

6-2016

# Child Welfare Social Workers' Knowledge and Comfort Level in Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Foster Youth

Deanne Gay McCollum

California State University - San Bernardino, [charmomder@sbcglobal.net](mailto:charmomder@sbcglobal.net)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

McCollum, Deanne Gay, "Child Welfare Social Workers' Knowledge and Comfort Level in Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Foster Youth" (2016). *Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations*. Paper 373.

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Graduate Studies at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@csusb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@csusb.edu).

CHILD WELFARE SOCIAL WORKERS' KNOWLEDGE AND  
COMFORT LEVEL IN WORKING WITH LESBIAN, GAY,  
BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUESTIONING  
FOSTER YOUTH

---

A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

---

by  
Deanne Gay McCollum

June 2016

CHILD WEFARE SOCIAL WORKERS' KNOWLEDGE AND  
COMFORT LEVEL IN WORKING WITH LESBIAN, GAY,  
BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUESTIONING  
FOSTER YOUTH

---

A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

by  
Deanne Gay McCollum

June 2016

Approved by:

Dr. Rosemary McCaslin, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Dr. Janet Chang, M.S.W. Research Coordinator

© 2016 Deanne Gay McCollum

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine child welfare social workers' attitudes, awareness, and understanding of the needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth while in out-of-home placement. This study used quantitative data collection methods of social workers in three Southern California counties regarding these issues, and 27 such workers participated.

It was found that only half of the child welfare social workers had received training on issues involving LGBTQ foster youth, but that the majority of those workers who received training were interested in learning more about the topic. It was also found that many workers had family, friends, or colleagues who belonged to the LGBTQ community, and that this personal connection reduced the endorsement of heterocentric views. Political orientation was also influential with liberal social workers being less inclined to endorse the idea that the world's inhabitants should be heterosexual. The results found that many social workers either had none or were not aware of the presence of any LGBTQ foster youth on their caseloads. This was explained with a combination of the worker not enquiring or feeling that it was not appropriate to do so. Of those who indicated that they were aware of such youth, all stated that the youth shared their identities after being asked about it or after some time had passed in working with them. Also, those who

acknowledged the presence of LGBTQ youth were more cognizant of identity development issues of LGBTQ youth, were more liberal politically, and had friends in the LGBTQ community. The limitations, recommendations for social work practice, policy, and suggested further research is also discussed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author of this project would like to acknowledge Dr. Rosemary McCaslin for providing guidance and support throughout the research process. I would also like to acknowledge the dedicated child welfare social workers that participated and spread the word about the study. Thank you so much for your help.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Problem Statement.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	3
Significance of the Project for Social Work.....	4
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction.....	7
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth, Foster Care, and the basis for Discrimination .....	7
Identity Development of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth.....	10
Studies of Professional Social Workers and Heterocentrism.....	14
Theories Guiding Conceptualization.....	16
Summary.....	17
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	
Introduction.....	19
Study Design.....	19
Research Questions.....	21
Sampling.....	21
Data Collection and Instruments.....	22

Procedures.....	24
Protection of Human Subjects.....	25
Data Analysis .....	25
Summary.....	27
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	
Introduction.....	27
Presentation of the Findings.....	27
Summary.....	38
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	
Introduction.....	40
Discussion.....	41
Limitations.....	44
Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research.....	44
Conclusions.....	46
APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS.....	48
APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE.....	50
APPENDIX C: CONSENT STATEMENT.....	58
APPENDIX C: DEBRIEFING STATEMENT.....	60
REFERENCES.....	62

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants.....	28
Table 2. Social Worker Relationships with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Community.....	30
Table 3. Reasons Why Social Workers are Not Aware of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth.....	32
Table 4. Reasons Why Social Workers are Aware of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth.....	33
Table 5. Awareness of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Identity Development in Youth.....	35
Table 6. Factors Affecting Heterocentrism.....	37

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The presence of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth in out-of-home care as part of the child welfare system is an important topic to examine to ensure that these youth's social, emotional, physical, safety, and developmental needs are adequately met. In this chapter, the issues of foster youth in general are discussed as well as the unique problems that LGBTQ minors face. Additionally, the attitudes and awareness of child welfare social workers was examined.

#### Problem Statement

The struggles of the LGBTQ community have been well documented in research, popular press, and the media in general. As with other minority groups, this population has suffered from systemic discrimination and violence. Unique to the present, however, the LGBTQ community is the only group who is still denied rights, such as marriage, that the rest of the United States population enjoys. It is an indication that while more and more citizens are recognizing that discrimination against this population is wrongheaded, this country still lags behind European countries in acceptance of the LGBTQ community (Chonody & Smith, 2013).

This still-present discrimination and lack of acceptance of this population naturally affects people of all ages, but it is especially problematic

for children as they are developing into adults. The period of adolescence is typically when identity is developed, according to Erik Erikson (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013, pg. 313), and is characterized by a period of thinking about who they are involves the crystallization of self. It is of no surprise, then, that most individuals come to the realization of their sexual orientation around this time, although they may not share this understanding freely due to understanding the social implications of doing so. For those youth who do disclose their sexual orientation, the risk of rejection by family and acquaintances is real and can lead to being ejected from the family of origin and into homelessness or the foster care system, which has been shown to be a largely non-supportive living situation for many LGBTQ youth (Clements & Rosenwald, 2007).

The number of youth who identify as LGBTQ who are in foster care is not unsubstantial. According to the National Resource Center for Youth Development (NRCYD, 2014), it is estimated that five to ten percent of adolescent foster youth are identified as part of the queer community (cite website). Research suggests that because of their sexual orientation, these youth do not receive needed services (e.g., educational, psychological, health-related) at the same level as their heterosexual peers in placement (Freundlich & Avery, 2004; Mallon,1998). This lack of assistance and support contributes to the poor outcomes of these youth as they reach the age of majority without having their needs met.

The coordination of services is a primary function of child welfare social workers, but few studies have examined the attitudes and level of acceptance that these workers hold. In a meta-analysis that looked at the state of antigay bias in the social work profession, Chonody and Smith (2013) identified only nine studies that focused on social work practitioners, and none of those contained a sample of child welfare professionals.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine child welfare social workers' attitudes, awareness, and understanding of the needs of LGBTQ youth while in out-of-home placement. As it has been found that few of these young people are successfully reunified with their families of origin or leave foster care with any significant adult connections (Mallon, Aledort, & Ferrera, 2002), it is vitally important that the needs of these youth be addressed appropriately and that they receive as much support as possible while in care.

One question addressed in this study is how aware child welfare social workers are regarding the presence of LGBTQ youth in their caseloads, as the identification of such youths is thought to be underestimated in the foster care population (Clements & Rosenwald, 2007). Indeed, it is believed that LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in this system (CASA, 2009). This could be due to several factors. Prior research had indicated that there is a degree of heterosexism that exists in child welfare social workers (Krieglstein, 2003), which is not surprising due to the rate of this attitude in the general public.

This could lead to a feeling of disdain or denial on the part of workers that, in turn, could contribute to the tendency to turn a blind eye to the issue.

