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Healthy Marriages,  
Relationships and Families:  
Interventions, Research  
and Policy Course



Week \_\_\_\_\_

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***Gay and Lesbian  
Couples and Families***

## *Promoting Child Welfare: Training Professionals to Support Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families Project.*

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*Project Mission: To develop curricula and provide training for students and professionals that enhance their ability to facilitate healthy marriages, relationships and families in the child welfare population, with the end goal of promoting and improving the well-being of children.*

**Project funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.**  
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## Course Objectives Covered:

- **Learn and apply** assessment tools, skills, and practices appropriate to the target population for couples, children and families as a whole in order to discern challenges and supports to family health, well-being and formation.
  - **Demonstrate the ability to apply** knowledge of the best practices to assessing, choosing and adapting to target population marriage and relationship enrichment, education and skill building programs.
  - **Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of** oppression, racism and prejudice on the formation, development and status of families and couples.
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- It is important to understand the culture of a particular group of people that you are working with and to develop effective skills for working with them. It is equally important *not to use your knowledge to stereotype or oppress people* based on these collective characteristics and behaviors gleaned from research. This work is based on patterns. All patterns have exceptions. Treat people as individuals and with dignity and respect. (Know your professional code of ethics.)  
(Payne et. Al, 2005)
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## Demographics



***Since the U.S. Census Bureau asks no questions about sexual orientation or behavior, how do researchers identify gay men and lesbians?***

*The Census form does ask about relationships between individuals in the household, including husband/wife, son/daughter, brother/sister, and so on. For the first time in 1990, the Census Bureau also added an "unmarried partner" category. If the person filling out the census form designates another adult of the same sex as his or her unmarried partner, the couple is counted as a same-sex unmarried partner household. Research strongly indicates that the same-sex unmarried pair identified by the census are, in fact, gay and lesbian couples.*

*Many gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals **never show up** in the Census data. The most significant omission is of single gay men and lesbians since, survey data show, only about a quarter of gay men and two-fifths of lesbians are in couples at any given time.*

(Gates & Ost, 2004))

See the Urban Institute's Facts and Figures handout.

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## Relationship Research

Individuals in committed same-sex relationships were generally not distinguishable from their committed heterosexual counterparts with one exception...

lesbians were especially effective at working together harmoniously.

(Roisman, et al, 2008)



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## Relationship Research

- Same-sex couples are just as committed in their romantic relationships as heterosexual couples.
- Researchers found that same-sex couples were similar to heterosexual couples on most relationship variables. Exception:
  - Same-sex couples reported more relationship satisfaction.
- As with married heterosexual couples, a legal marriage or civil union resulted in longer unions.

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(Balsam et al., 2008)

## Relationship Research



- Consistent with prior and current research, researchers intensively observed over 12-years the relationships of 21 gay and 21 lesbian couples; and found:
  - *Relationship satisfaction and quality are about the same across all couple types (straight, gay, lesbian).*

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(Gottman & Levenson, 2004)

## Gottman's 12-Year Study:

Gay and lesbian couples, like straight couples, *deal with every day ups-and-downs* of close relationships...

However, be mindful that these ups-and-downs often occur *in a social context of* isolation from family, workplace prejudice, and other social barriers that are unique to gay and lesbian couples.

*(Gottman & Levenson 2004)*

Drs. Gottman and Levenson recorded gay and lesbian couples interacting and coded partner's expressions to learn more about their emotions. They also used more common self-reporting and interview methods, in detail and over time. The combination of these measures provided a thorough assessment. The results of the research is currently under review for publication. This is the same methods of assessment that the Gottman Institute has used for its extensive research on couple relationships as described previously in our Healthy Relationships and Marriages modules.

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## **Conflict Resolution**

- Gay/Lesbian couples are more upbeat in the face of conflict.
  - Use more affection and humor when they bring up a disagreement and partners are more positive in how they receive it. More likely to remain positive after a disagreement..
- Unhappy gay & lesbian couples tend to show low levels of “physiological arousal” during disagreements. They are able to soothe one another.

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*(Gottman & Levenson 2004)*

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## **Six Key Principles that Govern Same-Sex Relationships – L. Kurdek**

- Many gay men and lesbians identify themselves as being involved in a committed relationship.
- One salient difference between gay and lesbian relationships is that lesbians tend to be more sexually exclusive than gay men.
- Gay men, and particularly lesbians, are more likely to endorse an “ethic of equality” in their relationship than their heterosexual counterparts.

