC) Social Services Agency (SSA). Participants were currently working in one of the following units of the agency: Family and Child Services, Recruitment, Adoption, Emergency Response, Dependency Investigation, Adolescent Services, Adult Protective Services, or Financial Management Services. Several participants had worked previously in other units and/or were knowledgeable about the daily operation of units other than the one in which they currently worked. Several participants had worked for the county for 20 years or more. Researchers interviewed eight female and two male staff.

Procedures

Researchers met with the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Concerns Committee of the Santa Clara County SSA to introduce the study and request their involvement in it. Approximately 20 Committee members were in attendance and asked to (a) be participants in the study; (b) assist in identifying other staff to be interviewed; and (c) assist in identifying participants for the focus group. Several members of the committee agreed to be interviewed. The committee identified SSA staff and gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents who might be interested in taking part in the study. Identified SSA staff were mailed a letter describing and requesting their participation in the

study. Prospective participants were contacted by telephone to confirm their participation and to schedule a meeting time. All staff interviews were conducted on the same day.

Participants were interviewed individually by two researchers. Interviews were conducted in a private room in the SSA and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Participants were informed that their responses would be kept strictly confidential and their anonymity maintained. They were also informed that they could decline to answer any questions they chose and that they could end the interview at any time. Thank you letters were mailed to all staff participants.

Focus Group

Participants

The focus group was comprised of 11 participants, four of whom were currently licensed foster parents with at least one child placed in their home; one of whom was a licensed foster parent without a child placed in the home; two of whom were adoptive parents; three of whom were prospective foster parents; and three of whom were prospective adoptive parents (categories are not mutually exclusive). Three of the participants indicated that they had biological children of their own and two of these noted that they were the adoptive parents of each other's biological child. The group was comprised of four female couples, one male couple, and one uncoupled lesbian. Of the coupled participants, the number of years coupled ranged from four to 14, with an average of seven years. Participants' age ranged from 22 to 47 years, with the average age being 36 years. The group consisted of two Hispanics and nine Caucasians. All participants reported receiving at least a high school degree. Four participants reported attending some college; six reported graduating from college; and one reported receiving a graduate degree.

Procedures

SSA Committee members identified and made the first contact with the focus group participants. Researchers mailed a letter to participants describing the study and requesting their attendance at the focus group. SSA staff provided participants with details of the focus group (e.g., meeting time and location) and confirmed their attendance.

The focus group was held in an auditorium located in the SSA and was facilitated primarily by one researcher. Another researcher was present and responsible primarily for taking notes. Prior to the focus group discussion, participants were asked to complete a short registration form containing demographic questions (Appendix A). A sign-in sheet was also circulated and participants were asked to provide their names and addresses if they wished to receive a copy of this report and list of names and addresses of other focus group members. Ground rules for the focus group were presented and discussed, and five open-ended questions were posed (Appendix B). Each participant was asked to share her/his experiences and thoughts about any one or all of the questions, as well as anything else s/he believed important or relevant to the discussion. The focus group discussion lasted for approximately three hours. Thank you letters were mailed to all focus group participants.

Section IV. Findings

The Social Science and Legal Literature

Gay and lesbian biological families are a growing segment of American society (Green & Bozett, 1991). As many as three million gay fathers and five million lesbian mothers are believed to live in the United States, parenting an estimated 14 million children (Sullivan, 1995). These estimates include children conceived in heterosexual marriages, as well as through artificial insemination and co-parenting with other gay men and lesbians (Ricketts, 1991). A substantial number of studies have examined biological families in which a parent is gay or lesbian, investigating both the parents and the parents' impact on their children's development. Concerns related to the parents generally deal with (1) their psychological and emotional health; (2) their parenting ability; and (3) whether they or their friends sexually molest or display sexual acts in front of their children. The second category of concerns generally deals with the children's (1) emotional and behavioral development; (2) social development; and (3) psychosexual development (Falk, 1989; Sullivan, 1995).

Parent-Related Issues

Psychological and Emotional Health

Until recently, gay men and lesbians were often assumed to be mentally ill (Susoeff, 1985). That assumption was discredited by the psychiatric, psychological, and social work communities (McIntyre, 1994), which provided a substantial amount of evidence showing that gay men and lesbians are no different than heterosexuals on various measures of psychological health, adjustment, and well-being. Indeed, most helping professionals are aware that more than two decades have passed since both the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from their diagnostic lists of mental illness. Those decisions came after extensive discussions, a massive literature review and determination that no scientific basis existed for the continued discrimination against homosexual parents (Ricketts, 1991). (See Appendix C for position statements of various professional organizations regarding homosexuality).

Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray, & Smith (1986) compared the overall psychological health of 50 lesbian mothers and their 56 children with 40 heterosexual mothers and their 48 children. The study sample consisted of families from rural and urban areas in 10 states. All had lived without adult males (18 years or older) in the household for at least two years. Families with heterosexual mothers were matched to families with lesbian mothers on age and race of mother; length of mother and child separation from father; educational level and income of mother; and number, age, and sex of children.

Each mother in the study was interviewed in her home and completed a questionnaire addressing child raising, parenting experiences, and marital and romantic relationships. They were also questioned about their attitudes toward divorce, sex roles, and sex education of children. In addition, personality scales, including the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, the Adjective Checklist, and the Jackson PRF-E were completed.

Scores on the Adjective Checklist revealed that lesbian mothers scored higher on self-confidence,

dominance (seeking leadership roles), and exhibition (eliciting attention from others). Heterosexual mothers scored higher on abasement (expressing feelings of inferiority) and deference (seeking subordinate roles in relation to others). Scores on the attitude scales and the Bem Sex-Role Inventory were not significantly different between lesbian and heterosexual mothers.

Parenting Ability

Several studies have examined the parenting ability of gay and lesbian parents. Findings from those studies suggest that homosexuality is not incompatible with effective parenting. For instance, Bigner & Jacobsen (1989) conducted a study of parenting behaviors of self-identified gay and non-gay men using a standardized instrument. The researchers examined whether there exist specific dimensions of parenting behavior that differentiate gay fathers from non-gay fathers. The sample consisted of 66 men who were fathers of at least two children. Thirty-three of the men were self-identified as homosexual; the remaining 33 men were presumed to be non-gay and were selected by random computer analysis from a subject pool of respondents (n=1,700) who had participated in another research project conducted by Bigner and Jacobsen.

