Honors Thesis Proposal

For

Social Work Students' Comfort with Gay and Lesbian Families

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Abstract

Despite recent advancements of legislation and policy regarding gay and lesbian Americans, negative attitudes and perceptions still exist toward this population. For instance, there is still much controversy about gays and lesbians raising children and forming their own families. Anecdotal information from social work classroom interactions indicates that biases against gays and lesbian families exist. This proposal presents a study that will examine social work student comfort with gay and lesbian families. The researcher proposes an exploratory-descriptive research design, with a sample of 120 Bachelors level social work students (BSW) and Masters level social work students (MSW) who will complete the 52 item Gay and Lesbian Parenting Questionnaire online. The proposal provides an overview of the literature and specific methodological strategies for implementing the research. The proposal also presents the significance of the study and the implications for social work practice and education.
Statement of the Problem

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

Throughout the country, state governments are addressing discriminatory practices against this population more than ever. Within every state in the country, there are organizations forging different battles within the realms of employment protection, housing protection, legal marriage and adoption policy for the gay and lesbian population. On the federal level, gay and lesbian issues remain present with policies such as “Defense of Marriage Act,” and recently repealed “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,” (Stone & Ward, 2011). The Defense of Marriage Act or “DOMA,” is a federal law defining marriage as between one man and one woman. Don’t Ask Don’t Tell was a federal law that prohibited any men and women serving in the military from being open about their homosexuality (Stone & Ward, 2011). Currently one of the most controversial issues affecting this population have to do with marriage and parenting rights.
(Patterson & Riskind, 2010). This includes different interpretations among the states on recognized marriage and state by state adoption laws (Gates, Badgett, Macomber & Chambers, 2007).

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

The challenges for gay and lesbian parents wishing to have children do not, however, end with discriminatory views (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Despite progressive moves socially and politically to help decrease discrimination, when it comes to parenting issues, the gay and lesbian population faces other complications in reaching their parenthood goals. Typically this population has to seek alternative ways to start or expand their families as men and women in same sex couples cannot reproduce without outside assistance. Another struggle for same sex parent households is the lack of legal protection ensuring that parents in a same sex household who are not biologically related to the child have the same basic rights as heterosexual parents (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). For instance, in the case of a death, an accident of the biological parent or separation from the biological parents, the non-biological same sex parent is legally
vulnerable to losing custody of the children. Typically since there is no recognized marriage, adoption and guardianship are both options to remedy this threat (Ritenhouse, 2011). However both of these options are time consuming, can be expensive and must be pursued before any death or accident occurs (Patterson & Riskind, 2010).

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

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

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

Review of the Literature

History of Gays and Lesbians in American Culture

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

Sexuality is slowly becoming less taboo of a topic in the United States and is commonly discussed in a variety of settings (Ellis, Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2003). More research studies now exist that examine general perceptions and attitudes toward the gay and lesbian population. These studies have ranged from general attitudes (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009) to perceptions on specific issues such as gays and lesbians in the institution of marriage or gays and lesbians in family functions (Johnston, Moore & Judd, 2010).

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

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

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

For example, the specific issue of gays and lesbians parenting children and forming family units is a topic that is becoming more prevalent (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). As the age for “coming out” about ones sexuality is decreasing and more young men and women confront their sexuality at a younger age, the likelihood that gay and lesbian men and women will become parents increases (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). The gap between heterosexual men and women expressing a desire to become parents is closing in (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Statistically, 52% of gay, childless men, versus 67% of heterosexual, childless men have expressed a desire for children. This compared with 41% of childless, lesbian women expressing a desire to have children with 53% of childless, heterosexual women indicating the same, illustrates that as time
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goes on, this population's wish to form their own families will continue to increase (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). Thus knowing common attitudes and comfort levels with gays and lesbians as parents will provide great insight in how to help gay and lesbian headed families as well as ways to help the general population embrace this growing alternative family configuration (Maney & Cain, 1997).

