

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF APPEAL  
FOR THE THIRD DISTRICT, STATE OF FLORIDA

CASE NO. 3D08-3044

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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES,

---

Appellant,

v.

IN RE: MATTER OF ADOPTION OF: X.X.G. AND N.R.G.,

Appellees.

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**REPLY BRIEF OF FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF  
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

---

On Appeal from an Order of the Eleventh  
Judicial Circuit, in and for Dade County, Florida

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES.....iv

REPLY ARGUMENT ..... 1

1. The rational basis test applies..... 1

2. The trial court’s categorical conclusions are unsupportable under rational basis review on this evidentiary record.....4

3. The evidentiary record aside, other rationales support the classification and meet the rational basis test. ....9

4. Adoption and foster care are fundamentally different as to permanence and state oversight..... 12

5. DCF’s witnesses were erroneously ignored..... 13

6. Even if Appellees can raise their special law argument on appeal, it should be rejected..... 15

CONCLUSION ..... 17

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE AND COMPLIANCE..... 18

APPENDIX

## TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

### CASES

<u>Buckner v. Family Servs. of Cent. Fla., Inc.</u> , 876 So. 2d 1285 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004).....	3
<u>Brown v. Bd. of Educ.</u> , 347 U.S. 483 (1954).....	6
<u>Cook v. Gates</u> , 528 F.3d 42 (1st Cir. 2008).....	2
<u>Cox v. Fla. Dep't of Health &amp; Rehab. Servs.</u> , 656 So. 2d 902 (Fla. 1995) .....	1, 2, 3
<u>Dade County Sch. Bd. v. Radio Station WQBA</u> , 731 So. 2d 638 (Fla. 1999) .....	15
<u>Dep't of Bus. Reg. v. Gulfstream Park Racing Ass'n</u> , 912 So. 2d 616, (Fla. 1st DCA 2005) .....	16
<u>Dep't of Bus. Reg. v. Classic Mile, Inc.</u> , 541 So. 2d 1155 (Fla. 1989) .....	16
<u>Dep't of Health &amp; Rehab. Servs. v. Cox</u> , 627 So. 2d 1210 (Fla. 2d DCA 1993).....	1, 2, 3
<u>Fla. Dep't of Transp. v. Juliano</u> , 801 So. 2d 101 (Fla. 2001) .....	15
<u>Hechtman v. Nations Title Ins. of N.Y.</u> , 840 So. 2d 993 (Fla. 2003) .....	3
<u>Hoffman v. Jones</u> , 280 So. 2d 431 (Fla. 1973) .....	1
<u>Jacoby v. Jacoby</u> , 763 So. 2d 410 (Fla. 2d DCA 2000).....	10, 11

Krischer v. McIver,  
697 So. 2d 97 (Fla. 1997) .....6

Lawrence v. Texas,  
539 U.S. 558 (2003).....1

Lofton v. Sec’y, Dep’t of Children & Family Servs.,  
358 F.3d 804 (11th Cir. 2004) .....2, 4, 17

Muller v. Oregon,  
208 U.S. 412 (1908).....6

N. Fla. Women’s Health & Counseling Servs., Inc. v. State,  
866 So. 2d 612 (Fla. 2003) ..... 4-5

Palmore v. Sidoti,  
466 U.S. 429 (1984).....10

St. Mary’s Hosp., Inc. v. Phillipe,  
769 So. 2d 961 (Fla. 2000) .....12

State ex rel. Landis v. Harris,  
120 Fla. 555 (1934).....16

State v. Hosty,  
944 So. 2d 255 (Fla. 2006) .....12

Warren v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co,  
899 So. 2d 1090 (Fla. 2005) .....5

Watkins v. State,  
701 So. 2d 592 (Fla. 1st DCA 1997) .....4

Westerheide v. State,  
831 So. 2d 93 (Fla. 2002) .....5

Williams v. Pryor,  
240 F.3d 944 (11th Cir. 2001) .....9

## STATE CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY PROVISIONS

Art. III, § 11(a)(16), Fla. Const.....	16
Art. X, § 12(g), Fla. Const. ....	16
§ 39.6221(5)-(6), Fla. Stat. ....	12
§ 63.022(1), Fla. Stat.....	11
§ 63.042(3), Fla. Stat.....	<i>passim</i>

## MISCELLANEOUS

Fla. Admin. Code R. 65C-16.005(3) .....	4, 9
Elizabeth Short, <i>et al.</i> , <u>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families</u> , Australian Psychol. Soc’y, Ltd. (2007).....	8
Judith Stacey & Timothy J. Biblarz, <u>(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?</u> , 66 Am. Soc. Rev. 159 (2001).....	6, App. A
Lawrence A. Kurdek, <u>The Nature and Correlates to Leaving a Relationship</u> , 13 Personal Relationships 521 (2006).....	10, App. C
Richard E. Redding, <u>It’s Really About Sex: Same-sex Marriage, Lesbigay Parenting, and the Psychology of Disgust</u> , 15 Duke J. Gender L. & Pol’y 127 (2008).....	5
Richard E. Redding, <u>Sociopolitical Diversity in Psychology: The Case for Pluralism</u> , 56 Am. Psychologist 205 (2001).....	13
Sotirios Sarantakos, <u>Children in three contexts: Family, education, and social development</u> , 21 Children Australia 23 (1996).....	7, App. B

## REPLY ARGUMENT

Appellees<sup>1</sup> and amici make a few points that merit rebuttal, each related to the standard of review and its application. Their case substantially hinges on elevating the state's burden of proof under the rational basis test or jettisoning the test altogether.<sup>2</sup>

### **1. The rational basis test applies.**

The Florida Supreme Court has specifically held that the rational basis test applies to equal protection challenges to section 63.042(3), a holding this Court must follow. Cox v. Dep't of Health and Rehab. Servs., 656 So. 2d 902, 903 (Fla. 1995); see Hoffman v. Jones, 280 So. 2d 431, 434 (Fla. 1973) (lower courts may not overturn decisions of higher courts lest they "create chaos and uncertainty"). Arguments to the contrary are without merit.

First, Appellees argue that the rational basis test does not apply, claiming that the United States Supreme Court's decision in Lawrence v. Texas, 539 U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> F.M.G. (Petitioner) and X.X.G. and N.R.G. (the Children) are referred to together as "Appellees." Their briefs will be cited as "P-AB" and "C-AB," respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Various amici also raise arguments the Florida Supreme Court rejected in Cox via its affirmance of most of the Second District's unanimous en banc opinion (which rejected privacy and due process-related claims, provided the legal framework for equal protection claims under the rational basis test, and held that adoption is a statutory privilege, not a fundamental right). Dep't of Health & Rehab. Servs. v. Cox, 627 So. 2d 1210, 1215-20 (Fla. 2d DCA (1993)). Because Cox resolved these issues, no response is necessary.

558 (2003), abrogated Cox. *See, e.g.*, P-AB at 43. This argument fails for the reasons the Eleventh Circuit stated in Lofton, which evaluated the proper standard of review *after Lawrence*, concluding that the rational basis test still applies in evaluating section 63.042(3). Lofton v. Sec’y, Dep’t of Children & Family Servs., 358 F.3d 804, 818 (11th Cir. 2004); *see also* Cook v. Gates, 528 F.3d 42, 61 (1st Cir. 2008) (finding “no basis” for arguing that Lawrence changed the standard of review applicable to sexual orientation-based classifications); Cox (2d DCA), 627 So. 2d at 1217 (noting that “it is not appropriate for [the district] court, as a matter of state constitutional law, to depart from a recent [federal ruling] under a virtually identical federal constitutional clause unless we are convinced that aspects of Florida’s constitution, law, or announced public policies clearly justify such a departure”). Further, Lawrence did not recognize a new fundamental right nor apply strict scrutiny; as such, it cannot be said to have altered the rational basis test in Cox, which binds this Court. *See* P-AB at 48 (Petitioner “understands that this Court may feel constrained by *Cox* ... but raises the Argument to preserve it”).

Next, Appellees suggest that a heightened burden applies under the rational basis test because the Florida Supreme Court in Cox remanded the equal protection claim for completion of the factual record. *See* P-AB at 9; C-AB at 23. The Cox decision did not abandon or modify the rational basis test; indeed, if the Florida Supreme Court intended to alter the long-standing principles underlying the



rational basis test, it surely would have said so. It did not. Instead, Cox is fairly read as merely allowing the parties to create a record in the first instance to better inform the court on an important state issue. *See Cox* (2d DCA), 627 So. 2d at 1213, 1220 n.11 (noting that the record consisted of only two articles and “virtually no evidence”; declining to certify the case as a matter of great public interest because of its limited record). In contrast to Cox, the parties below presented testimony and evidence addressing the research, thereby creating a meaningful trial record. As such, the traditional rational basis test still applies.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the standard of review that applies to illegitimacy-based classifications (C-AB at 31) has never been applied to foster children or allowed young wards to cast aside a state’s legislative protections and make placement decisions for themselves.<sup>4</sup> The argument that foster placements are improper or illegal if they cannot lead to adoption overlooks that many foster children in

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<sup>3</sup> Contrary to Appellees’ suggestion (P-AB at 9 n.9), courts – including the Florida Supreme Court – generally do not construe state and federal equal protection clauses differently. *See, e.g., Hechtman v. Nations Title Ins. of N.Y.*, 840 So. 2d 993, 996-97 (Fla. 2003) (defining rational basis test by reference to long-standing federal and state cases).

<sup>4</sup> *See Cox* (2d DCA), 627 So. 2d at 1215 (adoption is a statutory privilege; no fundamental right exists to adopt or to be adopted); *see also Lofton*, 358 F.3d at 810-11 (Florida “acting *parens patriae* for children who have lost their natural parents, bears the high duty of determining what adoptive home environments will best serve all aspects of the child’s growth and development”); *Buckner v. Family Servs. of Cent. Fla., Inc.*, 876 So. 2d 1285, 1288 (Fla. 5th DCA 2004) (“adoption is wholly a creature of the State”).

Florida are placed with foster parents who have no intention to adopt.<sup>5</sup> Thus, rational basis review is appropriate because “children of homosexual foster parents” are not a suspect class and no fundamental right to adoption exists.<sup>6</sup>

**2. The trial court’s categorical conclusions are insupportable under rational basis review on this evidentiary record.**

Appellees invoke rote deference to the trial court’s categorical conclusions, essentially asking that this Court rubber stamp the order below without any meaningful review of the record and history of litigation upholding the statute. P-AB at 12; C-AB at 23; *see also Amicus Fla. Bar* at 4, 9. Appellees’ cases, however, do not preclude review, especially given that the deferential rational basis test applies rather than strict scrutiny. *See, e.g., Watkins v. State*, 701 So. 2d 592, 593 (1st DCA 1997) (rejecting an equal protection challenge where the district court found record “expert testimony sufficient to satisfy us that there continues to be a rational basis”).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> If accepted, the minor children’s equal protection argument would effectively require DCF to make foster care placements only to persons able and willing to adopt – a policy that would diminish the pool of available foster parents.

<sup>6</sup> Florida acting *parens patriae* may draw distinctions as to who can adopt despite the fact that the classifications “would be constitutionally suspect in many other areas.” *Lofton*, 358 F.3d at 810; *see also, e.g., Fla. Admin. Code R. 65C-16.005(3)* (2006) (providing that Florida must screen for physical and mental health, income/financial status, marriage, housing, and neighborhood – unlawful classifications in other contexts, but permissible here to protect children).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Appellees rely on *North Florida Women’s Health & Counseling* (Continued ...)

Moreover, DCF does not ask this Court to “reweigh” the evidence, as Appellees suggest. P-AB at 12. Indeed, “weighing” the evidence is the precise error the trial court committed below. Rational basis review only requires that *some* evidence support the challenged legislation; its relative weight is immaterial. As the Florida Supreme Court recently stated, the “fact that there may be differing views as to the reasonableness of the Legislature’s action is simply not sufficient to void the legislation” under the equal protection clause. Warren v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co., 899 So. 2d 1090, 1096 (Fla. 2005). Moreover, the rational basis test allows a legislature to adopt minority scientific/medical views in its classifications even if other views have gained or are gaining greater acceptance.<sup>8</sup> As discussed in

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Services, Inc. v. State, 866 So. 2d 612, 626 (Fla. 2003), an abortion case in which the compelling state interest standard applied (i.e., the highest level of possible scrutiny under which a law is presumptively considered invalid). In view of the heavy burden tilted *against the state* in that case, the district court was found to have inappropriately discounted the trial court’s factual findings.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Westerheide v. State, 831 So. 2d 93, 101 (Fla. 2002) (Given “differing opinions of the scientific community regarding the efficacy of treatment” for certain offenders, the “Legislature’s determination that these individuals must be civilly committed for long-term treatment and care is not clearly erroneous and is entitled to deference.”); see also R-1031 (testimony that psychologists are divided on homosexual parenting issues, which has split national organizations); *Amicus Brief*, Am. Coll. of Pediatricians (a pediatrician group supports the statute’s restriction citing research to underpin their position). Even some detractors forthrightly acknowledge that the restriction at issue satisfies the rational basis test. See, e.g., Richard E. Redding, It’s Really About Sex: Same-sex Marriage, Lesbian Parenting, & the Psychology of Disgust, 15 Duke J. Gender L. & Pol’y 127, 133-34, 192 (2008).

DCF's initial brief, the trial court's categorical conclusions are erroneous given the state's minimal burden under the rational basis test.

Here, the trial court's vantage is entitled to less deference because independent review of the pre-existing academic literature and prior litigation does not implicate credibility determinations (i.e., this evidence exists independently of any expert's personal views or testimony). As just one example, Appellees rely on the trial court's interpretation of an article on sexual orientation (and the trial court's criticism of the Eleventh Circuit's analysis of this article) purportedly on the basis of "undisputed" expert testimony. P-AB at 16 n.15 (citing Judith Stacey & Timothy J. Biblarz, (How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?, 66 Am. Soc. Rev. 159-183 (Apr. 2001) ("S&B Article") (attached at **App. A**<sup>9</sup>). But expert testimony about this article does not *categorically* support Appellees' position. Instead, experts on both sides acknowledged the S&B Article in reporting

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<sup>9</sup> Attached for the Court's convenience are three articles (**Apps. A, B & C**), each referenced in the record below and the parties' briefs, which aid in understanding some of the disputed research-backed testimony the trial court mischaracterized. They also allay Appellees' assertions that the content or context of these studies do not support Appellant's assertions herein. Although they are attached for these limited purposes, this Court could more broadly rely upon them in conjunction with expert testimony to resolve this challenge to the state statute. *See, e.g., Muller v. Oregon*, 208 U.S. 412, 419 n.1 (1908) (case involving the original "Brandeis brief" containing studies and reports upon which the Supreme Court ultimately relied); *see also Krischer v. McIver*, 697 So. 2d 97, 100-04 (Fla. 1997) (citing articles, reports, medical journals, and other states' policies, as well as positions of leading healthcare organizations in upholding statute prohibiting assisted suicide).

that children of homosexual parents tend toward higher sexual experimentation and same-sex activity rates. *See* IB at 31 (discussing how these activities are harmful to minors for various public health reasons).<sup>10</sup> The trial court ignored that this evidence bolstered DCF's case, concluding incorrectly that the article categorically favored invalidation of the statute. [R-676 n.11]

In another instance, the trial court categorically rejected a study showing that children of heterosexual parents are better adjusted at school. P-AB at 14 n.13; R-1224 (*citing* Sotirios Sarantakos, Children in three contexts: Family, education, and social development, 21 *Children Australia* 23-31 (1996) (**App. B**)). The trial court discredited the study without any basis for doing so, concluding that: "The article was not published in a peer reviewed journal, but an Australian magazine." [R-676,

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<sup>10</sup> Appellees mistakenly claim Dr. Lamb's testimony regarding the S&B's article does not address sexual activity by minor children. P-AB at 26; *see also Amicus*, *Ctr. of Adoption Pol'y* at 18. Dr. Lamb's testimony, however, involved the sexual activity of "young people" and "kids." [R-1237-38] Dr. Lamb repeatedly discussed "children" who felt same-sex attraction and whether the children grow up to be gay. *Id.* at 1238-40 (testimony that homosexual parents give more support for "children" acting on same-sex attraction), 1315-16 (children of homosexuals feel freer to act on sexual feelings); *see also* R-1739 (DCF's expert likewise testified that S&B's article showed that "children" in homosexual homes have atypical or less typical gender role behavior and are more likely to explore the possibility of homosexual behavior as teenagers), 1848-50 (greater potential for children in homosexual homes to adopt a homosexual lifestyle); *see also Amicus*, *Am. Coll. of Pediatricians* at 7-8 (addressing S&B's article).

n.11]<sup>11</sup> This type of arbitrary and categorical exclusion of evidence is what the rational basis standard does not permit.<sup>12</sup> In sum, the trial court's order mischaracterizes or entirely disregards evidence that, but for its categorical exclusion, easily meets the deferential standards of the rational basis test.

**3. The evidentiary record aside, other rationales support the classification and meet the rational basis test.**

Beyond the direct evidence supporting the statute, Appellees challenge various rationales that support section 63.042(3). For example, they attempt to play down evidence showing that homosexuals generally have higher rates of various psychiatric disorders and conditions compared to heterosexuals by comparing these rates with those associated with American Indians, uneducated persons, and unemployed persons. P-AB at 19 & n. 21; *see also id.* at 24 (offering a similar

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<sup>11</sup> The fact that Dr. Lamb, one of Appellees' experts, was unfamiliar with the journal provides no basis for the trial court entirely rejecting it. [R-1222] Ironically, the Australian Psychological Society extensively cites and discusses Sarantakos' findings in a recent literature review article without qualification or dispersion of *Children Australia*, which is a peer-reviewed journal. *See* Elizabeth Short, *et al.*, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Parented Families, Australian Psychol. Soc'y, Ltd., August 2007, at 20, 21, 23, 28, *available at* <http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/LGBT-Families-Lit-Review.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> In yet another place, Appellees and an *amicus* contradict the trial court's finding that "homosexuals are no more susceptible to mental health or psychological disorders, substance or alcohol abuse ... than heterosexual counterparts." *Compare* [R-710] *with* P-AB at 19 (stating that "gay people ... have statistically higher rates than heterosexuals of mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, suicidality, and substance abuse") & *Amicus*, Am. Psych'l. Ass'n at 9-10 (noting higher rates of illness or psychological distress). Under the rational basis test, this evidence is relevant and supportive of the statute's constitutionality.

defense of domestic violence rates). This comparison is irrelevant and highly misleading. It is irrelevant because the rational basis test does not require perfection in establishing legislatively-constructed categories, which may be under- or over-inclusive. Williams v. Pryor, 240 F.3d 944, 948 (11th Cir. 2001). It is highly misleading because Appellees' hypothetical classification (i.e., "American Indian") would likely fail strict scrutiny; moreover, factors such as income, employment, and education-level are addressed on a case-by-case basis (e.g., an applicant may have little income, but large savings).<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, Appellees' focus on comparable rates for *individual or specific* psychiatric/adverse conditions is a misleading approach, which would disqualify all but Asian males from adopting. See P-AB at 19, n.21. The focus under rational basis review is on similarly situated groups. But Appellees fail to identify any other similarly situated group with the prevalence of *multiple* psychiatric and adverse conditions that the literature shows exist among homosexuals. Appellees fail to make an "apples to apples" comparison, and, instead, impermissibly attempt to shift their burden of proof to DCF. P-AB at 21, n.22; see also R-1325, 1339-40 (Dr. Lamb testified that higher disorder levels would "definitely" affect children).

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<sup>13</sup> Compare § 65C-16.005 (2)-(3), F.A.C. (describing DCF's screen of educational and financial needs of adoptees) with IB at 27, 35-36, 38-39 (discussing longer-term risks that a DCF home study cannot completely screen); see also R-1604-08, 1612-13, 1621-22, 1630-31, 1634-38 (identifying longer-term risks to adoptees).