Subjects in the study completed the Iowa Parent Behavior Inventory, which assessed the following five dimensions of parenting behavior: (1) involvement with children; (2) limit-setting; (3) responsiveness; (4) reasoning guidance; and (5) intimacy. Of the five dimensions of parenting behavior measured, three were found to discriminate significantly between gay and non-gay fathers. These were: limit setting; responsiveness; and reasoning guidance. Bigner and Jacobsen concluded that these results indicated that gay fathers are significantly more strict and consistent than non-gay fathers in setting and enforcing limits on children's behavior. They also concluded that the findings show that gay fathers go to greater lengths than non-gay fathers in promoting cognitive skills of children by explaining rules and regulations to their children and that they tend to be more responsive to the perceived needs of children than their non-gay counterparts. Bigner & Jacobsen (1989) found no significant differences on individual items of the involvement and intimacy dimensions of the inventory. Gay fathers were found, however, to go to greater

lengths than non-gay fathers to act as a resource for activities with their children. They were also found to be less willing than non-gay fathers to show affection to their partner in their child's presence. In addition, individual item analysis on the reasoning and guidance dimension indicated that gay fathers were more egalitarian and more likely to assume a counselor role than non-gay fathers. Finally, gay fathers were found to be more likely than their non-gay counterparts to encourage their children to discuss their fears with them. The researcher's overall conclusion about their findings was that "gay fathers are similar to non-gay fathers in their overall parenting abilities and skills," (p. 181) but that they differ in their approach, philosophy, and type of parenting.

Bigner and Jacobsen (1992) conducted another study which measured gay and non-gay fathers' parenting style and orientation to the fathering role. Twenty-four gay and 29 non-gay fathers were administered two instruments-- the Adult Responses to Child Behavior (ARC-B) and the Attitudes Toward Father (ATF). The ARC-B was designed to elicit both attitudes and behaviors toward the fathering role, while the ATF was designed to measure subjects' orientation toward their fathering role. As in their previous study, Bigner and Jacobsen concluded that gay and non-gay fathers are more similar than different regarding their responsiveness to hypothetical child behaviors and in their attitudes toward the fathering role.

Gay and non-gay fathers' child rearing attitudes and behaviors were also compared in a study conducted by Scallen (1981). The sample consisted of 20 gay and 20 heterosexual fathers, and a control group of 20 fathers. Data were obtained using responses from the Eversoll Father Role Questionnaire, the Kinsey Scale, the Father/Son/Daughter Practice Report, and a demographic questionnaire. No significant differences were found between the groups on the paternal problem solving dimensions, on the degree of emphasis placed on recreation, or on the subjects' self-reports pertaining to the encouragement of autonomy. However, gay fathers were found to be more likely to endorse paternal nurturance, less likely to emphasize economic providing as a central aspect of fathering behavior, and somewhat less traditional in their overall approach to parenting. Gay fathers were also found to have a substantial psychological investment in the

paternal role and to demonstrate a significantly more positive self-assessment of their performance in the paternal role than did heterosexual fathers (Bozett, 1989; Bigner & Bozett, 1990).

With regard to lesbian mothers, studies (Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983; Miller, Jacobsen, & Bigner, 1981; Mucklow & Phelan, 1979; Tasker & Golombok, 1995) indicate that they are as child-oriented, warm and responsive to their children, and nurturant and confident, as their non-lesbian counterparts. Lesbian mothers also appear to be more concerned than heterosexual mothers that their children have contact with male role models. Children raised by divorced lesbian mothers see their fathers more frequently than do children raised by divorced heterosexual mothers (Finkelhor & Russell, 1984; Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983; Tasker & Golombok, 1995).

Child Molestation and Exposing Children to Sexual Acts

Several studies (Bagnall, Gallagher, & Goldstein, 1984; Gonsiorek & Weinrick, 1991; Sosoeff, 1985; Wishard, 1989) have been interested in whether or not gay men and lesbian parents are more predisposed to child molestation or inappropriate sexual displays in front of children than heterosexual parents. This interest was often due to the fact that courts can deny custody to a gay or lesbian parent in fear that a child will be molested by the parent or the parents' friends (McIntyre, 1994). Work in this area generally comes from the research literature on abuse and is not specific to gay and lesbian parenting. Nonetheless, results from general studies on molestation show that there is no connection between homosexuality and child molestation (Patterson, 1992).

Groth and Birnbaum (1978), for example, conducted a random sample of 175 males convicted of sexual assault against children. The sample was divided into two groups based on whether the offenders were sexually fixated exclusively on children (n=83) or had regressed from peer relationships (n=92). The majority (53%) of all offenders in the study selected exclusively female victims. Only 29 percent of offenders selected exclusively male victims; the remaining 18 percent selected both female and male victims. Of the offenders who regressed to children from adult

sexual relationships, 76 percent were exclusively heterosexual. The remaining 24 percent were classified as bisexual. None of the regressed offenders were primarily sexually attracted to other adult males. (Sexual orientations for fixated offenders are not reported). The researchers concluded that homosexuality and homosexual pedophilia are not synonymous and that “the adult heterosexual male constitutes a greater sexual risk to underage children than does the adult homosexual male” (p. 181). Indeed, a more recent report by the Child Welfare League of America (Sullivan, 1995) indicates that 90 percent of all pedophiles are heterosexual males.

In their longitudinal study, Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith (1981) examined the development of sexual preference and found that of the male and female homosexual subjects in the study who had engaged in childhood or adolescent homosexual behavior, the overwhelming majority experienced sex play with friends and age-mates, not with strangers and adults. A small minority of both heterosexual and homosexual subjects reported that they had experienced homosexual sex with someone significantly older or with an adult while they were children or adolescents.

Miller (1979), conducted a study which directly examined the notion that gay fathers are prone to molesting their children. He conducted in-depth interviews with a snowball sample of 40 gay fathers and 14 of their children. Fathers and children were interviewed separately and in private. In addition, 12 wives/mothers were interviewed to triangulate the data. All of the fathers in the study were Caucasian, predominantly middle-class, and college-educated. Fathers in the study were asked the following three questions: (1) Have you ever fantasized about engaging in sex with your son(s)? (2) Have you ever had sex with them? (3) Have your children ever been molested by your gay friends?

Findings indicate that three subjects reported that they had fantasized about having sex with their sons, but none of the subjects had actually acted on their fantasies. All subjects reported that no gay friends had ever molested their sons. Miller concluded that his findings were consistent with those from other studies (See Gebhard, Gagnon, Pomeroy, & Christenson, 1965; Meiselman, 1978; Groth & Birnbaum, 1978) on child molestation and incest that show such offenders to be

disproportionately heterosexual.

While there has been some exploration of sexual abuse of children by gay men and fathers, no empirical studies to date have examined sexual abuse of children by lesbian mothers (Tasker & Golombok, 1995). Sexual abuse of children by adult women is extremely rare, however. Thus, lesbian mothers are very low risk for sexual abuse of their children (Patterson, 1992).

Child-Related Issues

There is no evidence that living with a gay or lesbian parent has any significant negative effects on children. In fact, gay and lesbian parents appear to be as effective as heterosexual parents (Bigner and Bozett, 1990). Of particular interest in previous studies on children raised by gay/lesbian parents is their: (1) emotional and behavioral development; (2) social well-being; and (3) psychosexual development.

Emotional and Behavioral Development

There has been some doubt about gay and lesbian parents' ability to provide a healthy psychological environment in which their children can develop emotionally and behaviorally. Social science research has concluded, however, that a parent's homosexuality does not give rise to inappropriate emotional or behavioral development (Huggins, 1989).