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(quoted in Roisman, 2008)

## Principles cont.

- As with heterosexual relationships, gay and lesbian partnerships show reliable, developmental changes over time.
- Few differences emerge when comparing global levels of satisfaction for gay, lesbian and heterosexual couples.
- Predictors of relationship stability and satisfaction are consistent across gay, lesbian and heterosexual couples.

(quoted in Roisman, 2008)

Indicates the six elements of a healthy relationship are most likely transferable to gay and lesbian partnerships.

Across researchers we are seeing consistent information about gay and lesbian couples.

## **SUMMARY: Are Gay and Lesbian Cohabiting Couples Really Different From Heterosexual Married Couples?**

- Being part of a couple is integral to the lives of many gays and lesbians.
- Gays and lesbians build and sustain durable, quality relationships
- In fact, in areas where differences were noted between heterosexual and same-sex relationships, there were indications that the gay or lesbian relationship *functioned better than* heterosexual partners.

(Kurdek, 2004)

### **Gays and lesbians build and sustain durable, quality relationships**

1. They do not function in ways that place their relationship at risk
2. *No evidence* of stereotypical assumptions that there is
  - Psychological maladjustment.
  - High levels of personality traits that predisposed them to relationship problems.
  - Had dysfunctional working models of their relationships.
  - Used ineffective strategies to resolve conflict.
3. In the above areas the relationships were comparable to relationships of heterosexual partners with children.

### ***Functioned better than heterosexual partners.***

1. The processes regulating close personal relationships are robust. (Psychological adjustment, personality traits, relationship styles, and conflict resolution.)
2. Notable exception: gay and lesbians received less support for their relationships from family members than heterosexual partners did.
3. Change is a core relationship process whether the couple is heterosexual, gay or lesbian.

## Relationship Dissolution Issues

- Gay and lesbian couples in non civil union relationships dissolve their relationships more frequently than heterosexual couples, especially heterosexual couples with children.
- They confront no formal institutional barriers and obstacles.
- Less likely to find they are trapped in unhappy relationships.
- Their experience is similar in their appraisal of barriers to leaving their relationship and in the personal emotional turmoil experienced.

(Kurdek, 2004)

Formal institutions = no legal marital bonds

Barriers to leaving – children for example.

## Sources of Conflict and Stress

### ■ External Factors

- Legal System – absence of legal privileges
- Family of Origin
- Career
- Race, Ethnicity and Socioeconomic issues.
- Discrimination



(Young and Long, 1998)

#### •Legal System – absence of legal privileges

- Inheritance
- Bereavement for family illness and death
- Tax penalty – not being able to file joint returns
- No access to reduced family rates for health insurance etc.
- Immediate access and decision-making rights in cases of emergency or incompetence.
- Right to claim a partners body after death
- Shared parental rights and achieving custody from a former heterosexual partner. Judged unfit because of sexual orientation

#### **Family of Origin**

- Lack of emotional and economic support
- Often cut off
- Acceptance and positive regard

#### **Career**

- Discrimination
- Double stigma if choose non-traditional careers.
- Disclosure to co-workers and supervisors
- Some fields must remain invisible – teaching, childcare, etc. – in response to the fear that they will recruit children to the lifestyle.

#### **Race, Ethnicity and Socioeconomic**

- Violation of the cultures role expectations.
- Layering of stigma

## Sources of Conflict and Stress

- Internal Factors that Impact Conflict
  - Identity Development.
  - Identity Management.
  - Age-Related Factors.

(Young and Long, 1998)

### •Identify Development

- “Coming out” involves restructuring one’s own self-concept, reorganizing one’s personal sense of history and altering one’s relations with others and with society.
- Internalized homophobia, may come to view themselves negatively. Violating social norms.

### •Identity Management

- Ever-changing process through which a person defines and redefines what it means to be gay or lesbian.
- Managing the “coming out” or keeping the secret.

### •Age-Related Factors

- Widely recognized difficulty for the aging same-sex couple is the lack of social and legal support.
- Discrimination fears for adequate long-term care and other senior services.
- Older couples that grew up in a time when such couples were considered sick or sinful. Many have abandoned religious values because of discrimination and may be fearful of death and the afterlife.