Gays and lesbians forming their own families, a tradition previously perceived as acceptable only for heterosexual couples, still draws many different reactions and feelings (Hicks, 2005). There has been substantial research to disprove the various claims against gays and lesbians parenting (Hicks, 2005). There is evidence that suggests children raised by same-sex parents are no more likely to identify as gay or lesbians themselves, or any more likely to be confused about their gender role, than children raised by heterosexual parents (Hicks, 2005). There is also research that indicates that a social, cognitive, or developmental difference between children raised by gay or lesbian parents and children raised by heterosexual parents does not exist (Hicks, 2005).

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

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

Herek (1987) categorized four functions of homophobic attitudes that explain perceptions of this population. Experimental or schematic, social expressive, defensive and value expressive are the classes of homophobic attitudes. An experimental or schematic view of gays and lesbians is based on contact or relationships with individuals of that population. A social expressive perception originates from the perceptions of peers, companion groups or larger social peer groups. The defensive approach is the result of an internal instinct to alleviate one’s own anxieties caused from thinking about this population. And the value expressive perception comes from one’s personal belief system, which includes religiosity and spirituality (Pennington & Knight, 2010). These four classes offer different reasons for where personal perceptions of gays and lesbians come from. It has also been suggested that sexism can also be found as a factor correlated with one’s views on homosexuality (Rye & Meaney, 2010). The correlation between sexist attitudes and predicted homo-negativity stems from the concept that identifying as gay or lesbian is a gender role violation. Those who strongly subscribe to traditional gender roles are more likely to also subscribe to sexist attitudes or beliefs. Because of this strong belief in gender
roles, homosexuality is also often viewed as a large violation and therefore is wrong (Rye & Meaney, 2010). Various studies found that gender is a prominent predictor of negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009; Rye & Meaney, 2010; Ellis, Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 2008). One study suggests that men are more likely to have negative perceptions of the population because of their strong investment in masculinity (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker, 2009). Other predictors of general perceptions and attitudes of this population are demographic characteristics such as, individual belief systems, contact with the population and faith denomination (Swank & Raiz, 2010). These details about an individual can often work as predictors of their perceptions when based on previous studies linking certain characteristics to either positive or negative perceptions. Swank and Raiz (2010) note that female, white and younger individuals have been found to more positively perceive gays and lesbians. Ellis and colleagues (2008) found that males, those of an ethnic minority and those with a strong religious affiliation are the most likely to hold negative attitudes, and it was found that attitudes toward gays were more negative than lesbians (Ellis et. al 2008).

One of the most powerful predictors that influence a positive attitude towards gays and lesbians is the presence of relationships or contact with these individuals as well as a developing lenience to gender roles and avoidance of authoritarianism (Swank & Raiz, 2010). Exposure to the population or individuals in the population is known to reduce personal stigma against gays and lesbians (Swank & Raiz, 2010). Since perceptions of gays or lesbians are often tied to the belief that homosexuality disrupts gender roles, lenience to gender roles generally means that an individual does not subscribe to the belief that homosexuality is a violation. When it comes to supporting the civil rights of this population, one study found that those who have previous or constant contact with the community are most likely to contribute support (Morrison et al.,
2009). Herek also asserts that positive social interactions between an individual and a gay man or lesbian woman are correlated with positive attitudes toward the population. Herek proposed that these interactions were organized into a bigger part of the individual’s knowledge structure. If an individual has had positive interactions and experiences, this is what prepares them for future interactions and experiences, thus the individual has a more positive perception of the population. Therefore a negative interaction with the population can lead to a negative perception of the population (Herek, 1987).

