



## ARE SAME-SEX FAMILIES GOOD FOR CHILDREN?

*What the Social Sciences Say (and Don't Say) About Family Experimentation*

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In Massachusetts, you won't find the words "husband" and "wife" on marriage applications. Clerks of the court performing marriages are instructed to use "party A" and "party B" instead. And it won't be long before we see "parent A" and "parent B," rather than "mother" and "father" on birth certificates and adoption records.

But we must all ask if these changes in our understanding of family are harmless. The social sciences have a great deal to say about this, as we will see momentarily. But before we look at what they can tell us, we must start with what they cannot tell us.

### **"DON'T WORRY. THE KIDS WILL BE FINE!"**

Same-sex advocates are quick to assure us that children with same-sex parents are happy and healthy:

- "A growing body of scientific literature demonstrates that children who grow up with 1 or 2 gay or lesbian parents fare as well in emotional, cognitive, social, and sexual functioning as do children whose parents are heterosexual."<sup>1</sup>
- "Studies comparing groups of children raised by homosexual and by heterosexual parents find no developmental differences between the two groups of children. ..."<sup>2</sup>
- "All the scientific evidence points to no differences among children raised in heterosexual or homosexual families."<sup>3</sup>

### **DO WE KNOW THEY WILL BE FINE?**

But is it true? Research tells us no such thing, simply because there is no *reliable* body of research that compares children being raised in same-sex versus mother/father homes. We are just beginning the same-sex family experiment; therefore there are not significant populations of such families for scientists to observe over long periods of time.

Honest researchers confess as much:

- "Research exploring the diversity of parental relationships among gay and lesbian parents is just beginning."<sup>4</sup>
- "Thus far, *no work* has compared children's long-term achievement in education, occupation, income and other domains of life"<sup>5</sup> (emphasis added).

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen C. Perrin, MD, "Technical Report: Coparent and Second-Parent Adoption by Same-Sex Parents," *Pediatrics*, Vol. 109 No. 2, (2002) p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> American Psychological Association, *APA Online*, [www.apa.org/pubinfo/answers](http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/answers) (15 August 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Ed Susman, "AMA Backs Same-Sex Adoption," *Washington Times*, June 16, 2004;

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[www.washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/20040615-035749-1425r.htm](http://www.washingtontimes.com/upi-breaking/20040615-035749-1425r.htm) (16 June 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Perrin, 2002, p. 343.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz, "(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?" *American Sociological Review*, 66 (2001), pp. 159-183.

- “From a sound methodological perspective, the results of these studies can be relied on for one purpose – to indicate that further research...is warranted. The only acceptable conclusion at this point is that the literature on this topic does not constitute a solid body of scientific evidence.”<sup>6</sup>
- Studies on same-sex parenting are plagued with "persistent limitation[s]. ...As a result, we cannot be confident concerning the generalizability of many of the findings. ...”<sup>7</sup>
- The authors of an *American Sociological Review* study, though personally sympathetic with the idea of the same-sex family, “disagree with those who claim that there are no differences between the children of heterosexual parents and children of lesbian parents. ...”<sup>8</sup>

#### WHAT RESEARCH DOES TELL US

So that’s what the research *doesn’t* tell us. But was *does* solidly replicated research confirm? It confirms that children do best when raised by their biological, married mothers and fathers.

- “An extensive body of research tells us that children do best when they grow up with both biological parents. ... Thus, it is not simply the presence of two parents, as some have assumed, but the

presence of two biological parents that seems to support child development.”<sup>9</sup>

- “Most researchers now agree that together these studies support the notion that, on average, children do best when raised by their two married, biological parents.”<sup>10</sup>
- “Almost everyone – a few retrograde scholars excepted – agrees that children in mother-only homes suffer harmful consequences: the best studies show that these youngsters are more likely than those in [mother/father] families to be suspended from school, have emotional problems, become delinquent, suffer from abuse and take drugs.”<sup>11</sup>
- “Overall, father love appears to be as heavily implicated as mother love in offsprings’ psychological well-being and health.”<sup>12</sup>
- “Female-headed households reported the greatest number of chronic [physical health] conditions for their children, regardless of racial or ethnic status.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Affidavit of Steven L. Nock, *Halpern et al., v. The Attorney General of Canada*, Ontario Superior Court of Justice, March 2001, Court File No. 684/00, par. 130-131.