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## Common Therapy Issues for Same-Sex Couples

- Problems related to unequal access to resources.
- Problems about ending the relationship.
- Problems arising from stage differences in coming out and in the development and management of each partner's gay or lesbian identity.
- Relationship issues such as communication, role definition, or masking their relationship from society or family.

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(Young and Long, 1998)

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## Family of Origin/In-Law Issues: Key Areas for Clinical & Program Consideration

- Determine *extent of the self-disclosure* to parents and to others.
- Focus on *decisions about secrecy and disclosure*.
- Provide support to each partner when one partner desires to “*come out*” to parents or others.
- Help couple grieve over the *loss of heterosexual privileges* in the family of origin.
- Encourage the couple to challenge the *ways they tolerate or perpetuate parental homophobia*.

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(Young and Long, 1998)

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## Family of Origin Issues: Key Areas for Consideration

- Help the couple to affirm their couple *boundaries with parents, co-workers and friends.*
- Recognize the need for *couples to build and validate their friendship networks.*
- Affirm the *couple's past history and hopes for the future.*
- Help the couple address issues related to *children.*
- Help the partners learn to affirm themselves and each other and *form a bond of friendship.*

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(Young and Long, 1998)

## Myths

**Myth:** Partners in lesbian couples are fused and in gay male couples, they are disengaged. These views came from stereotypes about gender and clinical work with distressed couples.

**Reality:**

- Lesbian couples in general are extremely cohesive but not fused.
- Gay male couples are actually more cohesive than heterosexual married couples, not more disengaged

(Green and Mitchell, 2002)

Note the 12-year study of Gay & Lesbian Couples by John Gottman and Robert Levenson regarding what makes same-sex relationships succeed or fail. Details the differences between heterosexual/gay-lesbian couples with regard to conflict, hostile/negative emotion and expression of emotions.

## *Case Study: Jack Mendel and Lee Granger*

If you were assigned to work with this gay couple, based on the readings and lecture, what questions would you ask?

See question and answer key for this slide.

**Even if Lee comes out to his family, Jack and Lee may never have the Granger's support. What will be the implications of this?** (Kurdek, 2004)

- They may gain support from some family members. Right now, Lee has none yet it seems that siblings miss him. Is not putting his relationship with his partner first. His fears come first.
- Family of Origin Issues – What will be some of the issues that need to be dealt with in therapy? (Young and Long, 1998)
  - Self-disclosure to Lee's family and any controversy/anger that may involve.
  - Decisions about secrecy and disclosure – perhaps only disclose to part of Lee's family.
  - Will they tolerate or perpetuate homophobia within Lee's family?
  - With Jack's sister – there is potential for boundary issues.

**Jack and his family have done a lot of personal work to heal and accept him fully. What are the internal developmental tasks that Lee still needs to confront?** (Young and Long, 1998)

- Identity Development
    - o Coming out to family
    - o Finding and expressing his interests/talents in a work setting
    - o Internalized homophobia??
    - o Establishing and maintaining close relationships – he avoids family and has had a poor track record with peers.
    - o Feelings about having children
  - Identity Management (both Jack and Lee)
    - o Managing the coming out or keeping it a secret with others.
    - o Redefining them as committed and eventually married. What will that mean?
  - Jack and Lee are in 2 different places regarding their stages of development personally. In addition, Lee would like to do more “masking” of their relationship to society. This difference could cause difficulty in their relationship.
- Gottman says that key ingredients to a relationship are friendship and building love maps. How would you apply this principle to working with this couple?** (Gottman and Silver, 1999)
- Within therapy context, it may be helpful to implement some of the love map exercises particularly around my “injuries and healing”, “my emotional world” and “who I want to become”. Jack has undergone a major reconciliation process in his life while Lee has avoided it. This difference could become a key stressor in their lives. Sharing and understanding where each of them is at could make a world of difference.

## Prevalence of Children with Same-Sex Parents



- 600,000 same-sex couples self-reported on the 2000 U.S. Census.
- 34% of the female same-sex couple households and 22% of male same-sex couple households report having at least one child under 18 yrs.
- Significant under-count, conservative estimates are that there are between one and nine million children age 19 years and younger living with same-sex couple parents.