**Significance of University Student Perceptions**

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

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

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

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

Diversity courses taken by university student can also impact perceptions toward this population. One study found that after a sample of 108 students took a diversity course they showed a heightened understanding of how privilege and certain advantages promote inequality for the gay and lesbian population. The design for this study was a pre-test, post-test that measured changes in "heterosexual privilege awareness," "prejudice against lesbians," "prejudice against gay men," and "support for same sex marriage," for the students after the diversity course was completed (Case & Stewart, 2010). Swank and Raiz (2010) found that the major students choose can also indicate perceptions for the individual. Their study of 575 undergraduate social work students from 12 different programs in the nation, indicates that a comparison among undergraduate social work students, Masters social work students and undergraduate psychology students, the psychology students were the most receptive to the gay and lesbian population (Swank & Raiz, 2010). This study also found that students who value compliance to the stereotypical images of femininity and masculinity within mainstream American society are often the students who are the least likely to have positive attitudes toward gays and lesbians (Swank & Raiz, 2010).
Some research has examined the general attitudes towards gays and lesbians by university or college students because the student population is the considered to be the next generation that will be taking over (Vejar, Oravec & Hall. 2011). However, there has not been much research conducted on how college or university students feel on specific social issues in regard to this population, and even less studies investigating how social work university students feel about gays and lesbians. Many students currently enrolled in higher education classes and course work, are apart of the Y Generation, born between 1982 and 1991 (Vejar, Oravec & Hall. 2011). This generation is thought to have mixed feelings toward gays and lesbians because the subject as a whole has become less taboo during the adolescent stages of their lives. For many young adults in the Y Generation it is common to have contrasting opinions on social and political issues, when compared to their parents or guardians. This is the generation that is thought to break free from the traditional ideals that for so long dictated common perceptions and attitudes (Vejar, Oravec & Hall. 2011). It is important to know how comfortable and open the student population is to the idea of gays and lesbians parenting, because as the years go on, this is the group that will become future policy and decision makers (Vejar, Oravec & Hall. 2011). As the Y Generation replaces those in the helping professions, specifically social workers, a study on student perceptions on gays and lesbians parenting will offer insightful knowledge on what the future might hold on a legal and social front for this population. It is important to research further into how social work students feel about this specific issue because it can offer insight into what might happen in the future with policy or social trends within micro or macro communities, and can also illustrate current attitudes on the subject while students are still being educated (Jenkins, Lambert & Baker. 2009).
Another reason to examine how comfortable social work students are with gay and lesbian families is because it very likely that during clinical practice social workers will come into contact with these alternative families. It is imperative that future social workers confront and work through any personal biases before working with clients or communities because if these issues are not dealt with then social workers risk further marginalizing or oppressing gay and lesbian clients. Personal negative biases against the gay and lesbian population can prevent high quality service delivery by hindering a clinician’s empathy or professional insight (Logie, Bridge & Bridge, 2007).

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

Discussion of Relevant Theory

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

Parenthood is one of the most universal and highly valued experiences of American adults homosexual or heterosexual (Riskind & Patterson, 2010). The theories explaining attitudes toward gays and lesbians provide the underpinnings of the resistance to allowing this population to serve as parents (Hicks, 2005). Some consider the concept of gays and lesbians entering parenthood to be challenging the conventional hetero-normative notions of family (Goldberg, 2007). Gay parenting can also be interpreted as a further disruption of the belief system that a real family is comprised of one man, one woman and the biological children they conceived together (Rye & Glenn, 2010). This concept of the nuclear family can be traced back to the Religious Coping Theory where many homo-negative perceptions can come from. Based on the existing Coping Theory, the Religious Coping Theory asserts religious based themes that are a significant part of the mechanics of coping (Trevino, Desai, Lauricella, Pargament & Mahoney, 2012). When an individual is trying to understand an event or circumstance in life an important interaction takes place between that event and the individual’s personal beliefs and values. Under the Religious Coping Theory, an individual turns to their belief system to help make sense of the event. With many fundamental or Christian religions, there is an ingrained reservation against
the gay and lesbian community because of a belief that this population is violating certain values, and many times an individual’s personal response to this population is based on the opinion of their larger collective religion (Trevino, Desai, Lauricella, Pargament & Mahoney, 2012). Most notably organized religions that have fundamentalist values or conservative Christian ideologies, are more likely to consider gay and lesbian parented families a violation because homosexuality in general is regarded a sin or unnatural (Trevino, Desai, Lauricella, Pargament & Mahoney, 2012). Those who identify as gay or lesbian are thought of as unnatural or sinners because of the biblical scripture that sanctions procreation as only for reproduction. This is the basis for most negative attitudes or perceptions against the gay and population based on religious affiliation or values (Trevino, Desai, Lauricella, Pargament & Mahoney, 2012).

