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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by L. Lynne Lux entitled "Measurement of the Differences in Attitude of Foster Parents as a Result of Having a Hard-to-Place Child." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Special Education.

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MEASUREMENT OF THE DIFFERENCE IN ATTITUDE  
OF FOSTER PARENTS AS A RESULT  
OF HAVING A HARD-TO-PLACE  
CHILD

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Science  
Degree  
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## ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine the difference in attitude of foster parents as a result of having a hard-to-place foster child. The general purposes of this study were to determine if differences in attitudes existed between those foster parents who have had a hard-to-place foster child and those who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and to isolate some significant factors in the placement of the hard-to-place child.

To accomplish these purposes a questionnaire was mailed to 282 foster parents. Differences in attitudes were calculated on the 62 responses via computer tabulation using chi square tests, t-tests and Pearson correlations. The major findings of the research indicate that male foster parents' attitudes toward hard-to-place children become less positive after having a hard-to-place child and the number of years the parent has been a foster parent is a significant factor in the foster parent's attitude.

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## CHAPTER I

### PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

#### Statement of the Problem

In this day and age of increased social awareness the problem of what to do with the hard-to-place child is receiving a long overdue increment of notoriety. The most difficult problem in the entire scheme of child placement is the location of a "proper" home for the hard-to-place child. Placement in an improper home creates many problems for the hard-to-place child. The first of these problems is insecurity. This insecurity is reflected in the child's attitude toward other children and in his school work. The child also feels he cannot communicate with his new foster parents and he must solve all of his problems himself.

The insecurity and frustration combine with the lack of approval shown by the parents to give the child a poor self-image. This causes the child to feel that his failures are beyond his control and his only choice is to give up. This complex problem of "proper" placement has perplexed both social workers and public officials for many years. Even the smallest amount of light shed on this subject by any study would be greatly welcomed by most social workers: public and private agencies.

According to a longitudinal study performed at Columbia University (Fanshel, 1976) there are basically two reasons for children entering foster home care; either the parent lacks the ability or desire to care for the child or the child exhibits maladjusted behavior. The infants that are placed in foster home care are usually illegitimate. The older children are often placed in care due to their maladjusted behavior. Placement of older children presents a problem for the social worker. The majority of foster parents prefer to have younger, assumedly well adjusted foster children. Thus, the older children have both their age and their behavior working against them in terms of placement. Thus, the problem of "proper" placement for them becomes a very acute one.

It is obvious that placing a hard-to-place child is a severe problem. Since the number of these children is increasing, the need for a study to aid in their placement is becoming increasingly more acute. It is the foster parent who must deal with these children, therefore, it is from the foster parent that we would most readily be able to determine the effect the hard-to-place child has on the foster home. A study of the attitudes of all foster parents would hopefully pinpoint changes caused by having a hard-to-place child in the home. Careful examination of the data would also point out the type of foster parent least negatively affected or most positively affected by the

presence of a hard-to-place child. The choice of "proper" foster parents does not only affect the immediate home, but reaches out and has an effect on the school and the community in general.

### Definition of Terms

The principle of fostering is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "encouraging, cherishing, and harboring fondly." These positive qualities are embedded in the term foster home care. The Child Welfare League of America (1959) defines foster family care as follows:

Foster family care offers the child who otherwise lacks adequate parental care and who cannot remain in his home a closer approximation to normal family living than other types of substitute care, and is particularly adapted to meet the child's normal developmental needs in a family-centered society. (Gruber, 1978, p. 6)

The 1978 definition of foster family care by the Child Welfare League of America is stated as a " . . . child welfare service which provides substitute family care for a planned period for a child when his own family cannot care for him for a temporary extended period."

A foster child is a child placed in foster family care.

A hard-to-place foster child is all of the above and in addition he (she) has special needs. These special needs may result from:

1. overt behavior problems
2. emotional problems
3. learning disabilities

4. mental retardation
5. minor physically handicapped
6. major or severely handicapped

For the purpose of this study the decision to consider a child hard-to-place was left to the discretion of the foster parent answering the questionnaire.

A foster parent is a temporary parent of the foster child.

A natural child is one born into the family; not adopted or a foster child.

### Purposes of the Study

The major purpose of this study is to ascertain foster parent's attitude toward children with special problems. This will include those with maladjusted behavior. One of the goals is to isolate the significant factors that affect foster parents' attitudes toward the hard-to-place child. Since it is essential to have proper communication between the special education teacher and the foster parents, this study will be of interest to the special education teacher for help in discussions with the foster parents of hard-to-place children.

### Significance of the Study

The most difficult problem of a social worker is the placement of a hard-to-place child. Factors most significantly affecting this placement have never been

studied to any large extent and therefore are little understood. Identification of these factors and their relative importance is greatly needed in the foster home care program.

Hard-to-place children have often caused stress in a foster home and school due to poor placement. This in turn has resulted in the hard-to-place child moving from home to home; thus school progress is hindered. If the proper home can be determined originally, this stress on the foster parent and constant moving of the child may once and for all be eliminated.

#### Underlying Theory and Assumptions

There are three aspects or roles which must be considered when dealing with the philosophy of the foster home: the role of the foster parent, the role of the agency, and the role of the communication between the agency and foster parents. If any one of these is to be singled out as the most important factor, it would have to be communication between the agency and the foster parent. It is impossible for the agency or foster parent to do their job completely and properly without an open communication channel.

Communication in the foster home care program, as it does most everywhere else, reflects many problems. These problems arise due to differences in and the transient

nature of caseworkers, lack of totally open and honest communication and loss of the caseworker's authoritative position on child care.

The groundwork for this communication lies in complete understanding of the attitudes and feelings present in foster homes. A complete understanding of foster parent attitudes will enable the caseworker to "properly" place the hard-to-place child. To get an understanding of these attitudes, we must turn to analysis of the data.

### Hypotheses to be Tested

Hypothesis 1: There exists no difference in the demographic data of the females and males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child.

