

Young Adults' Perceptions of Bisexual and Transgender Adoption

Sierra Cables, Luciana Scholtens & Merry Sleigh, Ph.D.
Winthrop University

Introduction

Around 500,000 children are in the United States foster care system on any given day, creating a large demand for adoptive parents (Francis, 2020). Public support for LGBTQ+ rights is at an all-time high; however LGBTQ+ adoption remains a controversial issue (Kovats, 2018). In general, more positive attitudes toward homosexuality are found among young, more highly educated, and less religious individuals (Halman & van Ingen, 2015; Takacs et al., 2016; Whitehead & Perry, 2016), but these attitudes do not consistently predict positive attitudes toward adoption. Sani and Quaranta (2020) reported that individually positive attitudes toward homosexuality only translate to positive attitudes toward LGBTQ adoption in countries that already have progressive policies in place.

Previous research examined these complex factors by presenting homosexual parents as a collective group. We focused specifically on bisexual and transgender adoption. We hypothesized that a male/female pair of bisexual parents would have higher social approval than a bisexual pair of women, but lower social approval than a male/female straight couple.

Method

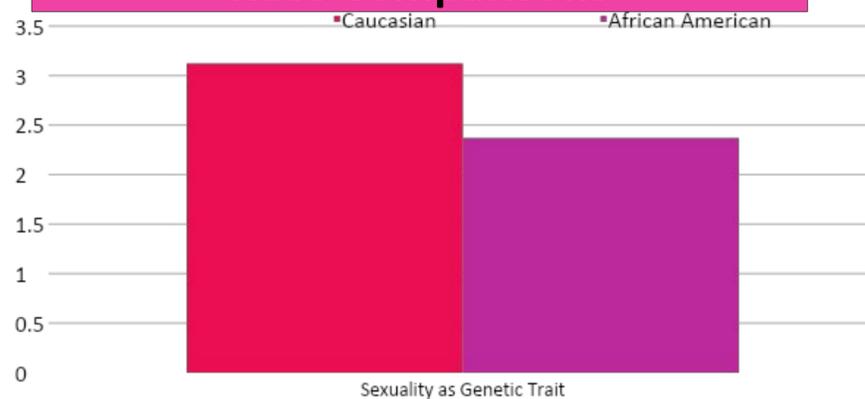
Participants:

Participants were 100 adults with a mean age of 19.98 ($SD = 1.71$). Seventy percent were women, 28% were men, and 2% were gender non-conforming. Forty-five percent were African American, 44% were Caucasian, and 11% reported other ethnicities. Seventy-five percent were heterosexual, 19% were bisexual, 3% were lesbian, and 3% reported as 'other.'

Scales:

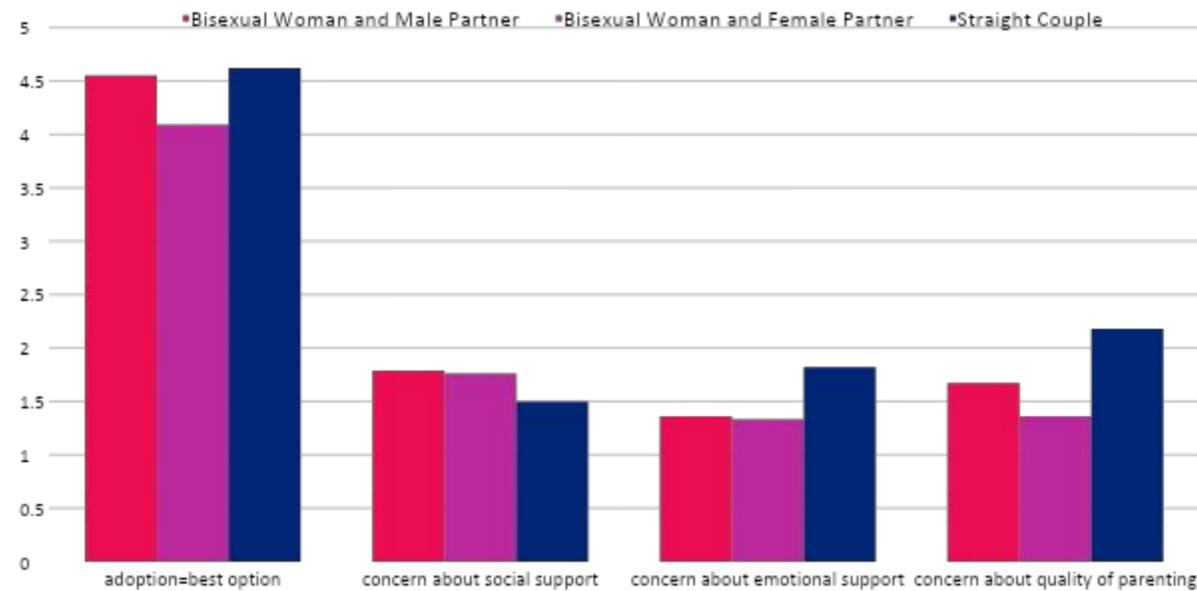
Participants were randomly assigned to receive one of three vignettes modified from Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni and Jordan (1999). The vignettes described an adoptive couple comprised of a bisexual woman and male partner, a bisexual woman and female partner, or a straight couple. Participants responded to questions to assess the couple's qualifications for adopting the child and the child's likely mental and physical health (Crawford et al., 1999). We also assessed participants' perceptions of transgender couples adopting children (Frias-Navarro & Monterde-i-Bort 2012) and LGBTQ+ rights (Anderson, Koc, & Falomir-Pichastor 2018).