However, it is possible that a lack of continuing educational experiences for workers on the presence and needs of this population could lead to less of an emphasis on identifying LGBTQ youth. It seems important to investigate the opportunities the agency is providing to child welfare social workers as further education could add to the worker's toolbox when managing the care of this or other foster care populations that would benefit from extra attention to their overall welfare.

As the areas of inquiry listed above have both quantitative and qualitative aspects, a mixed method approach was used. Basic demographic information was gathered as well as a short questionnaire regarding social workers' awareness of and work with LGBTQ youth on their caseloads. A scaled-down version of the Queer Consciousness Survey (Massey, 2009) was used to measure social workers' beliefs and attitudes such as to how much progress and diversity is valued, how firmly rooted to gender roles the individual is, and positive beliefs about gays and lesbians.

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work

This area of inquiry is important for the field of child welfare social work for several reasons. Primarily, as research has demonstrated that LGBTQ youth have unique challenges in out-of-home care that can lead to struggles both within and outside of themselves, it is vital that attitudes of child welfare

social workers are examined as these workers provide an important source of support to these youths. While attitudes cannot always be changed, education has an effect on understanding and can give social workers accurate information to use in assisting this vulnerable population. Indeed, Mallon (1997) postulated that a combination of moral attitudes and a lack of knowledge about LGBTQ identity development were key in appropriately serving this population. Thus, measuring the level of knowledge of social workers regarding the needs of LGBTQ youth is necessary in order to guide future implementation and design of educational programs within child welfare agencies.

It is also important that social workers work toward understanding other groups through education, as stated in the National Association of Social Worker (NASW) Code of Ethics. In 2008, the Code of Ethics was amended to include the following statement:

Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability.

This is a powerful addition as it commands social workers to push past their personal beliefs and to seek knowledge about others so that they can better serve their clients' needs. This study attempts to contribute to the

literature by looking at the educational opportunities afforded to social workers and their participation in those classes.

Finally, this study sought to examine the attitudes of a rarely studied population: child welfare social workers. Few studies have been conducted on this population regarding antigay bias and, as these workers play an integral role in the development and protection of LGBTQ foster youth, it is important to investigate.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter provides background on the prevalence of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth in out-of-home care, the special challenges this population faces, and outcomes as these youth transition out of adjudicated care. Also, the development of identity is discussed, and the role child welfare workers play in that development. Research has been used to illuminate what is known and what needs to be more fully addressed. Ecosystems theory is discussed as it pertains to the vastly different person-in-environment fit that LGBTQ youths often face. Lastly, previously conducted research that focused on the presence of consciousness, knowledge, and approach/withdraw behavior in professional social workers will be discussed.

#### Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth, Foster Care, and the Basis for Discrimination

In a recent article in the Los Angeles Times (2014), it was reported that approximately 1 in 5 foster youth in Los Angeles County identified as LGBTQ, which is a higher percentage than found in the general population. However, this population has been difficult to document due to youths wanting to remain invisible to the foster care system due to the problems associated with being

identified and the poor treatment that ensues. It has been well documented that LGBTQ foster youth are subject to poorer treatment in out-of-home care as compared to their gender-conforming counterparts. These youth are subject to verbal harassment and physical violence by caregivers and other foster youth, and have an increased risk of suicide, homelessness, multiple placement changes, group home placements, and a lack of permanency planning (CASA, 2009; Clements & Rosenwald, 2007; Mallon, 1998). As the risks to these youth are high, it is not surprising that they are hesitant to share with anyone their sexual orientation or to discuss questions they may have about their identity.

The fact that LGBTQ youth remain largely hidden is a concerning issue on several fronts. If these youth have no trusted people with whom they can discuss this topic openly, it can affect healthy identity development. Also, if LGBTQ youth are forced to keep silent because of the above-mentioned problems, it makes it impossible for the social worker to help connect the young person to supportive groups and services, and to work as a protective factor while the youth is in out-of-home care. Finally, the mere fact that youth conceal who they are indicates that they fear social workers' and foster caregivers' negative reactions which can have negative effects on the health and well-being of this population as their needs are not sufficiently met.

Some of the problems associated with attitudes toward this population could be explained by heterocentrism. To explain the concept more completely, Mallon (1998) stated,

Heterocentrism, which I feel most accurately describes the systemic display of gay and lesbian discrimination in major social institutions – in this case the child welfare system – has as its primary assumption that the world is and should be heterosexual. This assumption, illustrated most clearly by heterosexual privilege, causes gay and lesbian individuals to engage in a constant search for a good fit between their individual nature, which is regarded as stigmatized by Western society (and usually their families), and their environments, which are generally hostile and void of nutrients necessary for healthy growth. (pg. 9)

To the degree that child welfare social workers buy into heterocentrism can have a certain impact on LGBTQ youth as these individuals will be viewed as abnormal and that could lead to insensitive treatment as workers use a “one size fits all” approach to service delivery. As workers are charged with the task of “prevent[ing] and eliminate[ing the] domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of ...sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression...” according to the National Association of Social Worker’s Code of Ethics (2008), it is important to address this topic in the child welfare system in order to provide the best assistance to these youth.

## Identity Development of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth

Developmental theorists have talked about adolescence as a time when a youth examines who they are, what they believe in, and tries on different ideas in order to solidify their identity (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). The literature on identity formation and LGBTQ youth indicates that Erik Erikson's stage of Identity vs. Identity Diffusion does not capture the experience of these young people (Sullivan, 1994). Indeed, it has been argued that all theories of adolescent development assume heterosexuality (Mallon, 1998), thus do not capture the process that LGBTQ youth go through (pg. 20).

Within adolescence, there are four stages described by Troiden (1989) that are negotiated on the way to arriving at a homosexual identity. The first stage is *sensitization*, when a person notices that they are attracted to others of the same sex. After this awareness comes to the fore, it is thought that a struggle begins within the individual as they begin to think about what it means to be homosexual. This stage, *identity confusion*, is characterized by the evaluation of these feelings while surrounded by the ideas of the dominant culture regarding homosexuality. The third stage is *identity assumption*, where the individual accepts that they are gay, which leads to *commitment* – which is defined as “adopting the gay/lesbian identity (Ragg, Patrick, & Ziefert, 2006, pg. 244).” This set of stages is related to the coming-out process, and it is

described as a framework in which there is a high variability as to how an individual moves through the stages (Sullivan, 1994).

As LGBTQ youth are aware of the dominant culture's level of acceptance of homosexuality, they are often forced to make frequent decisions on with whom they can safely share their identity (Ragg, Patrick & Ziefert, 2006). As these disclosures can be met with negative responses, it is important that youth have caring and safe relationships with others who will support their identities and understand the unique needs of these young people. In foster care, that responsibility lies primarily with foster caregivers and child welfare social workers as both have been entrusted to ensure that the youth's safety, emotional, health-related, educational, and psychological needs are met. Social workers play an integral role in LGBTQ youth's healthy identity development due to their primary role in assuring sensitive and responsible care and services, as most homosexual youth in out-of-home care do not have familial or informal supports upon which they can rely (Ragg, Patrick & Ziefert).

