

Lesbians and Gay Men as Parents

Bill Bradshaw

The results of recently published research studies confirm the conclusion that lesbian and gay couples are successful parents; in various measures of psychological and social adjustment, the development of children raised in these households is equal to or sometimes better than that of children raised by heterosexual parents.

In an earlier volume of *Reunion* we summarized the work (1) of Judith Stacey (New York University) and Timothy Biblarz (University of Southern California) who reviewed the professional literature on this topic available at the time (2001). The same two authors have now conducted a more comprehensive review of work published since 1990 (2) in an effort to isolate the separate effects of the gender, number, marital status, sexual orientation, and biological relationship of parents on their children. By clarifying how these individual variables impact child rearing, these studies do not support the conventional wisdom that children are disadvantaged in the homes of same-gender parents.

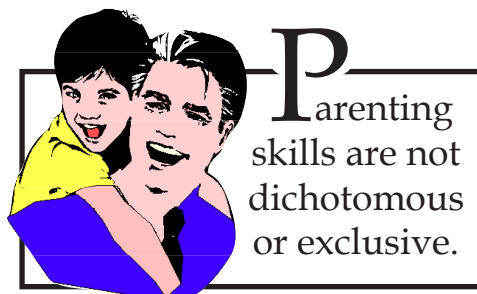
Biblarz and Stacey were able to identify 33 studies of two-parent families and 48 studies of single-parent families in which the investigators found gender differences in: 1) parental skills (e.g. availability, warmth, discipline, etc. in parent-child relationships), and 2) child outcomes (e.g. psychological and social well-being, behavioral problems, educational and occupational attainment, etc.). Importantly, they note that "...for every finding of significant differences in studies of same- and different-sex coparent families, there were roughly four or more findings of no significant differences..."

The Results Section of this review makes for very interesting reading, but we will cite here only the final conclusions. 1) "Compared to all other family forms, families headed by (at least) two committed, compatible parents are generally best for children." 2) "When there is a gender difference in parenting skills, women tend to be better than men. [However] Gay male-parent families remain under researched..." 3) "Lesbian coparents seem to outperform comparable married heterosexual, biological parents on several measures, even while being denied the substantial privileges of marriage." 4) "Married heterosexual fathers typically score lowest on parental involvement and skills..."

5) "Parenting skills are not dichotomous or exclusive." That is, parental traits conventionally deemed to be "masculine" (disciplinarian, problem solver, and playmate for sons; the appreciative audience to which daughters play out their femininity) are commonly exhibited by females, and those conventionally thought to be feminine (nurturance, security, and caretaking) are commonly exhibited by males.

Two additional studies published this year after the Biblarz/Stacey review appeared to further bolster its conclusions.

Nanette Gartrell (University of California, San Francisco) and Henny Bos (University of Amsterdam) have authored the "US national longitudinal lesbian family study: Psychological adjustment of 17-year-old adolescents" (3). This is an impressive study of 154 lesbian women who conceived by means of donor insemination (DI). They were



recruited in the Boston, Washington DC, and San Francisco metropolitan areas between 1986 and 1992 and agreed to a long-term evaluation of the psychological adjustment of their children (at 2, 5, 10, and 17 years of age). Ninety-three percent of the original volunteers remain in the study. Both mothers and children were personally interviewed and submitted responses to online questionnaires. There were 39 girls and 39 boys at the time of the adolescent sampling. The control comparison group consisted of 49 girls and 44 boys with essentially identical demographic characteristics.

The data obtained by these investigators include maternal responses to a standard Childhood Behavior Checklist (CBGCL) which generated scores on a set of traits that included activities, social competence, school/academic competence, anxiety/depression, withdrawal, social problems, attention problems, rule-breaking behavior and aggression. The overall result of this work is that "...the 17-year-old daughters and sons

of lesbian mothers were rated significantly higher in social, school/academic, and total competence and significantly lower in social problems, rule-breaking, aggressive, and externalizing problem behavior than their age-matched counterparts... [and] Adolescents who have been reared in lesbian-mother families since birth demonstrate healthy psychological adjustment." The authors find "no justification for restricting access to reproductive technologies or child custody on the basis of the sexual orientation of the parents."