Hypothesis 2: There exists no difference in the demographic data of the females and males who have had a hard-to-place child.

Hypothesis 3: There exists no difference in the demographic data of the females who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and the females who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

Hypothesis 4: There exists no difference in the demographic data of the males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and the males who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

Hypothesis 5: There exists no difference in attitudes between foster parent females and males who have not had a

hard-to-place foster child and foster parent females and males who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

Hypothesis 6: There exists no difference in attitude between the females who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and those females who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

Hypothesis 7: There exists no difference in attitude between males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and those males who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

Hypothesis 8: There exists no significant correlation with the demographic data, on a scale where a significant difference exists, for the females and males that had had a hard-to-place foster child that is not also a significant correlation for the females and males that have not had a hard-to-place foster child.

Hypothesis 9: There exists no significant correlation with the demographic data, on a scale where a significant difference exists, for the females that have had a hard-to-place foster child that is not also a significant correlation for the females that have not had a hard-to-place foster child.

Hypothesis 10: There exists no significant correlation with the demographic data, on a scale where a significant difference exists, for the males that have had a hard-to-place foster child that is not also a significant correlation for the males that have not had a hard-to-place foster child.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

#### History of Foster Care

Over the years, a variety of systems that have been established to provide children with food and shelter when parents were unwilling or unable to provide for their child or children's needs. In the past, these systems that were established were sometimes " . . . less than humane."

(Gruber, 1978, p. 13) "Unfortunately recent literature states that much too often the children placed in foster care today are left with little planning for their future" (Gruber, 1978, p. 14).

In the 1860's, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts set up one of the first foster home care programs. The state provided funds for the families who cared for homeless children. During this time the state also established adequate supervision for those children who were indentured and being abused. Many more changes were brought about by Charles Birtwell, Director of the Boston Children's Aid Society.

Charles Birtwell implemented the idea that each child should be treated individually to meet his individual needs. Also foster parent studies and discreet records were begun under Birtwell's leadership (Gruber, 1978, p. 14).

Foster home care is presently defined by the Child Welfare League of America as a " . . . child welfare service which provides substitute family care for a planned period for a child when his own family cannot care for him for a temporary extended period" (Gruber, 1978, p. 14).

Even though the Child Welfare League of America refers to foster family care as a planned period for a child and for a temporary extended period statistics do not show this to be the case. One of foster family care's greatest problems is that it has become a program of permanent care. In the United States, the statistics " . . . indicate that 50-80% of the children in foster family care on any given day will probably grow up in care" (Snell, 1977, p.2).

### Foster Care

The number of foster children is increasing. More natural parents are giving their maladjusted behavior problem teen-aged children to the state with the hopes that the foster parents can straighten their child out. Also children and teenagers that are in correctional schools are being placed in foster homes. Not only are these children and teenagers with maladjusted behavior problems being placed in foster home care, but so are other special needs children—the mentally retarded and other handicapped children (Snell, 1978). With these special needs children or hard-to-place children entering care at this alarming

speed, studies need to be made on foster parents' attitudes toward these hard-to-place children. Recent research has provided much information about foster home care but not about foster parent attitudes. Since the "normal" foster child has to face so many problems being in foster home care, that we need to eliminate as many additional problems as possible for him/her upon entering foster care placement. One way to do this is to start by looking at foster parents' attitudes toward these children. Since little research is available on the hard-to-place child, information on these "normal" foster children is used.

" . . . stress is likely to be most evident during periods of most rapid change" (Varma, 1973, p. vii). The stress referred to here is not stress in adults but stress in some groups of children. From some groups of children, stress in childhood is more permanent or more serious than what has been typically reported in educational, psychological and the social science literature in reference to the normal child. Therefore, it is of optimum importance that a child make as few traumatic changes in his life as possible. "The sense of well-being that eventually enables an individual to grow beyond himself and toward the world stems from a 'combination' of love and stability" (Carney, 1976, p. 2). Therefore, stability is often not a part of a foster child's life. One reason is because he is moved from home to home and this causes a distrust in adults and negative feelings toward himself.

Due to the many foster homes, even when placed in an adoptive home, the child is:

. . . armed with a thin hope. He basically doubts that these new parents will keep him. He has developed a veneer to disguise his wounds from the world and even from himself. He cherishes his possessions, no matter how tattered, for they are evidence of his past. Indeed, he is a scarred child. (Carney, 1976, p. 3)

When a child is removed from his home and subjected to several traumatic moves from foster home to foster home and when the child is additionally subjected to multiple caseworkers (the turnover rate of caseworkers within public agencies is 80% in the metropolitan areas (Snell, 1978, p. 6) might well experience a lack of love and/or stability which might lead to problems.

One solution to the problem of impermanence is a different approach to foster care (Gill, 1975). The Lutheran Child and Family Services, for example, has placed some children into adoptive homes before the child is legally free for adoption. They have found this successful in some cases. The advantages to this approach are that the children do not suffer so many different homes before they are adopted. The judges may rule in favor of making the child legally free for adoption because he is already successfully a part of a permanent family.

In the past many children whose parents have been unwilling or unable to care for them have been institutionalized. Institutionalization does not give a child the

opportunity to feel the very important parental love that is so vital to everyone. The institutionalized child lacks the personal individual care that one receives from a family environment.

Some "special educators have long since realized the negative effects of institutional living on a child's development" (Soeffing, 1975, p. 537). However, even today if a child is born handicapped, whether it be mentally or physically, the doctor may recommend institutionalization for the child. Reasons for this are that there are many problems associated with having a handicapped child. From the very beginning, the parents, particularly fathers, have a difficult time accepting the fact that their child's the handicapped (Norton, 1976, p. 202).

There are numerous factors influencing the reactions of parents toward their handicapped children. The severity of the handicap makes a significant difference. Also, "the inherent disposition and personality of parents, their educational and cultural backgrounds, their financial and social backgrounds in the community are all related to the impact made by the birth of a handicapped child."

