Why every child needs a mum and a dad

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During a public hearing arranged by the federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC – now called the Human Rights Commission) for its 2006 inquiry into same-sex couple entitlements, a woman was giving evidence. All was calm until she said: "I believe that every child has the right to grow up with both a mother and a father role model."

The room immediately erupted in fury. "Homophobe!" cried homosexuals in the audience.[1]

The HREOC inquiry report released on 21 June 2007 ignored evidence from pro-family groups and individuals. The report recommended that the federal government change 58 laws, including laws affecting children, to give same-sex partners the rights of marriage and suggested changing the law so that if a child has a parent who enters a same-sex relationship, the homosexual or lesbian partner is automatically treated as a legal parent of the child.[2]

The Victorian Law Reform Commission went further in its report released on 7 June 2007[3], recommending that homosexual and lesbian couples be allowed to procure children by adoption, reproductive technology or surrogacy and that "the best interests of the child" be of paramount concern. However the Commission did not explain how it could ever be in the best interests of a child to be intentionally deprived of a mum or a dad from the very beginning of his or her life.

The Victorian report listed in an appendix 27 studies, almost all of which supported homosexual parenting – but failed to adequately take into account the devastating critique by Drs Robert Lerner and Althea Nagai who analysed 50 pro-homosexual studies (including most of those listed in the Victorian report) and found in each one at least one fatal research flaw.[4]

Professor Lynn Wardle, in the *University of Illinois Law Review*, demonstrated that many studies which conclude in favour of homosexual parenting have data showing that homosexual parenting may be harmful, leading to a greater incidence of anxiety, sadness, hostility and inhibitions.[5]

The Victorian report failed to note the Lerner and Nagai or Wardle studies, but did cite one Australian study with reliable methodology by Dr Sotirios Sarantakos - which found that children raised by their biological married parents did best on almost every measure while those raised by homosexual or lesbian couples fared worst.[6] However the Victorian report gave very inadequate coverage to the Sarantakos findings.

This paper surveys the abundant evidence showing that children do best when raised by both a mum and a dad.

Two mommies is one too many

Dr James Dobson, founder and chairman of the US *Focus on the Family* wrote an article for *Time* magazine (18/12/06) explaining why every child needs a "mom and a dad" - and was immediately attacked.[7] Dr Dobson's article, *Two Mommies Is One Too Many*, said (in part):

What kind of family environment is best for the health and development of children, and, by extension, the nation at large?

The majority of more than 30 years of social-science evidence indicates that children do best on every measure of well-being when raised by their married mother and father. That is not to say [lesbian or homosexual partners] will not love their child. But love alone is not enough to guarantee healthy growth and development. The two most loving women in the world cannot provide a daddy for a little boy - any more than the two most loving men can be complete role models for a little girl.

The voices that argue otherwise tell us more about our politically correct culture than they do about what children really need. The fact remains that gender matters - perhaps nowhere more than in regard to child rearing. The unique value of fathers has been explained by Dr Kyle Pruett of Yale Medical School in his book *Fatherneed: Why Father Care Is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child*. Pruett says dads are critically important simply because "fathers do not mother".

According to educational psychologist Carol Gilligan, mothers tend to stress sympathy, grace and care to their children, while fathers accent justice, fairness and duty. Moms give a child a sense of hopefulness; dads provide a sense of right and wrong and its consequences.

Other researchers have determined that boys are not born with an understanding of "maleness". They have to learn it, ideally from their fathers.

In raising these issues, Focus on the Family does not desire to harm or insult [lesbian or homosexual partners who are raising children]. Rather, our conviction is that birth and adoption are the purview of married heterosexual couples. Traditional marriage is God's design for the family and is rooted in biblical truth. When that divine plan is implemented, children have the best opportunity to thrive. That's why public policy as it relates to families must be based not solely on the desires of adults but rather on the needs of children and what is best for society at large.