(Kovalanka, McClintock-Comeaux and Leslie, 2004)

## Differences Between Heterosexual Partners with Children and Same-Sex Couples

- Decreased social support by family members means that gay and lesbian couples function in a different family and social context from heterosexual couples.
- Same-sex couples cannot rely on gender of the partners to fashion the relationship, they must determine roles and negotiate common couple issues.
  - Must address household division of labor and family rituals in creative ways that do not involve gender.

(Kurdek, 2004)

**Research has found that children with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) grow up to be at least as happy and healthy as children of heterosexual parents.**



*No differences developmentally or psychologically.*

(Kovalanka, McClintock-Comeaux and Leslie, 2004)

Note: Mary Parke in her 2003 article “Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research says about the effects of family structure on child well-being” which we read earlier found :

“Children of gay or lesbian parents do not look different from their counterparts raised in heterosexual divorced families regarding school performance, behavior problems, emotional problems, early pregnancy, or difficulties finding employment. However ... children of divorce are at higher risk (more than twice as likely to have serious problems, 25 percent vs. 10 percent) .....

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## Gay and Lesbian Parenting has Broad Support. Organizations that have officially supported adoption by same-sex couples include

- *American Psychological Association,*
- *Child Welfare League* of America,
- *American Bar* Association,
- *American Psychiatric Association,*
- *National Association of Social Workers,*
- North American *Council on Adoptable Children,*
- *American Academy of Pediatrics,*
- *American Psychoanalytic* Association, and
- *American Academy of Family Physicians.*



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**The American Psychological Association states in its Resolution on Sexual Orientation, Parents, and Children (adopted July 2004):**

*there is no scientific evidence that parenting effectiveness is related to parental sexual orientation: lesbian and gay parents are as likely as heterosexual parents to provide supportive and healthy environments for their children...research has shown that the adjustment, development, and psychological well-being of children is unrelated to parental sexual orientation and that the children of lesbian and gay parents are as likely as those of heterosexual parents to flourish....*

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([www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org))

## However, children of LGBT parents face a variety of challenges as a result of unequal treatment

- Often denied the same rights and forms of economic and emotional security.
- Intimate exposure to the homophobia and heterosexism that exist in the outside world.
- Gays and lesbians are spoken of so little in reference to family life that when children of LGBT spoke to peers that peers had no frame of reference. *See quote from a parent.*

(Kualanka, McClintock-Comeaux and Leslie, 2004)

Exposure to Homophobia will –

Experience teasing in relation to their parent's sexuality

- o Exposure to anti-gay remarks and jokes, often on a daily basis.
- o Common form of childhood “dissing” is to call someone gay or to label something that is not cool “gay”.
- o Lack of knowledge, understanding and acceptance by the educational and other systems about lesbian and gay families
- o Social Isolation

*“We need to be careful about sharing information... some people start to think all kinds of nonsense... that you can't be trusted; some do not want to work with you... Even those that are or pretend to be liberal adopt that kind of delicate remoteness. Gay people, even when they feel comfortable about who they are, are always made to feel a little embarrassed about it. I am not surprised that some gay people prefer to socialize more within the community, who needs the hassle... but we don't have a choice because a child is involved and we need to have a relationship with the non-gay world. People look at us like “what is wrong with you guys? As if it is not enough that you are divorced, on top of it you have to live with another woman”. Living in a family like ours is not a picnic. We are constantly scrutinized and judged, mostly in negative terms. Even when people say something good about us it comes often with a qualification, “even though they are lesbians...” To live in a stepfamily is complicated enough in this society... to live in a gay stepfamily is made much harder. Every single step that all stepfamilies can make is made difficult for us... just try to put on your health insurance the child of your partner with whom you are legally connected in a domestic partnership agreement.”*

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### **Class Exercise**

Imagine you are an adoption worker in an agency that allows the same-sex couples to adopt in a state where such adoptions are legal. A beautiful, healthy, week-old infant becomes available: the mother has signed relinquishment papers and indicated that she does not wish to be involved in the selection of the adoptive family. The next family on the long waiting list is a highly qualified lesbian couple; the second family on the list is an equally qualified heterosexual couple. Where would you place the baby, and how would you justify your decision?

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(Hartman & Laird, 1998)

## Reflection

- Are you assuming that a child needs a father in order to grow into a healthy adult?
- If so, what is the source of that assumption? How is this assumption gendered, raced and classed?
- Whose interests does it favor?