Regarding relationship stability, Appellees claim an “extraordinary distortion” (P-AB at 23, n.24) involving the Kurdek study. *See* Lawrence A. Kurdek, The nature and correlates to leaving a relationship, 13 *Personal Relationships* 521 (2006) (*see* **App. C**). A review of Dr. Peplau’s testimony and the underlying research reveals that she plainly acknowledged Kurdek’s finding that homosexuals show less of a family-based and moral obligation to stay in relationships, though she expressed methodological concerns with the study. [R-818-20 (stating, for example, “it’s not necessarily a reflection on the morality of these two groups, that they’re responding in this way.”)]<sup>14</sup>

In addition, contrary to Appellees’ argument (P-AB at 27), the legislature may lawfully restrict adoptions based on research-backed concerns, as reflected in the evidence, that children of homosexuals suffer harm from discrimination and stigma. Appellees rely on Palmore v. Sidoti, 466 U.S. 429 (1984), and Jacoby v. Jacoby, 763 So. 2d 410 (Fla. 2d DCA 2000), but these cases involve the custody rights of *natural parents*, not state adoption policies. *See, e.g., Palmore*, 466 U.S. at 433 (concluding that “[t]he effects of racial prejudice, ... cannot justify a racial

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<sup>14</sup> In addition, DCF did not ignore that “other variables could also account for the break-up rates of gay couples such as the absence of children.” P-AB at 23, n.25. In fact, DCF argued that the statute should be upheld expressly because of such unknown factors and the need for additional research. *See* IB at 35 (quoting Dr. Peplau’s testimony that “the presence of children is something we need to look at in making comparisons between same-sex and heterosexual couples, because here it was really children that differentiates among groups.” [R-777]).



classification removing an infant child from the custody of its natural mother”).

Unlike applicants seeking to adopt, natural parents possess constitutionally-protected rights vis-à-vis their children that make their situations wholly different, a proposition Appellees conflate into an unsound argument. *See* C-AB at 29 (arguing that if DCF is correct “termination of parental rights should be ordered for every biological child of a gay parent”) (emphasis in original); *cf. Jacoby*, 763 So. 2d at 413 (acknowledging that a court might take account of a natural mother’s sexual orientation where it impacts a child’s interest).

Finally, with respect to legislative history, Appellees present a one-sided and incomplete picture of section 63.042(3)’s origins. C-AB at 29 n.12; P-AB at 40 n.41. The best interests of children plainly motivated, and continue to underlie, the legislature’s actions. *See, e.g.*, § 63.022(1), Fla. Stat. (Florida “has a compelling interest in providing stable and permanent homes for adoptive children”). Given that this case was premised on rational basis review, and not the personal motives of some legislators thirty-two years ago, this Court should not diverge into matters not litigated below in this proceeding.

**4. Adoption and foster care are fundamentally different as to permanence and state oversight.**

The Children’s (and the Florida Bar’s *amicus*) brief claim a contradiction exists in DCF’s policy because homosexuals are precluded from adopting, but may be foster parents. Adoptive placements, however, are fundamentally different from

foster care and guardianship. The former are final placements with little or no ongoing state oversight; the latter generally lack permanence and are subject to continual and highly regulated oversight by DCF. The state or natural parents may also more easily intervene on behalf of the children with respect to the latter. This degree of regulation and control is true even where active supervision ceases and the placements are considered permanent. *See, e.g.*, § 39.6221 (5)-(6), Fla. Stat. (providing for continued court jurisdiction and parental involvement in a permanent guardianship situation). In short, DCF's practice of placing children with homosexual foster parents or guardians does not require invalidating section 63.042(3). *See, e.g.*, State v. Hosty, 944 So. 2d 255, 263 (Fla. 2006) (noting that a statute must survive a facial challenge if it can be applied under any set of circumstances); St. Mary's Hosp., Inc. v. Phillipe, 769 So. 2d 961, 972 (Fla. 2000) (under separation of powers principles courts must give great legislative deference and construe acts to be constitutional).

#### **5. DCF's witnesses were erroneously ignored.**

Like the trial court's order, Appellees fail to cite record support for the trial court's conclusion that Dr. Rekers failed to give "neutral and unbiased recitation of the relevant scientific evidence." P-AB at 41; R-683. Appellees cite six purported bases for this conclusion. Four of these, however, have nothing to do with his trial demeanor and recitation of evidence. First, they discredit Dr. Rekers based on his

past writings: he cited to publications of non-scientists in one article and integrated psychology and religious themes in some old books. Id. Dr. Rekers, however, never recited or claimed reliance on these specific materials.<sup>15</sup> Second, Appellees point out that Dr. Rekers has been criticized in some academic literature and by a court in another case. Id. These factors, which the trial court did not even mention, are also unrelated to the specific reasons it disregarded Dr. Rekers testimony.<sup>16</sup> Third, Appellees claim that the court disregarded Dr. Rekers for heavily citing the research of Dr. Paul Cameron, who they claim to have been censured by the APA. Id. But Dr. Rekers' direct testimony never cited to or relied upon Cameron's work, *a fact noted by Appellees' counsel at trial.* [R-1644 (stating "one person you didn't mention in your testimony today was a man named Paul Cameron")] On cross examination, Dr. Rekers was asked to acknowledge Dr. Cameron [*see* R-1644-47], even though he did not favorably cite or rely upon Dr. Cameron's research; in fact,

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, evidence from non-scientists, even if Dr. Rekers had relied upon it, may lend sufficient support to uphold a classification under the rational basis test.

<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the studies generally relied upon by Appellees and the trial court to invalidate section 63.042(3) have also been criticized in the literature. *See* S&B's article at 160 (**App. A**) (stating that "ideological pressures constrain intellectual development in this field" of research and noting other published criticism); Richard E. Redding, Sociopolitical Diversity in Psychology, 56 *Am. Psychologist* 205, 207 (2001) (noting "[m]uch of the extant research finding no negative effects of gay parenting on children has serious limitations"); [R-1636-38, 1737-40 (Dr. Rekers' testimony)]; [R-1922-24 (Dr. Schuum's testimony)].

he noted that Dr. Cameron had a negative longstanding reputation in the academic world and society in general. [R-1652]

Last, Appellees explain that the trial court's decision to disregard Dr. Rekers' testimony was based on his opinion on two points: (1) that even after a ten year period, a child would be better served from a development perspective to be moved from a homosexual foster placement into a heterosexual family unit, and (2) a child would clinically recover from any psychiatric disorder related to such a transition in a year's time, though memory discomfort and pain could persist for a much longer period. [R-1736-37] The first opinion, of course, merely tracks the split of opinion of experts and others on the divisive issue of this case. And, though the second opinion "astonished" the trial court, neither the order below nor the Appellees cite research to dispute this opinion. [R-681] Thus, none of the explanations that Appellees offer relate to Dr. Rekers' demeanor and recitation of the evidence, thereby undermining the trial court's decision to disregard his extensive testimony.

Likewise, Appellees criticize Dr. Schumm's research techniques and analysis (P-AB at 42; R-684), but – like the trial court – err by ignoring his extensive recitation of others' studies, including studies conducted by Appellees' trial witnesses. [R-1810-18, 1828, 1845-51, 1861, 1864-67, 1874-77, 1879-82] Furthermore, even if Dr. Schumm "has a religiously based disagreement with

homosexual practices” and had incorporated religion and science into a prior article (P-AB at 42), his beliefs also do not permit a trial court to totally disregard his recitation of relevant studies published by others. *See* IB at 42. Thus, the trial court erroneously decided this case as if no reputable expert, empirical research, or social science evidence exists in support of the statute; whereas, some expert and empirical support clearly exists for the law, which is all that rational basis review requires.

**6. Even if Appellees can raise their special law argument on appeal, it should be rejected.**

Just before trial, Appellees moved to add a “special law” claim to their Amended Complaint, which the trial court denied. [R-2093] Appellees filed no cross appeal challenging the trial court’s decision. Instead, they now raise the claim on appeal, purportedly under the tipsy coachman doctrine. P-AB at 48. The Florida Supreme Court has rejected similar attempts to raise new issues on appeal, applying waiver principles where a party fails to cross-appeal the trial court’s denial of a motion to amend its pleadings. *See Fla. Dep’t of Transp. v. Juliano*, 801 So. 2d 101, 107 (Fla. 2001); *cf. Dade County Sch. Bd. v. Radio Station WQBA*, 731 So. 2d 638, 644 (Fla. 1999) (noting the general rule that a claim not raised in the trial court will not be considered, but permitting arguments supported by the record). This Court should likewise find this issue to be waived.

Even if this argument is considered, it should nonetheless be rejected because section 63.042(3) is a general law that operates universally in an area where the Legislature may draw valid classifications. Article III, section 11(a)(16) of the Florida Constitution declares “there shall be no special law or general law of local application pertaining to . . . adoption of persons.” As the First District has noted, a special law incorporates two slightly different concepts: “A law may be regarded as a special law because it regulates a class of persons or things when classification is not permissible, or because it applies only in a particular geographic location when there is no valid basis to distinguish that location from others.” Dep’t of Bus. Reg. v. Gulfstream Park Racing Ass’n, 912 So. 2d 616, 621 (Fla. 1st DCA 2005) (citing State ex rel. Landis v. Harris, 163 So. 237 (Fla. 1934)); *see also* Art. X, § 12(g) Fla. Const. (defining a special law as “a special law or a local law”). Conversely a general law “operates universally throughout the state or uniformly within a permissible classification.” Gulfstream Park, 912 So. 2d at 621 (citing Dep’t of Bus. Reg. v. Classic Mile, Inc., 541 So. 2d 1155 (Fla. 1989)).

In this case, section 63.042(3) “operates universally throughout the state”; thus, it is a valid general law unless it regulates a class of persons with an impermissible classification. The special law analysis only asks whether the Legislature can properly make a classification in the area and does not question the wisdom of that decision. Here, the state’s power to draw classifications regarding

who may adopt is unarguable because this power is necessary to protect children in the adoption process. *See, e.g., Lofton*, 358 F.3d at 810 (“Florida, acting *parens patriae* for children who have lost their natural parents, bears the high duty of determining what adoptive home environments will best serve all aspects of the child’s growth and development”). Thus, in enacting section 63.042(3) the Legislature has created a valid general law that applies universally in an area where classifications are permitted in order to advance the welfare of children in the state’s care.

### **CONCLUSION**

For the foregoing reasons, this Court should vacate the Judgment below and uphold section 63.042(3).

Respectfully Submitted,

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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE AND COMPLIANCE**

I hereby certify that this computer-generated brief is prepared in Times New Roman 14-point font and complies with the font requirement of Rule 9.210, Florida Rules of Appellate Procedure, and that a true copy of the foregoing has been furnished this 6th day of August, 2009, by U.S. Mail to: Robert F. Rosenwald, Jr., Shelbi D. Day, American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Florida, Inc., 4500 Biscayne Boulevard, Suite 340, Miami, FL 33137-3227, *Counsel for Petitioner*; Hilarie Bass, Elliot H. Scherker, Brigid F. Cech Samole, Ricardo Gonzalez, Greenberg Traurig, P.A., 1221 Brickell Avenue, Miami, Florida 33131 *Counsel for the Minor Children*; Hillary Kambour, Guardian Ad Litem Program, 3302 NW 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Miami, Florida 33142, *Counsel for Guardian Ad Litem*, Leslie Cooper, James D. Esseks, American Civil Liberties Union Foundation, 125 Broad Street, 18<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, New York 10004, *Counsel for Petitioner*; and Charles M. Auslander, The Children's Trust, 3150 SW Third Avenue, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Miami, Florida 33129, *Counsel for the Minor Children*.



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Attorney



# Appendix

## APPENDIX

- A. Judith Stacey & Timothy J. Biblarz, (How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?, 66 Am. Soc. Rev. 159 (2001)
- B. Sotirios Sarantakos, Children in three contexts: Family, education, and social development, 21 Children Australia 23 (1996)
- C. Lawrence A. Kurdek, The nature and correlates to leaving a relationship, 13 Personal Relationships 521 (2006)

# **Exhibit A**

# (HOW) DOES THE SEXUAL ORIENTATION OF PARENTS MATTER?

JUDITH STACEY

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University of Southern California

*Opponents of lesbian and gay parental rights claim that children with lesbian parents are at higher risk for a variety of negative outcomes. Yet most research in psychology concludes that there are no differences in developmental outcomes between children raised by lesbian parents and those raised by heterosexual parents. The analysis here challenges this defensive conceptual framework and analyzes how heterosexism has hampered intellectual progress in the field. The authors discuss limitations in the definitions, samples, and analyses of the studies to date. Next they explore findings from 21 studies and demonstrate that researchers frequently downplay findings indicating difference regarding children's gender and sexual preferences and behavior that could stimulate important theoretical questions. A less defensive, more sociologically informed analytic framework is proposed for investigating these issues. The framework focuses on (1) whether selection effects produced by homophobia account for associations between parental sexual orientations and child outcomes; (2) the role of parental gender vis-à-vis sexual orientation in influencing children's gender development; and (3) the relationship between parental sexual orientations and children's sexual preferences and behaviors.*

**T**ODAY, gay marriage is taking on an air of inevitability" (*Detroit News*, "Middle Ground Emerges for Gay Couples," October 4, 1999, p. A9). So observed a U.S. newspaper from the heartland in September 1999, reporting that one-third of those surveyed in an *NBC News/Wall Street Journal* poll endorsed the legalization of same-sex mar-

Direct all correspondence to Judith Stacey, Department of Sociology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, 90089-2539 (jstacey@usc.edu). We are grateful for the constructive criticisms on early versions of this article from: Celeste Atkins, Amy Binder, Phil Cowan, Gary Gates, Adam Green, David Greenberg, Oystein Holler, Celia Kitzinger, Joan Laird, Jane Mauldon, Dan McPherson, Shannon Minter, Valory Mitchell, Charlotte Patterson, Anne Peplau, Vernon Rosario, Seth Sanders, Alisa Steckel, Michael Wald, and the reviewers and editors of *ASR*. We presented portions of this work at: UCLA, Neuropsychiatric Institute Symposium on Sexuality; the Feminist Interdisciplinary Seminar of the University of California, Davis; and the Taft Lecture Program at the University of Cincinnati.

AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW, 2001, VOL. 66 (APRIL: 159-183)

159

quences of such research are by no means "academic," but bear on marriage and family policies that encode Western culture's most profoundly held convictions about gender, sexuality, and parenthood. As advocates and opponents square off in state and federal courts and legislatures, in the electoral arena, and in culture wars over efforts to extend to nonheterosexuals equal rights to marriage, child custody, adoption, foster care, and fertility services, they heatedly debate the implications of a youthful body of research, conducted primarily by psychologists, that investigates if and how the sexual orientation of parents affects children.

This body of research, almost uniformly, reports findings of no notable differences between children reared by heterosexual parents and those reared by lesbian and gay parents, and that it finds lesbian parents to be as competent and effective as heterosexual parents. Lawyers and activists struggling to defend child custody and adoption petitions by lesbians and gay men, or to attain same-gender marriage rights and to defeat preemptive referenda against such rights (e.g., the victorious Knight Initiative on the 2000 ballot in California) have drawn on this research with considerable success (cf. Wald 2000). Although progress is uneven, this strategy has promoted a gradual liberalizing trend in judicial and policy decisions. However, backlash campaigns against gay family rights have begun to challenge the validity of the research.

In 1997, the *University of Illinois Law Review Journal* published an article by Wardle (1997), a Brigham Young University law professor, that impugned the motives, methods, and merits of social science research on lesbian and gay parenting. Wardle charged the legal profession and social scientists with an ideological bias favoring gay rights that has compromised most research in this field and the liberal judicial and policy decisions it has informed. He presented a harsh critical assessment of the research and argued for a presumptive judicial standard in favor of awarding child custody to heterosexual married couples. The following year, Wardle drafted new state regulations in Utah that restrict adoption and foster care placements to households in which all adults are related by blood or marriage. Florida, Arkan-

sas, and Mississippi also have imposed restrictions on adoption and/or foster care, and such bills have been introduced in the legislatures of 10 additional states (Leslie Cooper, ACLU gay family rights staff attorney, personal communication, September 27, 2000). In March 2000, a paper presented at a "Revitalizing Marriage" conference at Brigham Young University assailed the quality of studies that had been cited to support the efficacy of lesbian parenting (Lerner and Nagai 2000). Characterizing the research methods as "dismal," Lerner and Nagai claimed that "the methods used in these studies were sufficiently flawed so that these studies could not and should not be used in legislative forums or legal cases to buttress any arguments on the nature of homosexual vs. heterosexual parenting" (p. 3). Shortly afterward, Gallagher (2000), of the Institute for American Values, broadcast Lerner and Nagai's argument in her nationally syndicated *New York Post* column in order to undermine the use of "the science card" by advocates of gay marriage and gay "normalization."

We depart sharply from the views of Wardle and Gallagher on the merits and morals of lesbian parenthood as well as on their analysis of the child development research. We agree, however, that ideological pressures constrain intellectual development in this field. In our view, it is the pervasiveness of social prejudice and institutionalized discrimination against lesbians and gay men that exerts a powerful policing effect on the basic terms of psychological research and public discourse on the significance of parental sexual orientation. The field suffers less from the overt ideological convictions of scholars than from the unfortunate intellectual consequences that follow from the implicit hetero-normative presumption governing the terms of the discourse—that healthy child development depends upon parenting by a married heterosexual couple. While few contributors to this literature personally subscribe to this view, most of the research asks whether lesbian parents subject their children to greater risks or harm than are confronted by children reared by heterosexual parents. Because anti-gay scholars seek evidence of harm, sympathetic researchers defensively stress its absence.

evidence of harm. Less obvious, however, are the ways in which heterosexism also hampers research and analysis among those who explicitly support lesbian/gay parenthood. With rare exceptions, even the most sympathetic proceed from a highly defensive posture that accepts heterosexual parenting as the gold standard and investigates whether lesbian/gay parents and their children are inferior.

This sort of hierarchical model implies that differences indicate deficits (Baumrind 1995). Instead of investigating whether (and how) differences in adult sexual orientation might lead to meaningful differences in how individuals parent and how their children develop, the predominant research designs place the burden of proof on lesbian/gay parents to demonstrate that they are not less successful or less worthy than heterosexual parents. Too often scholars seem to presume that this approach precludes acknowledging almost any differences in parenting or in child outcomes. A characteristic review of research on lesbian-mother families concludes:

[A] rapidly growing and highly consistent body of empirical work has failed to identify significant differences between lesbian mothers and their heterosexual counterparts or the children raised by these groups. Researchers have been unable to establish empirically that detriment results to children from being raised by lesbian mothers. (Falk 1994:151)

Given the weighty political implications of this body of research, it is easy to understand the social sources of such a defensive stance. As long as sexual orientation can deprive a gay parent of child custody, fertility services, and adoption rights, sensitive scholars are apt to tread gingerly around the terrain of differences. Unfortunately, however, this reticence compromises the development of knowledge not only in child development and psychology, but also within the sociology of sexuality, gender, and family more broadly. For if homophobic theories seem crude, too many psychologists who are sympathetic to lesbian/gay parenting seem hesitant to theorize at all. When researchers downplay the significance of any findings of differences, they forfeit a unique opportunity to take full advantage of the "natural laboratory" that the advent of

Wardle, like Blankenhorn, extrapolates (inappropriately) from research on single-mother families to portray children of lesbian mothers as more vulnerable to everything from delinquency, substance abuse, violence, and crime, to teen pregnancy, school dropout, suicide, and even poverty.<sup>2</sup> In short, the few scholars who are opposed to parenting by lesbian and gay men provide academic support for the convictions of many judges, journalists, politicians, and citizens that the sexual orientation of parents matters greatly to children, and that lesbian/gay parents represent a danger to their children and to society. Generally, these scholars offer only limited, and often implicit, theoretical explanations for the disadvantages of same-sex parenting—typically combining elements of bio-evolutionary theory with social and cognitive learning theories (e.g., Blankenhorn 1995). Cameron et al. (1996) crudely propose that homosexuality is a "learned pathology" that parents pass on to children through processes of modeling, seduction, and "contagion." The deeply rooted hetero-normative convictions about what constitutes healthy and moral gender identity, sexual orientation, and family composition held by contributors to this literature hinders their ability to conduct or interpret research with reality, nuance, or care.

Perhaps the most consequential impact that heterosexism exerts on the research on lesbian/gay parenting lies where it is least apparent—in the far more responsible literature that is largely sympathetic to its subject. It is easy to expose the ways in which the prejudicial views of those directly hostile to lesbian/gay parenting distort their research (Herek 1998). Moreover, because anti-gay scholars regard homosexuality itself as a form of pathology, they tautologically interpret any evidence that children may be more likely to engage in homoerotic behavior as

THE CASE FOR LESBIAN AND GAY PARENTHOOD

likely to engage in homoerotic behavior as

<sup>2</sup> The extrapolation is "inappropriate" because lesbian/gay-parent families have never been a comparison group in the family structure literature on which these authors rely (cf. Downey and Powell 1993; McLanahan 1985).

the chair of the Arkansas Child Welfare Agency Review Board repeatedly cited testimony by Cameron's group in her testimony at policy hearings, which, incidentally, led to restricting foster child placements to heterosexual parents (Woodruff 1998).