For example, Huggins (1989) compared 18 children of lesbian mothers with 18 children of heterosexual mothers. All children were between 13 and 19 years old. Researchers used the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory to determine subjects' self-esteem. Findings revealed no significant differences in self-esteem between children of lesbian mothers and children of heterosexual mothers.

Tasker & Golombok (1995) compared the psychological adjustment of 25 children raised by lesbian mothers with that of 21 children raised by heterosexual mothers. Subjects were asked to complete the Trait Anxiety Inventory and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) to assess current

levels of anxiety and depression. After completing both inventories, subjects were asked about current feelings of anxiety or depression, whether they had ever sought help from a health care professional for these problems, and whether they had ever consulted a medical doctor about psychosomatic indicators of stress, such as alcohol, cigarette or drug consumption, or insomnia. Subjects were classified according to whether they had ever sought professional help for psychological problems.

No significant differences between children raised by lesbian mothers and children raised by heterosexual mothers were found for either scores on the Trait Anxiety Inventory or the BDI. Similarly, no differences were found with regard to reported contact with a health care professional due to problems arising from anxiety, depression, or stress.

Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter (1983) compared lesbian households with single-parent households in which the parent was a heterosexual mother. Both groups were obtained through advertisements in various publications and contact with various organizations which catered either to gays and lesbians or single-parents. Each group was comprised of 27 families. There were 37 children between the ages of five and 17 in the lesbian households and 38 in the heterosexual households. Children's emotional and behavioral development was assessed using parent and teacher questionnaires. The researchers found no differences between children of lesbian mothers and children of heterosexual mothers on the mean scores of either scale. Systematic and detailed information from the interviews with mothers was used to determine the presence or absence of psychiatric problems. Only a small minority of children from either group were found to show significant psychiatric problems. Interestingly, children raised by heterosexual mothers were much more likely to show problems than children raised by lesbian mothers. Children of heterosexual parents were also more likely than children of lesbian mothers to have been referred to a psychiatric clinic some time in the past. Five children of heterosexual mothers had been referred to a clinic, compared to only one child of a lesbian mother.

A study by Kirkpatrick, Smith, & Roy (1981) compared 20 children of lesbian mothers with 20

twenty same-aged children of heterosexual mothers. Mothers were contacted through a request for single mothers in a local newsletter. A developmental history was taken of her child from each mother by a psychiatrist. In addition, the children were evaluated by both a child psychiatrist and a psychologist and were classified as either severely disturbed, moderately disturbed, or minimally disturbed/no evidence of emotional disturbance.

Findings show that of children classified as minimally or not disturbed, nine were being raised by lesbian mothers and seven were being raised by heterosexual mothers. The moderately disturbed group contained nine children of lesbian mothers and ten children of heterosexual mothers. Of the remaining children who were classified as severely disturbed, two were being raised by lesbian mothers and three by heterosexual mothers.

Social Well-being

Research indicates that, especially during early adolescence, children may face some social stigma if they are perceived as having parents who are “different” (Sullivan, 1995). In scrutinizing the “best interests” of the children, some courts are inclined to deny custody to gay/lesbian couples on the premise that the children may be harmed due to society’s view of their gay/lesbian parents (Boyd, 1992; McIntyre, 1994).

To test this hypothesis, Lewis (1980) interviewed 21 children of lesbians, ages nine to 26. She found that the children experienced some problems and conflicts because of society’s views of homosexuality and of their family constellations, but all expressed pride in the mother’s bravery in declaring her sexual preference. In spite of the problems experienced by some children raised in gay and lesbian families, the children still appear to be able to make friends and to develop socially.

For example, Golombok et al. (1983) found no significant differences between children of lesbian mothers and children of heterosexual mothers in regard to scores obtained on measures of "unsociableness" (e.g., not much liked by other children, solitary, and fights with other children).

An additional assessment was conducted on the quality of the child's peer relationships. The majority of the children in both groups showed definite evidence of good peer relationships. They generally were able to make and maintain relationships with people of their own age, there being no difficulties of any significance.

Children in the Green et al. (1986) study were asked who their best friend was and to rate their popularity with other children in their school and neighborhood. No significant differences were found. However, 80 percent of the daughters of lesbian mothers said they were liked "much more," "somewhat more," or "as much" by their same-sex peer group as other girls in the class, compared to 75 percent of the daughters of heterosexual mothers. More than 80 percent of the sons of lesbian and heterosexual mothers reported self-ratings of popularity with their male classmates.

Mothers in the study were asked to rate their child as "a leader," "a good mixer," "a loner," or "rejected by friends." Ninety percent of lesbian mothers rated their daughters as leaders or good mixers, compared to 92 percent of the heterosexual mothers. Lesbian mothers rated 96 percent of their sons as leaders or good mixers, while only 85 percent of heterosexual mothers gave corresponding ratings.

Evidence from Miller's (1979) study indicates that gay fathers do not expose their children to homophobic harassment. Both fathers in the study and their children, said they exercise discretion as to which audiences they reveal the father's homosexuality. Discretion was reportedly used to minimize the possibility of negative reaction. Should the need arise to counter community harassment, fathers in the study reported being prepared to give their children considerable support and resources.

Tasker and Golombok (1995) examined family and peer relationships. Subjects in their study were asked to give a brief history of family relationships from the time their mother and father separated. Subjects were then asked to recollect family relationships while their mother was with

her main relationship, i.e., the partner who was remembered most clearly from the time when the subject lived at home. Information was also asked about current family relationships. An overall rating of contentment with familial identity in a non-traditional family was also assigned, indicating that the subject was either “resentful,” “embarrassed,” “accepting,” or “proud” of their family identity. Two ratings were made for each subject: one focussing on feelings of family identity during high school, and the other focussing on current feelings of family identity.

To assess peer relations, subjects were asked if they had ever been teased or bullied by other students in school. If they had experienced teasing or bullying, it was rated by subjects as either an isolated incident or a prolonged episode. Subjects were also asked if they had ever been teased or bullied about their sexuality and whether they had ever been teased about their mother.

Young adults from lesbian family backgrounds were found to be no more likely to remember general teasing or bullying by their peers than were those from heterosexual family backgrounds. For those who did report such hostility, there was no group difference in the recollected seriousness of the episode. With regard to teasing about their sexuality, those from lesbian families were more likely to recall having been teased about being gay or lesbian themselves. This was especially true for boys from lesbian backgrounds. However, the groups did not differ with respect to the proportion who had been teased about their family background or mother’s lifestyle.

Children raised by lesbian mothers were also asked whether school friends were aware of their mother’s sexual orientation, and if so about their friends’ responses to learning about the mother. Responses included “all friends negative,” “at least one friend negative at first,” “friends neutral or accepting,” or “friends positive.”

Most of the subjects who were asked about their school friends’ awareness of their mother’s lesbian identity felt they had been in control of the information given to friends on the topic. Of the 18 participants whose friends knew about their mother’s lesbian identity, five received negative responses from friends.

