

Andrew Poe

Mr. Neagle

ENG 112-4249

22 January 2014

Parental Rights?: Same-Sex Couples vs Heterosexual Couples

Part I

This paper seeks to explore the effect of the parent's sexuality on a child's development, namely, those children of same-sex couples in comparison to those of heterosexual couples, in the fields of emotional development and school performance.

Part II

I have sought out studies on the two sub-issues from the last several decades. I then used the information these studies provided to come to a conclusion based on the available evidence.

Part III

The topic of same-sex marriage is a hot button issue in politics, and an important piece of that argument is the development of the children of these couples. Those opposed to same-sex marriage claim that by not being raised in an environment with a mother and father, these children will face emotional difficulty and problems with school. On the other hand, those for same-sex marriage point out that a same-sex couple usually has to make a conscious decision to have children, and this means that it is more likely the couple is invested in their child's future. They also cite studies that show that there is no quantifiable difference between children with heterosexual or homosexual parents in a number of metrics. In the end, the evidence shows that there are no negative effects on children of same-sex couples in comparison to those of heterosexual couples in the fields of emotional development and school performance.

Before delving into the evidence for this claim though, it is important to address a few points about children of same-sex couples. As same-sex couples can't have children of their own, there are a few ways that they can go about becoming parents. It takes a long time for many people to come out as gay or lesbian, and in the interim years or decades, many have children in heterosexual relationships. Therefore, the most common way same-sex couples have children is from a previous heterosexual relationship. These children fall into the same category as children of divorced heterosexual parents, and the data must be controlled for them accordingly. Adoption is another route that many same-sex couples take, and because many of the children in the adoption system are already emotionally damaged by their situation, needs to be properly controlled for as well.

Additionally, even though some states have legalized same-sex marriage, it is still not legal at the federal level. A report by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) points out that there are over 1100 benefits at the federal level that are exclusive to civil marriage(Pawelski 352). This puts same-sex couples at a significant financial disadvantage compared to heterosexual married couples, which again, must be controlled for.

One of the common arguments against same-sex couples being able to adopt or otherwise have children, is that the children will grow up emotionally damaged. The parental ability of the parents is a common target for this argument, because many have a preconditioned idea that a parent's sexuality somehow has a negative effect on their parenting ability. However, the AAP report mentions that there have been few differences found in research conducted over the last three decades comparing lesbian and heterosexual mothers' self-esteem, psychological adjustment, and attitudes toward child rearing(Pawelski 359). Another common argument against same-sex couples is that they lack either a male or female role model for the child. There is some

merit to this, as studies have shown that it is important to have both a masculine and feminine role model involved in a child's life. In actuality though, this isn't a serious issue. Even though same-sex couples are composed of a single sex, they still tend to develop gender roles, with one having more dominant masculine traits, and the other, more feminine. Thus, children of same-sex couples still receive the masculine and feminine role models they need, even though their parents are the same-sex. The AAP report also mentions that there are more similarities than differences between the parenting styles and attitudes of gay and heterosexual fathers(359). By looking at the evidence, it's easy to see that there's no real justification for the notion that a person is somehow a worse parent based on their sexuality alone.

Having looked at the parental ability of same-sex parents, one must also look at how the children themselves turn out. Several studies have failed to document any differences between children of lesbian and heterosexual mothers in metrics such as self-esteem, behavioral difficulties, or peer-group relationships(Pawelski 359). In fact, the AAP report states that children of same-sex parents “have been described as more tolerant of diversity and more nurturing toward younger children than children whose parents are heterosexual”(359). This can probably be attributed to society’s negative treatment of homosexual individuals, leading to their desire to teach their children not to propagate that treatment. Regardless of its origin though, it is definitely a positive emotional development. Another common fear is that the children of same-sex couples are predisposed to homosexuality. However, a study by University of Southern California Sociology Professor Judith Stacey, found that while children of lesbian mothers have been shown to be more open to the idea of homosexual relationships, there is no statistically significant difference between them and children of heterosexual parents with respect to sexual orientation(171). Looking at the evidence presented, it is clear that there is no negative effect on

a child's emotional development that can be attributed solely to their parents sexuality.