Likewise, Wardle (1997) draws explicitly on Cameron's work to build his case against gay parent rights. Research demonstrates, Wardle maintains, that gay parents subject children to disproportionate risks; that children of gay parents are more apt to suffer confusion over their gender and sexual identities and are more likely to become homosexuals themselves; that homosexual parents are more sexually promiscuous than are heterosexual parents and are more likely to molest their own children; that children are at greater risk of losing a homosexual parent to AIDS, substance abuse, or suicide, and to suffer greater risks of depression and other emotional difficulties; that homosexual couples are more unstable and likely to separate; and that the social stigma and embarrassment of having a homosexual parent unfairly ostracizes children and hinders their relationships with peers. Judges have cited Wardle's article to justify transferring child custody from lesbian to heterosexual parents.<sup>1</sup>

Wardle (1997), like other opponents of homosexual parenthood, also relies on a controversial literature that decries the putative risks of "fatherlessness" in general. Thus, Wardle cites books by Popenoe (1993, 1996), Blankenhorn (1995), and Whitehead (1993) when he argues:

[C]hildren generally develop best, and develop most completely, when raised by both a mother and a father and experience regular family interaction with both genders' parenting skills during their years of childhood. It is now undeniable that, just as a mother's influence is crucial to the secure, healthy, and full development of a child, [a] paternal presence in the life of a child is essential to the child emotionally and physically. (P. 860)

<sup>1</sup> In *J.B.F. v. J.M.F.* (Ex parte J.M.F. 1970224, So. 2d 1190, 1988 Ala. LEXIS 161 [1998]), for example, Alabama's Supreme Court quoted Wardle's (1997) essay to justify transferring custody of a child from her lesbian mother to her heterosexual father.

We take stock of this body of psychological research from a sociological perspective. We analyze the impact that this hetero-normative presumption exerts on predominant research strategies, analyses, and representations of findings. After assessing the basic premises and arguments in the debate, we discuss how the social fact of heterosexism has operated to constrain the research populations, concepts, and designs employed in the studies to date.

We wish to acknowledge that the political stakes of this body of research are so high that the ideological "family values" of scholars play a greater part than usual in how they design, conduct, and interpret their studies. Of course, we recognize that this is equally true for those who criticize such studies (including Wardle [1997], Lerner and Nagai [2000], and ourselves). The inescapably ideological and emotional nature of this subject makes it incumbent on scholars to acknowledge the personal convictions they bring to the discussion. Because we personally oppose discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender, we subject research claims by those sympathetic to our stance to a heightened degree of critical scrutiny and afford the fullest possible consideration to work by scholars opposed to parenting by lesbians and gay men.

THE CASE AGAINST LESBIAN AND GAY PARENTHOOD

Wardle (1997) is correct that contemporary scholarship on the effects of parental sexual orientation on children's development is rarely critical of lesbian/gay parenthood. Few respectable scholars today oppose such parenting. However, a few psychologists subscribe to the view that homosexuality represents either a sin or a mental illness and continue to publish alarmist works on the putative ill effects of gay parenting (e.g., Cameron and Cameron 1996; Cameron, Cameron, and Landess 1996). Even though the American Psychological Association expelled Paul Cameron, and the American Sociological Association denounced him for willfully misrepresenting research (Cantor 1994; Herek 1998, 2000), his publications continue to be cited in amicus briefs, court decisions, and policy hearings. For example,

lesbian-parent families provides for exploring the effects and acquisition of gender and sexual identity, ideology, and behavior.

This reticence is most evident in analyses of sexual behavior and identity—the most politically sensitive issue in the debate. Virtually all of the published research claims to find no differences in the sexuality of children reared by lesbian parents and those raised by nongay parents—but none of the studies that report this finding attempts to theorize about such an implausible outcome.

Yet it is difficult to conceive of a credible theory of sexual development that would not expect the adult children of lesbian parents to display a somewhat higher incidence of homosexual desire, behavior, and identity than children of heterosexual parents. For example, biological determinist theory should predict at least some difference in inherited predisposition to same-sex desire; a social constructionist theory would expect lesbian parents to provide an environment in which children would feel free to explore and affirm such desires; psychoanalytic theory might hypothesize that the absence of a male parent would weaken a daughter's need to relinquish her pre-ovipal desire for her mother or that the absence of a female parent would foster a son's pre-ovipal love for his father that no fear of castration or oedipal crisis would interrupt. Moreover, because parents determine where their children reside, even one who subscribed to J. Harris's (1998) maverick theory—that parents are virtually powerless when compared with peers to influence their children's development—should anticipate that lesbian parents would probably rear their children among less homophobic peers.

Bem's (1996) "exotic becomes erotic" theory of sexual orientation argues that in a gender-polarized society, children eroticize the gender of peers whose interests and temperaments differ most from their own. Most children thereby become heterosexual, but boys attracted to "feminine" activities and girls who are "tomboys" are apt to develop homoerotic desires. The impact of parental genes and child-rearing practices remains implicit because parents contribute genetically to the temperamental factors Bem identifies as precursors to a child's native activity preferences, and parental attitudes toward

gender polarization should affect the way those innate preferences translate into children's cognition and play. In fact, the only "theory" of child development we can imagine in which a child's sexual development would bear no relationship to parental genes, practices, environment, or beliefs would be an arbitrary one.<sup>3</sup> Yet this is precisely the outcome that most scholars report, although the limited empirical record does not justify it.

Over the past decade, prominent psychologists in the field began to call for less defensive research on lesbian and gay family issues (G. Green and Bozett 1991; Kitzinger and Coyle 1995; Patterson 1992). Rethinking the "no differences" doctrine, some scholars urge social scientists to look for potentially beneficial effects children might derive from such distinctive aspects of lesbian parenting as the more egalitarian relationships these parents appear to practice (Patterson 1995; also see Dunne 2000). More radically, a few scholars (Kitzinger 1987, 1989; Kitzinger and Coyle 1995) propose abandoning comparative research on lesbian and heterosexual parenting altogether and supplanting it with research that asks "why and how are lesbian parents oppressed and how can we change that?" (Clarke 2000:28, paraphrasing Kitzinger 1994:501). While we perceive potential advantages from these agendas, we advocate an alternative strategy that moves beyond hetero-normativity without forfeiting the fruitful potential of comparative research. Although we agree with Kitzinger and Coyle (1995) and Clarke (2000) that the social obstacles to lesbian (and gay) parenthood deserve rigorous attention, we believe that this should supplement, not supplant, the rich opportunity planned

<sup>3</sup> In March 2000, Norwegian sociologist Oystein Holter (personal communication) described Helmut Stierlin's "delegation" theory (published in German)—that children take over their parents' unconscious wishes. Holter suggests this theory could predict that a child who grows up with gay parents under homophobic conditions might develop "contrary responses." We are unfamiliar with this theory but find it likely that under such conditions unconscious wishes of heterosexual and nonheterosexual parents could foster some different "contrary responses."

lesbian parenthood provides for the exploration of the interactions of gender, sexual orientation, and biosocial family structures on parenting and child development. Moreover, while we welcome research attuned to potential strengths as well as vulnerabilities of lesbian parenting, we believe that knowledge and policy will be best served when scholars feel free to replace a hierarchical model, which assigns "grades" to parents and children according to their sexual identities, with a more genuinely pluralist approach to family diversity. Sometimes, to bowdlerize Freud's famous dictum, a difference *really is* just a difference!

**PROBLEMS WITH CONCEPTS, CATEGORIES, AND SAMPLES**

The social effects of heterosexism constrain the character of research conducted on lesbian parenting in ways more profound than those deriving from the ideological stakes of researchers. First, as most researchers recognize, because so many individuals legitimately fear the social consequences of adopting a gay identity, and because few national surveys have included questions about sexual orientation, it is impossible to gather reliable data on such basic demographic questions as how many lesbians and gay men there are in the general population, how many have children, or how many children reside (or have substantial contact) with lesbian or gay parents. Curiously, those who are hostile to gay parenting tend to minimize the incidence of same-sex orientation, while sympathetic scholars typically report improbably high numerical estimates. Both camps thus implicitly presume that the rarer the incidence, the less legitimate would be lesbian claims to rights. One could imagine an alternative political logic, however, in which a low figure might undermine grounds for viewing lesbian parenting as a meaningful social threat. Nonetheless, political anxieties have complicated the difficulty of answering basic demographic questions.

Since 1984, most researchers have statiscally reproduced numbers of uncertain origin, depicting a range of from 1 to 5 million lesbian mothers, from 1 to 3 million gay fathers, and from 6 to 14 million children of

gay or lesbian parents in the United States (e.g., Patterson 1992, 1996).<sup>4</sup> More recent estimates by Patterson and Freil (2000) extrapolate from distributions observed in the National Health and Social Life Survey (Laumann et al. 1995). Depending upon the definition of parental sexual orientation employed, Patterson and Freil suggest a current lower limit of 800,000 lesbian parents ages 18 to 59 with 1.6 million children and an upper limit of 7 million lesbian parents with 14 million children. However, these estimates include many "children" who are actually adults. To estimate the number who are dependent children (age 18 or younger), we multiplied the child-counts by .66, which is the proportion of dependent children among all offspring of 18- to 59-year-old parents in the representative National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet and Bumpass 1996).<sup>5</sup> This adjustment reduces the estimates of current dependent children with lesbian parents to a range of 1 to 9 million, which implies that somewhere between 1 percent and 12 percent of all (78 million) children ages 19 and under in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 1999) have a lesbian parent. The 12-percent fig-

<sup>4</sup> These estimates derive from an extrapolation of Kinsey data claiming a roughly 10 percent prevalence of homosexuality in the adult male population. Interestingly, Michael et al.'s (1994) revisiting of Kinsey (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard 1953) suggests that Kinsey himself emphasized that different measures of sexual orientation yield different estimates of individuals with same-sex sexual orientations in the population. Had scholars read Kinsey differently, they might have selected his figure of 4 percent of the men in his sample who practiced exclusive homosexual behavior from adolescence onward, rather than the widely embraced 10 percent figure. In fact, the 10 percent number is fundamentally flawed: Kinsey found that of the 37 percent of the white men in his sample who had at least one sexual experience with another man in their lifetime, only 10 percent of them (i.e., 3.7 percent of the entire white male sample) had exclusively same-sex sexual experiences for any three-year period between ages 16 and 55.

<sup>5</sup> This assumes that the ratio of number of dependent children to total offspring among current lesbian parents will be roughly the same as that for all parents and children.

ure depends upon classifying as a lesbian/gay parent anyone who reports that even the idea of homosexual sex is appealing, while the low (1 percent) figure derives from the narrower, and in our view more politically salient, definition of a lesbian/gay parent as one who self-identifies as such (also see Badgett 1998; Black, Maker, et al. 1998).

Across the ideological spectrum, scholars, journalists and activists appear to presume that the normalization of lesbian/gay sexuality should steadily increase the ranks of children with lesbian and gay parents. In contrast, we believe that normalization is more likely to reduce the proportion of such children. Most contemporary lesbian and gay parents procreated within heterosexual marriages that many had entered hoping to escape the social and emotional consequences of homophobia. As homosexuality becomes more legitimate, far fewer people with homosexual desires should feel compelled to enter heterosexual marriages, and thus fewer should become parents in this manner.

On the other hand, with normalization, intentional parenting by self-identified lesbians and gay men should continue to increase, but it is unlikely to do so sufficiently to compensate for the decline in the current ranks of formerly married lesbian and gay parents. Thus, the proportion of lesbian parents may not change much. Many women with homosexual desires who once might have married men and succumbed to social pressures to parent will no longer do so; others who remained single and childless because of their homosexual desires will feel freer to choose lesbian maternity. It is difficult to predict the net effect of these contradictory trends. However, as fewer closeted gay men participate in heterosexual marriages, the ranks of gay fathers should thin. Even if gay men were as eager as lesbians are to become parents, biology alone sharply constrains their ability to do so. Moreover, there is evidence that fewer men of any sexual orientation actually desire children as strongly as do comparable women (cf. Groze 1991; Shireman 1996), and most demographic studies of sexual orientation find a higher incidence of homosexuality among men than women (Kinsey et al. 1948; Kinsey et al. 1953; Laumann et al. 1994; Michael et al. 1994). Thus, although the ranks of inten-

parent decided to identify as lesbian or gay. Because many more formerly married lesbian mothers than gay fathers retain custody of their children, most research is actually on post-divorce lesbian motherhood. A few studies compare heterosexual and gay fathers after divorce (Bigner and Jacobsen 1989, 1992). If fewer self-identified lesbians and gay men will become parents through heterosexual marriages, the published research on this form of gay parenthood will become less relevant to issues in scholarly and public debates.

Fourth, because researchers lack reliable data on the number and location of lesbian parents with children in the general population, there are no studies of child development based on random, representative samples of such families. Most studies rely on small-scale, snowball and convenience samples drawn primarily from personal and community networks or agencies. Most research to date has been conducted on white lesbian mothers who are comparatively educated, mature, and reside in relatively progressive urban centers, most often in California or the Northeastern states.<sup>6</sup>

Although scholars often acknowledge some of these difficulties (Bozett 1989; Patterson and Friel 2000; Rothblum 1994), few studies explicitly grapple with these definitional questions. Most studies simply rely on a parent's sexual self-identity at the time of the study, which contributes unwittingly to the racial, ethnic, and class imbalance of the populations studied. Ethnographic studies suggest that "lesbian," "gay," and "bisexual" identity among socially subordinate and nonurban populations is generally less visible or less affirmed than it is among more privileged white, educated, and urban populations (Boykin 1996; Cantu 2000; Carrier 1992; Greene and Boyd-

<sup>6</sup> The field is now in a position to take advantage of new data sources. For example, the 1990 U.S. census allows (albeit imperfectly) for the first time the identification of gay and lesbian couples, as will the 2000 census (Black, Gates, et al. 2000). From 1989 to the present, the U.S. General Social Surveys (<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/GSS/index.html>) have also allowed for the identification of the sexual orientation of respondents, as does the National Health and Social Life Survey (Laumann et al. 1995).

Franklin 1996; Hawkeswood 1997; Lynch 1992; Peterson 1992).

Increasingly, uncloseted lesbians and gay men actively choose to become parents through diverse and innovative means (Benkov 1994). In addition to adoption and foster care, lesbians are choosing motherhood using known and unknown sperm donors (as single mothers, in intentional co-mother couples, and in complex variations of biosocial parenting). Both members of a lesbian couple may choose to become pregnant sequentially or simultaneously. Pioneering lesbian couples have exchanged ova to enable both women to claim biological, and thereby legal, maternal status to the same infant (Bourne 1999). It is much more difficult (and costly) for gay men to choose to become fathers, particularly fathers of infants. Some (who reside in states that permit this) become adoptive or foster parents; others serve as sperm donors in joint parenting arrangements with lesbian or other mothers. An affluent minority hire women as "surrogates" to bear children for them.

The means and contexts for planned parenting are so diverse and complex that they compound the difficulties of isolating the significance of parental sexual orientation. To even approximate this goal, researchers would need to control not only for the gender, number, and sexual orientation of parents, but for their diverse biosocial and legal statuses. The handful of studies that have attempted to do this focus on lesbian motherhood. The most rigorous research designs compare donor-insemination (DI) parenthood among lesbian and heterosexual couples or single mothers (e.g., Chan, Brooks, et al. 1998; Flaks et al. 1995). To our knowledge, no studies have been conducted exclusively on lesbian or gay adoptive parents or compare the children of intentional gay fathers with children in other family forms. Researchers do not know the extent to which the comparatively high socioeconomic status of the DI parents studied accurately reflects the demographics of lesbian and gay parenthood generally, but given the degree of effort, cultural and legal support, and, frequently, the expense involved, members of relatively privileged social groups would be the ones most able to make use of reproductive technology and/or independent adoption.

In short, the indirect effects of heterosexism have placed inordinate constraints on most research on the effects of gay parenthood. We believe, however, that the time may now be propitious to begin to reformulate the basic terms of the enterprise.

### RECONSIDERING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL FINDINGS

Toward this end, we examined the findings of 21 psychological studies (listed at the bottom of Table 1) published between 1981 and 1998 that we considered best equipped to address sociological questions about how parental sexual orientation matters to children. One meta-analysis of 18 such studies (11 of which are included among our 21) characteristically concludes that "the results demonstrate no differences on any measures between the heterosexual and homosexual parents regarding parenting styles, emotional adjustment, and sexual orientation of the children" (Allen and Burrell 1996:19). To evaluate this claim, we selected for examination only studies that: (1) include a sample of gay or lesbian parents and children and a comparison group of heterosexual parents and children; (2) assess differences between groups in terms of statistical significance; and (3) include findings directly relevant to children's development. The studies we discuss compare relatively advantaged lesbian parents (18 studies) and gay male parents (3 studies) with a roughly matched sample of heterosexual parents. Echoing the conclusion of meta-analysts Allen and Burrell (1996), the authors of all 21 studies almost uniformly claim to find no differences in measures of parenting or child outcomes. In contrast, our careful scrutiny of the findings they report suggests that on some dimensions—particularly those related to gender and sexuality—the sexual orientations of these parents matter somewhat more for their children than the researchers claimed.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> We chose to display the specific findings in each of the quantitative studies, rather than to conduct a meta-analysis, because at this stage of knowledge not enough studies are targeted to the same general "outcome" to enable a meta-analysis to reveal systematic patterns. The single meta-

effects of other factors, distinctive strengths of each study counterbalance this limitation. R. Green et al. (1986) rigorously attempt to match lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers on a variety of characteristics, and they compare the two groups of mothers as well as both groups of children on a wide variety of dimensions.<sup>3</sup> Tasker and Golombok (1997) offer a unique long-term, longitudinal design. Their data collection began in 1976 on 27 heterosexual single mothers and 39 of their children (average age 10) and 27 lesbian mothers and 39 of their children (also average age 10) in England. Follow-up interviews with 46 of the original children were conducted 14 years later, allowing for a rare glimpse at how children with lesbian mothers and those with heterosexual mothers fared over their early life courses into young adulthood.

### CHILDREN'S GENDER PREFERENCES AND BEHAVIOR

The first panel of Table 1 displays findings about the relationship between the sexual orientation of parents and the gender preferences and behaviors of their children. The findings demonstrate that, as we would expect, on some measures meaningful differences have been observed in predictable directions. For example, lesbian mothers in R. Green et al. (1986) reported that their children, especially daughters, more frequently dress, play, and behave in ways that do not conform to sex-typed cultural norms. Likewise, daughters of lesbian mothers reported greater interest in activities associated with both "masculine" and "feminine" qualities and that involve the participation of both sexes, whereas daughters of heterosexual mothers report significantly greater interest in traditionally feminine, same-sex activities

<sup>8</sup> Belcastro et al. (1993) point out that R. Green et al. (1986) did not successfully match heterosexual and lesbian single-mother families on the dimension of household composition. While 39 of R. Green et al.'s 50 lesbian single-mother households had a second adult residing in them by one-plus years post-divorce, only 4 of the 40 heterosexual single mothers did so. R. Green et al. (1986) note this difference, but do not discuss its implications for findings; nor do Belcastro et al. (1993).

(also see Hotvedt and Mandel 1982). Similarly, daughters with lesbian mothers reported higher aspirations to nontraditional gender occupations (Steckel 1987). For example, in R. Green et al. (1986), 53 percent (16 out of 30) of the daughters of lesbians aspired to careers such as doctor, lawyer, engineer, and astronaut, compared with only 21 percent (6 of 28) of the daughters of heterosexual mothers.

Sons appear to respond in more complex ways to parental sexual orientations. On some measures, like aggressiveness and play preferences, the sons of lesbian mothers behave in less traditionally masculine ways than those raised by heterosexual single mothers. However, on other measures, such as occupational goals and sartorial styles, they also exhibit greater gender conformity than do daughters with lesbian mothers (but they are not more conforming than sons with heterosexual mothers) (R. Green et al. 1986; Steckel 1987).<sup>9</sup> Such evidence, albeit limited, implies that lesbian parenting may free daughters and sons from a broad but uneven range of traditional gen-

<sup>9</sup> Many of these studies use conventional levels of significance (e.g.,  $|t| > 1.96$ ,  $p < .05$ , two-tailed tests) on minuscule samples, substantially increasing their likelihood of failing to reject the null hypothesis. For example, Hoeffler's (1981) descriptive numbers suggest a greater preference for masculine toys among boys with heterosexual mothers than those with lesbian mothers, but sampling only 10 boys in each group makes reaching statistical significance exceedingly difficult. Golombok, Spencer, and Rutter's (1983, table 8) evidence of a greater average tendency toward "femininity" among daughters raised by heterosexual mothers than those raised by lesbian single mothers does not reach statistical significance in part because their tabular crosscutting leads to very small cell counts (to meet conventional criteria the differences between groups would have to be huge in such cases). Single difference-tests that maximize cell counts (e.g., the percentage of children—male or female—in each group who report gender-role behavior that goes against type) might well yield significant results. Recent research on model selection shows that to find the best model in large samples, conventional levels of significance need to be substantially tightened, but that for very small samples conventional levels can actually be too restrictive (Raftery 1995).