Psychosexual Development

A principle concern of the courts, social welfare agencies, and others is that children raised by gay or lesbian parents will develop similar sexual identities. This concern may simply mask a deeper, hostile conviction about this type of alternative family. Nonetheless, findings from studies that have investigated the issue indicate children do not become gay or lesbian by being raised by or living in an environment with a gay or lesbian parent (Bigner & Bozett, 1990; Patterson, 1992).

In examining psychosexual development, a distinction is generally made between (a) gender or sexual identity, (b) gender-role behavior, and (c) sexual orientation (Tasker & Golombok, 1995). Gender identity is generally defined as the subjective sense that one is male or female, gender-role behavior consists of sex type behaviors that are culturally ascribed to either females or males, and sexual orientation refers to sexual partner preference, usually homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual (Steckel, 1987; Tasker & Golombok, 1995).

Gender Identity

The gender identity of children raised by lesbian mothers is consistent with their biological sex. None of the children studied to date have shown evidence of being confused about their gender identity. For example, in their study Kirkpatrick et al. (1981) compared gender development of the 20 children of lesbian mothers with 20 same-aged children of heterosexual mothers. All children were between the ages of five and 12 years old. Children's developmental history was taken by a psychiatrist and each child was evaluated by a psychologist on the WISC, Holtzman Inkblot Technique, and Human Figure Drawing.

The Human Figure Drawings were examined for sex of first-drawn figure, as an indicator of gender identity. Both groups of children fell within the norms, with 90 percent of the sons of lesbian mothers and 70 percent of the sons of heterosexual mothers drawing males first, and 70 percent of the daughters of lesbian mothers and 90 percent of the daughters of heterosexual mothers drawing females first. Of the eight children who drew an opposite-sex figure first, only three showed some concern over gender issues, as evidenced by their histories or playroom

responses. Of those three, one was a daughter of a lesbian mother and two were sons of heterosexual mothers.

Green et al. (1986) also examined gender identity in children raised by lesbians. Children in the study were administered the Draw-A-Person Test (DAP), a test similar to the Human Figure Drawing test used in the Kirkpatrick et al. (1981) study. Each child was asked to draw a person, sex unspecified. The first-drawn figure by each child was scored to assess the presence of emotional problems. No significant differences were found between groups of children on DAP scores. Only one son of a lesbian mother and none of the sons of heterosexual mothers drew the other sex first. Five daughters of lesbian mothers and seven daughters of heterosexual mothers drew the other sex first.

The It-Scale for Children was also used to test various aspects of gender identity. No significant differences were found for scores in the groups of sons or daughters. Both groups of boys scored within the masculine range. Similarly, mean scores for girls in both groups were within the feminine range.

Earlier work (Green, 1974) has shown that a wish to be a person of the opposite sex is a diagnostic variable used to determine a significant cross-sex identity. Thus, Green et al. (1986) interviewed the children in their study, asking each child if s/he could be born again, which sex s/he would choose. No differences were found for the wishes of either group of boys or girls. Most children chose the same sex as themselves.

Golombok et al. (1983) conducted individual interviews with the mothers and children in their study. Findings from the interviews revealed no evidence of inappropriate gender identity for any of the children. All reported that they were glad to be the sex that they were and none preferred to be the opposite sex.

Gender-role Behavior

Previous studies that have examined gender- role behavior generally show no differences between

children raised by gay/lesbian parents and children raised by heterosexual parents.

For example, Green et al. (1986) asked both children and mothers in their study about each child's favorite games, toys and activities. Children were also asked about their preferences for adult roles (e.g., "What would you like to be when you grow up?") Findings showed that, generally, boys in both groups made similar choices in their toys and activities and were typically masculine, while girls exhibited a wider range of choices. The daughters of lesbian mothers were found to be less traditionally feminine in their dress, and interest and preference for active play at school and in the neighborhood. Daughters of lesbians chose traditionally masculine jobs significantly more often than daughters of heterosexuals. Nearly all of the boys chose traditionally masculine jobs.

Kirkpatrick et al. (1981) conducted semi-structured playroom interviews of the children in their study. Interviews included questions about early memories, dreams, future plans, and gender related interests. In addition, the children's mothers provided developmental histories, containing data on favorite toys, characters chosen in fantasy play, and special interests. Psychologists and psychiatrists examined the responses during the playroom interviews and the data provided in the developmental histories. The psychologist and psychiatrist were not informed of the child's group membership until the evaluations were completed. They were unable to discern between children raised by lesbian mothers and children raised by heterosexual mothers. Kirkpatrick and his colleagues concluded that their findings revealed no indication of differences in gender development between the two groups of children.

Gender-role behavior also was assessed by Golombok et al. (1983) using two scales constructed from the interviews with the mothers and the children. Scoring on the scales was devised so that a high frequency on "masculine" and a low frequency on "feminine" items resulted in a low overall score, indicating male sex role behavior, or a high overall score indicating, female sex role behavior. On both scales, the scores of the boys in the two groups were closely similar, as were the scores of the girls. Additional analyses of the items making up the scales indicated that the boys were showing gender- role behavior that was characteristically masculine and that the girls were showing sex role behavior that was characteristically female.

Hoefffer (1980) examined children's play and activity interests to determine whether there were differences between children raised by lesbians and children raised by heterosexuals in their acquisition of gender-role behavior. Twenty lesbian and 20 heterosexual single mothers and their only or oldest child comprised the sample. The two groups of mothers were matched on educational background and occupational category. Children were matched on gender and age so that ten boys and ten girls of the same ages comprised the comparison groups of 20 children each. Children's age ranged from six to 10 years; the mean and median age of both groups was eight years old. Children's preferences for sex-typed masculine, sex-typed feminine, and neutral toys and activities were assessed using a modified version of Block's Toy Preference Test to examine gender-role behavior.

Findings from the study reveal that boys of both lesbian and heterosexual mothers selected a majority of sex-typed masculine toys and activities as their favorites, compared to sex-typed feminine or neutral toys and activities. Girls of both groups selected more neutral toys and activities as their favorites compared to sex-typed feminine or masculine ones. Mother's encouragement of toy preferences for their children, however, indicated that lesbian mothers preferred a more equal mixture of sex-typed masculine and feminine toys for their children than did heterosexual mothers. In spite of their mother's encouragement, children were considerably sex-typed in their preferences for and choices of toys and activities.

Sexual Orientation

A common notion about the genesis of homosexuality is that children become homosexual through their exposure to it. The notion that gay parents "cause" their children to become gay/lesbian has been used to justify separating them from their children (Miller, 1979).

In his study of 40 gay fathers and 14 of their children Miller (1979) attempted to determine whether there was a disproportionate amount of homosexuality among the children of gay men. The 40 gay fathers in the study had a total of 48 daughters and 42 sons. Twenty-seven daughters and 21 sons were of an age where their sexual orientation could be assessed. Only one of the sons and three of the daughters were reported to be gay/lesbian. Miller concluded that on the

basis of his small, non-random sample, there did not appear to be a disproportionate amount of homosexuality among the children of gay fathers. Other studies support Miller's findings.