Just as there are numerous factors influencing the reactions of natural parents to the birth of their retarded child, these same numerous factors influence most people's attitudes toward the handicapped. Often it is the people in the community that make it rough for the natural parents to

raise their handicapped child, even behavior problem children. Catherine Landsman (as reported by Soeffing, 1975, p. 542) suggests that support from professionals and the extended family would help parents keep the handicapped child at home.

The state of California is encouraging foster home placement over institutionalizing the mentally retarded children. A study performed by Justice (1971, p. 14) to evaluate the foster family placement program in that state suggests that this arrangement is working very well; however some problems have been noted, such as misconceptions and community awareness, antagonism of friends and neighbors and foster sibling social isolation. To overcome these problems, the caretakers made extensive use of existing medical, educational, recreational and religious programs.

In 1971, the Great Oaks Center, a State of Maryland regional facility for the mentally retarded

placed the mentally retarded children in foster homes, enabling the children to live in a more normal environment both at home and in the community. This has been a successful program and the children are making evident developmental gains. (Soeffing, 1975, p. 538)

There are several evident trends. One is placement of handicapped children into foster and adoptive homes. Another is increased services and programming for the severely handicapped and normalization of the environment in which the handicapped live, learn and work.

To help financially with the adoption of a handicapped child subsidized adoption in which the state helps the parents, who offer security and affection, pay the handicapped child's medical and educational expenses is available (Soeffing, 1975, p. 537).

Soeffing (1975) reported for example, that nearly 200 physically handicapped children from Rancho Los Amigos Hospital have been placed in foster homes and the children only return to the hospital for treatment when needed. So, there is a need for good stable homes for these children and these programs are working well. Hopefully, these much needed programs for the physically handicapped, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, behavior problem children and all children who have special needs will expand to provide love and stability to each child's life.

#### Attitude Measurement

Historically, the study of "attitude" can be traced back to the year 1888 when L. Lange observed some subjects during an experiment. A second historical root is found in American psychologists' fascination with individual differences. From the nineteenth century to today, there has been a definite " . . . need for a concept to name and explain a consistency in individual behavior across a variety of situations and many have chosen the concept of attitude for this purpose" (Kiesler, 1969, p. 5).

This concept of attitude has continued to draw significant interest from psychologists in recent years. But, it is probably the sociologists who have contributed most importantly to the concept of attitude, giving it the richness that has caused its increase in popularity in research studies. Due to this dual interest in the area of attitudes, the scientific study of this phenomenon is of particular concern to a special branch of psychology called social psychology. Although social psychology is not solely concerned with attitude studies, no single concept could be said to hold a more central position in that discipline than that of attitudes. Over the years, the study of attitudes has suffered from the serious limitation that they are exceedingly difficult to describe in objective terms, to say nothing of quantitative measurement. Thus, it is not at all surprising that recent studies have expended much time and effort in developing objective and scientific methods for measurement of attitudes. It is also not surprising that the validity, unbiasedness and accuracy of such instruments continues to be a heatedly discussed question.

Rosenberg and Havland (1960, p. 1) defined attitudes as predispositions to respond in a particular way toward specific subjects. Since attitudes are "inferred," there can be no such thing as a direct measure of attitude in any literal sense. The factor that distinguishes a direct measure from an indirect one in this context is the extent

of agreement between the goals of the investigator and the way in which the questions are interpreted (Lemon, 1973, p. 55). For example, the question, "What is your attitude toward arson?" is a direct question, in which there is a strong correlation between the goals of the investigator and the respondent's interpretation of the question. In this case, the respondent's inferences about the investigator's intentions are likely to be realistic ones, and the meaning of the question will be the same for both interviewer and respondent. In the same manner, the respondent will assume that the meaning he intends to convey by his reply will be the meaning which the investigator will put on it. This communication from respondent back to interviewer can be simplified by the use of multiple choice questions.

Direct measures ask respondents for self reports about their feelings, beliefs, and intentions regarding the attitude object. What is still uncertain is the status of these self reports. There are two opposing views about this. One of them is that respondents have some kind of privileged access to their own attitude and feelings and, because of this, they can tell the investigator what causes them to behave as they do. The other view is that these self reports are merely another form of behavior which has the same status as any other observations of behavior, and which can be used in conjunction with or without these other observations as an index of attitudes.

The second interpretation seems to be the most logical one. It would seem that self reports of respondents' attitudes should enjoy no inherently superior status to any other measures of his behavior. However, it is also quite apparent that self reports by respondents offer the simplest, most direct and inobstrusive method for attitude measurement. It is for this reason that such a vast number of studies have been performed using self reports of respondents.

A primary question which has to be asked at the outset of any investigation concerns the form of the questions to be used. These fall basically into two categories: the free response question and the multiple choice question.

The free response or open-ended question does not constrain the form or content of a respondent's reply, and she/he, therefore, can answer in any way she/he feels is important. Its advantages, in certain situations, are considerable. It is valuable where personal feelings or the respondent's opinion are not clearly defined and it is a useful tool for the formation of hypotheses, because it allows the respondent to give answers in his own terms and does not impose the investigator's frame of reference on him. The presumed advantages of the techniques are also major sources of weakness. In a questionnaire, the amount of space available for recording the response has been found to affect the length of the reply which is recorded, for

instance (Payne, 1929). The problem of coding can also be a very difficult one. Respondents use many different forms of words to express the same idea, and it is often difficult to tell whether two respondents are expressing the same idea or different one. What happens when the respondent produces two separate answers to the same question? Should he count both or take the first as being the most salient and therefore the most important? These are just a few of the problems that can be encountered in the coding process.