Race Comparisons



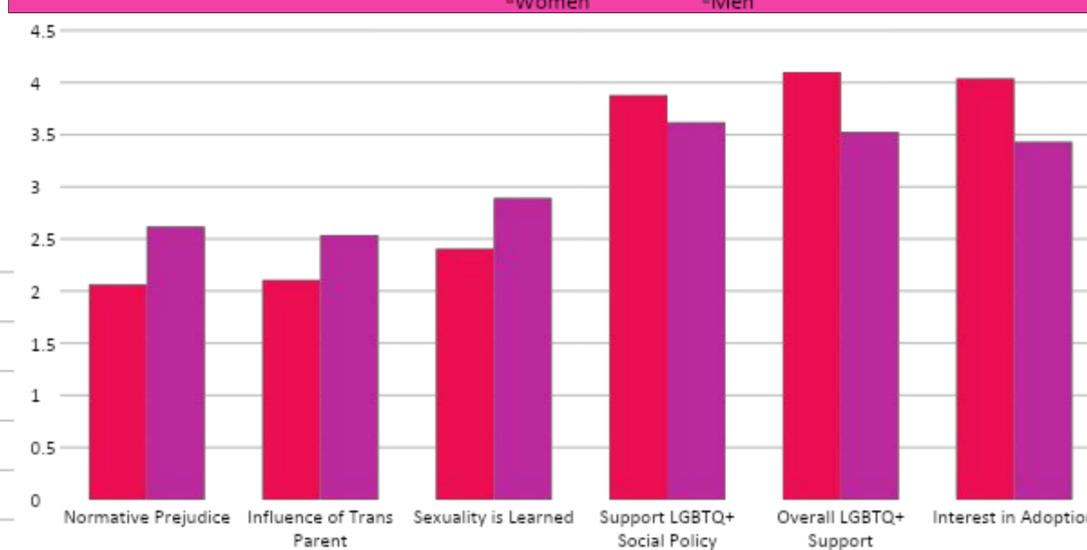
Compared to African Americans, Caucasian adults agreed more that genes influence sexual orientation, $t(87) = 3.37, p = .001$. There were no other differences based on race.

Adoption Scenario Outcomes



We compared the three versions of the survey using an ANOVA. Compared to being raised by a straight couple or a bisexual female/male couple, participants felt that adoption was the best option for the child when raised by two women, $F(2, 97) = 3.42, p = .037$. Participants felt that compared to the non-traditional couples, they had the most concern about the straight couple emotionally neglecting the child [$F(2, 97) = 3.54, p = .033$] and about the overall quality of the parenting [$F(2, 97) = 6.11, p = .003$].

Perceiver Gender



Compared to men, women felt that the child adopted by transgender parents would experience less normative prejudice [$t(96) = -3.38, p = .001$] and disagreed more that the transgender parents would influence their child to be transgender [$t(96) = -1.96, p = .05$]. Women were less likely to believe that sexual identity is learned [$t(96) = -2.20, p = .03$], were more likely to support social policies for LGBTQ+ individuals [$t(96) = 2.21, p = .03$], and were more likely to support LGBTQ+ individuals [$t(96) = 3.96, p < .001$]. Compared to men, women also expressed more interest in adopting a child [$t(96) = 2.67, p = .009$].

Perception Predictors

The more religious adults were, the

- less supportive they were of LGBTQ+ individuals and their rights [$r(100) = -.27, p = .006$]

The older the participants, the

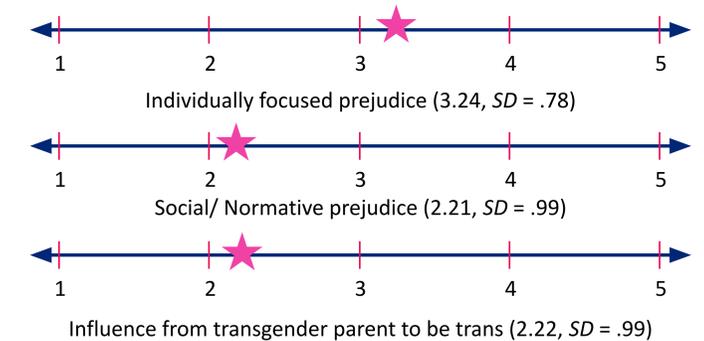
- more they felt that a child raised by transgender parents would experience normative prejudice [$r(100) = .23, p = .02$]
- more they believed that sexual identity is learned and not genetic [$r(100) = .21, p = .03$]

The more politically liberal participants rated themselves, the

- less individual prejudice they believed the child adopted by transgender parents would face [$r(97) = -.23, p = .025$]
- less normative/social prejudice they believed the child adopted by transgender parents would face [$r(97) = -.37, p < .001$]
- more they disagreed that the transgender parents would shape their adopted child's sexual orientation [$r(97) = -.39, p < .001$]
- more they disagreed that sexual orientation is learned [$r(97) = -.40, p < .001$]
- more they supported LGBTQ+ rights [$r(97) = .44, p < .001$]

Transgender Adoption

We examined how participants perceived the outcomes of a child adopted by transgender parents on a 5-point scale.



Closing Thoughts

In sum, we found strong support among young adults for non-traditional parents and perceptions of positive outcomes for non-traditional parents' adopted children. Women and politically liberal young adults were more supportive of non-heterosexual individuals and their adoption rights. These groups also tended to believe that their beliefs were widely endorsed as they predicted less prejudice for children adopted by non-heterosexual parents. Conservatively religious individuals were less supportive of LGBTQ rights, and African Americans expressed more doubts about sexuality being genetically determined. However, these factors were less influential in driving attitudes about adoption than were age, gender, and politics.

These findings suggest society's attitudes toward sexuality is becoming more fluid and the understanding of individual identities is becoming more open.