In a study that sought to discover what competencies child welfare social workers needed to play a positive and supportive role in gay and lesbian youth identity development, Ragg, Patrick, and Ziefert (2006) interviewed 21 youth who were involved in the foster care system. This qualitative study sought to find what social worker practices youth found helpful in supporting identity formation. Three themes were discovered and described as polar

opposites: Vulnerability verses empowerment, stigmatization verses validation, and acceptance verses rejection. Each will be discussed in turn.

It is easy to understand that LGBTQ youth feel vulnerable in the foster care system as who they come out to could have a strong effect on their lives. The theme of vulnerability verses empowerment captures this. Fears expressed by youth in this study included foster caregivers and peers finding out that they were gay/lesbian which often leads to caregivers overreacting to issues of a sexual nature, placement moves, harassment, and dehumanizing treatment (Ragg, Patrick & Ziefert, 2006). The youth interviewed were concerned about social workers sharing their sexual orientation with the system without permission, leaving the youth with a sense of powerlessness, as they have no control over who knows this personal information about them. The youth felt empowered by staying invisible to the system, which gave them a sense of security but hindered their ability to integrate their identity with those around them. Ragg, Patrick and Ziefert concluded that social workers “must be able to protect youth and manage their feelings of systemic vulnerability (pg. 253)”.

Stigmatization versus validation was another theme gleaned from the analysis of data. The reactions of child welfare social workers can either reinforce the feeling of being abnormal or can support feelings of being unique (Ragg, Patrick & Ziefert, 2006). Being unique is not a negative as all individuals have different ways of thinking of themselves. Having a supportive

person who feels that those areas of pride, which are different from others, are worthwhile can positively impact self-esteem. Social workers can help by providing appropriate services that connect the youth with others so that they can build a sense of pride and gain input that counters the negative messages in the dominant culture. Also, workers can play an important role in countering stigma and helping youth appreciate their own special abilities (Ragg, Patrick & Ziefert).

Finally, Ragg, Patrick and Ziefert (2006) identified the theme of acceptance versus rejection, which focused on the interactions between LGBTQ youths and others. The authors found that youth were very sensitive to signs of rejection to the point of avoiding sharing their identity as to do that would automatically end any relationship. Another issue was dismissal – when a social worker did not take seriously a youth’s understanding of their own identity. It was found that social workers that stayed open and engaged with the youth aided in the feeling of being accepted for who they are. This research points to the fact that child welfare social workers have a special role in LGBTQ youths’ lives and need to be aware of the influence they have. Social workers who work with foster youth have the opportunity to play a positive role in their lives by not only providing appropriate services but also by using “human capital” such as understanding, support, and patience which appears to be especially important to gay youth who likely have no one to turn to.

## Studies of Professional Social Workers and Heterocentrism

As negativity toward LGBTQ people exists in the general population, the question becomes how do social workers feel about homosexuality. This is important to examine because as a profession, social workers dominate the areas of social services and mental health provision that cater to a wide range of people. One would hope that because the desire of many who go into this field is to work with marginalized populations that there would be less heterosexism among professional social workers. However, relatively few studies have looked at this population and fewer yet have focused on child welfare social workers. It is an important topic as a conflict between personal beliefs and professional behavior often causes problems in service delivery (Mallon, 1999).

One study was identified that looked at research on views toward the LGBTQ community and professional social workers. Chonody and Smith (2013) conducted a meta-analysis in order to determine the prevalence of anti-gay bias. The authors identified peer-reviewed journal articles between the years of 1980 and 2012 by using several academic search engines typically used for social sciences and education. Thirty-one articles were identified. However, only eight of the studies were conducted on social work professionals, and none sampled child welfare workers. In general, it was found that heterosexism was low in social workers. It was also found that knowing people who were gay or lesbian (Krieglstein, 2003), the person's own

sexual orientation, people who were Democrats, and not religious significantly predicted lack of bias (Crisp, 2006). However, a religiosity was a heavy predictor of bias toward the LGBTQ population due to religion's influence on a person's attitudes (Whitley, 2009).

Other studies tried to discover if education had an impact on views on heterosexism. In a study that examined the views of school social workers, Krieglstein (2003) focused on three issues that have been found to impact attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals: the amount of education about the population, the number of positive relationships with gay and lesbian people, and religious affiliation. Overall, it was found that most social workers showed low levels of heterosexism. Using Spearman's Rho, it was found that hours of education and positive relationships were significantly negatively correlated with heterosexism, while religiosity was significantly positively correlated with it. This study could be used to argue that increased education about the LGBTQ population could play a role in breaking stereotypes and misinformation that exists in this culture.

As previously stated, the research outlined above surveyed social workers who deliver mental health services or work in an educational setting. Although these studies are illuminating regarding the attitudes of workers and provide information regarding predictors of heterosexism in the profession, no studies were discovered that looked at child welfare workers attitudes and thoughts. However, one article was found that discussed some findings from

a study conducted in 2000, which surveyed workers in a state child welfare agency (As cited in Quinn, 2002). As reported by Quinn (2002), an MSW student surveyed 254 workers in a state agency in the Northwest portion of the country and found that 33% of the workers indicated that they held beliefs that were consistent with negative stereotypes about the LGBTQ population, and 83% were aware that they had LGBTQ youth on their caseloads. Additionally, 45% of social workers that participated in this study indicated that they did not know about resources that would serve this population or failed to answer the question. This is a shocking finding as it indicates that although workers knew that they had LGBTQ youth to serve, they did not know how to help them in a culturally competent manner. As this study was conducted over a decade ago and attitudes toward this population have changed for the better, it is an important issue to explore.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

As many of the experiences that LGBTQ foster youth have are within families that are not their own and with a lack of meaningful people in their lives, it is important to pay attention to how these youth interact with other people and organization with which they are involved. Ecosystems theory holds that people interact in a dynamic fashion with the systems around them (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013). These interactions influence not only the person but the environment as well with the goal of finding a best fit between the individual and what is around them. This would appear to be a special

problem with LGBTQ youth in foster care as often, the family (their most primary unit in their systems), has not played a supportive role and the youth has been removed from it due to lack of fit (Mallon, 1998). As this population is particularly vulnerable to becoming isolated from others in their lives due to the fear of sharing their true selves, a large part of their primary systems that would act as a support in their development of a healthy identity is missing. This places the responsibility of foster caregivers and child welfare social workers to fill this role. Therefore, the transactional nature of the systems that surround these youth is altered, and it is important that those who have been entrusted with their care are sensitive to their special needs in order for the youth to be able to negotiate with outside systems in a manner that is relevant to them and supports their success.

### Summary

It is clear that problems exist for LGBTQ foster youth. Not only are they often mistreated and rejected while in care, but there is little understanding regarding the way that these youth develop a sense of identity. For child welfare social workers, not understanding the identity process, holding biases against this population, and the lack of education and resources are problematic in providing for the needs of LGBTQ youths. For these young people, their social supports can be few to non-existent if they are not in a supportive foster home or do not have a social worker with which they can feel comfortable and safe as these are the systems that most closely surround

them. One could venture to say that because of societal rejection because of their foster youth status on top of being gay, it is a challenge for these young people to have positive interactions with the systems that surround them.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in this research project. The design of the study is presented, including the rationale behind it. Additionally, practical methodological implications and the limitations of this study are explored, as well as the sampling frame and the tools used for data collection. The procedures for data collection and data analysis are described, which include protection of human subjects. Finally, a statement regarding the research questions guiding this study is presented.