Multiple-choice questions offer more structured answers. When the likely categories of response are known, and the risk of bias is low, then the use of closed questions will eliminate many of the disadvantages of the free response question without generating too much bias of its own. The multiple response form of closed questions is often used in attitude measurement, to express degrees of either agreement, confidence, strength, or involvement in an opinion, and also to obtain background information about activities, interests and so on, which may be used to estimate attitudes. The major disadvantage to this form of question is the order in which alternatives are listed has on the reply. Where the respondent has to estimate a figure or percentage, he is likely to choose some figure near the middle of the range offered, since he may conjecture that this range was constructed so as to give equal latitude to either overestimators or underestimators of the correct

figure. If there is a correct figure and it does lie near the center of the range, then its popularity may be inflated by this effect. Where the alternatives are not figures, but brands of coffee or work schedules from which the respondents are asked to select one or more which they like, then they appear to show some preference to those which lie at the top or bottom of the list (Payne, 1951). The major advantage of this type of question is the ease of coding. This ease of data analysis should easily offset any effort put forth in order to avoid bias.

To simplify data analysis, a semantic differential questionnaire was used for this study. The semantic differential is a method of measuring the psychological meaning of concepts.

The construction of a semantic differential involves: (a) an analysis of the nature of factors that enter into the semantic description of a concept or attitude, and (b) the selection of polar word pairs corresponding to these factors. By having subjects note a concept according to each factor along a Likerscale, the attitude of an individual can be quantatively specified as a point in a multidimensional semantic space.

Osgood (1957) explained that meaning is psychological, i.e., representational, and thus, is necessarily connotative and subjective for each person or group. The semantic differential measures a subjective connotative meaning. Any

concept, person, place or thing has many possible semantic meanings. By using the hypothetical construct of semantic space, Osgood attempted to account for these many meanings.

Semantic space is a hypothetical construct which can be operationally defined according to Osgood (1957).

Semantic space is not a natural phenomenon, it is a multidimensional space which includes all the possible meanings of a concept. According to Osgood's operational definition of meaning, the meaning of a concept is defined by a point in the semantic space specified by a series of differentiating judgements.

Osgood has reported highly acceptable levels of various forms of reliability (item, factor-score and concept meaning stability) when the semantic differential technique is used with adults. Jenkins, Russell and Suci (1958) also have reported coefficients of stability of .90 or higher for mean scale values and mean profiles based on ratings made by 20 or more college students.

The operational definition of an attitude as a point in the semantic space has two characteristics—direction and distance from origin. There is a correspondence between direction and distance with the properties of learned association of signs and mediated reactions—direction and intensity. Osgood (1957) indicated the direction of a point in the semantic space corresponds to reactions elicited by

the sign (positive or negative) and the distance from the origin corresponds to the intensity of the reactions.

## CHAPTER III

### DESIGN OF THE STUDY

#### Restatement of the Problem

The purposes of this study were as follows:

- (a) To determine if there exists a difference in attitude between foster parent females and males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and foster parent females and males who have had a hard-to-place foster child.
- (b) To determine if there exists a difference in attitude between the females who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and those females who have had a hard-to-place foster child.
- (c) To determine if there exists a difference in attitude between males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and those males who have had a hard-to-place foster child.
- (d) To determine if there exists a significant correlation with the demographic data on a scale where a significant difference exists for the females and males that have had a hard-to-place foster child that is not also a significant correlation for the females and males that have not had a hard-to-place foster child.

- (e) To determine if there exists a significant correlation with the demographic data, on a scale where a significant difference exists, for the females that have had a hard-to-place foster child that is not also a significant correlation for the females that have not had a hard-to-place foster child.
- (f) To determine if there exists a significant correlation with the demographic data, on a scale where a significant difference exists, for the males that have had a hard-to-place foster child that is not also a significant correlation for the males that have not had a hard-to-place foster child.

### Population

The subjects were 282 foster parents. Of the foster parents, 262 were married and 20 were single. The list of foster parents supplied by the Tennessee Department of Human Services was used to mail a questionnaire to each of the foster parents.

### Sources of Data and Procedures for

#### Gathering Data

Data was collected from the 282 foster parents, enrolled in one county of the Tennessee foster parent program, on a measure of attitudes using a semantic

differential format (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was mailed to all the foster parents. The explanatory cover sheet to the foster parents which was enclosed with the questionnaire may be found in Appendix B. As was indicated in the cover sheet, foster parents were requested to return the questionnaire within five days.

### Description of Data Gathering Instrument

The data gathering instrument consisted of several questions soliciting demographic information and a 12-item semantic differential regarding hard-to-place children (see Appendix A). The questionnaire devised for this study consists of 12 pairs of bipolar adjectives. The bipolar adjectives were selected from lists of bipolar adjectives found in DiVesta and Dick (1966), Greinbaum and Wang (1965) and Osgood (1957). Criterion for the selection of the word pairs was based upon their understandability and their appropriateness to the description of a hard-to-place child. The bipolar adjectives were arranged on either end of a line with seven spaces provided between them. The foster parent was asked to place an "X" in the blank which most nearly represented their attitude toward a hard-to-place child. For scoring purposes, a value of 1 was assigned to the blank next to the more negative of the adjectives, a 2 to the next blank, increasing until a value of 7 was assigned to the blank next to the more positive of

the adjectives. The decision as to which adjective should be on the left was made by random selection.

### Discussion of Basic Statistical

#### Design Used

The data were analyzed in three ways. T-tests, chi square analysis and Pearson correlations via computer tabulation were used to analyze the data.

The Chi Square tests were used to determine if the distribution of the demographic data was statistically the same for all groups of foster parents.

Means and standard deviations were calculated for females and males on all scales. T-tests were then applied to these means to determine if they were statistically different.

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated for correlations between the demographic data and responses on scales where a significant difference had been determined to exist.

A .05 level of confidence was utilized to answer all questions of statistical significance.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### Data Composition

Data was collected from a population of 282 foster parents enrolled in one county of the Tennessee foster parent program. (This population contains couples as well as single parents.) Of the 282 foster parents, 62 of the foster parents filled out and returned their semantic differential questionnaire. Fifteen foster parents had not had a hard-to-place foster child (8 females and 7 males). Forty-seven foster parents had had a hard-to-place child (28 females and 19 males). This sample of 62 was far more than the 48 that are required to be a statistically representative sample. Therefore our sample is a valid one.