This is a lesson we should have learned from no-fault divorce. Because adults wanted to dissolve difficult marriages with fewer strings attached, reformers made it easier in the late 1960s to dissolve nuclear families. Though there are exceptions, the legacy of no-fault divorce is countless shattered lives within three generations, adversely affecting children's behaviour, academic performance and mental and physical health. No-fault divorce reflected our selfish determination to do what was convenient for adults, and it has been, on balance, a disaster.

We should not enter into yet another untested and far-reaching social experiment, this one driven by the desires of same-sex couples to bear and raise children. The traditional family, supported by more than 5,000 years of human experience, is still the foundation on which the well-being of future generations depends.[8]

Homosexual activists claimed Dr Dobson had "lied" - in part because his article quoted from research which does not mention homosexual parenting. However there was no "lie". The research Dobson quoted found that fathers and mothers have different, complementary parenting styles and shows precisely why children need both a mother and a father.

Father-love is different from mother-love

Some of the authoritative research on which Dobson based his article is documented in a report, *Appreciating How Fathers Give Children a Head Start*, by the Head Start Bureau of the US Department of Health and Human Services.[9] The report noted (in part):



Fathers play

Mothers and fathers parent differently, and this difference is a big benefit for children. Fatherhood is just as essential to healthy child development as motherhood. The professional journal *Review of General Psychology* finds that "Evidence suggests that the influence of father love on offspring's development is as great as and occasionally greater than the influence of mother love."[10]

Fathering expert Dr Kyle Pruett explains in *Fatherneed: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child*, "Fathers do not mother."[11] *Psychology Today* states that, "Fatherhood turns out to be a complex and unique phenomenon with huge consequences for the emotional and intellectual growth of children."[12]

Erik Erikson, a pioneer in the world of child psychology, explained that father love and mother love are qualitatively different kinds of love. Fathers "love more dangerously", Erikson states, because their love is more "expectant, more instrumental" than a mother's love.[13] A father, as a male biological parent, brings unique contributions to the job of parenting a child that no one else can provide.

Below are some of the most compelling ways father involvement makes a unique and positive difference in a child's life.

Fathers parent differently

The mother/father difference provides an important diversity of experiences for children. Dr Pruett explains that fathers have a distinct style of communication and interaction with children. By eight weeks of age, infants can tell the difference between their mother and father in interactions. This diversity, in itself, provides children with a broader, richer experience of contrasting relational interactions. Whether they realise it or not, children are learning at an early age, through experience, that men and women are different and have different ways of dealing with life, other adults, and children.

Fathers play differently

While mothers and fathers are both physical with their children, fathers are typically physical in different ways. Fathers tend to play with their children, and mothers tend to care for them. Generally speaking, fathers tickle more, they wrestle, and they throw their children in the air (while mothers warn, "Not so high!"). Fathers are louder at play, while mothers are quieter. Mothers cuddle babies, and fathers bounce them. Fathers roughhouse, while mothers are gentle. Fathers encourage competition; mothers encourage equity. Fathers encourage independence while mothers encourage security.

Fathering expert John Snarey notes that children who roughhouse with their fathers learn that biting, kicking and other forms of physical violence are not acceptable.[14] Fathers help girls and boys learn a healthy balance between timidity and aggression.

Children need mum's softness, as well as dad's roughhousing. Both provide security and confidence in their own ways by communicating love and physical intimacy.

Fathers build confidence

Go to any playground and listen to the parents there. Who is often encouraging kids to swing or climb just a little higher, ride their bike just a little faster, or throw just a little harder? Who is encouraging kids to be careful? Mothers tend toward caution while fathers often encourage kids to push the limits. Either of these parenting styles by themselves can be unhealthy. One can tend toward encouraging risk without consideration of consequences. The other tends to avoid risk, which can fail to build independence, confidence and progress. Joined together, they keep each other in balance and help children remain safe while expanding their experiences and confidence.

Fathers communicate differently

A major study showed that, when speaking to children, mothers and fathers are different.[15] Mothers typically simplify their words and speak on the child's level. Fathers are not as inclined to modify their language for the child.