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

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

Lesbian and gay families may be viewed as alternative by society, but when compared to
heterosexual families they are not inherently different (Hicks, 2005). Hicks (2005) found that
children raised by lesbian and gay parents, did not live their lives dictated by restrictive
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traditional gender roles, which can be viewed a positive attribute. Another study found the following strengths of gay and lesbian families: aptness to nurture creativity, encouraging relationships, defiance of gender roles, dependable unity, adaptability, stability, and a deep sense of satisfaction from life (Johnston, Moore & Judd, 2010). This study had a sample of 167 respondents and used the Self-Report Family Inventory instrument which evaluated member’s self perception of their family functioning. Johnston believes that gay and lesbian families have their own, very unique strengths and a resiliency within their own rights. In a qualitative study out of 46 interviewed adult children of at least one LGB parent, found that adults, who were raised in same sex households, believed they were more tolerant and open minded, and exercised more flexibility with ideas about gender and society because of how they were raised (Goldberg, 2007). This may be because gay and lesbian parents are assuring and open with respect to their children about sexuality and may be more responsive to matters surrounding their children's sexual maturation within gender (Goldberg, 2007). Many of the participants in the sample of this study felt that having gay or lesbian parents nurtured their capacity to embrace differentiation within people and to welcome diversity, as well as increased their consciousness and awareness of homophobia and heterosexism within society and culture (Goldberg, 2007). Some adult participants reported feelings of defensiveness and inclination to protect their own families from any homo- negativity around them because of that increased consciousness (Goldberg, 2007). A few of the adults with lesbian mothers, reported a desire to speak out in favor of gay rights because they regarded their parents orientation only as a political issue (Goldberg, 2007). According to the youth interviewed, they showed more favorable attitudes toward sexual minorities than children by heterosexual parents, and often times felt they had more gay and lesbian friendships (Goldberg, 2007). A study of 61 individuals found that children raised in gay
or lesbian headed households, were more likely experiment in same sex relationships, however a large majority of the sample still felt they were heterosexual (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006).

The concepts behind heterosexism and homophobia, as they relate to parenting, are often brought up to counter the arguments against gays and lesbians parenting, (Rye & Meaney, 2010). Homophobia is generally defined as trepidation or an apprehension about being near or around gays or lesbians. It is not actually regarded as a traditional “phobia,” but more of an anxiety that is caused by gays and lesbians (Martínez, Barsky & Singleton, 2011). Heterosexism is the systematic assumption that any sexuality that is not heterosexual is deviant or abnormal. It places heterosexuals above any other sexuality and deems homosexuality as inferior (Martínez, Barsky & Singleton, 2011). Goldberg believes that sexuality and gender are not “fixed categories,” but are constantly fluctuating and therefore cannot be put into any boxes (Goldberg, 2007). Since the primary function of a family is the socialization of people in the family, sexuality is something that needs to be discussed because it is a part of life. Children, raised by homosexuals or heterosexuals, will learn the norms of gender and what is expected or assumed from each gender. However children with lesbian parents may grow up with an enlighten concept of sexuality because lesbian mothers may be more likely to openly discuss sex and reproduction as separate entities, which leaves room for the child to accept other types of sexuality other than heterosexuality (Cohen & Kuvalanka, 2011). When heterosexual parents simply assume their children to also be heterosexual, it can lead to confusion and a misunderstanding of other sexualities in the future for the child (Cohen & Kuvalanka, 2011). If a child is raised having been instilled with hetero-normative values and assumptions, when older, that child is likely to continue to perpetuate heterosexist attitudes. This happens because the child is not socialized to diversity within sexuality (Cohen & Kuvalanka, 2011).
Importance/rationale for study

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

Micro

The individual in the gay and lesbian population is deeply impacted by the issues within the population as a whole. Gays and lesbians are more likely to engage in suicidal and non-suicidal self-harm than heterosexual men and women (House, Van Horn, Coppeans & Stepleman, 2011). This likelihood is increased with lower education levels, a younger age, and a lower income level (House et al., 2011). It is important for mental health purposes that there be tolerance and acceptance for this population socially and politically. One study found that the
lack of civil rights for this population and the battle that is currently going on for certain civil rights, has caused stress and other mental health difficulties for some men and women within the population (House et al., 2011). On the micro level the individual in this population is more likely than a heterosexual to engage in substance abuse. This is important information for any minority being marginalized from society, because it can result in mental and physical health complications (House et al., 2011).