<sup>7</sup> David Demo and Martha Cox, “Families with Young Children: A Review of Research in the 1990s,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62 (2000), p. 889.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz, “(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?” *American Sociological Review*, 66 (2001) 159-183.

<sup>9</sup> Kristin Anderson Moore et al., “Marriage From a Child’s Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do About It?” *Child Trends Research Brief*, June 2002, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Parke, “Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?” *Center for Law and Social Policy*, May 2003, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Jame Q. Wilson, “Why We Don’t Marry,” *City Journal*, [www.cityjournal.org/html/12\\_1\\_why\\_we.html](http://www.cityjournal.org/html/12_1_why_we.html). (20 October 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Ronald P. Rohner and Robert A. Veneziano, “The Importance of Father Love: History and Contemporary Evidence,” *Review of General Psychology* 5.4 (2001): 382-405.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald J. Angel and Jacqueline Worobey, “Single Motherhood and Children’s Health,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 29 (1988): 38-52; Ronald J. Angel and Jacqueline L. Angel, *Painful Inheritance: Health and the New Generation of Fatherless Families*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

- Health scores are 20 to 35 percent higher for children living with both biological parents, compared with those living in single or stepfamilies.<sup>14</sup>
- “When young boys have primary caretakers of both sexes, they are less likely as adults to engage in woman-devaluing activities and in self-aggrandizing, cruel or overly competitive male cults.”<sup>15</sup>
- “We should disavow the notion that ‘mommies can make good daddies,’ just as we should disavow the popular notion of radical feminists that ‘daddies can make good mommies.’ ...The two sexes are different to the core, and each is necessary – culturally and biologically – for the optimal development of a human being.”<sup>16</sup>

So, we must ask, “Is it wise to enter the same-sex family experiment with a generation of children so we can learn how it will turn out?” Is it ethical to turn thousands of children into human guinea pigs? The answer must be a resounding “no.”

This is especially true when we already have strong indicators that children who don’t live with both biological parents fare worse than those who do. Thanks to the sexual revolution in the 60s and 70s, with its baggage of no-fault divorce and unwed childrearing, we have had

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<sup>14</sup> Deborah A. Dawson, “Family Structure and Children’s Health and Well-being: Data from the National Health Interview Survey on Child Health,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53 (1991): 573 - 584.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *My Brother’s Keeper: What the Social Sciences Do (and Don’t) Tell Us About Masculinity*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 121. See also Scott Coltrane, “Father-Child Relationships and the Status of Women: A Cross-Cultural Study,” *American Journal of Sociology* 93 (1988): 1085.

<sup>16</sup> David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage are Indispensable of the Good of Children and Society*, (New York: The Free Press, 1996), p. 197.

ample opportunity to witness and record the results of fatherless and motherless childrearing.

#### LEARNING FROM THE DIVORCE EXPERIMENT

We entered our national divorce experiment with all the best hopes, assuming that if parents could leave unhappy marriages, they would become happier parents, raising happier children. Advocates pushing the divorce experiment called forth a few authorities who assured us that children are resilient and they would adjust to living apart from their parents. “Love would see them through” we were told, much like same-sex family advocates seek to assure us today.

Well, the millions of children who were subjected to this experiment tell us a different story, as witnessed by multiple studies:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics, the same organization that tells us the same-sex family will work out just fine, now tells us that divorce “is a long, searing experience...characterized by painful losses.”<sup>17</sup>
- “Divorce is usually brutally painful to a child,” and 25 percent of adult children of divorce continue to have “serious social, emotional, and psychological problems.” Meanwhile, only 10 percent of adult children from intact families had such problems.<sup>18</sup>
- “Children in post-divorce families do not, on the whole, look happier, healthier, or more well-adjusted even if one or both parents are happier. National studies show that children from divorced and remarried families are more aggressive toward their parents and teachers. They experience more depression, have more learning difficulties, and suffer from more

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<sup>17</sup> George J. Cohen, et al., “Helping Children and Families Deal With Divorce and Separation,” *AAP Clinical Report*, 110 (2002): 1019-1023.

