

The removal of mothers and fathers

Despite being certified by almost all major social science scholarly associations – indeed, in part because of this – the alleged scientific consensus that having two parents of the same sex is innocuous for child well being is almost wholly without basis.

American College of Pediatricians, Family Watch International, Loren D. Marks, Mark D. Regnerus and Donald Paul Sullinsⁱ

The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that a child has, as far as possible, “the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.”ⁱⁱ The redefinition of marriage would, from the very beginning, deliberately deprive a child of this right.

This consequence of the redefinition of marriage is often countered by the claim that the outcomes for children raised by same-sex couples are equivalent or even superior to those for children raised by married, biological parents. For example, a “fact sheet” produced by the Australian Institute of Family Studies cited two literature reviews that claimed “children in same-sex parented families do as well emotionally, socially and educationally as those in opposite-sex parented families.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Such a claim is misleading for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the “no difference” studies that are relied upon to make such claims often fail to satisfy one or both of the requirements necessary for the studies to hold any statistical significance, being random sampling and adequate sample size:^{iv}

- **The lack of random sampling.** “Many of the comparative studies conducted to date on children or young adults raised in the same-sex parented families are based on volunteer samples of participants rather than random samples... many researchers in this field note that their participants were mostly white and well educated, which does not reflect the likely socio-economic, ethnic and racial diversity of the same-sex parenting population.”^v
- **Small sample sizes mean that the studies lack statistical significance.** “The universally small sample sizes in the existing literature has left room for several critiques, including the argument that small sample sizes would not have the statistical power to identify the effects of homosexual parents on childhood outcomes even if such effects did exist.”^{vi}

In addition to these threshold failures, the studies contain other methodological flaws:

- **The potential for bias in self-reporting.** “Parental self-report, of course, may be biased. It is plausible that, in a prejudiced social climate, lesbian and gay parents may have more at stake in presenting a positive picture.”^{vii}
- **The subjective and vague criteria used for assessing child wellbeing.** One study that claimed “no difference” used subjectively assessed factors such as “warmth” and “security of attachment to parents” in assessing the wellbeing of children.^{viii} This can be contrasted with a study showing superior outcomes for children raised by biological parents, which

used objective criteria such as “drug and alcohol use,” “criminal activity,” “employment” and similar objectively measurable factors to assess wellbeing.^{ix}

- **Contentious criteria used for assessing child wellbeing.** A similar flaw in “no difference” studies is that measures of wellbeing can legitimately be disputed as being indicators of positive outcomes. For example, one study listed “gender flexibility displayed by children” as being a positive outcome, but this could easily be argued to be an indicator of negative outcomes.^x
- **Non-longitudinal design.** While parenting by same-sex couples is not a new phenomenon, its prevalence has only increased in recent years, meaning that there has not been sufficient time to conduct a long-term study on the effects of same-sex parenting on children. Most of the studies asserting “no difference” have not studied their subjects over a long enough period of time.^{xi}
- **Lack of control group.** Studies seeking to compare same-sex parented families with other outcomes do not include a proper “control” group, and rather use a mix of single, step-parented and biological parents as the comparative group, meaning that the studies lack proper controls.^{xii}

Secondly, there is a large body of research unrelated to the specific question of same-sex parenting which demonstrates that children have the best outcomes when raised by their married, biological parents.^{xiii}

The largest longitudinal study on happiness – the Grant study of Adult Development, which was conducted over a period of 75 years – demonstrated that mothers and fathers contributed in different ways to their child’s development. The study found that the closeness of a child’s relationship with their mother was linked to their success in work, income and study in their adult life, whereas a child’s relationship with their father influenced their long-term mental health outcomes, their ability to play and enjoy vacations, and their coping skills.

The study did not seek to compare the outcomes for children raised by same-sex and opposite sex parents, but simply to evaluate the various influences on a child’s development. In so doing, it made plain that mothers and fathers provide different contributions to their child’s life, refuting the claim that there is no difference between the presence of mothers and fathers.^{xiv}

The legalisation of same-sex marriage will have the effect of depriving children raised within these marriages of their right to be raised by their biological parents. Those who claim that there is no consequence for children of such deprivation base their assertions on studies lacking the scientific rigour required to make that claim.

ⁱ Brief of *Amici Curiae* American College of Pediatricians, Family Watch International, Loren D. Marks, Mark D. Regnerus and Donald Paul Sullins in Support of Respondents, *Obergefell v Hodges*. Available at: https://www.supremecourt.gov/ObergefellHodges/AmicusBriefs/14-556_American_College_of_Pediatricians.pdf

ⁱⁱ UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

-
- ⁱⁱⁱ Qu L., Knight K., Higgins D. (2016). Same-sex couple families in Australia (Facts Sheets). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Available at: <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/same-sex-couple-families-australia>
- ^{iv} Brief of *Amici Curiae* American College of Pediatricians, Family Watch International, Loren D. Marks, Mark D. Regnerus and Donald Paul Sullins in Support of Respondents, *Obergefell v Hodges*. Available at: https://www.supremecourt.gov/ObergefellHodges/AmicusBriefs/14-556_American_College_of_Pediatricians.pdf
- ^v Dempsey D. Same-sex parented families in Australia, CFA Paper No. 13. Australian Institute of Family Studies, December 2013. Available at: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/cfca/pubs/papers/a145197/cfca18.pdf>
- ^{vi} Michael J Rosenfeld, Nontraditional Families and Childhood Progress through School, 47 DEMOGRAPHY 755 (2010). Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3000058/>
- ^{vii} Tasker F. (2010). Same-Sex Parenting and Child Development: Reviewing the Contribution of Parental Gender. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 35-40.
- ^{viii} Golombok S., Perry B., Burston A., et al. (2003). Children with lesbian parents: A community study. *Developmental Psychology*, 39, 20-33.
- ^{ix} Regenerus M. (2012). How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study. *Social Science Research*, 41, 752-70.
- ^x Brewaeys A., Ponjaert I., van Hall E. V., Golombok, S. (1997). Donor insemination: Child development and family functioning in lesbian mother families. *Human Reproduction*, 12, 1349–1359 as cited in Dempsey D. Same-sex parented families in Australia, CFA Paper No. 13. Australian Institute of Family Studies, April 2013. Available at: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/cfca/pubs/papers/a145197/cfca18.pdf>
- ^{xi} Nock S. 2001. Affidavit to the Ontario Superior Court of Justice regarding *Halpern et al. v. Canada*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Sociology Department. Available at: http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/general/2010/08/12/Exhibit_C.PDF
- ^{xii} *Ibid.*
- ^{xiii} See, for example, literature review by Terry-Humen E., Manlove J. and Moore K.A. Births Outside of Marriage: Perceptions vs. Reality. *Child Trends Research*. April 2001.; Brown S.L. Marriage and Child Well-Being: Research and Policy Perspectives. *J Marriage Fam.* 2010 Oct 1; 72(5): 1059–1077. See also Parke M. Are Married Parents Really Better for Children? What Research Says About the Effects of Family Structure on Child Well-Being. Center for Law and Social Policy. May 2003. Available at: <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/states/0086.pdf>. This study states that children of same-sex parented families have comparable outcomes to children of divorced heterosexual families, each of which is inferior to the outcomes for children of married, biological parents.
- ^{xiv} Vaillant G. E. (2012). *Triumphs of experience: The men of the Harvard Grant Study*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.