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

For future social workers, there are many different roles a social worker can play, an advocate being a main one. Within the ideologies of social work, is the call to advocate for those who being mistreated or for those who cannot advocate for themselves. Social workers are to demand justice in a society of injustice and to support equality, whether that is in the macro, mezzo or micro forum. That said, gays and lesbians becoming parents should not be looked at as a political statement, but that of human beings fulfilling their right and desire to parent (Patterson & Riskind, 2010). It is important to know how comfortable university social work students are with gay and lesbian families because that insight could indicate future trends or political moves when those students become working professionals and policy makers (Jenkins, Lambert &
Baker, 2009). For social workers, some of these students could be future clinicians or future clients. There has been little research conducted on student comfort levels with gay and lesbian families. While numerous studies completed on general attitudes toward the population exist, there is a scarcity of research on parenting. It is important to better understand social work student attitudes since one would expect social work students to be culturally sensitive and competent. As a social worker, advocating for the rights and privileges of this population should be a priority. Many studies (Goldberg, Kinkler & Hines, 2011; Hicks, 2005; Vejar, Oravec & Hall, 2011; Patterson & Riskind, 2010; Pennington & Knight, 2010) have indicated that same-sex couples are just as capable of raising children in society. It is important to understand if social work students are resistant in accepting gays and lesbians in the role of parenting.

Mezzo

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

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

**Macro**

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

The most significant part of this study on the macro level is the implications for higher education. The researcher anticipates that the results of this study will help schools of social work to examine their curriculum to ensure that students are presented with opportunities to learn more about this population. If the study finds that social work students are not accepting of gays and lesbians as parents, this has implications for emphasis in diversity courses, curriculum, the possibility of developing new courses or integration of gay and lesbian content with family focused courses. If this study finds negative perceptions, it can also be an indication that students are not properly working through their personal biases and are not taking the formal steps to become self aware. This will hopefully encourage educators to consider ways to help students work through those biases. The implications of this study have significance in every level of the
social work profession. Researching university, social work student’s comfort with gay and lesbian parents will lead to insight about future social workers and their abilities to be effective agents of change in society.

**Focused Research Questions**

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

**Hypotheses**

1. There is an association between social work student’s general attitudes towards gays and student comfort with gay families.

2. There is an association between social work student’s general attitudes towards lesbians and student comfort with lesbian families.

3. There is an association between social work student gender and student comfort with gay and lesbian families.

4. There is an association between social work student’s program enrollment and student comfort with gay and lesbian families.

5. There is no association between social work student’s perception of interactions with gay & lesbian community and student comfort with gay and lesbian families.

**Methods**

**Design**

The proposed research design is an exploratory-descriptive study that will utilize a survey. This study seeks to answer research questions about the relationships between the variables listed below (age, gender, class standing, etc.) and university social work student’s comfort with gay and lesbian families. The study will contribute to the already existing professional knowledge base. This study will test five hypotheses related to the relationships
between the independent variables of (1) attitudes towards gays in general, (2) attitudes towards lesbians in general, (3) social work student gender, (4) social work student program (BSW or MSW) and (5) student’s perceptions of interactions with gay and lesbian community and the dependent variable of comfort with gay and lesbian families.