#### Study Design

The aim of this study was to examine: 1) child welfare workers' understanding of identity development in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth, 2) the awareness of the presence and needs of LGBTQ youth in their caseloads, and 3) the attitudes of child welfare workers toward LGBTQ community members in general. This study used a mixed-methods approach, as it contains both quantitative and qualitative measures regarding the above-mentioned issues. The quantitative aspects of this study involved a scale measure that examined the subtle forms of prejudice, knowledge of and actions toward identifying LGBTQ youth that they were working with, and knowledge about LGBTQ identity

formation. Room for open-ended responses was provided in order to collect participants' further explanations or comments about these areas of interest. These open-ended responses were analyzed in a qualitative fashion or used in the results to illustrate the thoughts and feelings of the participants.

The implications of this study could affect the awareness of social workers and delivery of child welfare services in the future. As identity development in adolescence is important to future outcomes, it is important that social workers are aware of the unique process under which LGBTQ youth explore themselves and can play a unique role in supporting that. It is also important to look at the subtle signs of bias in order to examine ways to counter their effects. Finally, to explore the comfort of child welfare workers in supporting LGBTQ youth while in out-of-home care is important as youth need to be able to trust who they come out to and it could be the case that the worker does not know how to ask, the youth does not feel comfortable in sharing, or both.

A limitation with this study is that it is focusing on child welfare social workers that may respond to questions that do not reflect their true feelings. As it has been argued that there is a liberal bias that exists within the social work community, this may have an effect on the responses provided. A second limitation along the same vein is that child welfare workers may be reluctant to participate in the study due to the sensitive nature of the topic of inquiry and its relationship to their professional careers.

## Research Questions

This research is exploratory in nature and seeks to address the following questions:

### Question 1

Do child welfare social workers have access to training on the unique needs and identity development of LGBTQ youth?

### Question 2

What level of awareness do child welfare social workers have of LGBTQ youth on their caseloads?

### Question 3

What is child welfare social workers' understanding of identity development in LGBTQ youth?

### Question 4

How prevalent is heterosexism among child welfare social workers?

## Sampling

Data was collected by the snowball sampling of child welfare workers employed by county agencies in Southern California. Participants were recruited by the author. The initial participants were county child welfare workers who were pursuing their Master's Degree in Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino. Information about the study was provided printed on business-size cards (Appendix A) that were distributed to the initial participants requesting their cooperation. The card outlined the subject of the

study and a website address where respondents could go to complete the survey. The respondents were asked to complete the survey on their own time and to pass out information about the study to other child welfare workers who might be interested in participating. Extra materials were provided to the initial group for dissemination. To be included in the study, the participants were required to be a current employee of a county child welfare agency. While the participant's level of education was measured in this study, an MSW was not necessary to participate. This sample was chosen as there have been few previous studies using child welfare workers as participants, and these workers play an important role in the support of LGBTQ youth who are in the foster care system. As the participants were recruited by other workers in the field and surveys were completed during non-paid time, no agency authorization was required.

### Data Collection and Instruments

Data was gathered by self-report surveys, (Appendix B). Data was collected from child welfare social workers in Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties using snowball methodology. According to Grinnell and Unrau (2014), snowball sampling is accomplished by asking known members of a population to participate in a study with the request that they assist in identifying other members who would qualify as participants (pg. 309). Aside from collecting demographic information on the participants (e.g., gender, age, and level of education measured on a nominal or ratio scale as

applicable), the level of heterosexism, awareness of LGBTQ youth in the child welfare population, and understanding of identity development of these youth are additional variables.

Heterosexism will be measured using items from a seven-factor model developed by Massey (2009). The model seeks to tease out the more subtle attitudes involved in modern prejudice against members of the LGBTQ community (Massey, 2009). Massey conducted exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis on a series of questions and came up with seven subscales – four of which were used in the current study due to the measure’s focus on the topic of interest. All items were measured on an interval scale with four choices of response: Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree. Massey’s (2009) scale contains the following subscales: 1) Traditional Heterosexism (eight items) which measured the degree in which respondents find gay people immorally and should be denied certain rights; 2) Denial of Continued Discrimination (six items) that looked at the respondent’s level of belief that discrimination does not exist anymore regarding the gay and lesbian population; 3) Aversion Toward Gay Men and Lesbians (six items) examined the level of discomfort coming into contact with this population; and 4) Value Gay Progress (six items) which measured the degree that respondents support the progress made by gay men and lesbians.

The second topic, awareness of LGBTQ youth in out-of-home care, was measured by using a self-created scale focused on participants’ knowledge

regarding facts about the prevalence of these youth in foster care, and about the workers' own caseloads and knowledge of serving LGBTQ youth. The items were measured in a nominal fashion. A small subset of items was included that asks the participants how many trainings they had received at their workplace on LGBTQ topics and the manner in which that information was presented. Finally, a number of author-created questions were posed involving workers' knowledge of the LGBTQ youth's identity development process. Prompts to provide comments if desired were included.

Regarding the subscales outlined above, the responses will be converted into composite scores (interval) and bivariate tests will be computed to discover any relationships between this scale and the age (interval), gender (nominal), highest level of education (nominal), number of LGBTQ people known as family, friends, and co-workers (ratio), number of LGBTQ youth on caseload (ratio), religiosity (nominal), political orientation (nominal), how many years served as a case-carrying worker in any agency (ratio), and how many of those were served as a county employee (ratio).

### Procedures

As mentioned above, the target population was child welfare social workers in Riverside, San Bernardino, and Los Angeles Counties. Participants were recruited using snowball methodology. Child welfare social workers were recruited by the author who were provided with additional materials to distribute to other colleagues who might be interested in participating in the

study. Recruitment materials were business card-sized items that briefly described the study and gave instruction on how to take the survey via SurveyMonkey®.com. Both the statement of informed consent (Appendix C) and debriefing statement (Appendix D) were available on the website. Data collection was conducted from November 2015 to March 2016.

### Protection of Human Subjects

In order to protect the identity of the participants, no personal identifying information was collected, including county of employment. All participants received an informed consent form describing the nature of the study as well as a debriefing form with information regarding resources should help be needed as part of the online data collection instrument. Data collected was downloaded from the website onto a flash drive and stored in a locked container.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis was used in this study. Correlational, bivariate and multivariate analysis was used to discover any relationships that exist between the demographic variables and their responses to the four subscales of the Massey (2009) instrument measuring subtle forms of heterosexism. Also, the four subscales were totaled to create an overall score of heterosexism.

A scale was also created out of the survey items involving LGBTQ youth identity development. In order to examine whether it make sense to use

all six of the questions in the scale for analysis, a reliability analysis was conducted. It was found that by removing one question from the scale (i.e., “LGBTQ youth does not go through the same stages of development”), the reliability of the remaining items increased to an acceptable level ( $\alpha = .638$ ).