(Hartman & Laird, 1998)

**It is often considering the choices related to the welfare of children (which are always attended by powerful cultural myths concerning what children need) that heterosexual privilege emerges in the thinking of even the most progressive and accepting social worker.**

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## **Ethical Principles of Social Justice and Respecting the Dignity and Worth of All Individuals found in most Human Service Professions Codes of Conduct**

**Yet, it is often when considering the choices related to the welfare of children (which are always attended by powerful cultural myths concerning what children need) that heterosexual privilege emerges in the thinking of even the most progressive and accepting human service worker.**

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(Hartman & Laird, 1998)

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***“Moral practice does not require that professionals have no biases, preferences, or convictions. It does require that we do our best to constantly make ourselves aware of, re-examine, and critique these positions.”***

(Hartman & Laird, 1998)

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## Reflection

The following questions noted by Hartman & Laird (1998) can help toward this end.

- ❑ **Where have they come from?**  
(biases, preferences, or convictions)
- ❑ **Whose interests do they privilege?**
- ❑ **Have they outlived their usefulness?**
- ❑ **Have their meanings changed?**
- ❑ **Do they harm others?**

***REINFORCE:** With regard to human service practice, “unless we continuously make known to ourselves and re-evaluate our prior assumptions...they will operate underground, producing unintended and, often unknown, consequences.”*

## Unique Positive Outcomes of Living with LGBT Parents

- Increased tolerance, openness and acceptance of differences.
- Higher aspirations to non-traditional gender occupations

Resource for Couples and Professionals

**COLAGE** – Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere

(Kovalanka, McClintock-Comeaux and Leslie, 2004)

Handout of facts and figures by Collage is a resource only piece. Not to be reviewed in class.

See the video “daddy & papa” . Excerpts may be appropriate for class.

## Children of LGBT Parents Cannot Rely on the Same Protections

- Inclusion on *health insurance* plans for non-biological or non-adoptive parent.
- Access to *death benefits or Social Security* when non-biological or non-adoptive parent dies or is disabled.
- *Parental relationship* with child by the non-biological or non-adoptive parent is *denied by society and laws*, and therefore the child may lose:
  - The right to live with a non-biological or non-adoptive parent.
  - Right to financial support should parents separate or inheritance should one die.

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(Kovalanka, McClintock-Comeaux and Leslie, 2004)

## Will Children Benefit When Same-Sex Parents Can Marry?

While no empirical evidence exists on how same-sex parents' marriage might affect their children, Meezan and Rauch propose 3 areas where the benefits of marriage (heterosexual) carry over:

### ■ **Material Well-Being**

- Greater financial resources and security
- Greater access to health and other benefits

### ■ **Durability and Stability of the Parental Relationships**

- Likelihood of greater commitment and loyalty

### ■ **Social Investment**

- Increased social resources
- Greater access to kinship and social support networks
- Unquestionable parental authority. Treatment as a family unit with all the responsibilities and rights that are accrued through marriage.

(Meezan and Rauch, 2005)

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(Meezan and Rauch, 2005)

*Almost all researchers agree that the research conducted on children's outcomes based on parenting by couples who are gay or lesbian (married and not married) is limited due to the political climate, sample sizes and the small number of studies in general. Fathers are a particularly understudied group*

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## Research Gap

More work is needed to understand the impact extended family relationships (often missing in gay and lesbian couple's experiences) and alternate support systems.



Lesbian Couple with Parent  
Website for Parents of Lesbian  
and Gay Couples:  
[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

(Kunalanka, McClintock-Comeaux and Leslie, 2004)

## Current Law and Legislation

- Civil Marriage – currently only one state, Massachusetts, provides for civil marriage (since 2004). Civil marriage laws would not force religious institutions to conduct marriages but provide equal rights to access.
  - Vermont (in 2000), Connecticut (in 2005) and New Jersey (in 2006) offer “civil unions” which gives same sex couples the same rights and responsibilities as married heterosexual couples.
  - California, Hawaii, Maine and D.C. confer certain spousal rights to same-sex couples.
  - New York (2008) recognizes the legality of marriages from other states.
- Even though these states have significantly increased the rights and protections of same-sex couples, they offer no federal rights such as coverage under Medicaid and Social Security

(Kusalanka, McClintock-Comeaux and Leslie, 2004 and Hartman, 2007)

See Handout “In Focus: Civil Unions & Domestic Partnership Laws” from [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org) or the one by Hartman titled “A Primer on Same-Sex Marriage, Civil Unions, Domestic Partnerships, and Defense of Marriage Acts”

The legal system issues are in flux due to changing laws across the United States. It is recommended that a current review be conducted prior to delivery of this lesson.