School performance is another common metric used to determine the success of a couples parenting. It has long been feared by some, that children of same-sex couples would be predisposed to a number of negative negatives effects, such as poor school performance, and delinquency. A study into the school performance of children of same-sex couples, published in December of 2013 and written by Economics Professor Douglas Allen, used the 2006 Canadian census data to come to some controversial conclusions. This study, which is the largest of its kind to date, found that children of same-sex couples were 65% less likely to graduate high school than their peers with married heterosexual parents(635). This is controversial because this conclusion is completely different from the findings of over thirty studies performed over the last three decades. These studies all found that there was no correlation between the sexuality of the parent and the child's school performance. It has been widely cited by opponents of same-sex marriage, who largely appear to have ignored the decades of studies it contradicts, not looked at the actual data, or both. The size of the study is of particular interest. It had roughly 8600 individuals that met the criteria while the largest previous study had around 3500. Most studies done before this had fewer than one hundred participants.

There are a number of statistical anomalies that aren't explicitly mentioned in the text but are freely available in the tables, specifically table 4, which cast doubt on the validity of the author's claim. Disability and relocation rates were much higher for children of same-sex couples, while the age of the children and the incomes of their parents were much lower than those with heterosexual married parents. Disability rates among children of gay parents were over twice as high as heterosexual couples while among lesbian parents, relocation rates within one year were almost three times as high and within five years were two and a half times as

high(647). These variables are significant, and have a very real effect on the outcome of the data. Without properly controlling for them, the data from this study is no more useful than those with extremely small sample sizes.

The second largest study done on the issue was performed by Michael Rosenfield, a Sociology Professor for Stanford University, and published in August 2010. This study uses US census data and employs far more rigorous statistical analysis than the Allen study. Rather than merely looking at the surface of the data and coming to a conclusion, this study strives to remove any socioeconomic limiters that would affect the results, and only compare groups of children that are identical except for the sexual orientation of their parents. The primary focus of this study was on grade retention within two blocks of students, those in grades 1-4 and 5-8. It found that children of heterosexual married couples had the lowest rates of grade retention at 6.8% while those with lesbian mothers and gay fathers had rates of 9.5% and 9.7% respectively(761). However, the study found that children of heterosexual parents had both a socioeconomic and a racial/ethnic advantage. In comparison, children in group homes had grade retention rates of 34.4% and those that were incarcerated had a staggering 78% grade retention rate. Only 22.9% of children of heterosexual married couples were black or Hispanic while 53.7% and 37.1% of the children of gay and lesbian couples fit that demographic. Also, over 12% of the children of lesbian mothers were adopted, making them the group with the highest adoption rates(765). After controlling for these kinds of variables, the two numbers became much closer. Children of heterosexual couples had a 8.95% grade retention rate, while those of homosexual couples had a 9.07% grade retention rate(769). These weighted figures are no longer far enough apart to be deemed statically significant and the data clearly shows that, given equal environments, children of same-sex parents perform just as well as their peers.

With all the evidence showing that the children of same-sex couples and heterosexual married couples progress at the same rates in emotional development and school performance, one naturally comes to the conclusion that there are more similarities than differences between the two groups. This debate is extremely similar to the debate against interracial adoption. That is no longer even considered a serious issue, yet at its time, was a hotly debated topic using much of the same rhetoric as this. With same-sex couples having the highest rates of adoption of any group, and knowing what we know about how negatively group homes affect children, it is a huge disservice to the parentless children of the world to stand against this issue.

Works Cited

Allen, Douglas W. "High School Graduation Rates Among Children Of Same-Sex Households."

Review of Economics of the Household 11.4 (2013): 635-658. Web. 27 Jan. 2014

Pawelski, James G., et al. "The Effects Of Marriage, Civil Union, And Domestic Partnership

Laws On The Health And Well-Being Of Children." *Pediatrics* 118.1 (2006): 349-

364. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 27 Jan. 2014.

Rosenfield, Michael J. "Nontraditional Families And Childhood Progress Through School."

Demography 47.3 (2010): 755-775. Web. 4 Feb. 2014

Stacey, Judith, and Timothy J. Biblarz. "(How) Does The Sexual Orientation Of Parents

Matter?." *American Sociological Review* 66.2 (2001): 159-183. *JSTOR*. Web. 6 Feb.

2014.