An additional variable created in order to examine the relationship between knowing members of the LGBTQ community and the measures of heterosexism and knowledge of youth identity develop was also performed. The three variables indicating if a participant had a family member, friend, or co-worker who identified as LGBTQ were summed to create a category of number of relationships; Thus, a participant who had no family, friends, or co-workers would receive a score of zero on this item while a respondent who indicated that they had family, friends and co-workers who were part of the LGBTQ community received a score of three.

### Summary

In Chapter Three, the design of the study, sampling, procedures, instruments, data collection, protection of human subjects, and data analysis are described.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the awareness of child welfare social workers to the presence of LGBTQ youth on their caseloads, and to what extent heterosexism exists among this group of workers. Another purpose was to discern the level of understanding that child welfare social workers have regarding LGBTQ youth's identity development. The following chapter describes the results of a survey study obtained from child welfare social workers in three counties. Quantitative analysis was performed and includes descriptive statistic and frequency distributions to describe the sample population. Finally, bivariate and multivariate methods were used and will be presented to describe the association between variables.

#### Presentation of the Findings

The survey sample consisted of twenty-seven participants (N = 27) recruited via snowball sampling from three Southern California county child welfare agencies. Response rate was low with 150 card handed out to workers for recruitment purposes (12.3%). Using the median scores on age, years as a county social worker, and years as a case-carrying worker, those items were collapsed into categories reflecting high vs. low score ranges and used when appropriate.

Table1.

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Variable (N = 27)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	24	88.9
Male	3	11.1
<b>Age</b>		
Younger	15	55.6
Older	12	44.4
<b>Education Level</b>		
Bachelor's Degree	8	29.6
Some Graduate School	7	25.9
Master's Degree	11	40.7
Missing	1	3.7
<b>Number of Years as a County Social Worker</b>		
0 to 9 Years	17	63.0
Over 9 Years	10	37.0
<b>Number of Years as Case-Carrying Social Worker</b>		
0 to 8 Years	17	63.0
Over 9 years	10	37.0
<b>Political Orientation</b>		
Somewhat Conservative	8	29.6
Neither Conservative nor Liberal	9	33.3
Somewhat Liberal	7	25.9
Very Liberal	3	11.1
<b>Religiosity</b>		
Very Religious	3	11.1
Somewhat Religious	12	44.4
Slightly Religious	6	22.2
Agnostic	5	18.5
Atheist	1	3.0

According to Table 1, a large majority of participants were female (89%) with 11% identifying as male, and none as transgender. The ages of the respondents ranged from 29 to 66, with a mean of 40.54 years of age. All of the participants reported the completion of post-secondary education, with 41% reported having earned a Master's Degree, 26% had obtained a Bachelor's Degree but had attended some graduate school, and 30% had earned a Bachelor's Degree. Years working as a child welfare social worker ranged from one to 30 years of service ( $m = 9.33$ ), and years as a case-carrying social worker at any agency ranged from under one year to 26 years, with a mean of 8.78 years. In regards to political orientation of the sample, 20% indicated that they considered themselves to be somewhat conservative, 33% reported that they neither endorsed conservative or liberal views, 26% stated that they were somewhat liberal in their social view, while 11% reported being very liberal. Finally, the majority of the respondents considered themselves somewhat religious (44%), followed by slightly religious (22%), agnostic (19%), very religious (11%), and being atheist (4%).

Table 2.

*Social Worker Relationships with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Community*

Variable (N = 27)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Family Members in LGBTQ Community		
Yes	12	44.4
No	15	55.6
Friends in LGBTQ Community		
Yes	18	66.7
No	8	29.6
Missing	1	3.7
Co-Workers in LGBTQ Community		
Yes	24	88.9
No	3	11.1
Aware of LGBTQ Youth on Caseload		
Yes	13	48.1
No	13	48.1
Don't Know	1	3.7

Respondents were asked if they had family members, friends, and co-workers who were members of the LGBTQ community. Table 2 illustrates the participants' responses on this issue. Forty-four percent of the participants indicated that they had a family member who identified as part of the LGBTQ community, while 56% indicated that they did not. When asked about knowing people outside of the family that belonged to the LGBTQ population, a larger percentage of respondents said that they did with 67% indicating that they had

friends and 89% reporting that they had colleagues that belonged to the community.

*Social Worker Training on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth.* Frequency distributions were run on the set of questions involving whether training on the needs of LGBTQ youth was offered to the participants and, if so, their motivation for participating. It was found that 48% (n = 13) of respondents indicated that they had been offered training with 22% (n = 6) stating that they were not sure training was available. Of those who indicated that they had received training, all indicated that they were interested in the topic. Correlation analysis was conducted to see if there was any relationship between workers who had received training and the heterocentrism measure and its subscales. No relationship was found.

*The Presence of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth in Foster Care.* Frequencies were computed to determine what percentage of the participant know of LGBTQ youth on their caseloads and how they came to know this information. Also examined was the reasons workers may not have explored this with their youth. Half of the child welfare social workers indicated that they had at least one foster youth on their caseloads that identified as LGBTQ, while the same number stated that they did not (N = 13). One respondent indicated that they did not know.

Table 3.

*Reasons Why Social Workers Are Not Aware of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth\**

Variable (N = 13)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
I have not asked youth on my caseload about LGBTQ status	6	46.1
I feel that it is a personal matter the youth will share with me if they want	5	38.5
I feel uncomfortable talking to youth about their sexual orientation	1	7.7
I don't feel that I know enough about the special needs of LGBTQ youth	2	15.4
I do not carry a caseload at this time	2	15.4

\*Three responses were not endorsed by any participants

It was found that approximately half of the respondents had not inquired about youth's LGBTQ status (see Table 3). Roughly one-third indicated that they felt it was a personal matter of discussion, while a small percentage indicated discomfort or lack of knowledge about LGBTQ youth to engage in such a conversation.

Table 4.

*Reasons Why Social Worker Are Aware of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth*

Variable (N = 13)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
I asked the youth directly	6	46.1
The youth told me about their sexual orientation	13	100.0
I could tell because of the way the youth acted	3	23.1
I could tell because of the way the youth spoke	1	7.7
I read the information in the youth's case file/reports	8	61.5
After working with the youth, they told me	6	46.1
No such youth on caseload	4	30.8

As described in Table 4, respondents indicated that all of the youth on their caseloads who identified as part of the LGBTQ community let them know about it. Roughly half of the participants directly asked the youth about their status, while the same percentage reported that their youth opened up to them after some time of working together.

Correlation analysis was utilized to discover relationships between worker's knowledge of LGBTQ youth on their caseloads and the demographic variables

listed above. It was found that the number of years as a case-carrying social worker at any agency was negatively correlated with identifying LGBTQ youth on their caseload. Workers who indicated more years of case-carrying experience also reported having no LGBTQ youth in which they serve,  $r = -.516, p = .006$ .

Utilizing the information from the correlation matrixes, a t-test was conducted to ascertain if any mean differences among the group variable was significant. It was found that there was a mean difference in years as a case-carrying social worker between those who indicated they had LGBTQ youth on their current caseloads (mean = 5.92) and those who stated they did not (mean = 12.15,  $t = 2.733, df = 24, p = .012$ ).