Gottman (1990), for example, examined adult daughters of lesbian and heterosexual mothers and found that approximately 16 percent of the daughters in his study reported having same-gender sexual fantasies and 8 percent reported a sexual preference for other females. The proportion of daughters who identified as lesbian was similar for the two types of families. It is important to note that sexual fantasy and not sexual behavior, was measured.

Golombok et al. (1983) also examined the sexual orientation of the children in their study. Data were provided by individual interviews with the mothers of the children in the study using a standardized interview and individual interviews with the children. Some children were between the ages of five and 17. Therefore, pre-pubertal children were not able to be assessed for sexual orientation. Instead, patterns of those children's friendships were used to indicate typicality of their psychosexual development. Findings show that of the pre-pubertal children, most in both the lesbian and heterosexual groups had friends of their own sex. The researchers concluded that this indicated a typical pattern of psychosexual development. Nearly all of the children reported having a best friend of the same sex.

Of the pubertal and post-pubertal children in the study, it was possible to obtain some indication of their sexual orientation by asking about romantic crushes or friendships. Among the nine children of this age in the lesbian households, six showed definite heterosexual interest, two showed no particular interests in either direction, and one girl had no heterosexual interests but reported having a crush on a female teacher. Seven of the 11 children being raised in heterosexual households had not yet shown definite sexual interests and the remaining four exhibited clearly heterosexual interests. The two groups of children, thus, were concluded by the researchers as not differing in their sexual orientation.

Findings from Tasker and Golombok's (1995) study revealed no support for the assumption that lesbian mothers raise lesbian daughters and gay sons. Data on subjects' sexual orientation were

collected with semi-structured interviews. Subjects were asked whether they had ever thought that they might be physically attracted to a friend of the same gender and whether they had ever had sexual fantasies about someone of the same gender. Subjects also provided a chronological history of their sexual relationships. The presence or absence of same-gender attraction was established from these data. Subjects were also categorized according to whether they reported a same-gender sexual relationship and whether they identified themselves as lesbian or gay.

Of subjects in the study who had experienced sexual attraction to someone of the same gender, no significant differences were found between those raised by lesbian mothers and those raised by heterosexual mothers. However, of subjects who did report a same gender attraction, six from lesbian families reported actually being involved in a same-gender sexual relationship, compared to none of the subjects from heterosexual families. In regard to sexual orientation, while subjects raised in lesbian families were significantly more likely than subjects raised in heterosexual families to report that they were more willing to have and become involved in a homosexual relationship, the majority identified themselves as heterosexual (Tasker & Golombok, 1995).

Bozett conducted two studies in which sexual orientation in children of gay fathers was assessed. In one study (Bozett, 1982), 18 gay fathers were asked about the sexual orientation of their 25 children. None of the fathers reported having a gay son or lesbian daughter. In another study of gay fathers (Bozett, 1989) consisting of 20 children, two sons reported that they were gay and one daughter reported being bisexual. The remainder of the children described themselves as heterosexual. In neither study did the proportion of lesbian or gay children exceed that believed to characterize the general population (Patterson, 1992).

Limitations of Empirical Studies

Most of the social science research on biological families in which a parent is homosexual has examined lesbian-mother and not gay father families. Most of the parents studied bore their children while in heterosexual marriages, then divorced and came out as gays or lesbians. This is a very different situation from those gay men and lesbians who decide to have children after coming out -- or planned families (Sullivan, 1995).

Studies on gay and lesbian families are also limited by the composition of their samples, most samples are relatively small, the subjects are mostly Caucasian and well educated. Additionally, due to limitations of sample size, it is generally not possible to control for gender and other important variables. Many samples may not be generalizable due to their self-selection. It is not feasible to recruit a representative sample of lesbian or gay parents given that many do not publicly declare their sexual identity (Sullivan, 1995).

Other Relevant Literature

Increasingly, gay men and lesbians are also exploring their parenting options by way of adoption and foster care. Some reports estimate that hundreds of gay men and lesbians are already providing foster and adoptive homes for many of America's parentless children. For the most part, prospective gay and lesbian foster and adoptive parents have chosen not to reveal or have misrepresented their sexual orientation for fear that they would be denied the opportunity to parent a child or experience discrimination (Ricketts & Achtenberg, 1990).

When reviewing cases involving lesbian and gay foster and adoptive parenting, the current focus in the legal community is on the suitability of a particular home environment, rather than the past focus on detailed matching where parents were similar to the child in physical, mental, and personal traits (Lintz, 1990). Recent cases illustrate a trend among the state courts not to deny adoption solely on the basis of the petitioner's sexual orientation unless there is some evidence showing that the petitioner's sexual orientation would adversely affect the child (Horowitz & Maruyama, 1995). Lesbian and gay legal advocates support the argument that the fairest policy is to permit the disqualification of a gay/lesbian foster parent only when there is a showing of actual or imminent harm to a child. This "Nexus Standard" insists on demonstrating a causal association between a parent's sexual orientation and harm to a child (Baggett, 1992).

Two states - Florida and New Hampshire - explicitly prohibit by statute gay and lesbian adoption of children. The New Hampshire statute also prohibits gay men and lesbians from becoming foster parents (Horowitz & Maruyama, 1995). New Hampshire's ban on gay/lesbian foster care and adoption became effective in 1987. The state of Florida has statutorily prohibited

gays/lesbians from adopting since 1977. (South Dakota and North Dakota, in addition, require foster parents to be married) (Ricketts & Achtenberg, 1990). Other states' statutes are silent on the issue, leaving the courts free to interpret the rights of gays/lesbians to adopt or foster parent a child (Horowitz & Maruyama, 1995).

In 1976, the California Department of Social Services (DSS) adopted a policy allowing gay people with "clean records" and without a "proclivity to sexually assault children" to be licensed as foster parents (cited in Ricketts, 1991). Currently, the official California DSS policy statement on adoptions by unmarried couples (dated June 15, 1987) reads as follows: "All licensed adoption agencies and the Department will neither consent to the adoption of a child by an unmarried couple nor recommend approval of an adoption petition filed by an unmarried couple. Adoption is a subject created and regulated by statute for the purpose of promoting the welfare of children who have no parents. The best interests of these children are served by placement in homes where the couple demonstrates a deep commitment to permanency. Couples who have formalized their relationship through a legal marriage reflect this desired commitment. We believe that our policy is consistent with existing law which recognizes the state's legitimate interest in the promotion of marriage."

In December 1994, the California DSS issued a policy directive to local adoption and welfare agencies that released licensed agencies from denying adoptions based solely on the applicant's marital status. This policy stated that a "stable and permanent home" is in the best interest of the child (San Jose Mercury News, 1995). In March 1995, Governor Pete Wilson reversed this new state policy which allowed adoptions by gays/lesbians and directed the California DSS to reinstate the 1987 policy that banned adoptions by unmarried couples.