The second study is "Parenting and child development in adoptive families: Does parental sexual orientation matter?" (4). Its authors are Rachel Farr, Stephen Forsell, and Charlotte Patterson of the University of Virginia and George Washington University. These scholars studied 106 families: 27 lesbian, 29 gay, and 50 heterosexual couples. These adoptive families were recruited through adoption agencies across the U.S. The majority had only one child. The average parental age was 42. Their racial distribution was White 80%, Black 17%, Biracial and other racial 27%. The demographic characteristics of all families were similar. The development of the children (behavioral problems, gender role behavior) was assessed from age 1 and one-half through age 5. The authors also monitored parenting approaches, parental stress, and the relationship adjustment of the couples. Importantly, assessment of the various measure provided by parents was supplemented by outside assessment provided by teachers and caregivers.

The "bottom line" findings of this study were that there were "no significant differences" across all three groups of parents in all measures of child development or parental discipline, stress, or couple adjustment. The implications that the authors derive from their work include the following. "Parental sexual orientation was unrelated to children's adjustment." "From a policy perspective, our results provide no justification for denying lesbian and gay adults from adopting children." 🙏

References

1. *American Sociological Review*, 66, 159-183, 2001.
2. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 3-22, 2010.
3. *Pediatrics*, 126, 28-36, 2010.
4. *Applied Developmental Science*, 14, 164-178, 2010.

Family Fellowship

Family Fellowship is a volunteer service organization, a diverse collection of Mormon families engaged in the cause of strengthening families with homosexual members. We share our witness that gay and lesbian Mormons can be great blessings in the lives of their families, and that families can be great blessings in the lives of their gay and lesbian members. We strive to become more understanding and appreciative of each other while staying out of society's debate over homosexuality. We seek to put behind us all attitudes which are anti-family, which threaten loving relationships, and which drive family members apart. All who can support these goals are welcome to contribute to this newsletter. However, the views expressed here belong only to the individuals who express them.



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This Time

*I don't want to feel better after I cry for Grandma
For me, for the fact that she's gone
I just want to sit here and have it all stop
Stop when I was 5
And Grandma was herself
Before we all slowed down*

*This time I don't want the hugs to pick me back up
Don't want to see the light around the corner
Don't want to be crying here
With Grandma so far, so gone
Continuing to be myself, when Grandma is no longer herself*

*I've always believed there were endings in an abstract way
But right now I cannot bring myself to believe in endings for those we love
Because they are so tied up with ourselves
And we are still here
Crying all over each other
Unable to handle endings no matter how much we thought we could*

*This time I promised myself to be strong
And I couldn't
I bawl just like a baby
Think of the faces that miss Grandma like I do
Think of endings, cycles of life*

*But I'll get a shower, get out on the road
Calm down, become myself again
And brace for another blow*

With me in tears and Grandma there beside me

*Walking with me in Logan Canyon,
Asking me whether I'm sure I couldn't eat another waffle*

Craig Watts – July 2004

He is My Son

Kim Abney

My kids have always been my life. I have always lived my life around them. I was raised in a very good LDS family where my father was a Bishop and a Stake President at times. I guess you can say I lived a sheltered life. Nothing out of the normal or unusual happened to my family or me. My husband did not talk much about anything, especially his views on homosexuality. The only thing that he would say was it was gross.

I was a stay at home mom; well sort of, I worked from home doing data entry but was always there for the kids. So I have always been very close to them.

Nick is my middle child. He has always been a little unique and different. When his older brother was playing with trucks and playing sports, Nick enjoyed playing with his sister and her Spice girl dolls. He became very talented in high school with his photography so when his Dad found web sites of very questionable gay pictures he had viewed on the web, I chalked it up to the fact he was looking at photographs of models. But deep down I

knew something was different about him.

His father was and is very homophobic. I divorced his Dad in 2005 and remarried in 2006. I had been married for a month when my daughter had a birthday party and found Nick's "My Space" page. On this page he had stated that he was gay. I told her that he was playing a joke. That whole night I wondered. Nick was not at home that night and I finally got enough courage to call him. I asked him about the comment on his page – silence. Finally he said, "Do you still love me?"