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Operationalization</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comfort with gay and lesbian families (dependent variable)</td>
<td>Responses to questions on part II of the Gay &amp; Lesbian Parenting Questionnaire (GLPO)</td>
<td>Part II of GLPO Survey</td>
<td>Ordinal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward gay men</td>
<td>Responses to questions on Part 1 of the survey, questions 1-10</td>
<td>Part II of GLPO Survey</td>
<td>Ordinal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward lesbian women</td>
<td>Responses to questions on Part 1 of the survey, questions 11-20</td>
<td>Part II of GLPO Survey</td>
<td>Ordinal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (independent variable)</td>
<td>State of being male or female (with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones)</td>
<td>Category within general information form (Please chose one: Female Male)</td>
<td>Nominal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program: BSW or MSW (independent variable)</td>
<td>Whether student is in the Undergraduate or Graduate program</td>
<td>Category within general information form (ex: Please chose one: BSW Student MSW Student)</td>
<td>Nominal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of interactions with gay &amp; lesbian community (independent variable)</td>
<td>Perceived amount of interactions with individuals of the gay and lesbian community</td>
<td>Category within general information form (Q-52) How often would you say you interact with the gay or lesbian population?</td>
<td>Ordinal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Subcategory</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Data Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>(Demographic variable)</td>
<td>Particular system of faith Category within general information form (ex: Please chose one: Christian Catholic Protestant Jewish Lutheran)</td>
<td>Nominal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>(Demographic variable)</td>
<td>Race/ethnicity as identified by the participant Category within general information form (ex: please chose from one of the following: White African American Latino (a) Etc.)</td>
<td>Nominal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation</td>
<td>(Demographic variable)</td>
<td>Individual’s self-identification attraction toward members of the same, opposite, or both genders Category within general information form (ex: Please chose one: Heterosexual Gay Lesbian Bisexual Pansexual A-sexual)</td>
<td>Nominal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student perceptions Of religious beliefs</td>
<td>(Demographic variable)</td>
<td>Perceived degree of Religious affiliation Question within general Information form (ex.: How would you describe your religious beliefs? Non existent Somewhat weak Etc. )</td>
<td>Ordinal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of student</td>
<td>(Demographic variable)</td>
<td>Chronological age (measured in years) that an individual has been alive Category within general information form (ex: Please chose one of the following Age: 18-21 22-25 etc.)</td>
<td>Interval</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measurement/Instrumentation

A 52 item modified version of the Gay and Lesbian Parenting Questionnaire, developed by Maney and Cain (1997) will be used in this study. The original questionnaire was used in a study that examined preservice elementary school teacher's attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. The researcher decided on this measurement tool since there does not appear to be a data collection tool that more accurately measured social work student's comfort with gay and lesbian families. It should be noted that the first part of this instrument consists of two subscales that separately measure heterosexual attitudes towards gays and lesbians regardless of whether they are parents or not. This researcher decided to keep these components since attitudes towards gays and lesbians may influence student comfort with gay and lesbian families. Overall, this questionnaire has demonstrated good reliability. The two subscales that measure attitudes towards gays and lesbians are from Herek's Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Man scale which has an overall reliability coefficient of .90. This part is comprised of 20 likert scale questions, 10 questions regarding gay men (alpha = .77) and ten questions regarding lesbian women (alpha = .89). All responses are presented in a nine point Likert scale format. Examples of questions include "homosexual males should be allowed to adopt," and "female homosexuality is a sin," (Maney & Cain, 1997).

The second part of the questionnaire titled Comfort When Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families, received an estimate of .91 from Cronbach's alpha reliability scale. It is measured on a nine point likert scale from "strongly comfortable" to "strongly uncomfortable." A sample question includes "How comfortable would you feel asking a homosexual parent(s) questions about their family structure?" This section was developed by Maney & Cain (1997). These researchers also developed the third section measuring knowledge
about gay and lesbian parents, called Knowledge about Homosexual Relationships. This part of
the questionnaire has the lowest reliability coefficient - it received an alpha coefficient of .52
after a KR-20 reliability analysis. It is comprised of 10 true/false questions, for example “Gay
fathers are not as effective parents as are heterosexual fathers.” (Maney & Cain. 1997). The
fourth and final section of this questionnaire is the general information sheet that includes
demographic information on the sample (gender, age, year standing).

The researcher kept the different sections of the original instrument but made some minor
changes. The instrument similar to the original one had 52 questions, of which 12 elicited
demographic information. Responses to parts one and two of the questionnaire are formatted in a
nine point Likert scale format with responses ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly
Agree’. The third section uses ‘True/False’ responses. Modifications to the instrument including
rephrasing the following questions to make them relevant to social work students: (Bold
Questions are the revised items)

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

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

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

Q-22 How comfortable would you feel being
interviewed by a homosexual parent(s)
regarding your perceptions on sexuality?
Q-25  How comfortable would you feel during a parent/teacher conference with the homosexual parent(s) of your student?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

        YEARS OLD

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

18-21   22-25   26-29   30-33   34-37   38-41

Q-43  What is your race/ethnicity?
Q-43 What is your race/ethnicity?

1. AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK
2. AMERICAN INDIAN, ALASKAN NATIVE, OR NATIVE HAWAIIAN
3. ASIAN, ASIAN AMERICAN, OR PACIFIC ISLANDER
4. MEXICAN AMERICAN/CHICANO
5. PUERTO RICAN
6. OTHER LATINO
7. WHITE/CAUCASIAN
8. OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY): ___

Q-45 What is your major?

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

Q-45 What program are you currently enrolled in?

1. Bachelors of Social Work
2. Masters of Social Work

Q-46 How would you identify your sexual orientation?

1. ASEXUAL
2. BISEXUAL
3. HETEROSEXUAL
4. HOMOSEXUAL
5. OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY): ___
Q-45 How would you identify your sexual orientation?

1. ASEXUAL
2. BISEXUAL
3. HETEROSEXUAL
4. HOMOSEXUAL

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

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

Christian
Catholic
Protestant
Jewish
Lutheran
Baptist
Islamic
Buddhist

Q-51 How would you describe your religious beliefs?

1. NON EXISTENT
2. SOMewhat WEAK
3. SOMEWHAT STRONG
4. VERY STRONG

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

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

This overall data collection instrument has been mildly modified to better fit the requirements for the study of social work students' perceptions of gays and lesbians as parents.

Questions number 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 30, 42, 43, 45 and 46 have been reworded.
This questionnaire will be converted to an online survey through SurveyMonkey.com and made accessible only by a link.

**Scoring.**

The first section of the questionnaire based on Herek's Attitudes Towards Gays and Lesbians Scale, consists of two subscales that are presented on a nine point scale with a total score of 90 maximum points on each subscale. The response options range from "strongly disagree," to "strongly agree". Scoring for each subscale is reached by summing scores across items (Herek, 1988). Some of the questions on the subscales must be scored using a reverse scoring system. Higher scores on each of the subscales represents more negative attitude towards gays and lesbians (Herek, 1988; Maney & Cain, 1997).

The second section of the questionnaire, the Comfort When Interacting with Gay and Lesbian Families subscale also features ten items formatted in a 9 point likert scale design. The response options for these questions ranged from "very un-comfortable," to "very comfortable". The maximum total score for this subscale is 90 points (Herek, 1988). It is also anticipated that the 9 point responses on both parts one and two of the questionnaire may need to be collapsed for statistical testing. Higher scores on this subscale also reflect a lower level of comfort in interacting with gay and lesbian families.

While this researcher will also use the third section of the questionnaire, "Knowledge About Homosexual Relationships", it is recognized that due to the low reliability estimate for this true/false section, only descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies will be provided (Maney & Cain, 1997).

**Sampling Plan/Recruitment of Participants**
The sampling plan utilized will be simple random sampling. Currently there are 340 students enrolled in the University’s BSW program and 317 students enrolled in the MSW program. In collaboration with the office staff, 60 students from each program will be randomly selected by each of the programs office staff. In order to comply with FERPA legislation and to protect the identity of those students that will be invited to participate, the researcher will not have any information on the randomly selected students. Instead the researcher will ask the office staff to send an email containing an invitation to participate to the students identified. The invitational email, which will also serve as an informed consent, will contain important information on the study and will provide potential participants with a link to the survey via Survey Monkey. Participants who decide to follow the link will also find at that site an informed consent. If participants decide to take part in the study, they then continue to the survey. Throughout this entire process participants will be reminded of the anonymous and voluntary nature of the study.

**Ethical Considerations**

At this time there are no anticipated ethical considerations. Questions asked are soliciting general opinion and students are not being asked to reveal sensitive information. However, it is possible that this study may generate uncomfortable feelings in some participants. For example, it may cause uncomfortable feelings for gay and lesbian participants that are unsure or not open about their sexuality. It may also cause uncomfortable feelings for those participants who, in general, are uncomfortable with matters of sexuality.

