

## Queer as Parents

A first-ever national study reports on the willingness of adoption agencies to work with gay and lesbian parents. *By Bill Glovin*

In landmark court cases that challenged adoption by gay and lesbian parents in Hawaii and Florida in the early 1990s, David Brodzinsky served as an expert witness. “From my experience of observing gay and lesbian adoption and from all the writing and reading I had done on the subject, I testified that kids do just as well in gay families as they do in straight ones,” says Brodzinsky, an associate professor of psychology and director of the Foster Care Counseling Project at Rutgers–New Brunswick. “But I also found that no one had ever studied to what

extent agencies were open to placing children with homosexual parents.”

Spurred on by the lack of data, Brodzinsky launched two national studies four years apart on homosexual adoption practices at public and private adoption agencies; findings from the second study came out this spring. “The surveys were almost identical,” says Brodzinsky, who set out to determine whether agencies accepted applications from homosexual individuals and had made at least one adoption with a gay or lesbian adult. “Sixty-three percent of the respondents indicated that their agency accepted adoption applications from homosexual individuals, and nearly 38 percent indicated they had made at least one adoption with a gay or lesbian adult.” Some states, such as Florida, Mississippi, and Utah currently have legal obstacles that make it difficult, if not impossible, for gays to adopt.

Public agencies, the surveys showed, were much more open to gay adoption than private ones. While fundamentalist Christian agencies never willingly accepted applications from homosexuals, those affiliated with the Catholic church accepted homosexual applicants 14 percent of the time. Mainstream Protestant agencies were significantly more willing to accept gay applicants—42 percent—but not as willing as Jewish-affiliated agencies, 92 percent of whom did. “Some agencies with a religious affiliation didn’t have direct edicts against homosexual adoption,” Brodzinsky points out. “Instead, they had policies of only placing children with married couples, which meant they didn’t accept adoption applications from single parents or homosexual adults.”

The surveys also revealed that agencies handling children with special needs, older minority children, and those in large sibling groups, were most likely to accept applications from homosexuals. In contrast, those specializing in domestically born infants and toddlers without special needs were least likely to accept them. International agencies were willing to take applications depending on the country; some countries, such as China, prohibit adoption by homosexuals.

In his report to the second survey’s sponsor, the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute in New York City, Brodzinsky concluded—based on other research he has done—that:

◆ Children raised by gay and lesbian parents display no significant differences compared to chil-

dren raised by heterosexual parents in terms of emotional health and intellectual functioning.

◆ Being raised by homosexual parents does not increase the risk of gender identity problems.

◆ Homosexual parents are not deficient in parenting knowledge or skills.

◆ There is no link between homosexuality and child abuse.

“With over a half-million children in foster care and more than 100,000 waiting to be placed for adoption in the U.S., the need for more parents is evident,” he says. “There is growing recognition that homosexuals have the same capacities and can provide the same quality of care to children as heterosexuals. Homosexuals are a valuable parenting resource for raising children that need families.”

## A Worm's Life

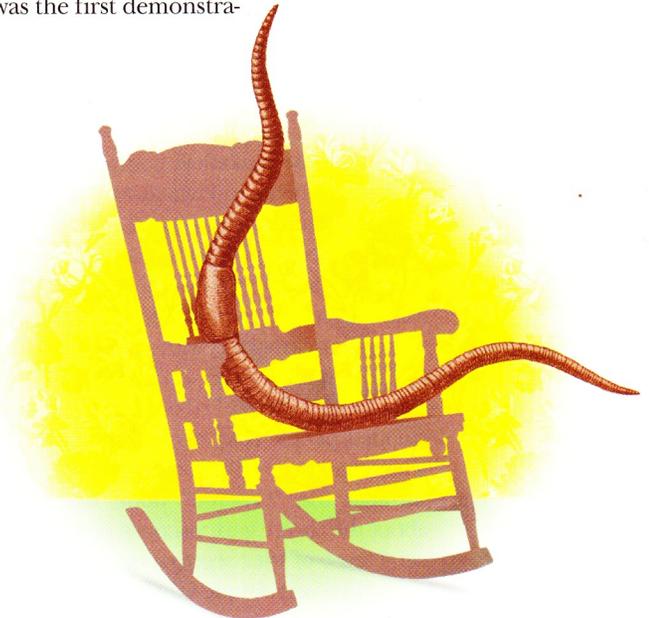
A tiny worm may  
hold the secret to  
firmer muscles in later life.

Middle-aged worms don't stretch before running or take their time walking up stairs, but they may be able to help us understand why we do. Biologists from Rutgers and Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York have found that *Caenorhabditis elegans*—a tiny translucent wiggler that is only about a millimeter long and has a life span of about three weeks—suffers at least some of the familiar indignities of age.

What Monica Driscoll, associate professor in

Rutgers' Department of Microbiology and Biochemistry and one of the principal investigators on the project, found was that these worms—which hit middle age in a matter of days—experience sarcopenia, a loss of muscle mass and strength. The culprit? An enzyme called age-1/PI3 kinase, which causes the muscle to deteriorate. Although the researchers already knew that mutant worms lacking this enzyme live longer, this was the first demonstration that showed that the enzyme had to be present to trigger age-related muscle deterioration.

Their findings, published last fall in the journal *Nature* and heralded as one of the first studies on tissue function in aging by the National Institute on Aging, may help scientists understand sarcopenia, which also plagues humans. “The way things work in the worm is the way things work in people, though we are a bit more complicated with a few more bells and whistles,” says Driscoll. “Once you have figured out what a key molecule is doing in the worm, you can look for it in humans and expect the same thing to happen,” she explains. Her long-term goal is to investigate whether drugs could halt the deterioration. “This way, we could maintain the health of the muscle very late into the life span and improve quality of life in old age.” □



## Did you know?

◆ The drug Prozac not only helps women combat depression but also improves their ability to concentrate after a traumatic event, reports a research team led by Tracey Shors, an associate professor of psychology at Rutgers–New Brunswick.

◆ Since smell helps consumers remember products, marketers are considering installing devices in packaging that emit scents—like a flowery smell wafting out of a laundry detergent box—to encourage shoppers to buy the product, says a new study on brand memory, co-authored by Maureen Morrin, an assistant professor of marketing on the Camden campus.

◆ Only 25 percent of employers say their firm employs at least one worker with a physical disability or mental illness, and fewer than half provide training to their employees regarding working with or accommodating people with disabilities, according to a work trends survey by Rutgers' Heldrich Center for Workforce Development.