Because the DSS is county-administered in California, however, prospective adoptive or foster parents often find that policies are enforced inconsistently. In the more conservative counties, for example, gays/lesbians are more often restricted from becoming adoptive or foster parents. In counties where there are larger gay/lesbian populations, and where social service agencies and courts are more familiar with gays/lesbians as parents, the resistance to their foster and adoptive

parenting is slowly dissipating. Nonetheless, in San Francisco, where there is a longstanding program for licensing gay/lesbian foster parents, and where single-parent adoptions by gays/lesbians are relatively common, homosexual applicants may be scrutinized more carefully and held to a higher standard than are their heterosexual counterparts (Ricketts & Achtenberg, 1990). In addition, even more so than other single applicants, prospective homosexual foster or adoptive parents may find that only difficult-to-place children are made available to them, including older children or those who have been severely abused or neglected or who have serious emotional or physical disabilities (Ricketts & Achtenberg, 1990).

Staff Interviews

Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA) staff were asked to talk about (1) their work experience within the agency and (2) their direct involvement with children placed in gay/lesbian foster and adoptive families. In general, staff evaluated the atmosphere of the agency as being "gay friendly." Some workers indicated that projects sponsored by the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Concerns Committee have increased the visibility of gay/lesbian employees and have led to a more tolerant attitude. However, one worker felt strongly that the agency should conduct additional in-service training on the issue of diversity of employees in the agency as well as in the client population served.

The county does not have a written policy regarding the practice of placing children into foster and adoptive homes with gay or lesbian parents. Staff agreed that there is an informal or "quiet" policy that guides such placements. The prevalent feeling was that most SSA employees regard gays and lesbians as a viable population for foster care and adoption placements. According to staff, this perspective is supported by the agency directors, several judges, and members of the Board of Supervisors. One worker added that gay/lesbian families from other counties have come to Santa Clara County to adopt children.

Several staff members expressed concern about how the county's practice interfaces with the state policy on gay/lesbian foster parenting and adoption. Since the State of California dictates the policy, the county cannot accept a homosexual couple as a legal entity. Two persons cannot

adopt together if they are not legally married. In order to dodge this prohibition, SSA workers conduct an adoption home study for each member of a gay/lesbian couple. The county then opens two cases which apply as one unit (i.e., independent adoption by each parent). This is automatically denied and a single proxy is reinstated. The judge then overrules and allows both members of the gay/lesbian couple to become the adoptive parents. However, in order to receive state or federal aid, the couple must choose one parent to be the principle parent.

SSA staff members spoke about their professional experiences regarding the placement of children in gay/lesbian foster and adoptive homes. Several noted that since prospective foster parents are not asked questions about their sexual orientation, gay/lesbian foster parents can decide whether or not to disclose this information. The situation is somewhat different with adoptive placements since the adoption home study encompasses personal issues (e.g., intimate relationships, sexuality) in greater depth than does foster care licensing. The SSA employee's comfort level with asking direct questions about intimate relationships may influence whether or not a prospective adoptive parent speaks openly about her/his lifestyle.

One worker addressed the perception equating gay male parents with the incidence of child sexual molestation. She explained that this is more likely to be regarded as a problem by attorneys in court than by employees of the SSA.

The prevalent feeling among staff was that foster care is an easier, more viable placement option for lesbian and gay parents. Since many gay and lesbian families have not reared children, foster care provides them with an opportunity to build their parenting skills. In addition, it is more common for SSA employees to place foster children in various types of homes including those where one or more adults is of the same gender (e.g., mother and daughter). Several staff stated that there exist greater obstacles for gay and lesbian parents who are interested in adoption because of the priority given to heterosexual, married couples.

Staff reported that at any point in time there are between 65 and 80 children in Santa Clara County waiting to be placed for adoption. Many of these children are children of color, nearly all

have special needs (e.g., medical, psychiatric, behavioral), and many are drug-exposed newborns. A few staff members indicated that there is usually a gay or lesbian prospective adoptive parent on the waiting list.

Most staff agreed that the views of child placement workers are critical when matching children with adoptive parents. Workers who are biased against gay or lesbian parents could affect the placement of children into such homes. According to one staff member, "These workers may sabotage placement efforts by leaking information to the birth family." Several staff indicated that certain employees are assigned gay/lesbian clients. Gay-/lesbian- friendly employees are more likely to be selected by supervisors to work with placements for gay and lesbian families. However, one staff member noted, "there still exists the reality that a homophobic supervisor will link prospective gay and lesbian parents with a homophobic worker."

Several staff members shared their experience with the adoption matching process, specifically the use of resource persons who advocate on behalf of a given community (e.g., gay/lesbian, African American). It has become increasingly common to have a representative of the gay/lesbian community present at the matching committee when such a placement is being considered. Staff members felt strongly that the chairperson of the adoption matching committee should be comfortable with placing children in gay/lesbian families.

A number of staff reported that the agency has an informal hierarchy for placing children into adoptive homes. Placements are considered in the following order: (1) heterosexual two-parent families, (2) single parent and gay/lesbian families, and (3) gay/lesbian individuals. Gay and lesbian couples are regarded the same as heterosexual single persons. Workers recounted that, over the past year, at least six gay/lesbian couples or individuals were matched with children. Many staff noted that children with serious physiological, psychological, or behavioral problems are often matched with gay or lesbian parents. In addition, gays and lesbians are more willing to accept children with a broader range of difficulties.

Several staff spoke to the "real strengths" of gay and lesbian prospective adoptive parents and

praised their willingness to adopt these difficult children. The strengths mentioned included: psychological stability, sensitivity, educational accomplishments, financial security, strong support systems, and the ability to use resources. One staff member indicated that, "By the time gay/lesbian/bisexual persons approach the agency, they have done their homework." Another stated, "These families are such a strong resource for these types of kids. They come with a genuine interest in children and a desire to give something to the community." One worker referred to gay and lesbian foster and adoptive parents as "pioneers" and commented, "Individuals and couples who want to be foster or adoptive parents have had to fight the system. Some have gone through hell legally. Some have depleted their emotional resources and face the system's and their own homophobia as they proceed through the home study."

Several staff expressed concern about the availability of supportive resources in the community for (1) assisting the children of gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents with potential difficulties relating to peer pressure/social stigma and (2) foster parents who have a gay or lesbian child placed in their home.

The major theme that emerged from the interviews with SSA staff was the importance of assessing how appropriate a placement is for the child, independent of the sexual orientation of the prospective parent(s). One worker clearly expressed this sentiment, "Instead of creating a battle of placement with the focus on gay/lesbian concerns, the focus should be on the needs of the child. There are so many other variables to consider in addition to gay/lesbian-- including income, education, experience with children, experience with adoptive children, and experience with minorities."