*CWS Social Workers' Knowledge of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Identity Development.* Correlations were also used to discover relationships between the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the measures of knowledge of LGBTQ youth identity. Regarding CWS social workers' knowledge about identity development process in LGBTQ youth, education level was positively correlated. Workers who had more education also expressed more knowledge about this topic,  $r = .391, p = .048$ . Also positively correlated with this variable are political orientation,  $r = .432, p = .025$ , having friends that belong to the LGBTQ community,  $r = .450, p = .021$ , and having LGBTQ youth on their caseloads,  $r = .946, p = .000$ . These results indicate that people who are more liberal in

their political views, who have friends in the community, or have identified LGBTQ youth on their caseloads also demonstrate an awareness of the similarity and differences in identity development in this population of youth.

Table 5.

*Awareness of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Identity Development in Youth*

Variable	Mean	t	df	Sig.
Education Level				
Less than MA	15.93			
MS Degree	16.73	-.876	24	.390
Friend in LGBTQ Community				
No	14.88			
Yes	17.06	-2.467	24	.021
Knowledge of LGBTQ Youth on Caseload				
No	16.69			
Yes	16.38	.381	24	.707
Political Orientation				
Conservative	14.63			
Liberal	17.30	-2.659	16	.017

As described in Table 5, a series of t-tests were conducted to look at any significant differences in the means according to the grouping variables listed above. There was a mean difference found when considering political orientation and having friends that are part of the LGBTQ community. It was

found that there was a mean difference between more politically conservative respondents and those who considered themselves liberal. There was also a significant difference between the means of those who indicated that they had friends who were part of the LGBTQ community and those who stated they did not. There were no mean differences between the scores on the LGBTQ youth identity scale among participants who did and did not identify LGBTQ youth on their caseloads, nor was there a mean difference according to those who had earned a Master's degree and those with a Bachelor's Degree/Some graduate school.

*Heterocentrism.* Finally, bivariate and multivariate analysis was utilized to discover any related variables to the Heterocentrism scale. It was found that participants' political orientation was positively correlated with Heterocentrism. People who considered themselves more liberal had higher scores on the Heterocentrism measure, indicating a more supportive attitude toward the gay community,  $r = .575$ ,  $p = .002$ . Also positively correlated with the measure was having family who was part of the LGBTQ community,  $r = .437$ ,  $p = .023$ , and having co-workers who identify as LGBTQ,  $r = .411$ ,  $p = .033$ .

Table 6.

*Factors Affecting Heterocentrism*

Variable	Mean	t	df	Sig.
Political Orientation				
Conservative	86.00			
Liberal	101.40	-3.056	16	.008
Family in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Community				
No	87.53			
Yes	99.17	-2.432	25	.023
Co-Workers in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Community				
No	77.33			
Yes	94.63	-2.256	25	.033

As outlined in Table 6, a series of t-tests of the heterocentrism scale and the above-indicated items was conducted. There were significant mean differences in all cases. Participants who indicated that they were liberal in their political views had a significantly higher mean score on the Heterocentrism scale, as did individuals who indicated that they have family or co-workers that are part of the LGBTQ community.

Utilizing the composite scores indicating the number of relationships respondents had with different categories of members of the LGBTQ community, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated on the participants' range of responses on the Heterocentrism scale and subscales. For the Heterocentrism scale, the results were significant,  $F(2, 24) = 3.48, p =$

.047. Post Hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated that there was a mean difference between individuals who indicated zero or one connection with the LGBTQ community ( $M = 86.57$ ,  $SD = 18.78$ ) than those who indicated that they had family, friends, and co-worker who identified as LGBTQ ( $M = 102.13$ ,  $SD = 9.52$ ). Participants who indicated two personal connections with the community ( $M = 90.0$ ,  $SD = 9.07$ ) did not significantly differ from either one of the other groups. Two of the subscales that make up the Heterocentrism scale also demonstrated the same pattern. Regarding the Aversion Toward Gay/Lesbian subscale, the results were also significant,  $F(2,24) = 7.37$ ,  $p = .003$ , where those who indicated none or one connection with the community ( $M = 27.43$ ,  $SD = 5.13$ ) scored lower than those with multiple connections ( $M = 34.50$ ,  $SD = 3.30$ , ). The other significant subscale, Traditional Heterocentrism [ $F(2, 26) = 3.42$ ,  $p = .049$ ], showed that those who indicated none or one connection ( $M = 23.14$ ,  $SD = 5.15$ ) scored lower than those with three different kinds of connections ( $M = 29.0$ ,  $SD = 1.85$ ).

### Summary

Chapter Four reviewed the analysis of the data collected during this project. Data was collected from 27 participants who were social workers in a county child welfare agency. The statistics presented described the participants' age, gender, education, years of job-related experience, political leanings, religiosity, and personal ties to the LGBTQ community. Bivariate analyses revealed that the number of years a social worker functioned in a

case-carrying capacity was related to acknowledging that they had LGBTQ youth on their caseloads. It was also found that political orientation and having family, friends, or co-workers who identified as LGBTQ were important factors regarding the level of awareness of LGBTQ identity development and endorsement of heterosexuality.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This section will discuss the findings outlined in the previous chapter. Demographics, frequencies, and bivariate analyses will be discussed, as well as the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research and social work practice.

#### Discussion

The current project's aim was to examine child welfare social workers' attitudes about and awareness of LGBTQ youth in their agencies and if training about the unique needs of these youth was offered to workers. Also examined were the factors implicated in heterocentric views and the effect of having multiple relationships with members of the LGBTQ community has on workers' endorsement or rejection of heterocentrism.

The results indicated that half of the child welfare workers that participated in this study either did not have access to training or did not know if it was available at their agency. It was also found that although half of the works surveyed had attended training regarding LGBTQ youth, attendance was not related to a negative view of heterocentrism or more knowledge of LGBTQ youth identity development. This could indicate that the training

received by workers does not address the topic of identity development and does not change a person's biases toward heterocentrism.

It does seem important that workers indicated that they have not received training on this topic, given that there are so many LGBTQ youth thought to be in the foster care population. It seems, then, that agencies are not fully addressing the needs of this significant youth population by providing adequate training to their staff. It is also a question as to whether or not workers would be open to attending training on this subject. As prior research suggests that heterosexism exists in child welfare agencies (Krieglstein, 2003), workers may opt-out of trainings on the subject unless mandated to attend. Even at that point, it may be a difficult thing to change a person's biases by trainings alone.

Regarding the findings about knowledge of LGBTQ youth on social workers' caseloads, approximately half of the workers surveyed reported that they either had none or did not know. Of those, half did not ask any of their youth about their sexual orientation, and roughly one-third indicated that they felt it was up to the youth to share this information. Finally, about one-quarter of the sample said that they did not feel equipped or comfortable talking about it with their youth. It is clear that workers who did not discuss sexual orientation with their youth felt ill at ease about addressing this topic. Three of the six who responded indicated as such, but it is not clear whether this is

indicative of avoiding the topic due to heterocentric ideas or just a lack of knowledge about what to do once armed with that knowledge.