#### Demographic Data

First it was necessary to look at the composition of the sample to determine if there were significant differences within the sample in regard to age, number of years a foster parent, number of natural children, number of children in the home, average number of years a child in foster care or number of natural children considered hard-to-place. A Chi Square analysis was used to determine these differences.

Hypothesis 1: There exists no difference in the demographic data of the females and males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child.

The results of the Chi Square analysis are shown in the first part of Table 1. As can be seen, there are no chi squares significant at the .05 level of significance. Therefore, hypothesis 1 has failed to be rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There exists no difference in the demographic data of the females and males who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

The results of the chi square analysis are shown in the second part of Table 1. As can be seen, there are no chi squares significant at the .05 level of significance. Therefore, hypothesis 2 has failed to be rejected.

Hypothesis 3: There exists no difference in the demographic data of the females who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and the females who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

The results of the chi square analysis are shown in the first part of Table 2. As can be seen, there are no chi squares significant at the .05 level of significance. Therefore, hypothesis 3 has failed to be rejected.

Hypothesis 4: There exists no difference in the demographic data of the males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and the males who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

Table 1

Raw Chi Square Value, Degrees of Freedom and Significance  
Level for Males and Females Who Have Not Had  
and Who Have Had a Hard-to-Place Child

| Item                               | Have Not Had   |    |                    | Have Had       |    |                    |
|------------------------------------|----------------|----|--------------------|----------------|----|--------------------|
|                                    | Raw Chi Square | df | Significance Level | Raw Chi Square | df | Significance Level |
| Age                                | 10.0           | 7  | .19                | 15.04          | 24 | .92                |
| No. of Yrs. a Foster Parent        | 2.94           | 7  | .88                | 10.04          | 23 | .99                |
| No. of Natural Children            | 2.94           | 6  | .81                | 1.66           | 6  | .95                |
| No. of Children in Home            | 1.47           | 5  | .91                | 1.89           | 8  | .98                |
| Avg. Yrs. Child in Foster Care     | 4.94           | 6  | .55                | 6.79           | 12 | .87                |
| No. Natural Children Hard to Place | 0.12           | 2  | .94                | 0.49           | 2  | .78                |

There were no chi squares which were significant at the .05 level of significance.

Table 2

Raw Chi Square Value, Degrees of Freedom and Significance  
Level for Females Who Have Not and Have Had  
a Hard-to-Place Foster Child and for Males  
Who Have Not and Have Had a Hard-to-  
Place Foster Child

| Item                               | Females |           |                    | Males   |           |                    |
|------------------------------------|---------|-----------|--------------------|---------|-----------|--------------------|
|                                    | Raw Chi | Square df | Significance Level | Raw Chi | Square df | Significance Level |
| Age                                | 19.91   | 21        | .53                | 16.14   | 18        | .58                |
| No. of Yrs. a Foster Parent        | 20.57   | 24        | .66                | 15.83   | 18        | .60                |
| No. of Natural Children            | 10.50   | 7         | .16                | 3.55    | 5         | .62                |
| No. of Children in Home            | 10.69   | 8         | .22                | 6.52    | 8         | .59                |
| Avg. Yrs. Child in Foster Home     | 23.69   | 14        | .05                | 14.49   | 11        | .21                |
| No. Natural Children Hard to Place | 3.92    | 3         | .27                | 3.22    | 3         | .36                |

There were no chi squares which were significant at the .05 level of significance.

The results of the chi square analysis are shown in the second part of Table 2. As can be seen, there are no chi squares significant at the .05 level of significance. Therefore, hypothesis 4 has failed to be rejected.

Conclusion: The composition of the sample is such that no statistically significant differences exist between the two groups.

#### Attitude Differences Measured by the Semantic Differential Questionnaire

The means and standard deviation obtained from the semantic differential questionnaire are listed in Table 3. These values are based on a total of 62 responses consisting of 15 foster parents who have not had a hard-to-place foster child (8 females and 7 males) and 47 foster parents who have had a hard-to-place foster child (28 females and 19 males). A general tendency toward lower values (more negative attitude) is noticeable for the males.

T-tests, via computer tabulation were performed to see if differences in attitudes existed between those who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and those who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

Hypothesis 5: There exists no difference in attitude between foster parent females and males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and foster females and males who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Females Who  
Have Not and Have Had a Hard-to-Place  
Foster Child and Males Who Have Not  
and Have Had a Hard-to-Place  
Foster Child

| Scales                    | Have Not Had |      |           |      | Have Had  |      |           |      |
|---------------------------|--------------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|
|                           | Females      |      | Males     |      | Females   |      | Males     |      |
|                           | $\bar{x}$    | s    | $\bar{x}$ | s    | $\bar{x}$ | s    | $\bar{x}$ | s    |
| Unfriendly-Friendly       | 3.88         | 2.59 | 4.00      | 2.31 | 4.29      | 2.05 | 3.84      | 1.68 |
| Clean-Dirty               | 3.75         | 1.98 | 3.43      | 1.81 | 4.18      | 2.00 | 3.67      | 1.68 |
| Intelligent-Unintelligent | 4.00         | 2.78 | 4.29      | 2.56 | 4.14      | 1.96 | 3.84      | 1.43 |
| Brave-Not Brave           | 4.13         | 2.30 | 4.86      | 1.57 | 4.12      | 2.18 | 4.33      | 1.78 |
| Calm-Fidgety *            | 3.75         | 2.12 | 2.86      | 1.68 | 2.33      | 1.44 | 2.67      | 1.65 |
| Strong-Weak               | 4.38         | 2.13 | 4.57      | 1.51 | 4.04      | 1.99 | 4.24      | 1.99 |
| Valuable-Worthless        | 4.50         | 2.33 | 5.00      | 2.08 | 5.24      | 1.76 | 4.88      | 1.54 |
| Loud-Quiet                | 4.25         | 2.49 | 3.86      | 1.95 | 3.04      | 1.91 | 3.28      | 2.05 |
| Unkind-Kind *             | 4.75         | 2.38 | 4.57      | 1.90 | 3.11      | 2.01 | 2.67      | 1.28 |
| Unhealthy-Healthy         | 4.13         | 1.81 | 5.29      | 0.95 | 4.15      | 2.20 | 3.84      | 2.12 |
| Agile-Clumsy              | 3.00         | 1.51 | 4.14      | 1.46 | 3.36      | 1.93 | 3.65      | 1.66 |
| Follower-Leader           | 3.75         | 2.19 | 2.86      | 1.86 | 3.46      | 2.32 | 3.17      | 2.01 |