"Of course," I said, without hesitation.

He is my son and nothing will ever change that. I did not sleep at all that night. I cried all night long. Not because my son was gay, but because I knew how much harder his life would be.

I went down early in the morning and woke him up. We talked for a long time. I just expressed my concerns with how his life might change. Nick has always loved kids and was so good with them. I knew it would be a lot harder for him to someday be a father.

We agreed that Nick would tell people when he was ready. He was not ready to tell his father. I am very close with my two sisters and Nick knew I needed their support. Only a few family members knew. But over the next six months, Nick was coming out more on his own, but still had not told his father.

One day after finding out his cousins on his father's side had now found out I decided to talk to Nick again. I told him that he needed to be honest with his dad. I don't think I really got it until this moment. Nick looked at me

and said, "don't you think that I want to have a normal life? That I would want to marry and have children? I did not choose this life, it's just the way I am."

I finally got it. He did not choose it; he was born this way. And I will argue and fight with anyone that he did not choose this. It was not how he was raised or anything like that. We put him in sports. He was not interested.

So it was time to tell his father. I told him I could tell him, but Nick knew it needed to come from him. His father had asked the kids to his home for dinner on the weekend. Nick could not tell him face to face so he sent him an email. No response. Nick was afraid to even check his email. The day of the dinner had come and Nick finally got an email from his dad. His father just expressed that he loved him, but was not ready to talk about it.

Nick attended the dinner and nothing was said. This has been 2 1/2 years now and his father still does not talk about it. They do not have a very strong relationship and I do not believe this is because of Nick's homosexuality. It is just the way his father is with all of his relationships.

Now that Nick's father knew, I needed to tell the rest of my family. I was nervous about doing this since most are LDS and can be judgmental at times. I sent an e-mail and every single one of them responded stating that they all still loved him. My parents were a little more concerned about how he was going to be able to live his life and his salvation, but none of them have ever judged him.

I have struggled as an active member of the

church and also a temple recommend holder. I agree with the fact that the church believes that a marriage should be between a man and a woman, but I also want to see my son happy. If he finds someone that he wants to be committed to, I do believe that he should have the same rights as a married couple.

Nick and I have had some disagreements over the church and how it stepped in on Prop 8. We have agreed not to talk church issues. I have personally talked with my Bishop and with members of the Stake Presidency about some of my feelings. I am very torn between my son's way of life and my beliefs. I just have faith and hope that the Lord will take care of him and that I can be with him.

I am very grateful for my son. Not just because he is my son, but the past three years I have grown as a person. I felt like sometimes I was a very judgmental person, even if I did not verbally express it; in my heart, I was. But with Nick, I have learned to love more people and accept them for exactly who they are. I do not judge them for the life they lead or the way they act. I have become very accepting. I am not saying that I am perfect, but I have grown and continue to grow.

I have once again found myself single and have been worried if I could find someone that would accept my son and me. I have had a lot of positive experiences and I have great hope for the future.

My prayer is the world will start to become more accepting and more loving; that all men will be treated as equals no matter what faith, gender or sexual preference they may be. 🙏

Same-Sex Attraction Not a Matter of Choice

Reprinted from *The Salt Lake Tribune, Opinion Section: Friday, March 4, 2011*

Bill Bradshaw, David Weight
and Ted Packard

Dennis V. Dahle, John P. Livingstone and M. Gawain Wells, in "Religion, science and same-sex attraction" (Opinion, Feb. 25), suggest that science and religion have joined to show that because it is not rooted in biological mechanisms, same-sex attraction is not innate, and is subject to change. They thus infer that gay and lesbian people choose their sexual orientation.

This proposition is severely flawed.

First, the authors' manipulations of quotations from Dr. Francis Collins distort and misrepresent his views. They first cite Collins about possible genetic influence on homosexuality. After several intervening paragraphs they introduce separate comments about "individual free will" and "playing the hand dealt to us," which they represent as his "additional insight on homosexuality."

This juxtaposition is a deception. The "free will" comments actually refer to genes and intelligence or criminal and antisocial behavior, not homosexuality. Collins has responded to this corruption of his statements by A. Dean Byrd as incoming president of

the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, or NARTH.