Focus Group

Gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents who participated in the focus group were asked to share their experiences and thoughts about five open-ended questions (see Appendix A), as well as anything else that was important and relevant to the discussion. When asked about why they wanted to become foster and adoptive parents, participants offered a range of responses. A few stated that they were in a committed relationship and wanted to have a family. Some remarked

that they had much to offer or share with a child (e.g., love, home, money). One participant noted, "I have a biological family and foster parenting is a nice way to expand." Others expressed their desire to parent and the fact that they were aging. Comments included, "We were getting older; one of us wanted a child and the other wasn't so sure, so foster care seemed like a good way to test the waters" and "I'm too old to carry another child but I came from a big family, I like kids and my birth daughter likes having siblings." A few of the lesbian participants reported that they had tried to become pregnant and others stated that they never wanted to become pregnant. One couple expressed interest in being foster parents of gay or lesbian youth in order to help the children with identity issues. One stated, "Who better than us to help these children?"

Most focus group participants reported having good to excellent experiences with the Santa Clara County SSA while becoming foster and adoptive parents. Several shared their personal accounts of how they were guided through the process. One participant commented, "The system is becoming more educated. I had one worker who could not use the "L" word [referring to "lesbian"] but she was trying to understand and be sympathetic." Another stated that the worker could not say the word "gay." Most participants agreed that foster care licensing is much easier than the adoption process. One lesbian parent shared that both her name and her partner's are on the foster care license.

Several participants did recount problems they experienced with the SSA in becoming foster and adoptive parents, however. One parent indicated that a long-term foster child was removed from her home due to a worker's homophobia. Another echoed this experience and shared the following statement made by a worker, "All of [the foster child's] problems were due to living with two moms."

Participants offered two suggestions for the SSA: (1) adoption forms need to be updated to include the word 'partner' rather than 'wife/husband,' and (2) questions need to be less "women oriented" and more applicable for a male couple.

Focus group participants were questioned about the types of children placed in their homes. One

couple stated that they have had a variety of children placed ranging from infants to teenagers. Children who have been adopted by these gay and lesbian families included a Latina infant born heroin addicted, and a "high demand" four-year-old boy who had been emotionally and physically abused.

Finally, focus group participants were asked to talk about their childrens' experiences in relation to having gay/lesbian foster or adoptive parents as well as some of the strengths they bring as gay and lesbian parents. All participants agreed that the fact that they are gay or lesbian is not as important as the quality of parenting that they are able to provide to their children. One parent shared, "We don't make a big deal out of our being lesbian. It doesn't make a difference to any of the kids. In fact, for one of the girls, she came from a lesbian home and it was good for her to be placed with us. The more we treat it as a non-issue the more of a non-issue it is. One of the children at school asked 'Are you T's mom? Is that T's mom too? T's really lucky, she has two moms.'" Several participants commented that children placed by the county have more pressing issues than the sexual orientation of their foster or adoptive parents. One parent added that challenges remain for our educational and health care systems in understanding the broadening definition of family."

The major strength mentioned by these gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents was the availability and importance placed on extended networks of family and friends to care for and support their children. One mother shared that her child has "so much love and self-confidence because of the care she has received from all of her aunts, many of whom are age 50 and over." Another strength reported by focus group participants was the ability to teach their children about the importance of accepting and honoring differences in others.

Section V. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study begins to address the issue of gay and lesbian foster and adoptive parenting by reviewing the social science literature on gay and lesbian biological parenting and the legal literature, and conducting interviews with key staff of the Santa Clara County Social Service

Agency and a focus group of gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents in the county.

As many as three million gay fathers and five million lesbian mothers are believed to be parenting and estimated 14 million children in this country (Sullivan, 1995). Social science research focusing on the psychological and emotional health of these parents and their ability to parent showed that homosexual parents have at least equal parenting abilities as do heterosexual parents. Furthermore, research found that a parent's sexual orientation does not negatively affect the psychological, behavioral, or psychosexual development of their children. Research indicated that, especially during early adolescence, children may face some social stigma if they are perceived as having parents who are "different." Results from studies on child sexual molestation showed that there is no connection between homosexuality and child sexual abuse.

Social service agency staff reported that gays/lesbians are a viable resource for foster and adoptive parenting and should be recruited to care for the difficult children waiting for placement in the county. Many staff recounted the numerous strengths (e.g., psychological stability, financial security, strong support systems) inherent in the gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents with whom children have been placed in the county.

Focus group participants provided insights about gay/lesbian foster care and adoption. Many talked about the care that they provide to their children, the informal supports available in the community to assist them, and some of the homophobia that they and their children have encountered. Focus group participants agreed that the fact that they are gay/lesbian is not as important as the quality of parenting that they are able to provide to their children.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1 - Informal policies that support gay/lesbian foster care and adoptive placements need to be incorporated into the written policies and procedures of agencies.

There is no evidence showing that gay/lesbian families are detrimental to their children. The implications of the research point to the need for equal scrutiny of homosexual and heterosexual

applicants by judges, probation officers, child welfare workers, and therapists when considering the placement of children. There is the need to develop official written policies for gay/lesbian foster care and adoptive placements.

In light of the fact that there is little written legislation which addresses the placement of children in lesbian and gay foster and adoptive homes, the most judicious and socially responsible approach for determining the appropriateness of such placements is a case by case analysis based on the needs of the child and the abilities of the prospective parents to meet these needs.

Recommendation #2 - Education about gay/lesbian families should be offered to human service and legal professionals.

The study supports the need for continued education and training for social service and legal professionals (attorneys, judges, and family court personnel) on the issue of alternative lifestyles and family constellations.

Recommendation #3 - Children placed in gay/lesbian families (as well as their parents) need to be provided with pre- and post-placement services and supports.

The inherent differences in gay/lesbian families need to be acknowledged so that the children can feel free to communicate any potential difficulties in addressing issues related to social stigma received from friends, classmates, and neighbors. Part of the assessment process for gay/lesbian foster and adoption placements needs to focus on the ability of the prospective family to help the child with appropriate responses should such rejection occur.

Recommendation #4 - Further research needs to be conducted on the issues of lesbian/gay foster care and adoption.

This is a preliminary and exploratory review of the issues pertaining to gay and lesbian

foster/adoptive placements. Additional empirical research is needed on this issue, especially longitudinal studies which would track the experiences of these children over time.

Special issues to consider in future research include: Are the early adolescent child's wishes being taken into consideration if s/he does not want a placement with a gay/lesbian family? Are the young child's wishes taken into consideration in determining future placements if s/he becomes attached to gay/lesbian foster parents? Are the gay/lesbian child's wishes taken into consideration in determining potential placements in gay/lesbian families?

The basic goal of child welfare is to guarantee safety. The scientific evidence shows that placements with gay/lesbian families are just as safe as those with heterosexual families. Another critical goal of child welfare is to promote permanent lifetime relationships when children cannot go home. If gay/lesbian caregivers are willing and able to provide for these children, we should not deny them an opportunity for permanence. Potential loving and competent adoptive and foster caregivers need not be excluded from receiving consideration for parenting the increasing numbers of children needing placement solely on the basis of sexual orientation.

Since there is no scientific evidence in the literature showing that gay/lesbian families are detrimental to a child's development and there exists a receptive pool of prospective gays/lesbians interested in fostering or adopting the large number of children waiting for placement, gay/lesbian foster and adoptive parents are a valuable community resource.