<sup>18</sup> E. Mavis Hetherington, *For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered*, (W.W. Norton, 2002), p. 7.

problems with peers than children from intact families. Children from divorced and remarried families are two to three times more likely to be referred for psychological help at school than their peers from intact families. More of them end up in mental health clinics and hospital settings.”<sup>19</sup>

Also, a convincing body of research shows us that children do not do as well when their mothers or fathers marry other people. And since it is biologically impossible for a child living in a same-sex home to be living with both natural parents, all same-sex homes are either literally step-families – formed after the end of a heterosexual relationship – or step-like, in that only one parent has a biological connection to the child.

The data on such families gives us great concern in forming more of them:

- “Social scientists used to believe that, for positive child outcomes, stepfamilies were preferable to single-parent families. Today, we are not so sure. Stepfamilies typically have an economic advantage, but some recent studies indicate that the children of stepfamilies have as many behavioral and emotional problems as the children of single-parent families, and possibly more. ...Stepfamily problems, in short, may be so intractable that *the best strategy for dealing with them is to do everything possible to minimize their occurrence*”<sup>20</sup> (emphasis added).
- Children from stepfamilies, where the biological father is missing, are 80 times

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<sup>19</sup> Judith Wallerstein, et al., *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*, (Hyperion, 2000), p. xxiii.

<sup>20</sup> David Popenoe, “The Evolution of Marriage and the Problems of Stepfamilies: A Biosocial Perspective,” in Alan Booth and Judy Dunn, eds., *Stepfamilies: Who Benefits? Who Does Not?* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994), p 5, 19.

more likely to have to repeat a grade and twice as likely to be expelled or suspended, compared to children living with both biological parents.<sup>21</sup>

- Compared to their peers in biologically derived mother/father homes, children in stepfamilies endure significantly higher degrees of emotional and behavioral problems, greater needs for psychological help and reports of poorer general health, along with increased likelihood of depression.<sup>22</sup>

Increased risks of physical and sexual child abuse at the hands of non-biological parents are another serious concern for same-sex families:

- Research on child-abuse indicates that preschool children who live with one biological parent and one stepparent are 40 times more likely to become a victim of abuse than children living with a biological mother and father.<sup>23</sup>
- Findings such as this led domestic violence researchers, Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, to conclude, “stepparenthood per se remains *the single most powerful risk factor* for child abuse that has yet been identified.”<sup>24</sup>
- Compared to children in biological homes and even single-parent homes, “stepchildren are not merely

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<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Zill, “Understanding Why Children in Stepfamilies Have More Learning and Behavior Problems Than Children in Nuclear Families,” in Alan Booth and Judy Dunn, eds., *Stepfamilies: Who Benefits? Who Does Not?* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994), p. 100.

<sup>22</sup> Bonnie Barber and Janice Lyons, “Family Process and Adolescent Adjustment in Intact and Remarried Families,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 23 (1994): 421-436; Popenoe, 1994, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, “Child Abuse and Other Risks of Not Living with Both Parents,” *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 6 (1985): 197-210.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, *Homicide*, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988), p. 87-88.

‘disadvantaged,’ but imperiled”<sup>25</sup>  
(emphasis added).

- Children residing in a home with a stepparent are eight times more likely to die of maltreatment than children living with two biological parents.<sup>26</sup>
- “Before the late 1970s, CSA [child sexual abuse] was regarded as rare. In the following decades, the incidence – based on official statistics – increased dramatically.” One of the major reasons for this increase was “the nature of the relationship between the child and perpetrator.”<sup>27</sup> More kids were living in homes with non-biological parents, therefore more kids were at risk for sexual abuse.

#### CONCLUSION

A wise and compassionate society always comes to the aid of children in motherless or fatherless families, but a wise and compassionate society never intentionally subjects children to such families. But every single same-sex home would do exactly that, for no other reason than that a small handful of adults desire such kinds of families.

There is no research indicating such homes will be good for children. In fact the data show us that the family experimentation we have subjected children to over the past 30 years has *all* failed to improve human well-being in any important way. What makes us think more of it will make the situation any better? It will only make life for our children dramatically worse. ♦

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<sup>25</sup> Margo Wilson and Martin Daly, “Risk of Maltreatment of Children Living With Stepparents,” in R. Gelles and J. Lancaster, eds., *Child Abuse and Neglect: Biosocial Dimensions*, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1987), p. 230.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Stiffman, *et al.*, “Household Composition and Risk of Fatal Child Maltreatment,” *Pediatrics*, 109 (2002), 615-621.

<sup>27</sup> Perrin, 2002, p. 341.