Table 1. Findings on the Associations between Parents' Sexual Orientations and Selected Child Outcomes: 21 Studies, 1981 to 1998

Variable Measured	Direction of Effect
<i>Gender Behavior/Preferences</i>	
Girls' departure from traditional gender role expectations and behaviors—in dress, play, physicality, school activities, occupational aspirations (Hoeffler 1981; Golombok et al. 1983; R. Green et al. 1986; Steckel 1987; Hotvedt and Mandel 1982).	0/+
Boys' departure from traditional gender role expectations and behaviors—in dress, play, physicality, school activities, occupational aspirations (Hoeffler 1981; Golombok et al. 1983; R. Green et al. 1986; Steckel 1987; Hotvedt and Mandel 1982).	0/+
Boys' level of aggressiveness and domineering disposition (Steckel 1987).	-
Child wishes she/he were the other sex (Green et al. 1986).	0
<i>Sexual Behavior/Sexual Preferences</i>	
Young adult child has considered same-sex sexual relationship(s); has had same-sex sexual relationship(s) (Tasker and Golombok 1997).	+
Young adult child firmly self-identifies as bisexual, gay, or lesbian (Tasker and Golombok 1997).	0
Boys' likelihood of having a gay sexual orientation in adulthood, by sexual orientation of father (Bailey et al. 1995).	(+)
Girls' number of sexual partners from puberty to young adulthood (Tasker and Golombok 1997).	+
Boys' number of sexual partners from puberty to young adulthood (Tasker and Golombok 1997).	(-)
Quality of intimate relationships in young adulthood (Tasker and Golombok 1997).	0
Have friend(s) who are gay or lesbian (Tasker and Golombok 1997).	+
<i>Self-Esteem and Psychological Well-Being</i>	
Children's self-esteem, anxiety, depression, internalizing behavioral problems, externalizing behavioral problems, total behavioral problems, performance in social arenas (sports, friendships, school), use of psychological counseling, mothers' and teachers' reports of children's hyperactivity, unsociability, emotional difficulty, conduct difficulty, other behavioral problems (Golombok, Spencer, and Rutter 1983; Huggins 1989; Patterson 1994; Flaks et al. 1995; Tasker and Golombok 1997; Chan, Raboy, and Patterson 1998; Chan, Brooks, et al. 1998).	0
Daughters' self-reported level of popularity at school and in the neighborhood (Hotvedt and Mandel 1982).	+
Mothers' and teachers' reports of child's level of affection, responsiveness, and concern for younger children (Steckel 1987).	+
Experience of peer stigma concerning own sexuality (Tasker and Golombok 1997).	+
Cognitive functioning (IQ, verbal, performance, and so on) (Flaks et al. 1995; R. Green et al. 1986).	0
Experienced problems gaining employment in young adulthood (Tasker and Golombok 1997).	0

Sources: The 21 studies considered in Tables 1 and 2 are, in date order: Hoeffler (1981); Kweskin and Cook (1982); Miller, Jacobsen, and Bigner (1982); Rand, Graham, and Rawlings (1982); Golombok, Spencer, and Rutter (1983); R. Green et al. (1986); M. Harris and Turner (1986); Bigner and Jacobsen (1989); Hotvedt and Mandel (1982); Huggins (1989); Steckel (1987); Bigner and Jacobsen (1992); Jenny, Roessler, and Poyer (1994); Patterson (1994); Bailey et al. (1995); Flaks et al. (1995); Brewaeys et al. (1997); Tasker and Golombok (1997); Chan, Raboy, and Patterson (1998); Chan, Brooks, et al. (1998); and McNeill, Rienzi, and Kposowa (1998).

+ = significantly higher in lesbian than in heterosexual parent context.  
 0 = no significant difference between lesbian and heterosexual parent context.  
 - = significantly lower in lesbian than heterosexual parent context.  
 ( ) = borders on statistical significance.  
 0/+ = evidence is mixed.

der prescriptions. It also suggests that the sexual orientation of mothers interacts with the gender of children in complex ways to influence gender preferences and behavior. Such findings raise provocative questions about how children assimilate gender culture and interests—questions that the propensity to downplay differences deters scholars from exploring.<sup>10</sup>

Consider, for example, the study by R. Green et al. (1986) that, by our count, finds at least 15 intriguing, statistically significant differences in gender behavior and preferences among children (4 among boys and 11 among girls) in lesbian and heterosexual single-mother homes. Yet the study's abstract summarizes: "Two types of single-parent households [lesbian and heterosexual mothers] and their effects on children ages 3–11 years were compared. . . . No significant differences were found between the two types of households for boys and few significant differences for girls" (p. 167).<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, we note an arresting continuum of data reported, but ignored, by Brewaeys et al. (1997, table 4). Young boys (ages 4 to 8) conceived through DI in lesbian co-mother families scored the lowest on a measure of sex-typed masculine behaviors (the PSAI-preschool activities inventory, rated by parents). DI boys in heterosexual two-parent families were somewhat more sex-typed, while "naturally" conceived boys in heterosexual two-parent families received the highest sex-typed masculine scores. By

<sup>10</sup> Much qualitative work, particularly by lesbian feminist scholars, has been exploring these issues. For example Wells (1997) argues that, unlike what she refers to as "patriarchal families," lesbian co-mother families rear sons to experience rather than repress emotions and instill in daughters a sense of their potential rather than of limits imposed by gender. From a quantitative perspective, this is a "testable" hypothesis that has sizable theoretical implications but which researchers in the field do not seem to be pursuing.

<sup>11</sup> The R. Green et al. (1986) research was conducted in a context in which custody cases often claimed that lesbian motherhood would create gender identity disorder in children and that lesbian mothers themselves were unfit. It is understandable that their summary reassures readers that the findings point to more similarities than differences in both the mothers and their children.

our calculation, the difference in the magnitude of scores between DI boys with lesbian co-mothers and conventionally conceived sons with heterosexual parents is sufficient to reach statistical significance, even though the matched groups contained only 15 and 11 boys, respectively. Rather than exploring the implications of these provocative data, the authors conclude: "No significant difference was found between groups for the mean PSAI scores for either boys or girls" (Brewaeys et al. 1997:1356).

**CHILDREN'S SEXUAL PREFERENCES AND BEHAVIOR**

The second panel of Table 1 shifts the focus from children's gender behavior and preferences to their sexual behavior and preferences, with particular attention to thought-provoking findings from the Tasker and Golombok (1997) study, the only comparative study we know of that follows children raised in lesbian-headed families into young adulthood and hence that can explore the children's sexuality in meaningful ways. A significantly greater proportion of young adult children raised by lesbian mothers than those raised by heterosexual mothers in the Tasker and Golombok sample reported having had a homoerotic relationship (6 of the 25 young adults raised by lesbian mothers—24 percent—compared with 0 of the 20 raised by heterosexual mothers). The young adults reared by lesbian mothers were also significantly more likely to report having thought they might experience homoerotic attraction or relationships. The difference in their openness to this possibility is striking: 64 percent (14 of 22) of the young adults raised by lesbian mothers report having considered same-sex relationships (in the past, now, or in the future), compared with only 17 percent (3 of 18) of those raised by heterosexual mothers. Of course, the fact that 17 percent of those raised by heterosexual mothers also report some openness to same-sex relationships, while 36 percent of those raised by lesbians do not, underscores the important reality that parental influence on children's sexual desires is neither direct nor easily predictable.

If these young adults raised by lesbian mothers were more open to a broad range of

sexual possibilities, they were not statistically more likely to self-identify as bisexual, lesbian, or gay. To be coded as such, the respondent not only had to currently self-identify as bisexual/lesbian/gay, but also to express a commitment to that identity in the future. Tasker and Golombok (1997) employ a measure of sexual identity with no "in-between" categories for those whose identity may not yet be fully fixed or embraced. Thus, although a more nuanced measure or a longer period of observation could yield different results, Golombok and Tasker (1996) choose to situate their findings within the "overall no difference" interpretation:

The commonly held assumption that children brought up by lesbian mothers will themselves grow up to be lesbian or gay is not supported by the findings of the study: the majority of children who grew up in lesbian families identified as heterosexual in adulthood, and there was no statistically significant difference between young adults from lesbian and heterosexual family backgrounds with respect to sexual orientation. (P. 8)

This reading, while technically accurate, deflects analytic attention from the rather sizable differences in sexual attitudes and behaviors that the study actually reports. The only other comparative study we found that explores intergenerational resemblance in sexual orientation is Bailey et al. (1995) on gay fathers and their adult sons. This study also provides evidence of a moderate degree of parent-to-child transmission of sexual orientation.

Tasker and Golombok (1997) also report some fascinating findings on the number of sexual partners children report having had between puberty and young adulthood. Relative to their counterparts with heterosexual parents, the adolescent and young adult girls raised by lesbian mothers appear to have been more sexually adventurous and less chaste, whereas the sons of lesbians evince the opposite pattern—somehow less sexually adventurous and more chaste (the finding was statistically significant for the 25-girl sample but not for the 18-boy sample). In other words, once again, children (especially girls) raised by lesbians appear to depart from traditional gender-based norms,

while children raised by heterosexual mothers appear to conform to them. Yet this provocative finding of differences in sexual behavior and agency has not been analyzed or investigated further.

Both the findings and nonfindings discussed above may be influenced by the measures of sexual orientation employed. All of the studies measure sexual orientation as a dichotomy rather than as a continuum. We have no data on children whose parents do not identify their sexuality neatly as one of two dichotomous choices, and we can only speculate about how a more nuanced conceptualization might alter the findings reported. Having parents less committed to a specific sexual identity may free children to construct sexualities altogether different from those of their parents, or it may give whatever biological predispositions exist freer reign to determine eventual sexual orientations, or parents with greater ambiguity or fluidity of sexual orientation might transmit some of this to their children, leading to greater odds of sexual flexibility.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Given historic social prejudices against homosexuality, the major issue deliberated by judges and policy makers has been whether children of lesbian and gay parents suffer higher levels of emotional and psychological harm. Unsurprisingly, therefore, children's "self-esteem and psychological well-being" is a heavily researched domain.

The third panel of Table 1 shows that these studies find no significant differences between children of lesbian mothers and children of heterosexual mothers in anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and numerous other measures of social and psychological adjustment. The roughly equivalent level of psychological well-being between the two groups holds true in studies that test children directly, rely on parents' reports, and solicit evaluations from teachers. The few significant differences found actually tend to favor children with lesbian mothers (see Table 1).<sup>12</sup> Given some credible evidence

<sup>12</sup>Patterson (1994) found that children ages 4 to 9 with lesbian mothers expressed more stress

that children with gay and lesbian parents, especially adolescent children, face homophobic teasing and ridicule that many find difficult to manage (Tasker and Golombok 1997; also see Bozett 1989:148; Mitchell 1998), the children in these studies seem to exhibit impressive psychological strength.

Similarly, across studies, no relationship has been found between parental sexual orientation and measures of children's cognitive ability. Moreover, to our knowledge no theories predict such a link. Thus far, no work has compared children's long-term achievements in education, occupation, income, and other domains of life.<sup>13</sup>

Links between parental sexual orientation, parenting practices, and parent/child relationships may indicate processes underlying some of the links between parents' sexual orientation and the child outcomes in Table 1. Table 2 presents empirical findings about the parents themselves and the quality of parent-child relationships.

PARENTAL BEHAVIOR TOWARD CHILDREN'S GENDER AND SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

The scattered pieces of evidence cited above imply that lesbian parenting may be associated with a broadening of children's gender and sexual repertoires. Is this because lesbian parents actively attempt to achieve these outcomes in their children? Data in the first panel of Table 2 provide little evidence

than did those with heterosexual mothers, but at the same time they also reported a greater sense of overall well-being. Patterson speculates that children from lesbian-mother families may be more willing to express their feelings—positive and negative—but also that the children may actually experience more social stress at the same time that they gain confidence from their ability to cope with it.

The only empirical evidence reported is Tasker and Golombok's (1997) finding of no differences in unemployment rates among young adults that are associated with their parents' sexual orientations. However, some of the children studied were still in school, and the authors provide no information on occupations attained to assess differences in long-term occupational achievements.

that parents' own sexual orientations correlate strongly with their preferences concerning their children's gender or sexual orientations. For example, the lesbian mothers in Kweskin and Cook (1982) were no more likely than heterosexual mothers to assign masculine and feminine qualities to an "ideal" boy or girl, respectively, on the well-known Bem Sex Role Inventory. However, mothers did tend to desire gender-traits in children that resembled those they saw in themselves, and the lesbians saw themselves as less feminine-typed than did the heterosexual mothers. This suggests that a mother's own gender identity may mediate the connection between maternal sexual orientation and maternal gender preferences for her children.

Also, in some studies lesbian mothers were less concerned than heterosexual mothers that their children engage in gender "appropriate" activities and play, a plausible difference most researchers curiously downplay. For example, Hooffer's (1981) summary reads:

Children's play and activity interests as indices of sex-role behavior were compared for a sample of lesbian and heterosexual single mothers and their children. More striking than any differences were the similarities between the two groups of children on acquisition of sex-role behavior and between the two groups of mothers on the encouragement of sex-role behavior. (P. 536)

Yet from our perspective, the most interesting (and statistically significant) finding in Hooffer (1981, table 4) is one of difference. While the heterosexual single mothers in the sample were significantly more likely to prefer that their boys engage in masculine activities and their girls in feminine ones, lesbian mothers had no such interests. Their preferences for their children's play were gender-neutral.

Differences in parental concern with children's acquisition of gender and in parenting practices that do or do not emphasize conformity to sex-typed gender norms are understudied and underanalyzed. The sparse evidence to date based on self-reports does not suggest strong differences between lesbian and heterosexual parents in this domain.

(Table 2 continued from previous page)

Variable Measured	Direction of Effect
<i>Parent's Self-Esteem and Psychological Well-Being</i>	
Mother's level of depression, self-esteem (Rand et al. 1982; R. Green et al. 1986; Chan, Raboy and Patterson 1998; Golombok et al. 1983).	0/+
Mother's level of leadership, independence, achievement orientation (R. Green et al. 1986; Rand et al. 1982).	0/+
Mother's use of sedatives, stimulants, in- or out-patient psychiatric care in past year (Golombok et al. 1983).	0
Mother ever received psychiatric care in adult life? (Golombok et al. 1983).	+
Mother's level of self-reported stress associated with single-parenthood (R. Green et al. 1986).	0

Source: See Table 1.

- + = significantly higher in lesbigay than in heterosexual parent context.
- 0 = no significant difference between lesbigay and heterosexual parent context.
- = significantly lower in lesbigay than heterosexual parent context.
- ( ) = borders on statistical significance.
- 0/+ = evidence is mixed.

**PARENTING PRACTICES:  
DEVELOPMENTAL ORIENTATIONS  
AND PARENTING SKILLS**

The second panel of Table 2 displays findings about parenting skills and child-rearing practices—developmental orientations, parental control and support, parent/child communication, parental affection, time spent with children—that have been shown to be central for many aspects of children's development (introversion/extroversion, success in school, and so on) (Baumrind 1978, 1980). The many findings of differences here coalesce around two patterns. First, studies find the nonbiological lesbian co-mothers (referred to as lesbian "social mothers" in Brewaeys et al. [1997]) to be more skilled at parenting and more involved with the children than are stepfathers. Second, lesbian partners in the two-parent families studied enjoy a greater level of synchronicity in parenting than do heterosexual partners.

For example, the lesbian birth mothers and heterosexual birth mothers who conceived through DI studied by Flaks et al. (1995) and Brewaeys et al. (1997) scored about the same on all measures of parenting. However, the DI lesbian social mothers scored significantly higher than the DI heterosexual fathers on measures of parenting skills, practices, and quality of interactions with chil-

dren. DI lesbian social mothers also spent significantly more time than did DI heterosexual fathers in child-care activities including disciplinary, control, and limit-setting activities. In fact, in the Brewaeys et al. (1997) study, lesbian social mothers even scored significantly higher on these measures than did biological fathers in heterosexual couples who conceived conventionally. Similarly, in Chan, Raboy, and Patterson (1998), whereas the lesbian birth mothers and co-mother partners evaluated their children's emotional states and social behaviors in almost exactly the same way, heterosexual mothers and fathers evaluated their children differently: Fathers identified fewer problems in the children than did mothers (a similar pattern is observed in Chan, Brooks, et al. 1998, table 4).

These findings imply that lesbian co-parents may enjoy greater parental compatibility and achieve particularly high quality parenting skills, which may help explain the striking findings on parent/child relationships in the third panel of Table 2. DI lesbian social mothers report feeling closer to the children than do their heterosexual male counterparts. The children studied report feeling closer to DI lesbian social mothers as well as to lesbian stepmothers than to either DI fathers or stepfathers (measures of emotional closeness between birth mothers and children did not vary by mother's sexual ori-

Table 2. Findings on the Associations between Parents' Sexual Orientations, Other Attributes of Parents, and Parent-Child Relationships: 21 Studies, 1981 to 1998

Variable Measured	Direction of Effect
<i>Parental Behavior toward Children's Gender and Sexual Development</i>	
Mother prefers child engages in gender-appropriate play activities (Hoefler 1981; R. Green et al. 1986; M. Harris and Turner 1986).	0/-
Mother classifies the ideal child as masculine (if boy) and feminine (if girl) (Kweskin and Cook 1982).	0
Mother prefers that child be gay or lesbian when grown up (Golombok et al. 1983; Tasker and Golombok 1997).	0
Child believes that mother would prefer that she/he has lesbigay sexual orientation (Tasker and Golombok 1997).	+
<i>Parenting Practices: Developmental Orientations and Parenting Skills</i>	
Mother's developmental orientation in child rearing and parenting skill (Miller et al. 1982; McNeill et al. 1998; Flaks et al. 1995).	0/+
Spouse/partner's developmental orientation in child rearing and parenting skill (Flaks et al. 1995; Brewaeys et al. 1997).	+
Spouse/partner's desire for equal/shared distribution of childcare (Chan, Brooks, et al. 1998).	+
Degree to which mother and spouse/partner share child-care work (Brewaeys et al. 1997; Chan, Brooks, et al. 1998).	+
Similarity between mother's and spouse/partner's parenting skills (Flaks et al. 1995).	+
Similarity between mother's and spouse/partner's assessment of child's behavior and well-being (Chan, Raboy, and Patterson 1998; Chan, Brooks, et al. 1998).	+
Mother allowed adolescent child's boyfriend/girlfriend to spend the night (Tasker and Golombok 1997).	0
<i>Residential Parent/Child Relationships</i>	
Mother's rating of quality of relationship with child (Golombok et al. 1983; M. Harris and Turner 1986; Brewaeys et al. 1997; McNeill et al. 1998).	0
Mother's likelihood of having a live-in partner post-divorce (Kweskin and Cook 1982; R. Green et al. 1986).	+
Spouse/partner's rating of quality of relationship with child (Brewaeys et al. 1997).	+
Child's report of closeness with biological mother growing up (Tasker and Golombok 1997; Brewaeys et al. 1997).	0
Child's report of closeness with biological mother's partner/spouse growing up (Tasker and Golombok 1997; Brewaeys et al. 1997).	0/+
Child felt able to discuss own sexual development with parent(s) while growing up (Tasker and Golombok 1997).	+
<i>Nonresidential Parent/Child Relationships</i>	
(Non-custodial) father's level of involvement with children, limit setting, and developmental orientation in child rearing (Bigner and Jacobsen 1989, 1992).	0/+
Mother's encouragement of child's contact with nonresidential father (Horvdt and Mandel 1982).	0
Divorced mother's contact with children's father in the past year (Golombok et al. 1983).	+
Child's frequency of contact with nonresidential father (Golombok et al. 1983).	+
Child's positive feelings toward nonresidential father (Horvdt and Mandel 1982; Tasker and Golombok 1997).	0(+)

(Table 2 continued on next page)

entation). Children of lesbian mothers also report feeling more able than children of heterosexual parents to discuss their sexual development with their mothers and their mothers' partners (Tasker and Golombok 1997; also see Mitchell 1998:407). If lesbian social mothers and stepmothers have more parenting awareness and skill, on average, than heterosexual DI fathers or stepfathers, and if they spend more time taking care of children, they may be more likely to earn the children's affection and trust.