## Current Law and Legislation



- **1996, Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)**
  - defined marriage under federal law as exclusively heterosexual (between one man and one woman)
  - it declared that states are not required to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states.
- **Adoption Law**
  - Joint and second parent adoption allow both parents of a child to have their parental relationship legally recognized
  - Only 7 states allow second parent adoptions.

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(Kusalanka, McClintock-Comeaux and Leslie, 2004)

## Policy Recommendations



- Policies are needed that allow both parents of these children to be legally recognized.
  - Joint and second-parent adoptions.
  
- Use civil union laws until civil marriage is a reality to at least offer some rights and protection of children and partners.

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(Kusalanka, McClintock-Comeaux and Leslie, 2004)

# Legal Framework for Governing Marriage

- Guest Lecturer

For the policy discussion it may be helpful to bring in a legal aspect to discuss the legal framework governing hetero-sexual and same-sex marriage and civil unions as well as insure the most current context for this issue.

## Nine Ways to be an Ally & a Friend

- Be a listener.
- Be open-minded.
- Be willing to talk.
- Be inclusive and invite LGBT friends to hang out with your friends and family.
- Don't assume that all your friends and co-workers are straight. Someone close to you could be looking for support in their coming-out process. Not making assumptions will give them the space they need.
- Homophobic comments and jokes are harmful. Let your friends, family and co-workers know that you find them offensive.
- Confront your own prejudices and homophobia, even if it is uncomfortable to do so.
- Defend your LGBT friends against discrimination.
- Believe that all people, regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation, should be treated with dignity and respect.

(<http://www.glaad.org/PSA2006/10ways.php>. Retrieved 2,4,08)

See Handout on Use of Language and Glossary

Ethics:

**Value:** *Social Justice*

**Ethical Principle:** *Social workers challenge social injustice.*

Social workers *pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people*. Social workers' social change efforts are focused primarily on issues of poverty, unemployment, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These activities seek *to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression* and cultural and ethnic diversity. Social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources; equality of opportunity; and meaningful participation in decision making for all people.

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## Required Reading

- Kurdek, L. A. (2004). Are gay and lesbian cohabitating couples really different from heterosexual marriage couples? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66 (November 2004), 880– 900.
  - Kuvalanka, K., McClintock-Commeaux, M. and Leslie, L. A. (2004). Children of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents; Current research, legislation and resources available for family professionals. *Vision 2004: What is the Future of Marriage* (pp. 32-40). Minneapolis, MN: National Council on Family Relations.
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## Suggested Reading:

- Balsam, K.F., Beauchaine, T.P., Rothblum, E.D. and Solomon, S.E. (2008). Three-year follow-up of same-sex couples who had civil unions in Vermont, same-sex couples not in civil unions, and heterosexual married couples. *Developmental Psychology*, 44:1, 102-116.
- Berger, R. (2000). Gay stepfamilies: A triple-stigmatized group. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 81(5), 504–516.
- Meezan, W. & Rauch, J. (2005). Gay marriage, same-sex parenting, and Americas children. *Future of Children*, 15 (2), 97-115.
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  - Hartman, K. “A Primer on Same-Sex Marriage, Civil Unions, Domestic Partnerships, and Defense of Marriage Acts.” Retrieved on February 6, 2008 from Infoplease.com at <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0922609>.
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## Case study: Jack Mendel and Lee Granger

**Family Background:** Jack is a 38-year-old, white male who has come to the clinic for many years while working out issues related to his homosexuality and family. He was 16 years old when he was confronted by his girl friend about having sex. He realized that Betsy was his friend but he had no real sexual desire for her but Betsy's brother was another story. Already in a rocky place during adolescents, this new insight made him question his sexuality and resulted in months of depression and one suicide attempt. He connected with a clinician here at the Hamilton Health Center who was able to help Jack and his parents work through issues around his found identity as a gay person and their own prejudices against homosexuals. Today, Jack is a well-established and well-accepted executive in the jewelry industry. He is very engaging. He is openly gay and has a wide circle of friends and family that support him. Jack's sister Kate is a particular supporter and involves Jack routinely in her family life just as he involves her in his. Jack enjoys being with his young niece and nephew often taking them on vacations to Disney World and other resorts. He longs for a family of his own.