Mother's way facilitates immediate communication. Father's way challenges the child to expand his or her vocabulary and linguistic skills - an important building block of academic success.

Father's talk tends to be more brief, directive, and to the point. Mothers tend to be more descriptive, personal and verbally encouraging. Children who do not learn how to understand and use both styles of conversation will be at a disadvantage, because they will experience both of these styles as they enter the adult world.

Fathers discipline differently

Educational psychologist Carol Gilligan tells us that fathers stress justice, fairness, and duty (based on rules), while mothers stress sympathy, care and help (based on relationships).[16] Fathers tend to observe and enforce rules systematically and sternly, teaching children the objectivity and consequences of right and wrong. Mothers tend toward grace and sympathy in the midst of disobedience, providing a sense of hopefulness. Again, either of these by themselves is not good, but together they create a healthy, proper balance.

Fathers prepare children for the real world

Generally speaking, fathers tend to see their child in relation to the rest of the world, while mothers tend to see the rest of the world in relation to their child. For example, mothers are often very aware of things from the outside world that could hurt their child (eg violence, lightning, accidents, disease, strange people, dogs or cats). Fathers, while not unconcerned with these things, tend to focus on how their children will or will not be prepared for something they might encounter in the world.

Fathers often help children see that particular attitudes and behaviours have certain consequences. For instance, fathers are more likely to tell their children that if they are not nice to others, kids will not want to play with them. Or that, if they don't do well in school, they will not get into college or land a good job. Generally speaking, fathers help children prepare for the reality and harshness of the real world, and mothers help protect against it. Both are necessary as children grow into adulthood.

Fathers provide a look at the world of men

Men and women are different. They dress differently. They smell differently. They cope with life differently. Stereotypically, fathers do "man things" and mothers do "woman things".

Girls and boys who grow up with a father are more familiar and secure with the world of men. Girls with involved fathers are more likely to have healthier, more confident relationships with boys in adolescence and men in adulthood. This is because girls have a greater opportunity to learn from their fathers how men should act toward women. This knowledge builds emotional security and safety from the exploitation of predatory males.

Boys who grow up with dads are less likely to be violent. They have their masculinity affirmed and can learn from their fathers how to channel that masculinity and strength in positive ways. Fathers can help boys understand appropriate male sexuality, hygiene and age-appropriate behaviour. It can be difficult for mothers to teach these things to their boys.

Fathers can teach respect for the other sex

Research consistently shows married fathers are substantially less likely to abuse

their wives or children than other men.[17] This means that boys and girls with married fathers in the home are more likely to learn by observation how men should treat women.

Girls with involved fathers, therefore, are more likely to select good boyfriends and husbands because they have had a good model by which to judge all candidates. Fathers also help weed out bad candidates. Boys raised with fathers are more likely to be good husbands because they can emulate their fathers' strengths and learn from their shortcomings.

The *American Journal of Sociology* finds that: "Societies with father-present patterns of child socialisation produce men who are less inclined to exclude women from public activities than their counterparts in father-absent societies."[18]

Fathers connect children with job markets

A crucial point in life is the transition from financial dependence to independence. This is usually a gradual process, spanning from about 16 –22 years of age. Fathers can help connect their children – especially boys – to job markets as they enter adulthood.

Fathers more than 'second adults'

As noted sociologist David Popenoe explains, "Fathers are far more than just 'second adults' in the home. Involved fathers – especially biological fathers – bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring."[19] Fathers make substantial contributions to the lives of their children. Children are impoverished developmentally when they are deprived of their father's love.