\*  $p < .05$ .

The results of the t-tests are shown on the first part of Table 4. As can be seen, a significant difference in the negative direction was found on the unkind-kind scale. Therefore, hypothesis 5 was only rejected on the unkind-kind scale at the .05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 6: There exists no difference in attitude between the females who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and those females who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

The results of the t-tests are shown on the middle part of Table 4. As can be seen at the .05 level of significance, the only significant difference found was in the negative direction on the calm-fidgety scale and therefore, hypothesis 6 was rejected on the scale.

Hypothesis 7: There exists no difference in attitude between males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and those males who have had a hard-to-place foster child.

The results of the t-tests are shown in the last part of Table 4. A significant difference was found in the negative direction on the unkind-kind scale, thereby rejecting hypothesis 7 for this scale.

Conclusions: There is a general overall tendency of a more negative attitude for females and males who have had a hard-to-place foster child. On 10 out of the 12 scales, the average for the males decreased.

Significant differences in attitudes between females and males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and

Table 4

T-Value, Degrees of Freedom and Significance Level  
for Females and Males Who Have Not and  
Have Had a Hard-to-Place Foster  
Child

| Scales                    | Have Not/Have Had<br>Females and Males |       |       | Have Not/Have Had<br>Females |    |       | Have Not/Have Had<br>Males |    |               |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------|-------|------------------------------|----|-------|----------------------------|----|---------------|
|                           | T                                      | Value | df    | Sig.<br>Level                | T  | Value | df                         | T  | Sig.<br>Level |
| Unfriendly-Friendly       | 0.29                                   | 60    | .77   | 0.47                         | 34 | .64   | 0.19                       | 24 | .85           |
| Clean-Dirty               | 0.68                                   | 59    | .50   | 0.54                         | 34 | .60   | -0.31                      | 23 | .76           |
| Intelligent-Unintelligent | 0.19                                   | 60    | .85   | 0.17                         | 34 | .87   | 0.56                       | 24 | .58           |
| Brave-Not Brave           | 0.44                                   | 57    | .66   | 0.01                         | 32 | .99   | 0.68                       | 23 | .50           |
| Calm-Fidgety              | 1.79                                   | 58    | .08   | 2.19                         | 33 | .04*  | 0.26                       | 23 | .80           |
| Strong-Weak               | 0.61                                   | 57    | .54   | 0.42                         | 33 | .68   | 0.40                       | 22 | .69           |
| Valuable-Worthless        | -0.67                                  | 55    | .51   | -0.96                        | 31 | .35   | 0.15                       | 22 | .88           |
| Loud-Quiet                | 1.56                                   | 58    | .13   | 1.47                         | 33 | .15   | 0.64                       | 23 | .53           |
| Unkind-Kind               | 3.16                                   | 58    | .01** | 1.95                         | 33 | .06   | 2.91                       | 23 | .01**         |
| Unhealthy-Healthy         | 1.07                                   | 59    | .29   | -0.03                        | 33 | .98   | 1.73                       | 24 | .10           |
| Agile-Clumsy              | 0.11                                   | 55    | .91   | -0.48                        | 31 | .64   | 0.69                       | 22 | .50           |
| Followers-Leader          | -0.01                                  | 57    | .99   | 0.31                         | 32 | .76   | -0.35                      | 23 | .73           |

\*  $p < .05$ ,  $df=33$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ ,  $df=58/23$ .

those who have had a hard-to-place foster child exists on only 2 of 12 scales (calm-fidgety and unkind-kind).

### Pearson Correlations

Females and males who have had a hard-to-place foster child exhibit, on a few scales, a difference in attitude from the males and females who have not had a hard-to-place foster child. This difference in attitude should be related to the demographic data. The have-not-had females and males' attitudes should not show this same relationship to the demographic data. Thus, if we compare the correlations found between the have-not-had females and males and the demographic data with the correlations found between the have-had females and males and the demographic data, the differences between these two sets of correlations will be the correlations that may be a cause of the difference in attitude. To do this, Pearson Correlation Coefficients were tabulated via computer.

Hypothesis 8: There exists no significant correlation with the demographic data for the females and males on a scale where a significant difference exists, that have had a hard-to-place foster child, that is not also a significant correlation for females and males that have not had a hard-to-place foster child.