Appendix A:
Gay/Lesbian Foster Parenting and Adoption Focus Group
Registration Form

Please check all applicable responses or fill in the blanks.

Demographic Information

Your Gender:

Female

Male

Your Age:

Years

Your Ethnicity:

Caucasian/White

African American

Hispanic/Latino American

Asian/Pacific Islander

Native American

Mixed

Other

Your Current Relationship Status:

Single

Coupled/Domestic Partnered

If you are coupled, for how many years have you been in this relationship?

Years

Your Highest Level of Education Completed:

- Elementary School
- High School
- Some Undergraduate course work
- Vocational Training
- Undergraduate Degree
- Graduate Degree

Your Place of Residence in County:

_____ City or Town

Foster Care/Adoption Data

Are you presently a : (*Check all that apply*)

- Licensed Foster Parent with a child(ren) placed in your home
- Licensed Foster Parent without a child(ren) placed in your home
- Adoptive Parent
- Prospective Foster Parent
- Prospective Adoptive Parent
- Other (please explain)

How many foster children currently live in your home?

- None
- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five or more

How many adoptive children currently live in your home?

- None
- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five or more

How many years have you been a foster parent and/or adoptive parent with the County?

- Years

Appendix B:
Gay/lesbian Foster Parenting and Adoption Focus Group

WELCOME

OVERVIEW:

The purpose of our discussion here tonight is to learn more about your experiences as (prospective) gay/lesbian foster and/or adoptive parents. Each of you has unique experience to share.

This research is sponsored by the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA). We are staff researchers with the Center for Social Services Research (CSSR) at the University of California, Berkeley. The SSA has contracted with the Bay Area Social Services Consortium, a component within the CSSR, to conduct this focus group tonight, meet with staff of the SSA and write a report which includes a thorough literature review on gay and lesbian foster parenting and adoption.

The information gathered here tonight will be useful to child welfare workers and administrative judges in Santa Clara and other counties in making more informed decisions regarding the placement of children into gay/lesbian foster and adoptive homes. Once we have collected the information from our discussion, we will include it in an anonymous and confidential way into a discussion/research paper that we are writing on this important topic.

This topic is important to both of us as facilitators. For example,

GROUND RULES:

1. Before we begin, I would like to review a few items to ensure a successful conversation during the next 1 1/2 hours.

A. To help make sure that we have an accurate and detailed record of our discussion, we will be

taking notes/computer. Your identities will be kept confidential in all written material resulting from this study.

B. Please know that what is said here tonight is completely confidential. Any and all comments made here tonight should not be attributed to the specific individual who made them after you leave here.

C. Speak one at a time and give everyone a chance to talk.

D. There are no right or wrong answers. If your experience is different than what others are describing then that is exactly what we want to hear.

E. There are refreshments and rest rooms are located in the rear.

F. Have each of you completed the Registration Form that was handed to you when you arrived? Please return these to Devon or myself. Also, please sign the sign-in form.

G. Are there any questions before we begin?

INTRODUCTIONS:

Let's go around and each introduce ourselves by stating our names and experience with foster and/or adoptive parenting.

QUESTIONS:

We will be asking a series of FIVE questions.

1. What are/were the reasons that you want/ed to become foster and/or adoptive parents?
2. What have been your experiences with the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency in becoming a foster parent and/or adoptive parent?

Pre or post foster parenting or adoption including:

- a. recruitment
 - b. attitudes of staff - relationship with staff
 - c. obstacles
 - d. supports
 - e. services
3. What type(s) of children are placed with you/or are you interested in having placed with you?
- a. age
 - b. race/ethnicity
 - c. physical health
 - d. emotional health
 - e. past history
4. Are you aware of any (or do you anticipate any) influences/affects on your foster or adoptive children concerning your being gay/lesbian parents? (for example)
- a. psychosexual [gender identity- self id as M/F; gender role identity/behavior; sexual orientation]
 - b. psychological [emotional health, behavioral, adjustment]
 - c. social [relationships; stigma/teasing; peer relationships]
5. What do you see as some of the strengths of gay/lesbian foster parenting and/or adoption for children placed in your homes? (for example)
- a. increased tolerance for differences/different viewpoints
 - b. open to multi-cultural environment

THANK YOU - SUMMARIZE MAJOR POINTS - (SIGN-IN COPIED AND DISTRIBUTED?)

Appendix C:
**Position Statements of Various Professional Organizations Regarding Homosexuality
and/or Foster and Adoptive Parenting**

American Psychiatric Association - In 1973, the APA deleted homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-II).

The APA position statement on discrimination in selection of foster parents (approved 1986) states, "The Council (Council on Children, Adolescents and their Families of the APA) finds that the available research and experience show that single factors (e.g., being a single parent, homosexual, or elderly) should not necessarily or automatically rule out selection of a potential foster parent. All potential foster parents should be evaluated, carefully and comprehensively, by experts using multiple factors regarding their suitability to meet the needs of their potential foster children at that time and in that setting." (in Ricketts, 1991)

American Psychological Association - At its September 1976 meeting, the APA adopted the following resolution regarding child custody or placement, "The sex, gender identity or sexual orientation of natural or prospective adoptive or foster parents should not be the sole or primary variable considered in custody or placement." (in Ricketts, 1991)

National Association of Social Workers - The NASW statement on Foster Care and Adoption (approved 1987) includes the following: "Agencies must ensure removal of any barriers that prevent children from being placed in permanent homes. Financial barriers can be breached by strong use and expansion of existing adoption subsidy programs. Barriers that are unsupported by tested experience, such as resistance to using single parents, foster parents (for adoption), and nontraditional family patterns including lesbian and gay parents as potential foster care and adoption resources, must be removed." (in Ricketts, 1991)

Child Welfare League of America - CWLA's Standards for Adoption Service (1988) addressed the issue of the sexual preference of applicants in the following sections: All applicants should have an equal opportunity to apply for the adoption of children, and receive fair and equal treatment and consideration of their qualifications as adoptive parents, under applicable law. (5.4) Applicants should be fairly assessed on their abilities to successfully parent a child needing family membership and not on their appearance, differing life style, or sexual preference. (5.4) Agencies should assess each applicant from the perspective of what would be in the best interests of the child. The interests of the child are paramount. (5.4) Sexual preference should not be the sole criteria on which the suitability of adoptive applicants is based. Consideration should be given to other personality and maturity factors and on the ability of the applicant to meet the specific needs of the individual child. (5.8) The needs of the child are the priority consideration in adoption.

The CWLA policy regarding adoption by gay or lesbian individuals approved in 1994 continues to say that "Gay and lesbian adoptive applicants should be assessed the same as any other adoptive applicant. It should be recognized that sexual orientation and the capacity to nurture a child are separate issues. Staff and board training on cultural diversity should include factual information about gays and lesbians as potential adoptive resources for children needing families in order to dispel common myths about gays and lesbians." (in Sullivan, 1995)

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