We believe (as do Brewaeys et al. 1997; Chan et al. 1998; Flaks et al. 1995) that the comparative strengths these lesbian co-parents seem to exhibit have more to do with gender than with sexual orientation. Female gender is probably the source of the positive signs for parenting skill, participation in child rearing, and synchronicity in child evaluations shown in the comparisons in Table 2. Research suggests that, on average, mothers tend to be more invested in and skilled at child care than fathers, and that mothers are more apt than fathers to engage in the kinds of child-care activities that appear to be particularly crucial to children's cognitive, emotional, and social development (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991; Simons and Associates 1996). Analogously, in these studies of matched lesbian and heterosexual couples, women in every category—heterosexual birth mother, lesbian birth mother, nonbiological lesbian social mother—all score about the same as one another but score significantly higher than the men on measures having to do with the care of children.<sup>14</sup>

In our view, these patterns reflect something more than a simple "gender effect," however, because sexual orientation is the key "exogenous variable" that brings together parents of same or different genders. Thus, sexual orientation and gender should be viewed as *interacting* to create new kinds of family structures and processes—such as an egalitarian division of child care—that have fascinating consequences for all of the relationships in the triad and for child devel-

<sup>14</sup> Chan, Brooks, et al. (1998:415) make interesting connections between these kinds of findings and the theoretical perspectives developed in Chodorow (1978) and Gilligan (1982).

opment (also see Dunne 1999, 2000; Patterson 1995). Some of the evidence suggests that two women co-parenting may create a synergistic pattern that brings more egalitarian, compatible, shared parenting and time spent with children, greater understanding of children, and closeness and communication between parents and children. The genesis of this pattern cannot be understood on the basis of either sexual orientation or gender alone. Such findings raise fruitful comparative questions for future research about family dynamics among two parents of the same or different gender who do or do not share similar attitudes, values, and behaviors.

We know little thus far about how the sexual orientation of nonresidential fathers may be related to their relationships with their children (the fourth panel of Table 2) (and even less about that for custodial fathers). The Bigner and Jacobsen studies (1989, 1992) find similarity in parenting and in father/child relations among heterosexual nonresidential fathers and gay nonresidential fathers. Bozett (1987a, 1987b, 1989) found that in a small sample of children with gay fathers, most children had very positive feelings toward their fathers, but they also worried that peers and others might presume that they, too, had a gay sexual orientation (Bozett did not include a control group of children with heterosexual fathers).

**PARENTAL FITNESS**

The bottom panel of Table 2 demonstrates that evidence to date provides no support for those, like Wardle (1997), who claim that lesbian mothers suffer greater levels of psychological difficulties (depression, low self-esteem) than do heterosexual mothers. On the contrary, the few differences observed in the studies suggest that these lesbian mothers actually display somewhat higher levels of positive psychological resources.

Research on a more diverse population, however, might alter the findings of difference and similarity shown in Table 2. For example, the ethnographic evidence suggests that people of color with homophobic practices often value racial solidarity over sexual solidarity. Boykin, Director of the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum,

cites a 1994 University of Chicago study which found that among people who engage in homophobic activity, whites, urbanites, and those with higher education were more likely to consider themselves gay or lesbian (Boykin 1996:36). If, as it appears, racial/ethnic solidarities deter disproportionate numbers of people of color from coming out, they might suffer greater psychological and social costs from living in the closet or, conversely, might benefit from less concern over their sexual identities than do white gay parents. We also do not know whether lesbian couples of different racial/ethnic and social class contexts would display the same patterns of egalitarian, compatible co-parenting reported among the white lesbian couples.

**NO DIFFERENCES OF SOCIAL CONCERN**

The findings summarized in Tables 1 and 2 show that the "no differences" claim does receive strong empirical support in crucial domains. Lesbian parents and their children in these studies display no differences from heterosexual counterparts in psychological well-being or cognitive functioning. Scores for lesbian parenting styles and levels of investment in children are at least as "high" as those for heterosexual parents. Levels of closeness and quality of parent/child relationships do not seem to differentiate directly by parental sexual orientation, but indirectly, by way of parental gender. Because every relevant study to date shows that parental sexual orientation per se has no measurable effect on the quality of parent-child relationships or on children's mental health or social adjustment, there is no evidentiary basis for considering parental sexual orientation in decisions about children's "best interest." In fact, given that children with lesbian parents probably contend with a degree of social stigma, these similarities in child outcomes suggest the presence of compensatory processes in lesbian-parent families. Exploring how these families help children cope with stigma might prove helpful to all kinds of families.

Most of the research to date focuses on social-psychological dimensions of well-being and adjustment and on the quality of parent/child relationships. Perhaps these vari-

ables reflect the disciplinary preferences of psychologists who have conducted most of the studies, as well as a desire to produce evidence directly relevant to the questions of "harm" that dominate judicial and legislative deliberations over child custody. Less research has explored questions for which there are stronger theoretical grounds for expecting differences—children's gender and sexual behavior and preferences. In fact, only two studies (R. Green et al. 1986; Tasker and Golombok 1997) generate much of the baseline evidence on potential connections between parents' and child's sexual and gender identities. Evidence in these and the few other studies that focus on these variables does not support the "no differences" claim. Children with lesbian parents appear less traditionally gender-typed and more likely to be open to homosexual relationships. In addition, evidence suggests that parental gender and sexual identities interact to create distinctive family processes whose consequences for children have yet to be studied.

**HOW THE SEXUAL ORIENTATION OF PARENTS MATTERS**

We have identified conceptual, methodological, and theoretical limitations in the psychological research on the effects of parental sexual orientation and have challenged the predominant claim that the sexual orientation of parents does not matter at all. We argue instead that despite the limitations, there is suggestive evidence and good reason to believe that contemporary children and young adults with lesbian or gay parents do differ in modest and interesting ways from children with heterosexual parents. Most of these differences, however, are not causal, but are indirect effects of parental gender or selection effects associated with heterosexist social conditions under which lesbian-parent families currently live.

First, our analysis of the psychological research indicates that the effects of parental gender trump those of sexual orientation (Brewaeys et al. 1997; Chan, Brooks, et al. 1998; Chan, Raboy, and Patterson 1998; Flaks et al. 1995). A diverse array of gender theories (social learning theory, psychoanalytic theory, materialist, symbolic inter-

hetero-normative presumption, one fascinating riddle to explain in this field is why, even though children of lesbian parents appear to express a significant increase in homosexual activity, the majority of all children nonetheless identify as heterosexual, as most theories across the "essentialist" to "social constructionist" spectrum seem (perhaps too hastily) to expect. A nondefensive look at the anomalous data on this question could pose fruitful challenges to social constructionist, genetic, and bio-evolutionary theories.

We recognize the political dangers of pointing out that recent studies indicate that a higher proportion of children with lesbian parents are themselves apt to engage in homosexual activity. In a homophobic world, anti-gay forces deploy such results to deny parents custody of their own children and to fuel backlash movements opposed to gay rights. Nonetheless, we believe that denying this probability capitulates to heterosexist ideology and is apt to prove counterproductive in the long run. It is neither intellectually honest nor politically wise to base a claim for justice on grounds that may prove falsifiable empirically. Moreover, the case for granting equal rights to nonheterosexual parents should not require finding their children to be identical to those reared by heterosexuals. Nor should it require finding that such children do not encounter distinctive challenges or risks, especially when these derive from social prejudice. The U.S. Supreme Court rejected this rationale for denying custody when it repudiated discrimination against interracial married parents in *Palmire v. Sidioti* in 1984: "[P]rivate biases may be outside the reach of the law, but the law cannot, directly or indirectly, give them effect" (quoted in Polikoff 1990:569-70). Inevitably, children share most of the social privileges and injuries associated with their parents' social status. If social prejudice were grounds for restricting rights to parent, a limited pool of adults would qualify.

One can readily turn the tables on a logic that seeks to protect children from the harmful effects of heterosexist stigma directed against their parents. Granting legal rights and respect to gay parents and their children should lessen the stigma that they now suffer and might reduce the high rates of depression and suicide reported among clos-

underanalyzed, hints that parental sexual orientation is positively associated with the possibility that children will be more likely to attain a similar orientation—and theory and common sense also support such a view. Children raised by lesbian co-parents should and do seem to grow up more open to homosexual relationships. This may be partly due to genetic and family socialization processes, but what sociologists refer to as "contextual effects" not yet investigated by psychologists may also be important. Because lesbian parents are disproportionately more likely to inhabit diverse, cosmopolitan cities—Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco—and progressive university communities—such as Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, Madison, and Ann Arbor (Black, Gates, et al. 2000)—their children grow up in comparatively tolerant school, neighborhood, and social contexts, which foster less hostility to homosexuality. Sociology could make a valuable contribution to this field by researching processes that interact at the individual, family, and community level to undergird parent-child links between gender and sexuality.

Under homophobic conditions, lesbian parents are apt to be more sensitive to issues surrounding their children's sexual development and to injuries that children with nonconforming desires may experience, more open to discussing sexuality with their children, and more affirming of their questions about sexuality (Mitchell 1998; Tasker and Golombok 1997). It therefore seems likely, although this has yet to be studied, that their children will grow up better informed about and more comfortable with sexual desires and practices. However, the tantalizing gender contrast in the level of sexual activity reported for sons versus daughters of lesbians raises more complicated questions about the relationship between gender and sexuality.

Even were heterosexism to disappear, however, parental sexual orientation would probably continue to have some impact on the eventual sexuality of children. Research and theory on sexual development remain so rudimentary that it is impossible to predict how much difference might remain were homosexuality not subject to social stigma. Indeed, we believe that if one suspends the

macy and satisfaction (Dunne 2000; Sullivan 1996; Weeks et al. forthcoming). The decision to pursue a socially ostracized domain of intimacy implies an investment in the emotional regime that Giddens (1992) terms "the pure relationship" and "confluent love." Such relationships confront the inherent instabilities of modern or postmodern intimacy, what Beck and Beck-Gersheim (1995) term "the normal chaos of love." Thus, a higher dissolution rate would be correlated with but not causally related to sexual orientation, a difference that should erode were homophobia to disappear and legal marriage be made available to lesbians and gay men.

Most of the differences in the findings discussed above cannot be considered deficits from any legitimate public policy perspective. They either favor the children with lesbian parents, are secondary effects of social prejudice, or represent "just a difference" of the sort democratic societies should respect and protect. Apart from differences associated with parental gender, most of the presently observable differences in child "outcomes" should wither away under conditions of full equality and respect for sexual diversity. Indeed, it is time to recognize that the categories "lesbian mother" and "gay father" are historically transitional and conceptually flawed, because they erroneously imply that a parent's sexual orientation is the decisive characteristic of her or his parenting. On the contrary, we propose that homophobia and discrimination are the chief reasons why parental sexual orientation matters at all. Because lesbian parents do not enjoy the same rights, respect, and recognition as heterosexual parents, their children contend with the burdens of vicarious social stigma. Likewise, some of the particular strengths and sensitivities such children appear to display, such as a greater capacity to express feelings or more empathy for social diversity (Mitchell 1998; O'Connell 1994), are probably artifacts of marginality and may be destined for the historical dustbin of a democratic, sexually pluralist society.

Even in a utopian society, however, one difference seems less likely to disappear: The sexual orientation of parents appears to have a unique (although not large) effect on children in the politically sensitive domain of sexuality. The evidence, while scanty and

actionist) would predict that children with two same-gender parents, and particularly with co-mother parents, should develop in less gender-stereotypical ways than would children with two heterosexual parents. There is reason to credit the perception of lesbian co-mothers in a qualitative study (Dunne, 2000) that they "were redefining the meaning and content of motherhood, extending its boundaries to incorporate as activities that are usually dichotomized as mother and father" (p. 25). Children who derive their principal source of love, discipline, protection, and identification from women living independent of male domestic authority or influence should develop less stereotypical symbolic, emotional, practical, and behavioral gender repertoires. Indeed, it is the claim that the gender mix of parents has no effect on their children's gender behavior, interests, or development that cries out for sociological explanation. Only a crude theory of cultural indoctrination that posited the absolute impotence of parents might predict such an outcome, and the remarkable variability of gender configurations documented in the anthropological record readily undermines such a theory (Bonvillian 1998; Brettell and Sargent 1997; Ortner and Whitehead 1981). The burden of proof in the domain of gender and sexuality should rest with those who embrace the null hypothesis.

Second, because homosexuality is stigmatized, selection effects may yield correlations between parental sexual orientation and child development that do not derive from sexual orientation itself. For example, social constraints on access to marriage and parenting make lesbian parents likely to be older, urban, educated, and self-aware—factors that foster several positive developmental consequences for their children. On the other hand, denied access to marriage, lesbian co-parent relationships are likely to experience dissolution rates somewhat higher than those among heterosexual co-parents (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Weeks, Heahy, and Donovan forthcoming, chap. 5). Not only do same-sex couples lack the institutional pressures and support for commitment that marriage provides, but qualitative studies suggest that they tend to embrace comparatively high standards of emotional inti-

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intergenerational issues. Current projects include an investigation of historical change in the relationship between family structure and the children's educational transitions, a test of an evolutionary theory of marital stability, and a study of social mobility patterns by sexual orientation.

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ected gay youth living with heterosexual parents. Thus, while we disagree with those who claim that there are no differences between the children of heterosexual parents and children of lesbian parents, we unequivocally endorse their conclusion that social science research provides no grounds for taking sexual orientation into account in the political distribution of family rights and responsibilities.

It is quite a different thing, however, to consider this issue a legitimate matter for social science research. Planned lesbian/gay parenthood offers a veritable "social laboratory" of family diversity in which scholars could fruitfully examine not only the acquisition of sexual and gender identity, but the relative effects on children of the gender and number of their parents as well as of the implications of diverse biosocial routes to parenthood. Such studies could give us purchase on some of the most vexing and intriguing topics in our field, including divorce, adoption, step-parenthood, and domestic violence, to name a few. To exploit this opportunity, however, researchers must overcome the hetero-normative presumption that interprets sexual differences as deficits, thereby inflicting some of the very disadvantages it claims to discover. Paradoxically, if the sexual orientation of parents were to matter less for political rights, it could matter more for social theory.

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# **Exhibit B**

# Children in three contexts

## Family, education and social development

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*This paper explores the relationship between family environment and behaviour of primary school children living in three family contexts. It uses data from studies including children of married heterosexual couples, cohabiting heterosexual couples and homosexual couples, and examines the extent to which these children differ with regard to scholastic achievement and aspects of social development. It shows that in the majority of cases, the most successful are children of married couples, followed by children of cohabiting couples and finally by children of homosexual couples.*

The significance of the family for the educational success and social development of children has already been documented (Connell et al 1982; Brown 1990). Writers from diverse backgrounds have produced evidence which supports the notion that family resources in general and structural conditions and parental attributes in particular are very significant for shaping the future of the child. In spite of this, very little is known about the effects the nature of the family has on the development of the child; we know very little, for instance, about whether families of heterosexual married couples, heterosexual cohabiting couples and homosexual cohabiting couples offer significantly different environments for their young children. Have children of married heterosexual parents better chances for a better social and educational development than children of heterosexual cohabiting parents or homosexual parents? Does the nature of the relationship of the parents make a difference? Are children of cohabiting heterosexual and homosexual parents 'children of a lesser God'?

In this paper an attempt will be made to seek some answers to these questions. Using findings from studies conducted by the author relating to educational achievement and social development of children living in these three contexts (marriage, heterosexual cohabitation, and homosexual cohabitation), the relationship between

the nature of parental relationship and the educational and social development of young children will be explored.

### METHOD

This paper presents findings which were collected through a sample of 174 primary school children living in three different types of families. More specifically this sample included 58 children of heterosexual cohabiting couples, 58 children of heterosexual married couples and 58 children of homosexual (47 lesbian and 11 gay) couples, matched according to age, gender, year of study, and parental characteristics (education, occupation and employment status). All children were of primary school age, and were living with at least one of their biological parents at the time of the study.

The sample of the parents was chosen from the context of previous studies. The homosexual couples were taken from the homosexual project which is currently in progress, and were chosen by means of snowball sampling procedures. All couples came from metropolitan and country areas of NSW and Victoria, and constitute a part of a larger project on homosexual couples which is currently under way. Only couples with children of primary school age were considered in this study.

These couples were matched according to socially significant criteria (eg, age,

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number of children, education, occupation, and socio-economic status) to married and cohabiting (heterosexual) couples taken from a longitudinal cohabitation study conducted by the author over the last 20 years (Sarantakos 1984; Sarantakos 1992); this study included 330 married and 330 cohabiting heterosexual couples and over 900 children.

The selection of the children for this study began with the children of homosexual couples. As stated above, all children of the cohabiting homosexual couples which are currently included in the homosexual cohabitation project were included in the study. These children were born in a previous relationship (marriage, cohabitation or unmarried motherhood) and were subsequently brought into the homosexual relationship. These children were subsequently matched to children living in families of married and cohabiting heterosexual couples of same or similar attributes (education, occupation, employment status, etc) to those of the homosexual parents. One child of primary school age from each unit was selected to match the children of homosexual couples. This process resulted in 174 children, who constituted the sample of this study.

The study was interested in exploring a large number of issues, attitudes, conditions, etc, regarding parents, children and schools. Issues related to parents and schools will be discussed in another place. In this paper the following areas will be considered:

- the level of academic performance of these children at school, by considering their achievement in a number of representative subjects (eg, language, mathematics, social studies and sport);
- their social behaviour at school, attitudes to school and learning, and educational aspirations;
- some fundamental personality issues, such as sex identity, autonomy and power;
- school-related family issues such as parental support, participation in household tasks, methods of control and punishment, and parent-school relationships.

Information for this study was collected primarily from teachers and only secondarily from parents and children. This information was collected by means of semi-structured questionnaires, and was enriched through telephone interviews. Information already available through previous studies (cohabitation project, homosexual cohabitation project) was also considered. Measures of achievement included a child's aptitude in various areas and were computed by the teachers, according to a child's performance in class and in out-of-class interests and activities, and by means of criteria which will be discussed later in this article. Analysis of variance allowed us to test the significance of the differences identified in the various contexts.

It must be noted that although precautions have been taken to control for bias, objectivity and distortions, certain aspects of the nature of the study deserve special attention. In the first place the sample is rather small; a larger and more representative sample might bring to light more accurate and more detailed data on children living in diverse family environments. In a similar vein, the measures chosen to evaluate the status of children are limited; considering more diverse measures of children's performance may enhance the overall image of children. Finally, using teachers as informers may entail an inherent bias which could distort the real picture of children. For these reasons, the findings of this study reported below should be interpreted in the context of these parameters.

## FINDINGS IN GROUP DIFFERENCES

### Language

The first issue that was considered in the context of this study was related to the level of performance of all children in the area of language. The main question was about whether children living in certain family environments performed differently than children living in other environments. In order to establish the linguistic abilities of these children a series of tests were employed, administered by the teachers; in most cases they were part

of the normal school assessment but some additional tests were also initiated just for this study. These tests contained a number of elements, such as reading, writing, comprehension, verbal skills, vocabulary, and composition. An overall score was computed by the teacher and assigned to each student of the three family groups on the basis of his/her performance in each of these areas ranging from 1 (very low performance), through 5 (moderate performance) to 9 (very high performance).

The findings arrived at through this process of evaluation can be summarised as follows:

1. the achievement of the children of the various family groups varied with family type;
2. the children of the married couples achieved the highest scores and the children of the homosexual couples the lowest: the average achievement score of the children of homosexual, cohabiting and married parents was 5.5, 6.8 and 7.7 respectively; the respective standard deviations were 0.9319, 0.6097, and 0.6606 ( $F=128.66$ , significant at 0.000 level);
3. the average score of the children of homosexual couples in all items of assessment was lower than the average of the children of the other two groups, and it was more pronounced in the areas of verbal skills, vocabulary and composition.

### Mathematics

The achievement of the children in arithmetic was concentrated in three major areas, namely, basic mathematical skills, knowledge of the basic operations and application of arithmetic in solving problems. The performance of the children in the three family groups shows the same trend that was identified in the context of language: here children of homosexual partners showed an overall performance of 5.5, as against 7.0 and 7.9 for the children of cohabiting and married couples respectively; the respective standard deviations were 0.9753, 0.5484 and 0.5414. ( $F=167.48$ , significant at the 0.000 level). While the achievement of

the children of homosexual couples in the area of problem solving was satisfactory (6.9), their score in basic mathematical skills was 5.6 (which is below the average score of all students of 7.1); and their ability in doing operations was lower still, their score being 4.9, while the average score of all students was 6.5.

### Social studies

In the area of social studies, the performance of the children in our study is quite different from that demonstrated in the areas of language and arithmetic. Here, children of homosexual couples tend to perform slightly better than the children of the other two groups. The teachers reported that their interest in social issues and their involvement in projects related to social studies were very strong, their knowledge and comprehension of relevant issues above average, and the quality of their work relatively high. The differences between these three groups is shown in their average scores, ie, 7.6, 7.3 and 7.0 for the children of homosexual couples, married couples and cohabiting couples respectively; the respective standard deviations were 1.018, 0.827 and 1.188. ( $F=5.07$ , significant at the 0.008 level). As the figures show, the differences between the scores of the three groups of children are not as pronounced as in previous measures.