The first section of Table 5 gives the Pearson Correlation Coefficients and significance levels for the

Table 5

Pearson Correlation Coefficient, Degrees of Freedom and Significance  
Level on Scales Where Significant Differences were Found  
Between Males and Females Who Have Not Had and Those  
Who Have Had a Hard-to-Place Foster Child

| Item                                 | Females and Males<br>Unkind-Kind Scale |     |            |          |      |            | Females<br>Calm-Fidgety Scale |    |            |          |      |            | Males<br>Unkind-Kind Scale |    |            |          |      |            |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----|------------|----------|------|------------|-------------------------------|----|------------|----------|------|------------|----------------------------|----|------------|----------|------|------------|
|                                      | Have Not                               |     |            | Have Had |      |            | Have Not                      |    |            | Have Had |      |            | Have Not                   |    |            | Have Had |      |            |
|                                      | r                                      | df  | Sig<br>Lev | r        | df   | Sig<br>Lev | r                             | df | Sig<br>Lev | r        | df   | Sig<br>Lev | r                          | df | Sig<br>Lev | r        | df   | Sig<br>Lev |
| Age                                  | .28                                    | 10  | .21        | -.02     | 42   | .45        | .60                           | 5  | .14        | -.59     | 25** | .01        | .35                        | 5  | .28        | .34      | 17   | .09        |
| No. of Yrs.<br>a Foster<br>Parent    | .47                                    | 15* | .04        | -.39     | 45** | .01        | .24                           | 8  | .28        | -.27     | 27   | .09        | .59                        | 7  | .08        | -.59     | 18** | .01        |
| No. of<br>Natural<br>Children        | .06                                    | 15  | .41        | -.12     | 45   | .22        | -.12                          | 8  | .39        | -.40     | 27*  | .02        | .30                        | 7  | .26        | -.29     | 18   | .12        |
| No. of<br>Children<br>in Home        | -.26                                   | 15  | .18        | .13      | 45   | .20        | -.59                          | 8  | .06        | .34      | 27*  | .04        | -.09                       | 7  | .42        | .36      | 18   | .07        |
| Avg. Yrs.<br>Child in<br>Foster Care | .53                                    | 9   | .07        | -.18     | 35   | .15        | .22                           | 5  | .36        | -.22     | 21   | .17        | .84                        | 4  | .08        | -.47     | 14*  | .04        |

\*  $p < .05$ ,  $df = 15/27/27/14$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ ,  $df = 25/45/18$ .

have-had and have-not-had females and males between results on the unkind-kind scale and four types of demographic data at the .05 level of significance. The only significant correlation for the have-not-had females and males is with the number of years a foster parent. This is also true for the have-had parents. It should be noted, however, that the correlation coefficient changes from positive to negative, so it is possible that this is a factor in the difference in attitude.

Hypothesis 9: There exists no significant correlation with the demographic data for the females, on a scale where a significant difference exists, that have had a hard-to-place foster child, that is not also a significant correlation for the females that have not had a hard-to-place foster child.

The center section of Table 5 gives the correlation coefficients and significance levels for the have-had and have-not-had females between the results on the calm-fidgety scale and the four demographic variables. The have-had females show significant correlations for age, number of natural children in the home. Therefore, hypothesis 9 is rejected for these correlations.

Hypothesis 10: There exists no significant correlation with the demographic data for the males, on a scale where a significant difference exists, that have had a hard-to-place foster child, that is not also a significant correlation for the males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child.

The last section of Table 5 gives the Pearson Correlation Coefficients for the have-had and have-not-had males between these results on the unkind-kind scale and various demographic data. No significant correlations exist for the have-not-had males. The have-had males show significant correlations between the results on the unkind-kind scale and for number of years a foster parent and average number of years a child is in foster care. Therefore, hypothesis 10 is rejected.

Conclusions: There do exist significant correlations, with the demographic data, for the individuals who have had a hard-to-place foster child, that did not exist for the have-not-had cases. It would therefore seem that the information contained in the demographic data is indeed related to the difference in attitude. Unfortunately, all of the demographic data seems to be involved for either the males or the females. Thus the situation is a very complex one and involves many items. Age, number of years a foster parent, number of natural children, number of children in the home and average length of time a child is in foster care all seem to be involved in the difference in attitude.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Restatement of the Problem

The purposes of this study were as follows: (a) to determine the difference in attitude of females and/or males who have not had a hard-to-place foster child from those who have had a hard-to-place foster child; (b) to determine if there is a relationship between this difference in attitude and the demographic data.

#### Summary of Procedures Used

The subjects of this study were foster parents. A 12-item semantic differential questionnaire was mailed to each of the 282 foster parents in a Tennessee county. Sixty-two foster parents completed and returned the semantic differential questionnaire. This measured the attitude differences of those foster parents who have had a hard-to-place foster child in the home and those who have not.

The data obtained on responses was analyzed using three techniques. These techniques were chi square tests, t-tests and correlation calculations. The chi square analysis was used to assure statistically that the females and males' demographic data of the sample were similar. The t-tests were used to determine if there were significant

differences between the attitude of foster parents who have not had a hard-to-place foster child and those who have had a hard-to-place foster child. Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between these significant differences and the demographic data.

### Principle Findings and Conclusions

A chi square analysis was used to determine if significant differences in the demographic data existed for members of the sample. At the .05 level of significance, no differences were found. This assures that any differences in attitude which were found were not attributable to differences in demographic data.

Means and standard deviations were calculated to enable one to easily obtain an estimate of attitude differences. The overall tendency for males was a less positive attitude after having a hard-to-place foster child. Although present for both, the tendency was more pronounced for the males.

T-tests were used to determine how many and which of these differences were statistically significant. Three differences were found to be statistically significant at the .05 level of significance (one for the females and males, one for the females and one for the males). The unkind-kind scale showed statistically significant differences for the male and female haves versus have-nots and for the male haves versus the male have-nots. The female have and

have-nots showed a significant difference on the calm-fidgety scale. Thus, foster parents tend to see hard-to-place children as unkind and fidgety after they have had a hard-to-place foster child.

Pearson Correlation Coefficients were calculated between the results of the scales showing significant differences and certain demographic data for each sample pool described. Both combined groups of females and males who had not had a hard-to-place child and those who had had a hard-to-place child demonstrates significant correlations between their results on the unkind-kind scale and the number of years as a foster parent. The coefficients (unkind-kind scale) were a positive .47 for the have-not females and males and a -.39 for the have-had females and males. Thus, a definite change is noted in this relationship after having a hard-to-place child. The have-not-had females' responses on the calm-fidgety scale and the have-not-had males' responses on the unkind-kind scale showed no significant correlations with any of the demographic data. The have-had females' responses on the calm-fidgety scale showed significant correlations with age (-.59), number of natural children (-.40) and number of children in the home (.34). The have-had males' responses on the unkind-kind scale showed significant correlations with number of years a foster parent (-.59) and average number of years a child is in foster care (-.47). Thus, we see that

some of the demographic data is related to the differences in attitude.