Last year Jack met Lee Granger and their relationship has become very serious. They are talking about marrying. Lee is a 31 year-old waiter at a posh restaurant in downtown. Lee never finished college, although he is a bright and a gifted writer. One of the reasons he dropped out of college was his (unreturned) attraction to his roommate, which led to a difficult situation. Many of Lee's early attempts at romance followed this path. Lee recently published a short story in a national magazine under an alias. He maintains a small circle of friends. He has not told his family that he is homosexual and rarely engages them. He is tall, dark and handsome but awkward in informal social situations and also with his family.

Jack and Lee met last year at a coffee house where local poets and songwriters were showcasing their work. They struck up a conversation that has led over the last year to a serious relationship. Kate, Jack's sister, has developed a strong friendship with Lee based on their mutual interest in writing. She is concerned, however, that Jack and Lee must first deal with Lee's inability to accept and disclose his homosexuality, especially to his family. Kate has casually spoken to several of Lee's siblings who remain baffled by Lee's withdrawal and unaware of his homosexuality. Without revealing confidences, she has gathered that Lee's parents are conservative Christians with strong views against homosexuality and same-sex marriages. With recent news framing the controversy over gay marriages, Lee has become more reluctant than ever to "come out".

**Presenting Problem:** Jack and Lee have discussed the future of their relationship and mutually agree that they want to begin living together and eventually marry. Jack's family is very supportive and includes Lee in all their family gatherings. He loves the closeness and acceptance he feels from Jack's family but fears his family's reaction. He wants to move in together as "roommates" but Jack feels that he cannot live a lie. In the past that has caused him serious psychological damage. They are at odds yet continuing to be very devoted to one another. Children are also an issue that creates tension for Jack and Lee. Jack feels that Lee needs to come to terms with who he is so that he "can be all that he can be" including being a published author under his own name. He wants to help Lee. They have come to the Hamilton Health Center to begin this difficult journey together.

**Even if Lee comes out to his family, Jack and Lee may never have the Granger's support. What will be the implications of this?** (Kurdek, 2004)

- They may gain support from some family members. Right now, Lee has none yet it seems that siblings miss him. Concern that Lee is not putting his relationship with Jack first. Letting his family's opinion and his fears come first.
- Family of Origin Issues – What will be some of the issues that need to be dealt with in therapy? (Young and Long, 1998)
  - Self-disclosure to Lee's family and any controversy/anger that may involve.
  - Decisions about secrecy and disclosure – perhaps only disclose to part of Lee's family.
  - Will they tolerate or perpetuate homophobia within Lee's family?
  - With Jack's sister – there is potential for boundary issues.

**Jack and his family have done a lot of personal work to heal and accept him fully. What are the internal developmental tasks that Lee still needs to confront?** (Young and Long, 1998)

- Identity Development
  - Coming out to family
  - Finding and expressing his interests/talents in a work setting
  - Internalized homophobia??
  - Establishing and maintaining close relationships – he avoids family and has had a poor track record with peers.
  - Feelings about having children
- Identity Management (both Jack and Lee)
  - Managing the coming out or keeping it a secret with others.
  - Redefining them as committed and eventually married. What will that mean?
- Jack and Lee are in 2 *different places regarding their stages of development* personally. In addition, Lee would like to do more “*masking*” of their relationship to society. This difference could cause difficulty in their relationship.

**Gottman says that key ingredients to a relationship are friendship and building love maps. How would you apply this principle to working with this couple?** (Gottman and Silver, 1999)

- Within therapy context, it may be helpful to implement some of the love map exercises particularly around my “injuries and healing”, “my emotional world” and “who I want to become”. Jack has undergone a major reconciliation process in his life while Lee has avoided it. This difference could become a key stressor in their lives. Sharing and understanding where each of them is at could make a world of difference.
- Exercise 2: The History and Philosophy of Your Marriage under the second Gottman principle may also be an important exercise for this couple to complete.

## **Mendel and Granger Case Study Questions**

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