The *Review of General Psychology* states, "Many studies conclude that children with highly involved fathers, in relation to children with less involved fathers, tend to be cognitively and socially competent, less inclined toward gender stereotyping, more empathetic and psychologically better adjusted."[20]

Same-sex partnerships 'fragile'

Children need more than just a mother and father role model - they need long-term stability. Homosexual or lesbian partnerships are far more transient than marriage, and hence less likely to provide the stable environment needed to raise children. Moreover a 2007 research abstract, *Homosexual Unions: Rare and Fragile*, shows that government recognition of same-sex relationships has not led to greater permanence.[21] The research abstract states (in part):

US activists have argued strenuously in recent years that giving homosexuals the legal right to marry will improve life for homosexual couples and will consequently benefit society as a whole. A new study of registered same-sex relationships in Scandinavia,[22] however, casts serious doubt on such assertions. Relatively few homosexual couples avail themselves of this revolutionary right - and a surprisingly high percentage of those who do so end up in divorce court.

To analyse the demographics of homosexual marriages, a team of German and Norwegian scholars recently examined data collected in Norway and Sweden since these countries discarded centuries of legal tradition by authorising homosexual unions (in 1993 in Norway and in 1995 in Sweden).



Mothers care

Both countries have thus now enacted laws granting homosexuals "the legal right to registered partnerships, a civil status that [the researchers believe] in practice does not deviate much from the concept of marriage". The legal equivalence of homosexual unions to heterosexual marriage largely explains why the researchers use the terms registered partnerships and same-sex marriage interchangeably. Similarly, the researchers "use the term divorce to refer to [homosexual] partnership dissolution because the divorce procedures of the marriage act [in both countries] apply to registered [homosexual] marriages as well".

As the German and Norwegian scholars survey the available data for homosexual unions, they cannot avoid one obvious reality: "the incidence of same-sex marriage in Norway and Sweden is not particularly impressive". Between 1993 and 2001, while Norway recorded 196,000 heterosexual marriages, the country witnessed the legal registration of only 1,293 homosexual partnerships. Similarly, while Sweden recorded 280,000 heterosexual marriages between 1995-2002, the country saw the formation of only 1,526 registered homosexual partnerships.

The researchers accordingly calculate "a ratio of around 7 same-sex marriages to every 1,000 new opposite-sex marriages" in Norway, and a comparable "ratio of 5 new partnerships to every 1,000 new opposite-sex marriages" in Sweden. The researchers remark that the numbers of same-sex marriages have run "considerably lower" than might have been expected by those relying on recent surveys of sexual behaviour.

The data for same-sex unions in Norway and Sweden indicate, however, not only that such unions are relatively rare, but also that they are remarkably fragile, ending in divorce significantly more often than do the heterosexual marriages of peers. The statistics indeed reveal "that the divorce risk for partnerships of men is 50% higher than the corresponding risk for heterosexual marriages and that the divorce risk for partnerships of women is about double (2.67) that for men (1.50)."

The researchers then re-examine the data in statistical models that take into account age, education, and other background characteristics, but these multi-variable models "do not alter the basic relation between divorce risks in different family types".

The German and Norwegian scholars acknowledge that "divorce-risk levels [that are] considerably higher in same-sex marriages" than in heterosexual marriages would not have been predicted by those who campaigned for the right of same-sex partners to have their relationships given "civil status" on the ground that such status would lead to "higher commitment ... and lower divorce risk". The researchers predict that "past relationship experience" is likely to cause "lesbians and gay men...[to] have lower expectations of relationship duration than will heterosexual couples".

In their concluding comment on their groundbreaking study - the first such study of "an unambiguously defined population of gay and lesbian couples" - the researchers emphasise the applicability of their findings well beyond Norway and Sweden. "Many of the demographic characteristics of our Scandinavian couples," they say, "resemble those found for other populations of same-sex couples, such as same-sex co-residents in the US ..."

Risks for children in homosexual communities

There is growing evidence that dangerous behaviours are significantly more common in homosexual and lesbian communities. Such behaviours can result in child abuse – physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect.