### Sport

The interest and involvement in sport activities of the children of the three groups was diverse, with the children of heterosexual cohabiting couples following closely the children of married couples, and with children of homosexual couples far behind. More specifically, the average scores of married, heterosexual cohabiting and homosexual couples were 8.9, 8.3 and 5.9 respectively; the respective standard deviations were 0.6745, 0.9965, 0.9074. ( $F=175.43$ , significant at 0.000 level).

The performance of the children of homosexual couples in sport activities has caused some concern to the teachers. The reason for this concern was that, firstly, children of homosexual couples did not express an

interest in group sport to the same degree as other children; secondly, because of their 'rather passive' orientation to sport; and, thirdly, because of the type of sport interests they chose to pursue – when they did so.

Commenting on the low performance of these children in sport, the teachers added that many children avoided involvement in group activities of any kind, including group work in class and project work in teams, preferring to work alone; they were considered by their teachers to be 'introverts' and 'loners'. Experiences in their personal and family life were thought to have motivated them to avoid working with and relying on others, and to mistrust other children – in the case of children of lesbians, males in particular.

### Class work, sociability and popularity

The class behaviour of children of all three groups was similar. Overall, most children were reported to listen attentively, to attend closely to classroom activities, to complete assigned homework on time, to obey school rules, to participate in classroom discussions, to volunteer for special tasks, to show interest in subjects taught, and sensitivity to the needs and problems of others, and to enjoy helping others in class, while the teacher was present. In this sense, and without considering at this stage the degree to which these tasks were accomplished, these children were not different.

Nevertheless, more children of homosexual couples were reported to be timid, reserved, unwilling to work in a team, unwilling to talk about family life, holidays and about out-of-school activities in general, to feel uncomfortable when having to work with students of a sex different to the parent they lived with, and to be characterised as loners and as introvert. To a certain extent these feelings were reciprocated by a number of the students in class, who preferred not to work with them, to sit next to them, or work together on a project.

A similar attitude was expressed by these children in their out-of-class activities. In most cases children of

homosexual couples ended up being by themselves, skipping rope or drawing, while the others were involved in team sports. In extreme cases, they have been ridiculed by the other children for some personal habits or beliefs, or for the sexual preferences of their parents. In certain cases, these children were called *sissies*, *lesbians* or *gays*, or asked to tell 'what their parents do at home', where they slept, and so forth. Such incidents were one of the reasons for these children to move to another school, to refuse to go to that school, or even for the parents to move away from that neighbourhood or town.

The averages of sociability scores for the three groups of children, as reported by the teachers, were 7.5 for the children of married couples, 6.5 for the children of cohabiting couples and 5.0 for the children of homosexual couples; the respective standard deviations were 0.9319, 0.991 and 1.0121. ( $F=94.29$ , significant at the 0.000 level).

When two or three children of homosexual parents were attending the same school, and if they happened to know about their family circumstances (and in most cases they did), they tended to group together and to spend their time inside and outside the class together. Such incidents were reported to 'make these kids happier', but also to generate negative reactions on the part of the other school children and to motivate them to take more drastic and more aggressive attitudes towards the children of homosexual families. Parents and teachers alike reported that comments such as 'the pervs are coming', 'don't mix with the sissies', or 'sisterhood is filthy', made by some pupils, were not uncommon.

Another point raised by many teachers is that children of homosexual parents, in comparison to children of the other two family groups, tend to be more overly polite and formal, careful in their behaviour and actions, generally distant, and to show stronger feelings of respect to authority, to teachers, secretaries and to parents of fellow students.

### School and learning

The general attitude of most children to school and to learning was positive. Overall, this attitude was found to

depend on the experiences children have at school, with the students and the teachers. On the whole, most children were found to try hard to please the school in general and the teachers in particular, and to avoid conflicts and disappointments, but children of cohabiting couples (especially homosexuals) demonstrated a stronger attitude to learning than other children. These children seem to have a high tolerance level of irritating behaviour and to act towards the others – students and teachers alike – in a formal, polite and distant manner.

In general, the average score of the children of the various groups, ranked between 1 and 9 by the teachers on the basis of the attitude to school and learning, was 7.5 for the children of married couples, 6.8 for the children of cohabiting couples and 6.5 for the children of homosexual couples; the respective standard deviations were 1.373, 1.179 and 1.183 ( $F = 9.60$ , significant at the 0.000). Obviously, the influence of the attitudes of teachers to life styles on the process of evaluation of students' performance cannot be underestimated. A separate study of these attitudes is currently under way.

### Parent-school relationships

While many married couples (particularly mothers) maintained close relationships with schools and teachers, visited school functions, and saw the teacher frequently, cohabiting couples did so to a lesser extent. In such cases it was more likely that the biological parent of the child visited the school or attended school functions.

With regard to homosexual couples the relationships between parents and the school were relatively weaker and the visits fewer and almost exclusively between the school and the biological parent. In most cases the parent visited the school or the teacher either to discuss problems of the child, or at the teacher's request concerning the child's progress or behaviour at school. In only a few cases both 'parents' visited the school, or explained to the school principal or the teacher the nature of their relationship and asked for consideration. There were also only a few parents who attended parents and teachers meetings, or who offered

volunteer work of any kind. They rarely inquired about the progress of their child at school in person, and when they did so, it was the biological parent who undertook the inquiry, and in most cases by telephone.

Ranked in a continuum between 1 and 9, the average school participation score of the parents was 7.5 for the marrieds, 6.0 for the cohabitants and 5.0 for the homosexual couples ( $F = 151.30$ , significant at the 0.000 level).

### Sex identity

This issue was approached especially with regard to children of homosexual couples who have quite often been thought to have difficulties in establishing a sex identity, that is, to know what is expected of a male or a female, and to behave the way it is expected of a male or a female in the school and in the community in general. This issue was assumed to be particularly relevant for the very young pupils, but it was also a common one among older students.

More particularly, children were reported by teachers to have some identity problems, varying in extent and intensity from case to case. Teachers felt that a number of students of homosexual parents were confused about their identity and what was considered right and expected of them in certain situations. Girls of gay fathers were reported to demonstrate more 'boyish' attitudes and behaviour than girls of heterosexual parents. Most young boys of lesbian mothers were reported to be more effeminate in their behaviour and mannerisms than boys of heterosexual parents. Compared to boys of heterosexual parents, they were reported to be more interested in toys, sport activities and games usually chosen by girls; they cried more often when under the same type of stressful situations; and they more often sought the advice of female teachers.

In general, children of homosexual couples were described by teachers as more expressive, more effeminate (irrespective of their gender) and 'more confused about their gender' than children of heterosexual couples.

With regard to the experiences young children of homosexuals gain in their

everyday life, the findings show that these children usually find it difficult to be fully accepted by their peers as boys or girls. In many cases these children have been harassed or ridiculed by their peers for having a homosexual parent, for 'being queer' and even labelled as homosexuals themselves.

In certain cases, heterosexual parents advised their children not to associate with children of homosexuals, or gave instructions to the teachers to keep their children as much as possible away from children of homosexual couples. Teachers also reported exceptional cases where a group of 'concerned parents' demanded that three children of homosexuals be removed from their school. Others approached the homosexual parents with the same request.

Teachers have reported that children who went through such experiences have suffered significantly in social and emotional terms, but also in terms of scholastic achievement, and have developed negative attitudes to school and learning. These children found it very difficult to adjust in school, to trust friends inside and outside the school, and to join peer groups in general. Children with such experiences were reported to show more interest in the circles of the acquaintances of their parents than in the peers of the school or their neighbourhood.

### Support with homework

The amount of school-related support offered to children by their parents varies among the three family types of our study. In general, all parents offered support to their children; however, children of married couples received support more frequently and in higher proportions.

More particularly, the study shows that the proportion of children receiving assistance with their school work at home increases significantly when we move from the homosexual couples to the cohabiting couples and to the married couples. The extent of support, ranked in a continuum ranging from 1 to 9, was expressed in relevant scores identified by the teachers on the basis of statements made by the children. The average scores for each of the three groups were 7 for the children of married couples, 6.5 for the children of

cohabiting couples and 5.5 for the children of homosexual couples; the respective standard deviations were 0.9688, 0.8057, 1.1698. ( $F = 34.34$ , significant at the 0.000 level).

Personal judgement of the teachers suggests that, in many cases, while children of married couples obtain assistance in all subjects (reading, writing, arithmetic and project work), children of cohabiting and homosexual couples are less likely to obtain assistance in more than reading or arithmetic. Further, married couples are reported to offer assistance more readily and more often of their own accord than parents of the other two groups, who are more likely to assist their children at the child's request and/or on the teacher's advice. Homosexual parents are more likely to employ tutors to assist their children with their homework than parents of the other two groups, who are more likely to assist their children personally. While in families of cohabiting and married couples both parents are likely to be involved in helping their children with their homework, in most homosexual families only the natural parent of the child provides assistance.

Overall, married couples and, to a certain extent, cohabiting couples are reported by the teachers to offer more assistance and more personal support and to be more interested in the school work of their children than homosexual couples. A similar trend was reported with regard to parents assisting their children with sport and other personal tasks. Given that parents of the three groups were matched according to education, the educational status of the parents is excluded as a possible cause of this trend.

### Parental aspirations

Children were asked by their teachers about the educational aspirations of their parents, that is, whether the parents expected them to continue beyond Year 10, to undertake tertiary studies and to have definite plans, and whether they expected them to enter certain occupations. Parents' efforts to facilitate such aspirations were also considered. Teachers fused the information they obtained for each child and expressed it in a score

ranging from 1 to 9, expressing the relevant strength of parental aspirations respectively.

The findings show a marked difference between the three groups. The average score was for married parents 8.1, for cohabiting parents 7.4 and for homosexual parents 6.2; the respective standard deviations were 0.6807, 0.7027, 1.0978. ( $F = 75.38$ , significant at the 0.000 level). More significant was the difference between married parents and homosexual parents ( $F = 53.13$ , significant at the 0.000 level) and cohabiting parents and homosexual parents ( $F = 28.0$ , significant at the 0.000 level).

Overall, most of the children had a firm idea about what they intended to do in the future. However, the proportion of children of homosexual couples who reported that they were expected to continue their studies beyond year 10, and who would undertake university studies, particularly engineering, law or medicine, was significantly smaller than the proportion of children of the other two family groups. There were also more female children of homosexuals who expressed a preference for traditional female jobs than girls of the other two family groups. Finally, there was an obvious trend among the children of cohabiting homosexual and heterosexual couples to get a job as soon as possible, to earn money, and to establish a household of their own.

It was more likely for homosexual parents to have no firm expectations regarding the education of their child and to leave the decision to their children and their future interest and progress. Unlike the parents of the other two groups, although they valued higher quality education, they still tended in lower proportions to expect their children to complete high school, to study at a university and to enter prestigious professions.

### Personal autonomy

Of interest also is the degree of autonomy the child has in his/her own home. The question is about the extent to which children are involved in buying new clothes, spending free time, going out with friends, choosing friends and leisure time activities, watching TV, having to go to bed,

spending holidays, and about inviting friends home. On the basis of this information children were ranked in a continuum of autonomy ranging from 1 (lowest degree of autonomy) to 9 (highest degree of autonomy).

The findings show that the average autonomy score for the children of married couples, heterosexual cohabiting and homosexual cohabiting couples was 5.9, 7.2 and 8.3 respectively; the respective standard deviations were 1.147, 0.9562, 0.7897. ( $F = 87.89$ , significant at the 0.000 level) The highest difference was between children of married couples showing the lowest level of autonomy and children of homosexual couples showing the highest ( $F = 157.80$ , significant at the 0.000 level).

Overall, the study shows that children of homosexual couples enjoy the highest degree of autonomy and power to decide on personal issues, followed by the children of cohabiting couples and lastly the children of married couples. In many cases, the child's life revolved around his/her own space which overlapped with that of the parents to a much lesser extent than that of other children. More children of homosexual couples had their 'own living room' which usually was their bedroom equipped with their own TV set, radio and, sometimes, stereo system and sitting area, giving them a relatively high degree of freedom and autonomy at home.

Further, children of heterosexual cohabitants report less autonomy and power at home than children of homosexuals but more than children of marrieds, who seem to report lower scores in this context. Marrieds are reported to control and direct their children more than the couples of the other two groups.

### Household tasks

A similar trend was identified in the context of the contribution children made to household tasks. The issue considered here was the extent to which children were making their bed, doing the shopping, preparing their lunch, ironing clothes, doing the dishes, sweeping the floor, washing clothes, cleaning the table, tidying their room, and tidying the house, that is, whether

they were participating in these tasks every day, often, sometimes or never.

The responses show that the proportion of children of homosexual parents completing these tasks on a regular basis ('every day' or 'often') is significantly higher than the proportion of children of the other two family groups ( $\chi^2 = 28.84$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The highest difference in household participation is between children of married and children of homosexual couples ( $\chi^2 = 21.953$ ,  $df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and the lowest between children of heterosexual and homosexual cohabiting couples ( $\chi^2 = 2.892$ ,  $df = 3$ , ns). The degree of autonomy and independence coupled with responsibility for household tasks is significantly higher among these children than among children of heterosexual cohabiting and married couples.

### Parenting styles -- control and punishment

The study explored the ways in which punishment is administered in the families in question, who administers it, and in what way. The first question asked by the teacher in this context was: If you do something wrong that makes your parents angry, who usually punishes you? Mostly father, father and mother, mostly mother, or none?

The answers to this question indicate that:

1. in the majority of cases the natural parent controls the children in all three groups;
2. for minor problems the 'mother' or the person who spends most time in the home administers the punishment;
3. in step-relationships, the natural parent carries the responsibility for the misbehaviour of the child;
4. in a small number of cases both partners/spouses are reported to have control over the child, and share the responsibility for his/her actions.

In summary, there were no differences between the three groups with regard to controlling young children. What was characteristic for the same-sex couples was that, when the relationship was based on the 'butch-femme' model

(where one partner plays the role of the husband and the other the role of the wife), minor offences were settled by the 'wife' and more serious problems by the 'husband', irrespective of their sex, or of whether he/she was the natural parent of the child. Designation of the role also entailed the authority to control the child unconditionally.

The next question was: If you do something wrong what does your father/mother do to you? The following options were given, of which the respondents were asked to answer one for each parent:

- they tell me they hate me (9);
- hit me (8);
- yell at me (7);
- withdraw privileges (6);
- ignore me for some time (5);
- threaten me (4);
- tell me to be more careful (3);
- sit down and talk about it (2);
- do nothing (1).

The numbers next to each response category indicate the scores allocated to each item. The results show no difference between the three groups of children.

Overall, parents throughout the study indicated that they did not punish their children more or less than their own parents punished them. Nevertheless, compared to the homosexual couples, there were relatively more married and cohabiting couples reporting punishment levels administered to their children which were lower than those employed on them by their own parents. Finally, in spite of the diversity of responses, there were no statistically significant differences between the three groups regarding control and punishment of children.

### DISCUSSION

Overall, the findings show that there are differences between the children of the three family groups, and that these differences are significant in most areas of educational and social development. However, although differences between the three groups of children might be easy to establish, the explanation of these differences is not. The paucity of research on heterosexual married and

cohabiting couples and their children as well as on homosexual families makes an attempt to clarify this issue even more difficult. The only information available in this area is about families as social systems and about their effects on young children. We shall use this information as a basis for our approach to understand and explain the differences identified among our subjects. The general trend in the literature on this point can be summarised as follows:

#### Socio-economic status (SES)

Australian and overseas studies have shown that SES, as expressed in the form of class, income, occupation and material wealth of the parents, has a significant impact on a child's educational and occupational achievement (Lareau 1987, p. 83; Stevenson and Baker 1987; Lareau 1989). Keeping in mind the concerns of some writers (Share et al 1993; Winter 1988), namely, that SES differences may reflect personal and social attributes of the parents such as parental education and school involvement, educational aspirations, language models, income and academic guidance, most relevant studies show that the higher the SES:

- the higher the retention rates (Poole 1983; Ashendon et al 1987);
- the more access children have to private coaching; and this is reported to have a 'massive effect' on test scores (Egan and Bunting 1991, p. 90);
- the more likely it is for children to attend private schools (Graetz 1990);
- the more likely it is for children to enter tertiary institutions (Byrne and Byrne 1990; Lee 1989; Mortimore and Mortimore 1986; IEA 1983);
- the higher the IQ (Birch 1980), for example, the more opportunities children have to develop their potential or even to better prepare themselves for IQ tests and to do well in them;
- the more access they have to resources, and the less likely it is for them to live in poverty, a factor which has adverse effects on the educational success of children (Edgar 1986; Connell and White 1989, p. 111; Garmezy 1992;

Werner 1989; Garner and Raudenbush 1991, p. 258).

Although the notion that SES has a diverse impact on the educational development of young children is valid, this explanation is of little value for our analysis since all family units were chosen to be of the same or similar status. Consequently, the differences identified in the three groups of children are unlikely to be caused by differences in the status of the SES of the parents.

#### Parental characteristics

More logical is the explanation that educational achievement of children may be associated with personal characteristics of the parents. This notion has been widely supported by relevant Australian and overseas research, which indicates that:

- the higher the expectations of the parents, the higher the motivation of the children and the higher the educational success (Ainley et al 1991);
- the higher the education of the parents, the more likely it is for children to succeed at school (Dronkers 1993). Positive parental characteristics also help reduce attrition rates (Ensminger and Slucavcick 1992; Useem 1992);
- authoritative parenting styles are more conducive to educational success than other styles, for example, permissive or authoritarian (Steinberg et al 1989; Dombush et al 1987; Grolnick and Ryan 1989; de Jong 1993; Rumberger et al 1990; Rumberger 1987);
- the higher the motivation of the parents, and the more they support and encourage children to do well at school, the more likely it is for these children to succeed at school. The example with ethnic families is relevant here (Partington and McCudden 1992; Hartley 1987; Cahill and Ewen 1987; Bullivant 1988; Clifton et al 1991).

This suggests that the differences among the three groups of children identified in our study may be caused by differences in the attributes of the parents. Of these attributes, parental expectations, parenting styles, motivation, support and encouragement

are most important. Parental education is less significant since parents of the three groups were chosen to have same or similar education. It is therefore reasonable to expect that differences in educational achievement between the three groups of children may be associated with differences in personal attributes of the parents.

#### Family environment

The environment of the family and its relationship to educational progress and school performance has been explored very extensively by many writers (eg, Bradley et al 1988). For instance, the importance of a stimulating environment and of gifted mentors such as parents and teachers has been stressed by a study of child prodigies and exceptional early achievers (eg, Radford 1990). Although both environmental and genetic factors are given due recognition, family environments seem to be assigned central position in the process of personal and educational development. Overall, it has been reported that the family environment:

- entails materials and experiences which contribute immensely to the child's education in general and scholastic achievement in particular;
- offers the setting of growth and development and is 'the gatekeeper which controls the child's access to society and also the society's access to the child'; and it encourages social competence which is associated with scholastic achievement (Wentzel 1991);
- regulates quality of life;
- offers the setting for social development and instils social control which promotes attentiveness at school (de Jong 1993);
- maximises or minimises learning potential, depending on its quality. Reading activity at home, for instance, has been reported to have 'significant positive influences on students' reading achievement, as well as the mediating variables of attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom' (Rowe 1991, p. 30) and, finally, on educational development in general (Kirner 1989; Hewison 1988).

Applied in the area of our analysis, these findings indicate that the differences identified in the performance levels of children of the three groups of families of our study may be due to differences in family environments of married couples and cohabiting homosexual and heterosexual couples. Family environments of married couples may be more positive, supportive, rich, rewarding, secure and guiding than the family environments of cohabiting heterosexual and homosexual couples. Family environments may explain parts of the differences identified in our study among children of the three family contexts.

#### Family structure

Two-parent and one-parent families have often been reported to offer different educational opportunities to children. In the first place single parent families are often the product of divorce; and divorce experience is reported to affect the scholastic achievement of children (Zimiles and Lee 1991; Amato and Keith 1991) and particularly of boys (Bisnaire et al 1990). Compared to children of intact and stepfamilies, children of single-parent families seem to demonstrate the lowest academic performance. This relates to overall performance but also to achievement in specific subjects, such as mathematics, as well as to specific family conditions of the single-parent family (Mednick et al 1990). Similar views have been held by other writers (Hetherington et al 1983; Milne et al 1986; Thompson et al 1988) although the justification of such differences vary (Mulkey et al 1992, p. 62). Children of divorce, finally, are thought to demonstrate in higher proportions low performance and misbehaviour at school, and to be suspended from school more often than other children (Furstenberg et al 1987; Peterson and Zill 1986; Wallerstein 1987; Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1990; Sarantakos 1995).