The results from those workers who did acknowledge LGBTQ youth on their caseloads show some of the ways that this information is shared. Of all of the respondents who indicated the presence of such youth, all of them said that the young people shared with them their sexual identities. As Ragg, Patrick, and Ziefert (2006) found that youth were reticent to share this knowledge due to fear of rejection, it seems that there could be something about these workers that instilled a sense of acceptance so that the youth did not feel that sharing this about themselves was a risky move. However, it also could be that these youth tended to embrace their identity and were more likely to share it willingly to those around them. It was disheartening to find that workers with more experience in the care-carrying capacity were less likely to identify LGBTQ youth on their current caseloads as this many indicate less awareness of the presence of such youth which, in turn, could lead to fewer services provided to address their unique developmental and service needs.

The findings about child welfare social workers' knowledge about LGBTQ identity development indicated that those who had earned a Master's Degree were more knowledgeable about the topic, as were those who had friends who were a part of the community, who held liberal political views, and had identified LGBTQ youth on their caseloads. However, there were only

significant differences among the scores of those who had a personal connection with the community and those who held liberal views. This finding supports those of Krieglstein (2003) in that these two factors tended to indicate a more accepting attitude toward the LGBTQ population as a whole, which would translate into more openness to these youth in foster care. Having friends in the LGBTQ community could provide social workers with a venue in which to discuss identity development from hearing about personal experiences of their friends when they were adolescents. This experience, although anecdotal, could inform workers about the challenges these youth face as well as encourage more exploration on the topic. Mere awareness of the issue could also play a role that affects social work practice.

Finally, regarding the topic of the existence of heterocentrism among child welfare workers, it was found that having more liberal political views and having several different connections with the LGBTQ community was related to lower levels of heterocentrism. Again, this could be the case of familiarity that has increased respondents' awareness of the struggles of this community and spawned an increased level of rejection regarding views that the world should be made up of only heterosexual individuals. It seems a given that those who have these personal connections with LGBTQ individuals have a heightened awareness and interest regarding the issues that this community faces as they have probably heard from loved ones and friends about them.

## Limitations

The primary limitations of this study are the small sample size and low response rate. The low response rate for this study could be an indication that this is a very sensitive and controversial topic where one would have to weigh one's own values against those of the profession of social work. Having to acknowledge biases is an uncomfortable thing for people to face, especially when it directly impacts those that one has been charged with care and well being. The results of this study could represent a select sample of workers who felt more comfortable about their views, which are not necessarily representative of the child welfare social worker population as a whole.

Another limitation to this study is that it is not know what the child welfare workers' training included or who the training was delivered. It is very possible that information on the topics that are the focus of this study were not presented; thus, no greater knowledge in the area of identity development should be expected.

## Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

It is a given that there are youth in the care and custody of child welfare agencies who are part of the LGBTQ community and that these youth have unique needs that are not necessarily being addressed due to underreporting of their presence. It is important to be respectful of their privacy but also to

advocate for them and to provide the support that they may not have gotten from their families of birth.

It is also important that child welfare social workers become aware of LGBTQ youths' needs and feel competent in addressing them. This is where training can play an important role. It is essential that child welfare agencies include mandatory training regarding LGBTQ youth in foster care to their workers. Perhaps hearing from former foster youth who are part of the LGBTQ community might make the topic more personal, as it seems that knowing someone in the community makes a difference in attitudes. As some workers surveyed indicated a lack of knowledge about these youth, it is clear that more training about the LGBTQ community is needed in terms of awareness of the large population of such youth in foster care, how to approach the topic of sexual orientation, and resources to refer their young clients to in the community.

There are a few recommendations for future research. First, it is recommended that more studies of child welfare social workers be conducted in this area in order to determine what training needs are present. Although training in and of itself will not change deeply-held views on acceptance of the LGBTQ community, further awareness that this population exists in foster care and information about how to address issues of gender and sexual non-conformity could help workers deal effectively with their biases and become more comfortable about speaking to these youth and assisting them. A

second recommendation is that research needs to be done on what services are available to this population in each community. It needs to be determined if culturally-competent services for LGBTQ youth exist, and to what extent child welfare social workers are aware of their existence so that their identified youth could be referred.

### Conclusions

This study was conducted to explore child welfare social workers' knowledge about LGBTQ youth in foster care and to the extent that heterocentrism exists in this population. Also examined were any linkages to on-the-job training about LGBTQ foster youth with knowledge of these youth on workers' caseloads. This study used quantitative data collection methods of social workers in three Southern California counties regarding these issues, and 27 such workers participated.

It was found that only half the child welfare social workers surveyed had received training on issues involving LGBTQ foster youth, and that the majority of those workers who had received training were interested in the topic. These trainings, however, did not affect levels of heterocentrism. It was also found that many workers had family, friends, and/or colleagues who belonged to the LGBTQ community, and that personal connection reduced the likelihood of endorsing heterocentric views. Although religious views were not indicative of heterocentrism, political orientation was, with liberal social workers being

less inclined to endorse the idea that the world's inhabitants should be heterosexual.

Finally, it was found that many social workers either had none or were not aware of the presence of any LGBTQ foster youth on their caseloads. This was explained with a combination of the worker not enquiring about it or feeling that it was not appropriate to do so. Of those who indicated that they were aware of such youth, all stated the youth shared their identities after being asked about it or after some time had passed with the social worker and youth working together. Also, those who acknowledged the presence of LGBTQ youth were more cognizant of identity development issues, were more liberally politically, and had friends in the LGBTQ community.

It seems that it would be beneficial for child welfare social workers receive more targeted training on the presence and needs of these youth, and to learn ways to communicate with them and support them. Only if one is aware of their presence and have the tools and knowledge needed to assist can proper support and care occur.

APPENDIX A  
RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Thank you for your help by  
completing this survey regarding  
LGBTQ youth and CWS



Please enter the following into your web browser to be  
taken directly to the survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CWSLGBTQ2016>

**Created by / Developed by Deanne McCollum**

APPENDIX B  
QUESTIONNAIRE

### General Information

2. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Transgender

3. What is your age (in whole years)? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Graduated from high school
- One year of college
- Two years of college
- Three years of college
- Bachelor's Degree
- Some graduate school
- Master's Degree
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Politically speaking, I consider my views to be

- Very conservative
- Somewhat conservative
- Neither conservative nor liberal
- Somewhat liberal
- Very liberal

6. I consider myself to be

- Very religious
- Somewhat religious
- Slightly religious
- Agnostic
- Atheist

7. I have family members who are a part of the LGBTQ community.

- Yes
- No
- If yes, please indicate how many (in numbers): \_\_\_\_\_

8. I have close friends who are members of the LGBTQ community.

- Yes
- No
- If yes, please indicate how many (in numbers): \_\_\_\_\_

9. Do you have co-workers who belong to the LGBTQ community?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, please indicate how many (in numbers): \_\_\_\_\_

10. What program and population of youth do you primarily work with at the county (check all that apply)?

- Family Reunification
- Family Maintenance
- Permanent Placement
- Supportive Transition
- Group Home
- 0-18 years
- 0-12 years
- 12-18 years
- 18 and over

11. How many years have you worked as a social worker for your county of employment?

\_\_\_\_\_

12. How many years did/have you work/worked as a case-carrying worker? \_\_\_\_\_

13. During your employment as a social worker with the county, were you offered training on working with LGBTQ youth?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If yes, how many of these courses did you take (please indicate number)? \_\_\_\_\_