Drug abuse

Parents who abuse illicit drugs or alcohol, for example, are more likely than other parents to abuse their children[23] and tobacco smoking is associated with a significantly higher rate of health problems among smokers and their children.[24]

Researchers at New Zealand's Massey University found that homosexual, lesbian and bisexual people are significantly higher users of illicit drugs, alcohol and tobacco than the heterosexual community[25] - thus increasing the risk that children raised by same-sex partners will suffer abuse.

An article in *Massey News*, 1 July 2007, states (in part): "The disparity in rates of substance use have been found by Massey University researchers analysing data from the New Zealand Health Behaviour Surveys, commissioned over recent years by the Ministry of Health. The study showed that the gay, lesbian and bisexual population was

more than twice as likely as the heterosexual population to have used marijuana over the last year; nearly four times as likely to have used amphetamines on a regular basis in the previous 12 months; more than four times as likely to have used LSD over a year: and more than three times as likely to have regularly used ecstasy over the same period."

Physical health risks

Research continues to show increased health and other risks in homosexual communities - risks which can affect the parenting abilities of same-sex couples.

A study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* in June 2007 found that almost two thirds of syphilis cases in the US are found in men who have sex with other men.[26] Another study in the journal used data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth with a study sample of almost 6000 women.[27] It found that lesbians are more than twice as likely as other women to be overweight or obese – and hence vulnerable to associated health risks.

Homosexual men are suffering increasing, disproportionate rates of anal cancer compared with heterosexual men. In the US, the number of people diagnosed with anal cancer has increased by nearly 40% in a decade – in contrast to the overall increase in cancer diagnoses of only 1%.[28] Moreover US men who have sex with other men have an HIV prevalence 60 times higher than the general population.[29]

Mental health risks

A 2006 paper by NZ researcher Dr Neil Whitehead notes: "Recent studies show homosexuals have a substantially greater risk of suffering from psychiatric problems than do heterosexuals. We see higher rates of suicide, depression, bulimia, antisocial personality disorder and substance abuse."[30]

Whitehead documents these studies, observing that suicide attempts by homosexuals are motivated by relationship breakups rather than social stigma. The high prevalence of promiscuity in homosexual communities is likely to be a factor contributing to their high level of mental ill-health.

Testimony

Dawn Stefanowicz was raised in a homosexual household in Toronto, Canada, in the 1960s and 70s. She has given evidence about her childhood to the State of Massachusetts Judiciary Commission on 11 April 2006 and to other bodies including the US Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

Among other things, Dawn has testified: "My mother was very seriously ill. From infancy I grew up with a homosexual father. I loved my Dad, but my father exposed me to [gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual] subcultures [which] did not have boundaries and principles of morality and monogamy ... Even when my father was in what looked like monogamous relationships, he continued cruising for anonymous sex ... By age ten I was exposed to a gay nude beach, a sex shop and a cruising park.

"My father had partners in the home from my infancy ... by six years old I was stuttering, blacking out and having nightmares caused by molestation, physical and verbal abuse and abandonment ... At eight, two of my father's partners committed suicide ... Alcohol, drugs, gay bars and parties were part of the scene ... My father and his partners were involved in domestic violence and he dropped them like commodities. Males who were minors were at risk in my home of being preyed upon sexually ... My father could not show affection or affirmation to females, making me believe it was better to be a boy... I felt worthless and began seeking other boys' affections by age 12 ... Sado-masochism was alluded to and aspects demonstrated ... My father died of AIDS aged 51 ... I know 14 children who grew up with a homosexual parent ... all of us have been negatively impacted long term."[31]

Conclusion

The long-accepted notion that children need both mother and father role models is supported by increasing scientific evidence on the different but complementary parenting styles of mothers and fathers. Studies which purport to show that homosexual parenting does not harm children have at least one fundamental methodological flaw.

Physical and mental health risks associated with the homosexual lifestyle and the greater instability of homosexual partnerships compared with marriage are likely to expose children raised by same-sex partners to an increased risk of abuse.

In the best interests of children – Australia's future – governments should not give same-sex partners legal parenting rights nor allow same-sex couples to procure children through adoption, surrogacy or reproductive technology.

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