Collins sets the record straight as follows: 1) "The words quoted by NARTH . . . have been juxtaposed in a way that suggests a somewhat different conclusion than I intended"; 2) The fact that there are other factors that influence how information in DNA is expressed "certainly doesn't imply that those other factors are inherently alterable"; 3) Even though the actual genes contributing to SSA have yet to be identified, "it is likely that such genes will be found in the next few years."

Here is the full text of Collins' unequivocal denunciation of others who, like Byrd and the three authors, have recently misappropriated his scientific views. "It is disturbing for me to see special interest groups distort my scientific observation to make a point against homosexuality. The American College of Pediatricians pulled language out of context from a book I wrote in 2006 to support an ideology that can cause unnecessary anguish and encourage prejudice. The information they present is misleading and incorrect, and it is particularly troubling that they are distributing it in a way that will confuse school children and their parents."

Relying entirely on quotations, Dahle, Livingstone and Wells make no reference to empirical evidence, the linchpin of scientific inquiry. They neglect the enormous body of data in the biomedical literature demonstrating that sexual orientation is under biological control. This evidence from neuroscience, anatomy, molecular biology, endocrinology and psychology shows that gay men and lesbians are anatomically, physiologically, and cognitively atypical for their sex. Moreover, these differences are often in place prenatally or shortly after birth.

The authors propose that evolution would eliminate gay genes over time. This argument is invalid. Cystic fibrosis (lung), Wilm's tumor (kidney), and Retinoblastoma (eye) are life-threatening for children. But the responsible genes persist because their normal variants control necessary biochemical processes.

In support of the malleability of same-sex attraction, the authors quote Robert Spitzer, but omit the many professional commentaries that recommend caution about his methodology and conclusions, and his own admission that orientation change is likely to be rare.

This 2009 statement by the American

Continued on next page.

Psychological Association represents the overwhelming consensus of the mental health community: "Contrary to claims of sexual orientation change advocates and practitioners, there is insufficient evidence to support the use of psychological interventions to change sexual orientation."

Upon reflection, heterosexuals will acknowledge that their own romantic attraction to the opposite sex was inborn and spontaneous, not a willful decision. It is inconceivable that fully committed Latter-day Saints (or those from any other faith tradition) would intentionally abandon their most deeply-held spiritual aspirations and invite the disapproval and sometime virulent animosity of their religious community and society at large by assuming a sexual identity that was not natural to them.

In addition, family members and other close associates will offer compelling testimony about the Herculean, but unsuccessful, efforts of their LGBT loved ones who have attempted, through force of will, professional therapeutic guidance or fervent supplication to deity, to change their sexual orientation.

No matter what the source, the assertion that a homosexual orientation is a choice is at once wrong, unkind, and harmful.

A model of homosexuality, which out of good intentions attempts a reconciliation of science and religion, but disregards crucial experimental and experiential evidence is unlikely to promote the sensitivity, equality and Christian charity which we ought to extend to God's LGBT children. ☹

William S. Bradshaw is professor emeritus of molecular biology at Brigham Young University; David G. Weight is professor emeritus of clinical and neuropsychology at BYU; and Ted Packard is professor emeritus of educational psychology at the University of Utah.



Noteworthy

Family Fellowship Forum

Sunday, June 26, 2010 at 5:00 p.m.
Northwest Auditorium at
Utah Valley Regional Medical Center
1230 North 500 West, Provo, UT

Our speaker will be Jim Birrell. The title of his presentation is "The Gift of a Gay Son: A Father's Journey to Understanding, a Teacher Learns to Communicate that Journey to Others."

James R. Birrell is a professor of Teacher Education at Brigham Young University where he teaches classes in human diversity, develops teacher certification programs for career-change teachers in urban settings, runs the BYU inner city student teaching program/partnership in Washington, D.C., establishes teacher preparation partnerships in various urban settings, and conducts research on preparing teachers for diverse learners.

Separate but Equal?