From the study, we see that a general less positive attitude exists toward hard-to-place children after having a hard-to-place foster child. This attitude difference is statistically significant for some groups on two (unkind-kind and calm-fidgety) of the 12 scales measured. This difference in attitude is related to the demographic data. The optimum placement for a hard-to-place child would depend on whether or not both a male and female parent was in the home, or only a male or female parent was in the home. If both male and female parents are present, the parents can be placed in four groups; have not had inexperienced, have not had experienced, have had inexperienced, and have had experienced. From the data, the parents could be ranked for placement of the hard-to-place child from most preferred to least preferred in this order: have had inexperienced, have not had inexperienced and have had experienced. If only a female parent is present, she should be young, have only a few or no natural children and there should be a number of children in the home. If only a male parent is present, it should be a recently established foster home and he should be given only children who will not be in foster care for a long term. These conditions should help minimize the negative attitudes felt by foster parents towards hard-to-place children.

### Recommendations for Further Study and Research

In the course of performing this study, two ideas came to light which would offer possible improvement for future studies of this nature.

The first would be to perform a very long term study. This would involve using a semantic differential every 6 months - 1 year, over a period of years. These would be completed by the same set of subjects each time, noting those responses which came from single parent homes. This would allow us to measure not only the difference in attitude but also the period of time during which this change took place. It would also allow more precise calculations of correlation coefficients for age and length of time a foster parent.

The second change would involve handing out a second semantic differential to determine the foster parents' attitude towards "normal" foster children. This would help us determine the overall difference in attitude towards "normal" foster children caused by a hard-to-place foster child.

### Educational Implications

Frequently the hard-to-place foster child is enrolled in a special education program. The foster parents of these

hard-to-place children have negative attitudes toward these children. They characterize these children as unkind and fidgety.

This is the same way in which many parents of special education students describe their children. So the hard-to-place foster child is faced with many negative attitudes toward him at home and therefore, a greater emphasis must be placed on building a good self image for the child at school. What this study should do then, is help the educator identify the particular areas that they should concentrate on in building a good self image. The educator needs to make the child feel that he is kind and not fidgety and concentrate to a lesser extent on those attitudes that are already positive such as valuable and friendly.

The teacher may realize through this study that the hard-to-place foster children with older foster females and parents who have been a foster parent longer will be exposed to more negative attitudes at home and therefore, the teacher may desire to spend more time with the less fortunate foster child.

So, through this study, it is hoped that a special education teacher can obtain specific ideas of areas in which hard-to-place foster children are in need of assistance. Identification of these areas of greatest need will hopefully allow the teacher to concentrate her efforts where they are needed most.

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## REFERENCES

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## THE HARD-TO-PLACE CHILD

Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_

Age

How long have you been a foster parent?

How many natural children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

How many children are in your home now? \_\_\_\_\_

On the average, how long do you keep a foster child? \_\_\_\_\_  
If your natural children had been your foster children, how  
many of them would you consider hard-to-place?

How many foster children that you have had would you consider hard-to-place?

Have you had a hard-to-place child?

Below are pairs of adjectives which describe a hard-to-place child. Place an "X" at the position on the scale which you feel describes a hard-to-place child. An example of this is as follows:

good                      X                      bad  
In this case, the parent felt that a hard-to-place  
child was good more often than he was bad, but not good  
all the time.

good                  X                  bad

In this case, the parent felt that a hard-to-place child was good as often as he was bad.

good  
In this case, the parent felt that a X bad  
hard-to-place  
child was bad more often than he was good, but not  
bad all the time.

Place an "X" in the appropriate blank.

Hard-to-place children are -

|             |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |               |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---------------|
| unfriendly  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | friendly      |
| clean       |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | dirty         |
| intelligent |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | unintelligent |
| brave       |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | not brave     |
| calm        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | fidgety       |
| strong      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | weak          |
| valuable    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | worthless     |
| loud        |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | quiet         |
| unkind      |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | kind          |
| unhealthy   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | healthy       |
| agile       |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | clumsy        |
| follower    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | leader        |

## APPENDIX B

Dear Foster Parent,

I am presently enrolled in the Graduate School at The University of Tennessee working on my Master's degree in Special Education. I have decided to write my thesis on "Measurement of the Difference in Attitude of Foster Parents as a Result of Having a Hard-to-Place Child."

I have enclosed an Attitude Evaluation questionnaire, which I would greatly appreciate your filling out. My interest in the feelings and attitudes of foster parents is not purely academic. Being a foster parent myself, I have a personal interest in the expressed feelings and attitudes of other foster parents. I feel it is most important that the general attitudes of foster parents be made known, so that areas of weakness in the system can be identified, in order that remedies can and will be worked out.

If you will be so kind as to fill out the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the stamped, self-addressed envelope, it would not only aid in furthering my education, but could also prove to be of great benefit to the foster parent program.

Please do not sign the questionnaire. Complete confidentiality needs to be maintained and the identities of the respondents is in no way required for my study.

Your assistance is most gratefully received.

Sincerely,

Lynne Lux

## VITA

Lynne Lux was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee on October 10, 1952. She moved to Joplin, Missouri at age three and attended the Joplin Public Schools. In May of 1970 she graduated from Joplin Memorial High School. In the fall of 1970 she entered Missouri Southern State College and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Education in May 1974. Lynne taught Learning Disabled children in Forsyth, Missouri and Lafayette, Indiana. In the fall of 1976 she entered The University of Tennessee as a graduate student.

Lynne is married to Dr. C. Ray Lux and they have two foster children.