This factor is found to have the strongest impact on a child's behaviour. As shown elsewhere, (Sarantakos 1995a), children who experienced parental divorce and have been through a number of family changes (eg, cohabitation and step-family) are more likely to report



problems, to have been involved in antisocial activities and delinquency and to be more likely to become recidivists than children who experienced no radical changes in their family history. In most cases it was not single parenthood alone that contributed to the problems but also marital breakdown of the parents, divorce, separation from the parents and siblings and finally step-parenthood. It is then reasonable to assume that parental divorce explains in part the differences in educational development of the children in the three contexts.

This factor may be considered not directly relevant to our study. However, given that the majority of children of cohabiting homosexual and heterosexual couples have experienced parental divorce, and in many cases not long ago, divorce as a factor of education and social development in general is far from irrelevant. For a number of theorists, divorce experiences influence the development of young children for a long period of time (Sarantakos 1995; Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1990).

### CONCLUSION

The study has shown some directions regarding the effects the nature of parental relationships may have on the development of children. Some major differences between children of married and unmarried heterosexual couples and of homosexual couples were found to be significant. Overall, the study has shown that children of married couples are more likely to do well at school, in academic and social terms, than children of cohabiting heterosexual and homosexual couples.

However, these findings must be treated with caution. Before one jumps to conclusions encouraging homophobia and traditionalism, other relevant factors must be considered. There are many other factors which can cause or contribute to the trends demonstrated above in addition to the life styles of the parents. These factors can be equally responsible for such trends in the educational development of young children. Gender is one (Campbell and Greenberg 1993; Jones 1990; Leder and Sampson 1989; Leder and Sampson 1989); adequacy of

linguistic models offered by the family is another (Mehan 1992). Despite the similarity in education and socio-economic status, parenting styles and other competencies may vary. Apart from this, it is possible that the techniques of data collection may favour one life style more than another.

Overall, although the conclusions presented above are defensible, there are additional factors which must be considered when the differences in children's performance are generalised. In the first place it must be stressed that assessment of children's personal and educational characteristics were in most cases made by the teachers, who judged performance and state of mind of children on the basis of their personal qualities and cultural beliefs. The criteria of assessment are obviously expected to be fair and objective, however, they might have been biased – consciously and/or unconsciously – by the personal views and beliefs of the teachers. In this sense, the attributes of children described in this study might reflect perceptions of attributes rather than actual attributes or differences. Such perceptions might have favoured children of married couples more than children of other couples. (Teachers' attitudes to life styles and their implications for the quality reports on children's performance is being considered separately and will be reported elsewhere).

In summary, family environments are definitely instrumental for the development of the attributes which encourage educational progress and social development among children. However, these environments are shown to vary significantly according to the life style of the parents, leading to adverse reactions among these children. In this study, married couples seem to offer the best environment for a child's social and educational development. In the light of the cautions and implications, more research is required in this area. ☉

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# **Exhibit C**

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## The nature and correlates of deterrents to leaving a relationship

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### Abstract

The nature and correlates of perceived deterrents to leaving a relationship were examined in a sample of both partners ( $N = 314$ ) from gay male, lesbian, and heterosexual couples. Partners rated the extent to which self-identified features of their relationship were regarded as either attractions to the relationship or deterrents to ending that relationship. The deterrents identified included features that were also identified as attractions as well as unique features that functioned as barriers to leaving. Satisfaction with the relationship tended to be positively correlated with deterrents that were attractions but negatively correlated with deterrents that were barriers. Differences between gay male/lesbian partners and heterosexual partners were found in the kinds of deterrents identified but not in the link between deterrents and relationship satisfaction.

Why do partners stay in their relationships? From the perspective of interdependence theory (Rusbult, Arriaga, & Agnew, 2001), partners within a relationship become mutually dependent on each other as they increasingly rely on the relationship for the fulfillment of personal needs. The subjective experience of this dependence is commitment, the intention to remain in the relationship. In an early account of the factors that influence commitment, Levinger (1979) regarded the level of commitment partners have to their relationships as depending on two sets of forces. One set of forces draws partners to the relationship, whereas the other set of forces deters partners from leaving the relationship. The focus of the current study was on how partners

from gay male, lesbian, and heterosexual cohabiting couples appraise both sets of forces and on the link between appraisals of deterrents and satisfaction with the relationship.

Since Levinger's (1979) early attempt to identify the factors that influence commitment, at least four models of commitment have been formulated. Although each model posits that the level of commitment to a relationship is influenced by multiple factors, the number and the nature of these factors vary across models. In the first model, Stanley and Markman (1992) proposed that commitment to a close relationship is determined by two factors. The *personal dedication* factor reflects the desire to maintain or to improve the quality of the relationship for the joint benefit of the relationship partners such as tying one's personal identity to being part of the couple, regarding the relationship as having primacy over all other relationships, and having lifelong plans for the relationship. The *constraint commitment* factor reflects the forces that motivate partners to maintain a relationship regardless of their personal dedication to it such as perceiving difficulty in ending the

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relationship, having unattractive alternatives to the relationship, and fearing the loss of investments made in the relationship.

In the second model, Johnson, Caughlin, and Huston (1999) regarded commitment to marriage as involving three distinct experiences. *Personal commitment* reflects the sentiment of "I want to continue the relationship" and has three components: attraction to the partner, attraction to the relationship, and incorporating the relationship into one's identity. *Structural commitment* reflects the sentiment of "I have to continue the relationship" and has four components: unavailability of acceptable alternatives, pressure from members of one's social support network, the difficulty of procedures needed to end the relationship, and irretrievable investments made in the relationship. Finally, *moral commitment* reflects the sentiment of "I ought to continue the relationship" and has three components: a sense of obligation regarding marriage as a special type of relationship, a sense of obligation regarding the well-being of people (such as partner and children) affected by the relationship, and a general predisposition to honor commitments.

In the third model, Adams and Jones (1997) conceptualized marital commitment as being influenced by three factors. The *commitment to spouse* factor is based on devotion, satisfaction, and love and focuses on positive feelings toward the spouse or partner. The *commitment to marriage* factor is based on the belief that marriage has special social and religious significance and focuses on positive feelings toward marriage as a social institution. Finally, the *entrapment* factor is based on the fear of the emotional, financial, and social costs to ending the marriage and focuses on feelings of being forced to stay in the marriage.

In the last model, Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) conceptualized commitment to any relationship as being the result of three bases for dependence on the relationship. *Level of satisfaction* represents the overall level of positive affect experienced in the relationship and the extent to which important personal needs are being met in the relationship. *Quality of alternatives* represents a comparison between actual outcomes derived from the

current relationship and potential outcomes derived from the best available options to the current relationship. Finally, *investment size* represents an evaluation of intrinsic resources (such as time and effort) and extrinsic resources (such as common social networks and shared material possessions) put into the relationship that would decline or be lost if the relationship ended.

The four models just described are alike in that each posits that commitment is influenced by an attraction component that includes forces that draw one to the relationship. Stanley and Markman (1992) call this component personal dedication; Johnson et al. (1999) call it personal commitment; Adams and Jones (1997) call it commitment to spouse; and Rusbult et al. (1998) call it satisfaction. The models differ in at least three ways, however, with regard to the conceptualization of forces that deter one from leaving the relationship.

First, only Johnson et al. (1999) and Adams and Jones (1997) incorporated a moral-normative component into their models (moral commitment and commitment to marriage, respectively). Because both models were designed to account for commitment in marriage—a social, legal, and religious institution—they appropriately address social, legal, and religious restrictions to ending the marriage. Second, only Stanley and Markman (1992), Johnson et al., and Adams and Jones included a component that explicitly addressed factors that deter one from ending the relationship (with constraint, structural, and entrapment components, respectively). Rusbult et al.'s (1998) model indirectly addresses deterrents in its quality of alternatives and investment size components but the standard assessment of their model (see appendix of Rusbult et al.) does not consistently assess the deterrent aspect of these components. Third, whereas Rusbult et al. regard quality of alternatives and investment size as possible deterrent factors that operate independently of satisfaction, Adams and Jones as well as Johnson (1999) have argued that deterrent factors depend on the overall level of satisfaction with the relationship. When relationship satisfaction is relatively high, partners are likely not to leave their relationships because of the attractive

features of the relationship. In contrast, when relationship satisfaction is relatively low, partners are likely to not to leave their relationships because of barriers to doing so.

Supportive evidence for the contingent nature of the link between deterrent factors and satisfaction, however, seems limited to two studies. In the first study, Frank and Brandstätter (2002) looked at the link between staying in a relationship to avoid the negative consequences of leaving it (what they termed "avoidance commitment") and satisfaction with the relationship in a longitudinal study involving both partners of heterosexual couples. Although avoidance commitment was not concurrently related to satisfaction with the relationship, high levels of avoidance commitment did predict decreases in satisfaction with the relationship over a 13-month period. Further, the avoidance commitment of one's partner did not affect one's own level of satisfaction. This study is limited in that Frank and Brandstätter recruited only heterosexual couples and conducted their analyses using averaged partner scores rather than individual partner scores with controls for nonindependent observations.

In the second study, Previti and Amato (2003, p. 564) asked one spouse from married couples in a telephone interview, "What are the most important factors keeping your marriage together?" Responses were coded as rewards (e.g., love, friendship, and communication) or barriers (e.g., children, religion, and financial need). Compared to persons who reported only rewards, those who reported only barriers were less happy with their marriages and were more likely to have divorced within the 14 years of a follow-up assessment. This study is limited in that Previti and Amato asked heterosexual participants what kept their marriage together, making it difficult to distinguish between reasons that were attractions or barriers. For example, although "commitment to marriage" and "children" may be viewed as barriers (as Previti and Amato did), participants could also regard each of these two reasons as attractions. Also, Previti and Amato did not obtain information on the extent to which participants regarded their reasons as keeping their marriage together.

The focus of the current study was on examining appraisals of factors that deterred one from leaving a relationship. Because past relevant studies have included only partners from heterosexual couples, partners from both gay male couples and lesbian couples were also of interest to assess the generality of findings across diverse types of couples. The study had four specific purposes, each of which is described next.

The first purpose was to examine the kind of factors that partners from gay male, lesbian, and heterosexual couples identified as deterrents to leaving their relationships. This was accomplished by having partners list in surveys up to five things that prevented them from ending their relationship (deterrents) and then having partners rate how strong each identified deterrent was. In addition, as one way of providing a context within which to view deterrents, partners also listed up to five things about their relationship that they found attractive (attractions) and then rated how much they liked each identified attraction. Given the probable interdependence in data collected from both partners of the same couple, analyses of the data were conducted with multilevel modeling in which partners were nested in couples. Based on Previti and Amato's (2003) findings, it was hypothesized that two classes of deterrents would be found. The first class would include factors that were also identified as attractions (such as feelings of love and affection). In contrast, the second class would include factors that were not also identified as attractions but, rather, could be regarded as barriers to leaving the relationship (such as fear of losing benefits associated with being in the relationship).

The second purpose of this study was to examine whether the extent to which attractions or barriers were rated as deterrents would be differentially linked to satisfaction with the relationship. Two related hypotheses were tested. First, if partners are deterred from leaving their relationships because they want to maintain the benefits currently associated with the positive features of the relationship (Johnson, 1999; Levinger, 1999; Rusbult et al., 1998), then the extent to which attractions were rated as deterrents should be positively related to

relationship satisfaction. Second, if partners are deterred from leaving their relationships as a result of either obligation or necessity (Adams & Jones, 1997), or a motive to avoid negative consequences to ending the relationship (Frank & Brandstätter, 2002), then the extent to which barriers were rated as deterrents should be negatively related to relationship satisfaction.

The third purpose of this study was to explore whether relationship satisfaction was influenced not only by one's own ratings of specific deterrents but also by the ratings of the same deterrent made by one's partner. Two outcomes were plausible. In the first outcome, although one's own ratings of a deterrent influence one's own relationship satisfaction, the evaluation of that deterrent by one's partner has no effect on one's own relationship satisfaction. In this outcome, the link between deterrents and relationship satisfaction is largely an intrapartner process that is unaffected by processes relevant to the partner. In the second outcome, both one's own rating of a deterrent and the rating of that deterrent by one's partner account for unique portions of the variance in one's own relationship satisfaction. In this outcome, the link between deterrents and relationship satisfaction is viewed as a couple-level process in which both intrapartner and cross-partner processes occur (Kenny, Mannetti, Pierro, Livi, & Kashy, 2002). Although Frank and Brandstätter (2002) found no evidence of cross-partner effects, as already noted, their findings were limited in that they conducted their analyses with averaged partner scores.

The final purpose of this study was to examine differences between partners from heterosexual couples and partners from both gay male and lesbian couples in both perceived deterrents and in the link between perceived deterrents and relationship satisfaction. Two hypotheses were advanced. First, because the relationships of gay male and lesbian partners exist with little benefit from legal or religious sanctions (Andersson, Noack, Seierstad, & Weedon-Fekjaer, 2006), these partners were expected to be less likely than heterosexual partners to identify legal or moral deterrents to leaving their relationships. Second, in keep-

ing with previous evidence that the factors related to relationship quality are similar for gay male, lesbian, and heterosexual partners (Kurdek, 2004), differences in the strength of the link between perceived deterrents and relationship satisfaction due to type of couple were not expected.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants included both partners from 33 gay male cohabiting couples, 52 lesbian cohabiting couples, and 72 heterosexual married couples. The data reported here were collected as part of an ongoing longitudinal study of couples conducted with mailed surveys that addressed the nature of change in relationship quality over time and the predictors of relationship stability. Gay male and lesbian partners were initially recruited from notices placed in gay male and lesbian national publications in the United States (such as *The Advocate* and the newsletter of the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues) as well as from recommendations from partners who had already participated. Because there is no formal registry for gay male and lesbian couples in the United States, the use of convenience samples was the only method available to recruit partners from gay male and lesbian couples. Further, although it is unknown whether equal numbers of gay male and lesbian partners saw the notices, lesbian couples were more likely to participate and to recommend other lesbian couples. Heterosexual partners were initially recruited as newlyweds from published marriage licenses in the local newspaper of a Midwestern city in the United States. No claims can be made that any of these groups of couples were representative of their larger populations. None of the gay male and lesbian couples lived with children, were married, or had civil unions.

Most gay male participants were White (94%) and employed (76%), and 27% of them had earned a baccalaureate degree. Their mean age was 49.7 years, and their mean length of cohabitation was 14.69 years. Most lesbian

participants were White (92%) and employed (90%), and 31% of them had earned a baccalaureate degree. Their mean age was 46.1 years, and their mean length of cohabitation was 13.61 years. Most heterosexual participants were White (97% of husbands and 100% of wives) and employed (90% of husbands and 67% of wives). Thirty-three percent of husbands and 43% of wives had earned a baccalaureate degree. Sixty-five percent of husbands and 61% of wives were in first marriages. The mean age for husbands was 41.9 years and for wives 40.4 years, and their mean length of cohabitation was 10.63 years. Eighty-one percent of the heterosexual couples had (step)children.

#### *Procedure*

For each couple, 2 surveys were sent in the mail. Completed surveys were returned in separate postage-paid envelopes. Partners were instructed to complete the surveys on their own, but no checks were employed to ensure that these instructions were followed.

#### *Measures*

*Demographic variables.* Partners provided information about age, level of education (1 = less than seventh grade, 8 = doctoral degree), race, whether they were employed, the number of months they had lived with their partners, and whether children lived in the household.

*Attractions.* Participants were instructed to list up to five things about their relationships that they really liked or found attractive. They then rated how much, 1 = not much to 9 = a lot, they liked each identified factor. The numbers of partners providing one, two, three, four, and five listings were 312, 305, 285, 237, and 176, respectively. Each of the 1,315 responses was initially categorized by the author into 1 of 87 microcodes that reflected semantically distinct attractions. That is, each attraction that reflected a different kind of meaningful category was given a separate code. These microcodes were then aggregated by the author into 13 macrocodes on the basis of content similarity. For example, microcodes

that focused on demonstrations of affection, sexual contact, and shared secrets were merged into one macrocode that focused on intimacy. Two undergraduate students independently coded all responses using the macrocodes. Percent perfect agreement between these two raters across all attractions was 98%, attesting to the distinct nature of the macrocodes. Discrepant codings were resolved through discussion.

For each attraction, two scores were derived. The first score was the proportion with which the particular coded attraction was listed relative to the total number of attractions listed. For example, if a partner listed affection, sexual contact, and shared secrets as separate attractions and identified four total attractions, then he or she was given a proportion score of .75 (3/4) for intimacy. The second score was the mean rating given to each attraction. For example, if a partner rated affection, sexual contact, and shared secrets as 4, 5, and 6, then he or she was given a rating score of 5 (4 + 5 + 6/3) for intimacy. If a particular attraction was not mentioned, it was given a score of zero. Thus, high ratings indicated that the identified attraction was a feature of the relationship that was liked a lot. Macrocodes are presented in Table 1 in decreasing order of proportion used along with definitions and illustrative responses. The mean proportion and mean rating for each macrocode are also presented in this table for the total sample.

*Deterrents.* Participants were instructed to list up to five things that prevented them from ending their relationship. They then rated how strong a deterrent, 1 = not strong to 9 = very strong, each identified factor was to ending the relationship. The numbers of partners providing one, two, three, four, and five listings were 312, 274, 215, 150, and 85, respectively. Each of the 1,036 responses was initially categorized by the author into 1 of 82 microcodes that reflected semantically distinct deterrents. These microcodes were then aggregated by the author into 10 macrocodes on the basis of content similarity. Two undergraduate students independently coded all responses using the macrocodes. Percent perfect agreement between these two raters across all deterrents



**Table 1.** Codes, definitions, and examples of open-ended responses for attractions with mean frequency, mean rating, and intraclass correlation

Code	Definition	Example	Mean proportion	Mean rating	Intraclass correlation
Intimacy	Having feelings of love and affection	"I love her very much"	.20	5.10	.07
Compatibility	Having similar interests, values, or goals	"We have similar values and goals"	.13	3.47	.13
Companionship	Referring to friendship and companionship	"She is my best friend"	.10	2.81	.11
Shared activities	Doing activities together	"We do fun things together"	.09	2.76	.16*
Trust	Referring to trust, dependability, and reliability	"We count on each other"	.09	2.47	.04
Support	Providing or receiving support	"We help each other through tough times"	.09	2.55	.06
Communication	Talking, listening, and problem solving	"We talk things through"	.06	2.17	.09
Sex	Referring to sexual relationship	"Our sex life is still good"	.06	2.10	.16*
Family or children	Mentioning family or children	"We work together to make a family"	.05	1.38	.29**
Security	Feeling safe, stable, and secure	"My relationship provides stability"	.05	1.38	.07
Partner characteristics	Referring to a characteristic of the partner	"He is tender and affectionate"	.04	1.18	.05
Commitment	Mentioning commitment or a desire to stay in the relationship	"Our commitment to each other"	.02	0.99	.18*
Material possessions	Referring to money, property, or things owned	"We don't worry about money"	.02	0.76	.23**

Note. Maximum scores for mean frequency and mean rating were 5 and 9, respectively.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

was 98%, attesting to the distinct nature of the macrocodes. Discrepant codings were resolved through discussion.

Two scores were derived for each deterrent. The first score was the proportion with which the particular coded deterrent was listed relative to the total number of deterrents listed.

The second score was the mean rating given to each deterrent. If a particular deterrent was not mentioned, it was given a score of zero. Thus, high ratings indicated that the identified deterrent was very strong. Macrocodes are presented in Table 2 in decreasing order of proportion used along with definitions and

**Table 2.** Codes, definitions, and examples of open-ended responses for deterrents with mean frequency, mean rating, and intraclass correlation

Code	Definition	Example	Mean proportion	Mean rating	Intraclass correlation
Intimacy	Having feelings of love and affection	"My love for him"	.45	6.63	.05
Commitment	Mentioning commitment or a desire to stay in the relationship	"Our commitment to each other and to the relationship"	.11	2.92	.01
Family or children	Mentioning family or children	"We are a family"	.11	2.71	.75**
Unattractive alternatives	Seeing no good alternatives to the current relationship	"There is no one better out there"	.09	1.89	-.05
Material possessions	Referring to money, property, or things owned	"Our home"	.06	1.31	-.19*
Companionship	Referring to friendship and companionship	"My partner is my best friend"	.05	1.24	.10
Moral values	Referring to the relationship in terms of morality, obligation, or religion	"My marriage is a sacrament"	.04	0.97	.36**
Fear	Being afraid of not having the relationship or losing its benefits	"Fear of loneliness"	.04	0.74	.07
Support	Providing or receiving support	"She is there when I need somebody"	.03	0.82	.18*
Family members or friends	Mentioning family or friends	"Our friends would kill us if we split"	.02	0.44	.21**

Note. Maximum scores for mean frequency and mean rating were 5 and 9, respectively.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

illustrative responses. The mean proportion and mean rating for each macrocode are also presented in this table for the total sample.