The Newsletter staff have chosen to reproduce this excellent editorial from The New Republic, January 10, 2000, because of its relevance to the Same Sex Marriage/Civil Union debate and the ballot measure currently under consideration in the state of New York. We urge your attention, especially to the last two paragraphs. It has been just over 11 years since it was so compellingly written.

We cannot put it better than the justices of the Supreme Court of Vermont: "The extension of the Common Benefits Clause [of the Vermont Constitution] to acknowledge plaintiffs as Vermonters who seek nothing more, nor less than legal protection and security for their avowed commitment to an intimate and lasting human relationship is simply, when all is said and done, a recognition of our common humanity." The December 20 ruling in *Baker v. State* stands as a legal landmark in the controversy about equal marriage rights for homosexuals. It is more important than the Hawaii Supreme Court's recent meanderings, because it is unlikely to be overruled by the legislature or by popular referendum, and because it rests not on the tangential issue of whether a ban on same-sex marriage violates sexual equality (as the Hawaii court argued) but on the question of whether it violates civil equality itself.

We believe it does. As civil marriage is currently conceived and practiced in America, it contains no requirements and holds out no aspirations that homosexuals cannot achieve as easily as heterosexuals. The point of modern marriage is not merely to procreate – as many childless heterosexual married couples attest. Neither is it to entrench ancient gender roles, with women at home and men at work – as innumerable working families prove. It is to provide a secure, acknowledged institution in which the love of one person for another can find expression and support and in which children, if they are present, can find security and protection. If homosexual love is as deep and as worthy as heterosexual love and if the children of homosexuals are deserving of as much social support as the children of heterosexuals, then there is no principled reason to allow civil marriage for straights but not for gays. Legalizing gay marriage, then, is not a radical reformation of an unchanging institution. It is the long-overdue correction of a moral anomaly that dehumanizes and excludes a significant portion of the human race.

Opponents of civil marriage for homosexuals (whose ranks include, shamefully, the two Democratic candidates for president and, of course, all the Republican candidates) argue that it will weaken heterosexual marriage. But it is hard to see how. No existing heterosexual marriage will be changed. Same-sex marriage only harms opposite-sex marriage if you believe that homosexuality is so immoral that legitimizing it would instantly undermine family life. We do not hold that belief. Homosexuals are already part of families across America, and they always have been. They deserve to be there under better conditions than strained condescension and fickle toleration. If anything, the equal inclusion of homosexuals in marriage will

strengthen family life as it folds gay family members into the social warp and woof of their parents and siblings. Some argue that such a change should never be imposed by the courts, since homosexuality remains a source of widespread public unease. But surely such an argument also applied to the courts' assaults on anti-miscegenation laws in the 1950s and '60s. Should the courts not have struck down those laws for fear of invoking "judicial tyranny"? After all, public hostility toward interracial marriage was at least as great in 1967, when it was finally protected by *Loving v. Virginia*, as is hostility toward same-sex marriage today.

Post-Vermont, we have entered a different world. But it contains pitfalls as well as opportunities. One danger is that supporters of equal marriage rights will accept a semantic compromise that would grant homosexuals every benefit and responsibility of civil marriage but deny them the word. The Vermont legislature is under pressure to construct an elaborate parallel institution, a kind of super-domestic-partnership, that would be indetical in all legal respects to marriage but not invoke the m-word. There is an old phrase for this kind of arrangement: separate but equal. To grant homosexuals all the substance of marriage while denying them the institution is, in some ways, a purer form of bigotry than denying them any rights at all. It is to devise a pseudo-institution to both erase inequality and at the same time perpetuate it. What if Virginia had struck down interracial-marriage bans only to erect a new distinction between same-race marriages and mixed-race "domestic-partnerships"?

There is in fact no argument for a domestic-partnership compromise except that the maintenance of stigma is an important social value – that if homosexuals are finally allowed on the marriage bus, they should still be required to sit in the back. This "solution" smacks of the equally incoherent half-measure of "don't ask, don't tell," another unwieldy contraption that was designed to overcome discrimination but instead has ruthlessly reinforced it. Equality is equality. Marriage is marriage. There is no ultimate moral or political answer to this question but to grant both. And to keep marshaling the moral, religious, civic, and human reasons why it is an eminently important and noble thing to do. ☹

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