If for any reasons participants feel uncomfortable during any point of the survey they can immediately terminate their participation. Also, the researcher will list on the informed consent form the following resources with accompanying telephone, email and address information.
- University of Central Florida Counseling Center
- EQUAL (registered student organization, LGBT affiliated)
- LGBTQ Services

**IRB & Protection of Study Participants**

The study will be anonymous and completed online via Survey Monkey software application. Since the sampling plan for this study is simple random sampling, the researcher will not be able to access the identity of potential participants. Nor will there be a place for participants to put their identity on the informed consent form or the actual data collection tool. Participation in this study will be completely anonymous and voluntary. Individual identities of the participants will not be revealed and all findings will be reported in aggregate format.

To ensure complete protection for participants there will be an informed consent form when the initial link is followed from the email. This informed consent form will not ask for a signature or any other kind of identifier from participants.

There will be an IRB application submitted for this study. This application will be submitted between late summer of 2012 and early fall 2012. This study WILL NOT be implemented until the researcher has been granted official IRB approval.

**Data Collection Strategy**

After the BSW and MSW office staff have agreed to assist the researcher in collecting a random sample, the researcher and her thesis committee chair set up participant recruitment procedures with the office staff. For example, from the complete list of students enrolled, each office staff will pick every “x” (third, fourth, etc.) student until 60 students from each program (resulting in 120 combined) is selected. Each list of the 120 students will then be sent an email from the office staff of their program. This email will be composed by the researcher and given
to the office staff at an earlier date. At no point during the study will the researcher have access to which students were selected for participation. After the email is sent to potential participants from the perspective office staffs, students will receive an email with a message from the researcher about the study and will be provided the link to the informed consent. If participants decide to follow the link, the informed consent will appear. Participants will be asked to read the informed consent and if they decide to participate, they continue on to the data collection tool. If the student completes the survey they will be thanked and debriefed. Attempts will be made for the researcher to speak about the upcoming study at a BSW and MSW faculty meeting as well as at the BSW and MSW student associations, before the email goes out to potential participants.

The purpose of speaking at these engagements is to inform students of the upcoming study and to encourage participation. Also during the fall semester a reminder to consider participation will be sent to the random participants through the office staffs that also encourage participation.

The data collection tool will be made available on SurveyMonkey.com. The data survey will not be accessible by anyone other than the researcher and thesis chair. Proper features will be set up via Survey Monkey to ensure that the information is anonymous and that only those individuals who are sent the link will be able to participate in the study.

The data collection phase will begin only after IRB approval has been granted. It is hoped that data collection will take place no later than mid Fall semester. Recruitment of participants will continue until the participation goal of 100 students has been reached. 50 students from each program. Once the data collection period is over, results will be downloaded by the researcher through SurveyMonkey.com.

**Data Management Strategy**
All downloaded anonymous data will be secured by the researcher in a locked cabinet and only the researcher and her Thesis Committee Chair will have access to the data. The researcher will develop a code book to organize the data and SPSS will be used for data entry. All data will first be cleaned to ensure accuracy and those questions not answered or difficult to decipher responses will be marked as ‘missing’ in SPSS.

**Plan for Data Analysis**

The researcher will use SPSS to prove the hypotheses stated earlier in this proposal. The researcher anticipates that descriptive analyses such as frequencies and inferential analyses such as chi square tests will be used in the data analysis.

**Limitations/Challenges in Anticipation**

At this time there are three challenges and limitations that may come up in the future of this study. The first is the whether or not the participation goal will be reached. Similarly to mail surveys, participation completion rates are known to be lower when online data collection tools are implemented in place of face-to-face data (Yegidis, Weinbach & Myers, 2011). The second challenge is the mere length of the data collection tool. Currently the questionnaire has over 51 items and this may deter participation because of time requirements. The third challenge to this study is the limitation related to modifications in the data collection tool that may affect the fidelity of the measurement. Various questions and directions needed to be reworded to make sense in terms of social work students as opposed to pre-service elementary school teachers. However, given the scarcity of research and data collection tools on this topic, this measurement was still thought to be the best one. Additionally, it must be recognized that the questionnaire is a self-report tool and therefore may have some subjectivity.
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