*Relationship satisfaction.* Relationship satisfaction was assessed by the three-item Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Schumm et al., 1986). Participants were instructed to rate how true (1 = *not at all true*, 9 = *extremely true*) it was that they were satisfied with their relationships, satisfied with their partners in his or her role as partner, and satisfied with their relationships with their partners. One desirable feature of this assessment is that it provided a broad evaluation of the relationship and avoided any

overlap in the items used to assess both satisfaction and its predictors (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). Cronbach's alpha for the summed composite score in a sample with one partner randomly selected from each couple was .98. The mean (and *SD*) across all partners was 24.14 (3.92).

## Results

### Data analysis issues

Because the individual partner was the unit of analysis in this study, the first issue of concern was whether ratings of both partners from the same couple were independent of each other.

If they were not, then special analyses were needed that took the nonindependent nature of partners' data into account (Sayer & Klute, 2005). Given that partners from gay male and lesbian couples are not distinguished from each other (as are husbands and wives in married heterosexual couples), overlap between partners' ratings from the sample couple was assessed by intraclass correlations. These values, which can be interpreted as if they were Pearson correlations, are presented in the last column of Table 2 for each deterrent.

As seen from Table 2, 5 of the 10 intraclass correlations were significant, indicating that partners' ratings from the same couple were not independent of each other. In particular, partners from the same couple tended to provide similar ratings (i.e., intraclass correlations were positive) for deterrents referencing family or children, moral values, support, and family members or friends but tended to provide dissimilar ratings for material possessions. (For descriptive purposes, intraclass correlations for the ratings for attractions are also presented in Table 1.) In view of the interdependent nature of partners' scores, data were analyzed using multilevel modeling with the module available in LISREL 8.72 (Jöreskog, Sörbom, du Toit, & du Toit, 2001).

The multilevel models tested were two-level random-intercept models in which individual partners (Level 1) were nested in couples (Level 2). The Level 1 model was a within-couple model that used information from both partners to define one parameter—an intercept—for each couple. This intercept reflected the average value of the outcome score for a couple and was treated as a random variable based on the assumption that the couple-level intercepts from the sample were derived from a larger population. The Level 2 model was a between-couple model that explained variability in the intercept derived at Level 1 in terms of type of couple while taking into account the extent to which partner scores from the same couple were interrelated.

#### *Kinds of factors identified as deterrents*

The first purpose of this study was to examine the kind of factors that partners identified as

deterrents to leaving the relationship. As seen from the mean proportion scores for attractions in Table 1 and the mean proportion scores for deterrents in Table 2, intimacy was the feature of the relationship most frequently identified as both an attraction and a deterrent. Five other features of the relationship identified as attractions—companionship, support, family or children, commitment, and material possessions—were also identified as deterrents. In contrast, seven features of the relationship—compatibility, shared activities, trust, communication, sex, partner characteristics, and security—were unique to attractions. Four features of the relationship—unattractive alternatives, moral values, fear, and family members or friends—were unique to deterrents. It is of note that each of the features unique to deterrents referenced possible barriers to leaving the relationship. In sum, as predicted, two classes of deterrents emerged. The first class reflected features of the relationship also identified as attractions, whereas the second class reflected features of the relationship that were unique to deterrents and highlighted possible barriers to leaving.

Because data were available from both partners from the same couple, it was possible to examine the extent to which both partners from the same couple identified the same deterrent. The percentage of the entire sample in which both partners identified one, two, and three deterrents that were the same was 54%, 23%, and 8%, respectively. Thus, although not extensive, there was some overlap in the deterrents that both partners from the same couple identified.

#### *Links between ratings of deterrents and relationship satisfaction*

The second purpose of this study was to assess the link between ratings of deterrents and relationship satisfaction. Separate multilevel models were run for each of the 10 deterrents in which each deterrent was the sole predictor of relationship satisfaction. Relevant unstandardized coefficients and effect-size correlations are presented in the column Model 1 of Table 3. Following Cohen (1988), cutoff values for small, medium, and large effects were

**Table 3.** Unstandardized coefficients and effect-size correlations for links between ratings of deterrents and relationship satisfaction

Deterrent	Model 1		Model 2			
	Own coefficient	Effect-size <i>r</i>	Own coefficient	Effect-size <i>r</i>	Partner's coefficient	Effect-size <i>r</i>
Intimacy	.38**	.37	.42**	.40	.19**	.20
Commitment	-.01	.00	.01	.01	.06	.06
Family or children	-.24**	.23	-.13*	.10	-.19**	.15
Unattractive alternatives	-.12*	.11	-.10	.08	.04	.03
Material possessions	-.19*	.13	-.20**	.14	-.08	.06
Companionship	.16*	.13	.17*	.13	.04	.03
Moral values	-.18*	.13	-.15*	.10	-.36**	.24
Fear	-.06	.03	-.10	.06	-.15	.09
Support from partner	.08	.06	.10	.06	.09	.05
Family members or friends	-.22*	.10	-.22	.09	.01	.00

Note. Model 1 assesses only intrapartner effects, whereas Model 2 assesses both intrapartner and cross-partner effects. \**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

represented by *r*s of .10, .30, and .50, respectively. As seen from the table, intimacy and companionship—both attractions—were positively related to relationship satisfaction. In contrast, family or children, unattractive alternatives, material possessions, moral values, and family members or friends—all barriers—were negatively related to relationship satisfaction. As shown by the effect-size correlations in this table, the effect involving intimacy was medium in size, whereas all other effects were small in size. The unstandardized coefficients obtained for commitment, fear, and support from partner were not significant. In sum, as predicted, deterrents that tended to reflect attractive features of the relationship were positively related to relationship satisfaction, whereas deterrents that tended to reflect barriers to leaving the relationship were negatively related to relationship satisfaction.

#### *Adding information about partner's deterrents to predicting one's own relationship satisfaction*

The third purpose of this study was to examine whether adding information regarding the appraisals of deterrents by one's partner contributed additional information regarding one's own relationship satisfaction above and

beyond one's own appraisal of that same deterrent. Separate multilevel random-intercept regression analyses were run for each deterrent in which self and partner versions of that deterrent were the only two predictors of relationship satisfaction. As seen from the Model 2 column of Table 3, both one's own appraisal and one's partner's appraisal provided unique information regarding one's own relationship satisfaction for three deterrents—intimacy, family or children, and moral values. Consistent with findings from the previous section, both intrapartner and cross-partner effects were positive in direction for intimacy but were negative in direction for family or children and moral values. Thus, whether effects were of an intrapartner or cross-partner nature and the specific direction of the effect depended on the specific deterrent.

#### *Type-of-couple differences*

The final purpose of this study was to assess differences between partners from heterosexual couples and partners from both gay male and lesbian couples in mean ratings of deterrents as well as in the strength of the link between ratings of deterrents and relationship satisfaction. Preliminary multilevel random-intercept regression analyses were conducted

to see whether there were differences due to type of couple on each demographic variable. The type-of-couple effect at Level 2 was represented by two dummy variables that indexed membership in a gay male couple or a lesbian couple, respectively, with heterosexual couples serving as the reference group. Thus, for each dummy variable, a positive coefficient indicated a higher score (i.e., a stronger deterrent) for the target couple (gay male or lesbian) compared to heterosexual couples, whereas a negative coefficient indicated a lower score (i.e., a weaker deterrent) for the target couple (gay male or lesbian) compared to heterosexual couples. The  $t$  ratio associated with the coefficient for each dummy variable was converted to an effect-size correlation to obtain the size of the effect associated with each comparison. Based on Rosenthal and Rosnow (1984, p. 217),  $r = \sqrt{t^2/(t^2 + df)}$ .

Multilevel analyses indicated that, relative to heterosexual partners, gay male partners were older, unstandardized coefficient = 8.48,  $p < .01$  (effect-size  $r = .23$ ); had more formal education, unstandardized coefficient = 0.39,  $p < .05$  (effect-size  $r = .13$ ); had higher incomes, unstandardized coefficient = 2.31,  $p < .01$  (effect-size  $r = .15$ ); and cohabited longer, unstandardized coefficient = 28.30,  $p < .05$  (effect-size  $r = .11$ ). Further, relative to heterosexual partners, lesbian partners were older, unstandardized coefficient = 5.03,  $p < .01$  (effect-size  $r = .17$ ), and had more formal education, unstandardized coefficient = 0.62,  $p < .01$  (effect-size  $r = .23$ ). Consequently, these variables were used as covariates in analyses regarding effects due to type of couple.

*Mean ratings of deterrents.* Differences in the partners' mean ratings of deterrents by type of couple were assessed by multilevel random-intercept regression analyses. Age, education, and personal income were used as control variables at Level 1, and length of cohabitation was used as a control variable at Level 2. Mean ratings for deterrents are presented in Table 4 by type of couple along with the unstandardized coefficients for the two dummy variables. Type-of-couple differences were found for 3 of the 10 deterrents: intimacy, family or children, and moral values. Relative to heterosex-

ual partners, gay male partners and lesbian partners reported stronger deterrents regarding intimacy (effect-size  $r = .19$  and  $.24$ , respectively, small effects); gay male partners and lesbian partners reported weaker deterrents relevant to family or children (effect-size  $r = .29$  and  $.26$ , respectively, small effects); and gay male partners and lesbian partners reported weaker deterrents referencing moral values (effect-size  $r = .25$  and  $.29$ , respectively, small effects). In fact, as seen from the table, none of the gay male and lesbian partners mentioned moral values as a deterrent.

*Link between deterrents and relationship satisfaction.* Differences due to type of couple in the strength of the link between each of the nine deterrents (excluding moral values, which had no variability for gay male and lesbian partners) and relationship satisfaction were assessed in multilevel random-intercept regression analyses. For each deterrent, the predictors of relationship satisfaction included age, education, income, and length of cohabitation (as control variables); the particular deterrent of interest; two dummy variables representing membership in a gay male couple or a lesbian couple (with heterosexual couples as the reference group); and interactions involving the deterrent of interest and each of the two type-of-couple dummy variables. Because none of the effects associated with the interactions involving the two dummy variables were significant, the link between deterrents and relationship satisfaction was of the same strength for gay male and lesbian partners as it was for heterosexual partners.<sup>1</sup>

## Discussion

### *Kinds of factors identified as deterrents*

Although considerable attention has been devoted to identifying the factors that predict the decision to stay in a relationship (Adams &

1. In analyses not reported here, the link between attractions and relationship satisfaction was also of the same strength for gay male and lesbian partners as it was for heterosexual partners.

**Table 4.** Mean ratings of deterrents for partners by type of couple and unstandardized coefficients for type-of-couple contrasts

Deterrent	Mean rating			Unstandardized coefficient (heterosexual versus)	
	Gay male ( <i>n</i> = 66)	Lesbian ( <i>n</i> = 104)	Heterosexual ( <i>n</i> = 144)	Gay male	Lesbian
Intimacy	7.51	7.65	5.49	1.95**	2.10**
Commitment	3.48	2.59	2.91	0.58	-0.46
Family or children	0.39	1.56	4.58	-3.73**	-2.78**
Unattractive alternatives	1.77	2.43	1.55	0.27	0.80
Material possessions	1.78	1.20	1.17	0.57	-0.06
Companionship	1.62	1.44	0.90	0.59	0.51
Moral values	0.00	0.00	2.11	-1.98**	-2.01**
Fear	0.48	0.54	1.00	-0.57	-0.48
Support from partner	0.96	0.58	0.92	0.11	-0.31
Family members or friends	0.37	0.50	0.42	-0.01	0.08

Note. Maximum score = 9.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

Jones, 1997; Johnson et al., 1999; Rusbult et al., 1998; Stanley & Markman, 1992), there is limited evidence regarding the factors that deter one from leaving a relationship. One advantage of the current study was that separate assessments of attractions and deterrents were obtained from partners from fairly durable gay male, lesbian, and heterosexual relationships. As predicted, and consistent with the findings of Previti and Amato (2003), two classes of deterrents emerged. The first class included factors that were also identified as attractions, whereas the second class included factors that could be regarded as barriers to leaving the relationship.

This finding indicates that the models of commitment that include preventive components (Adams & Jones, 1997; Johnson et al., 1999; Stanley & Markman, 1992) might be refined by characterizing deterrents in terms of distinct attraction and barriers components. This finding also provides one basis for examining whether the assessment of the investment size component of the Rusbult et al. (1998) model might distinguish between two aspects of investment that are currently merged. The first aspect addresses the extent to which resources have been invested in the relationship, whereas the second aspect addresses the

extent to which one fears losing those resources if the relationship were to end.

#### *Links between types of deterrents and relationship satisfaction*

Consistent with speculations by Adams and Jones (1997), Johnson (1999), and Levinger (1999), findings from the current study indicate that the kinds of factors regarded as deterrents to leaving a relationship are linked to one's overall satisfaction with the relationship. As predicted, deterrents that tended to reflect attractive features of the relationship (such as intimacy and companionship) were positively related to relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, deterrents that tended to reflect barriers to leaving the relationship (such as family or children, unattractive alternatives, material possessions, moral values, and family members or friends) were negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Effects for commitment, fear, and support from partner were not significant.

The nonsignificant effects for fear and support might be due to limited variability for these features. The nonsignificant effects associated with commitment, however, cannot be due to limited variability because responses

reflecting some aspect of commitment were the second most frequent deterrent mentioned. It is possible that different aspects of commitment might be differentially related to attractions and barriers. Indeed, Previti and Amato (2003) distinguished between commitment to the partner, which they regarded as a reward, and commitment to the relationship, which they regarded as a barrier. Attempts to distinguish between types of commitment in the responses participants provided in this study, however, were frustrated by the fact that many participants simply listed "commitment." Future studies could develop structured ratings scales in which the deterrent force of different dimensions of commitment is assessed.

The finding that particular deterrents were either positively or negatively related to satisfaction supports Johnson's (1999) view that the overall quality of the relationship provides a context in which relationship partners become aware of their reasons for maintaining membership in a relationship. In the presence of positive relationship quality, the very factors that draw one to the relationship are likely to be perceived as the factors that prevent one from leaving that relationship. This finding is consistent with evidence by Johnson et al. (1999) and Rusbult et al. (1998) that resources invested in a relationship account for unique variation in commitment. However, in the presence of negative relationship quality, barriers—and not attractions—emerge as factors that prevent one from leaving the relationship. This finding corroborates Previti and Amato's (2003) evidence that, compared to persons who reported only rewards as factors keeping their marriages together, those who reported only barriers were less happy with their marriages and were more likely to divorce.

As noted earlier, Rusbult et al.'s (1998) model is probably the best empirically validated model of commitment in that there is evidence not only that satisfaction, alternatives, and investment are distinct factors but also that each factor accounts for unique variance in commitment. Future studies done within the context of this model could examine whether the motive to avoid negative consequences to leaving the relationship is an additional factor that accounts for unique variability

in commitment. Etcheverry and Agnew (2004) found that dating partners' normative beliefs about whether members of their social network (e.g., friends, siblings, and parents) thought they should stay in their relationship accounted for variability in commitment above and beyond that accounted for by satisfaction, alternatives, and investment. To the extent that the need to comply with the expectations of social network members acts as an outside factor that affects one's willingness to maintain a relationship, the motive to avoid untoward consequences to ending the relationship might address unique aspects of the commitment process.

In addition, studies with a longitudinal focus could identify the point in the trajectory of change in relationship quality when the factors that deter one from leaving the relationship change from a predominant focus on attractive features of the relationship to a predominant focus on barriers to leaving. Such studies could also lay the foundation for clinical applications. For example, the usefulness of developing couple typologies could be explored by comparing couples in which partners are similar or different with regard to perceived deterrents to leaving the relationship. Extending Previti and Amato's (2003) findings that were based on only one partner per couple, couples in which both partners perceive deterrents as barriers may be especially likely to dissolve. Also, interviews with partners from abusive or "empty shell" relationships (Levinger, 1979) who are likely to feel trapped in their relationships could specifically target appraisals of both the attraction and the barriers dimensions of factors that deter one from leaving a relationship.

#### *Cross-partner effects regarding the influence of deterrents on relationship satisfaction*

One advantage to having data from both partners from the same couple is that both intrain-partner and cross-partner effects can be examined (Kenny et al., 2002). Consistent with the findings of Frank and Brandstätter (2002), for most of the deterrents identified in this study, only one's own appraisal of that deterrent accounted for variability in one's

own relationship satisfaction. However, for three deterrents—intimacy, family or children, and moral values—both one's own appraisal and that of one's partner accounted for variability in one's own relationship satisfaction. Clinical interventions might specifically focus on these three deterrents for both members of the couple.

The compound effect for intimacy on relationship satisfaction was positive in nature such that one's own view and the view of one's partner that intimacy was a deterrent to leaving the relationship made independent contributions to one's own high relationship satisfaction. This finding highlights the interdependent character of close relationships in which one's own appraisal of the quality of the relationship is determined not only by one's own perceptions of what happens in the relationship but also by those of one's partner. Future work could identify the mechanisms by which this interdependence affects relationship quality. For example, both partners placing value on intimacy in the relationship may facilitate the constructive resolution of conflict.

In contrast, the compound effect for both family or children and moral values on relationship satisfaction was negative in nature such that one's own view and the view of one's partner that family/children or moral values were deterrents to leaving the relationship made independent contributions to one's low relationship satisfaction. It is possible that having two partners in the same relationship who value the importance of family or children or who feel morally obligated to honor the commitments made to the relationship may provide partners with reasons and motivations to stay in a relationship despite relatively low satisfaction with it. Future work could identify what these reasons and motivations are and how they exert their effects on relationship stability as well as assess the extent to which an exclusive focus on obligatory deterrents detrimentally affects the well-being of each individual partner.

#### *Type-of-couple effects*

Differences between gay male/lesbian partners and heterosexual partners occurred for only 3

of the 10 deterrents studied. Nonetheless, the pattern of these differences is consistent with previous findings comparing these kinds of partners (Kurdek, 2001). Relative to heterosexual partners, both gay male and lesbian partners reported stronger deterrents regarding intimacy, weaker deterrents relevant to family or children, and weaker deterrents referring to moral values.

Because the gay male and lesbian partners studied here did not have legal or religious barriers to prevent them from ending an unhappy relationship, it is understandable that, relative to heterosexual partners, they would report both stronger perceived attractions to their relationship and weaker moral deterrents. Still, it is of note that some gay male and lesbian participants did regard the promises made to their partners as having some moral force. In addition, because the gay male and lesbian partners in this study were not living with children, they could not identify children as a deterrent (see Previti & Amato, 2003). Still, some of these partners regarded being a member of a couple as being part of a family. Even though evidence regarding higher instability for gay male and lesbian couples relative to married heterosexual couples is limited and not consistent (Andersson et al., 2006), trends toward higher instability for gay male and lesbian couples could be accounted for, in part, by the overall absence of institutionalized barriers that help to stabilize relationships. As same-sex partners begin to raise children more frequently and as same-sex relationships are legally recognized, one might expect that family, children, and moral values will show a concomitant increase as deterrents to leaving the relationship.

In contrast to the type-of-couple differences that were found in perceived deterrents, there were no type-of-couple differences in the strength with which perceived deterrents were linked to relationship quality. This evidence is consistent with an overall trend indicating that the factors linked to relationship quality do not differ for gay male, lesbian, and heterosexual partners (e.g., Kurdek, 2004). In the context of the current study, the lack of type-of-couple effects provides evidence that the links between perceived



deterrents and relationship satisfaction are fairly robust.

#### *Limitations and conclusion*

Several limitations of the current study need to be noted. First, no claim can be made that the samples of predominantly White partners from the United States recruited were representative. Second, partners from gay male, lesbian, and heterosexual couples were not matched on demographic variables. Third, gay male and lesbian partners did not live with children, removing an important deterrent to ending a relationship. Fourth, because gay male and lesbian partners were recruited from the United States in which marriage is not a universal option, findings might not generalize to other countries in which such an option is available. Fourth, because participants provided their responses in surveys rather than in interviews, no mechanism was available to ensure that participants understood the distinction between attractions and deterrents and that they did not collaborate on their responses. Fifth, because the measure of relationship quality was specific to satisfaction, the current findings may not generalize to other measures of relationship quality such as commitment, separation proneness, and stability. Finally, because no longitudinal data were collected, the claim that perceived deterrents to ending a relationship change as a function of relationship quality remains to be empirically verified. Despite these limitations, the findings from this study document that both attractions to the relationship and barriers to leaving the relationship can be viewed as deterrents to leaving a relationship, that relationship satisfaction is linked to which type of deterrent is regarded as salient, that some deterrents have both intrapartner and cross-partner influences, and that the link between deterrents and relationship satisfaction is robust over partners from diverse types of relationships.

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