14. If you received training on serving LGBTQ youth, what was your motivation?

- I need to participate in a number of training hours yearly as a part of my terms of employment but I was not interested in the topic
- I need to participate in a number of training hours yearly as a part of my terms of employment but I was interested in the topic
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

15. Do you have LGBTQ youth on your current caseload?

- No
- Yes
- I don't know

16. If you have none or you do not know about the presence of LGBTQ youth in your caseload, please choose as many that apply:

- I have not asked youth on my caseload about LGBTQ status.
- I feel that it is a personal matter that the youth will share with me if they want.
- I feel uncomfortable talking to youth about their sexual orientation.
- I think that it is not relevant to providing for the needs of the youth to discuss their sexual orientation.
- I am afraid to ask as it might change the way I view the youth.
- I feel that it would impact the way that the youth is treated by others if it became known.
- I don't feel that I know enough about the special needs of LGBTQ youth.
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

17. If yes, how did you come to know this information (Check all that apply)?

- I asked the youth directly.
- The youth told me about their sexual orientation.
- I could tell because of the way the youth acted.
- I could tell because of the way the youth spoke.
- I read the information in the youth's case file/reports.
- After some time working with the youth, he/she shared with me about their sexual orientation.
- I do not have any LGBTQ youth on my caseload.
- Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

18. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

- All youth develop their identities in the same manner
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- LGBTQ youth are an at-risk population
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- Identity development is a different process for LGBTQ youth
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- It is not important for child welfare workers to be aware of LGBTQ youth in foster care as they are treated the same as any other youth by caregivers
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- LGBTQ youth do not go through the same stages in identity development
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
- Identity development is not important to consider when working with youth in foster care
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree

19. Please rate the following statements:

On average, people in our society treat gay people and straight people equally

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I try to avoid contact with gay and lesbian individuals

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Homosexuality is just as moral a way of life as heterosexuality

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Lesbians aren't real women and gay men aren't real men

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I see the lesbian and gay movement as a positive thing

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Homosexuality is detrimental to society because it breaks down the natural division between the sexes

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Society has reached the point where gay people and straight people have equal opportunities for advancement

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I admire the strength shown by lesbians

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The idea of same-sex marriage seems ridiculous to me

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Too many lesbians and gay men still lose out on jobs and promotions because of their sexual orientation

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Society is enhanced by the diversity offered by lesbian and gay people

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I wish lesbians would act more feminine

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Discrimination against gay men and lesbians is no longer a problem in the United States

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

It would be upsetting for me to find that I was alone with a gay or lesbian individual

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

If my daughter told me she thought she might be lesbian, I would encourage her to explore that aspect of herself

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Homosexual behavior is just plain wrong

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Most lesbians and gay men are no longer discriminated against

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I would like to have more gay and/or lesbian friends

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

It is important for gay and lesbian people to be true to their feelings and desires

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Lesbians can't be feminine

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

If two people really love each other, then it shouldn't matter whether they are a woman and a man, two women, or two men

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

It is easy to understand why gay and lesbian rights groups are still concerned about societal limitation of homosexual's opportunities

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I'm uncomfortable when gay men act feminine

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Gay men and lesbians should be admired for living their lives in the face of adversity

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children the same as heterosexual couples

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Male homosexuals should not be allowed to teach in schools

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I wish gay men would act more masculine

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I'm uncomfortable when lesbians act masculine

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

If my son told me he thought he might be gay, I would encourage him to explore that aspect of himself

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Adapted from Massey, S. G. (2009). Polymorphous prejudice: Liberating the measurement of heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 56, 147-172.

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT



APPENDIX D  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

## DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

This survey that you have just completed was designed to investigate child welfare social workers' knowledge about identity development of LGBTQ youth, awareness of LGBTQ youth in foster care, and the relationship between subtle attitudes toward the gay and lesbian population and social workers' level of training on working with LGBTQ youth, personal contact, and comfort in addressing issues important to these youth that we serve.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study or would like to find out about the study's outcome, please feel free to contact Dr. Rosemary McCaslin at (909) 537-5507 or at [rmccasli@csusb.edu](mailto:rmccasli@csusb.edu).

## REFERENCES

Branson-Potts, H. (2014, August 27). Gay youths more likely to report trouble in foster care, study finds. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved February 1, 2015, from <http://www.latimes.com>.

Chonody, J. M., & Smith, K. S. (2013). The state of the social work profession: A systematic review of the literature on antigay bias. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services, 25*, 326-361.

Clements, J. A., & Rosenwald, M. (2007). Foster parent's perspectives on LGB youth in the child welfare system. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services, 19*(1), 57-69.

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). (2009). Addressing the needs of LGBTQ youth in foster care. *The Connection, Fall*, 6-13. Retrieved from [http://nc.casaforchildren.org/files/public/site/publications/TheConnection/Fall2009/Cover\\_Story.pdf](http://nc.casaforchildren.org/files/public/site/publications/TheConnection/Fall2009/Cover_Story.pdf)

Freundlich, M., & Avery, R.J. (2004). Gay and lesbian youth in foster care: Meeting their placement and service needs. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services, 17*(4), 39-57.

Krieglstein, M. (2003). Heterosexism and social work: An ethical issue. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 8*(2/3), 75-91.

Mallon, G. P. (1997). Toward a competent child welfare service delivery system for gay and lesbian adolescents and their families. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work, (3/4)*, 177-194.

Mallon, G. P. (1998). *We don't exactly get the Welcome Wagon: The experiences of gay and lesbian adolescents in child welfare system*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mallon, G. P. (1999). *Let's get this straight: A gay and lesbian-affirming approach to child welfare*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mallon, G. P., Aledort, N., & Ferrera, M. (2002). There's no place like home: Achieving safety, permanency, and well-being for lesbian and gay adolescents in out-of-home care settings. *Child Welfare, 81(2)*, 407-439.

Martinez, P., Barsky, A., & Singleton, S. (2011). Exploring queer consciousness among social workers. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services, 23*, 296-315.

Massey, S. G. (2009). Polymorphous prejudice: Liberating the measurement of heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality, 56*, 147-172.

National Association of Social Workers (NASW). (2008). *Code of Ethics*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/Code/code.asp>

National Resource Center for Youth Development (2014). *LGBTQ Youth in Care: Information and Resources*. Retrieved from <http://nrcyd.ou.edu/lgbtq-youth>.

Quinn, T.L. (2002). Sexual orientation and gender identity: An administrative approach to diversity. *Child Welfare, 81*(6), 913-928.

Ragg, D. M., Patrick, D., & Ziefert, M. (2006). Slamming the closet door: Working with gay and lesbian youth in care. *Child Welfare, 85*(2), 243-265.

Sullivan, T. R. (1994). Obstacles to effective child welfare service with gay and lesbian youths. *Child Welfare, 73*(4), 291-303.

Troiden, R. (1989). The formation of homosexual identities. *Journal of Homosexuality, 17*, 1-2

Zastrow, C.H. & Kirst-Ashman, K.K. (2013). *Understanding Human Behavior and the Social Environment* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.