Reply to the American Academy of Pediatrics Statement on
Marriage and the Well-Being of Children
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Reply to the American Academy of Pediatrics statement on Marriage and the Well-Being of Children

The AAP has issued a statement regarding the well-being of children that cannot go unchallenged by the academic community (c.f., Garrett & Lantos, 2013). Their thesis is “Any couple or individual is capable of adequate child-rearing (whether married or not)...given the material resources and support to be good parents” (2013, p. 559). They add a condition for whatever family unit is formed: “set a reasonable minimal threshold for state recognition [of the family grouping]” (Garrett et al., p. 559). The authors never state what a “minimal threshold” is or how the state could even begin to evaluate and monitor such a threshold. Their proposition is like stating:

Anyone should be allowed to own and use a firearm given the training and resources necessary to be a prudent handgun owner. Licensing requirements will be set low to enable almost anyone to get a gun permit. We will monitor all gun owners to make sure they comply with the state and federal regulations.

To test the AAP hypothesis researchers must show empirical evidence that children from any type of family environment or structure do as well, on average, across a variety of psycho-social-cognitive-indicators as those reared in a married, father-mother household. The only long-term, large-scale and representative study to date that compares children with at least one lesbian parent to those reared by a married mother and father was published by Dr. Regnerus last July (Regnerus, 2012). Regnerus' research demonstrates conclusively that children with at least one lesbian parent, on average, fare worse across several psycho-social-cognitive measures compared to children reared in biological two-parent heterosexual families.

Walter Schumm (2011; 2010) from Kansas State University has published widely in this area and found that the research that appears to indicate equivalence to and/or the superiority of the lesbian family over the heterosexual family is consistently flawed by small, biased samples (i.e., using white professional women with high incomes as the lesbian sample; and there are far too few studies of children of gay men to make any conclusions) In addition, homosexual relationships are significantly less stable than heterosexual ones, and homosexual couples are also more likely to experience mental health problems and addictions (Alexander, 2001; Schumm, 2010; Sandfort, de Graaf, Biji & Schnabel, 2001; Wang, Hausermann, Ajdacic-Gross, Aggleton, & Weiss, 2007).

Abbott (2012) reviewed the literature and concluded, “The married, heterosexual family, on average and in general, still provides the environment most likely to bring physical health and mental happiness to both parents and children” (p. 176; see Figure 1). The superiority of the married, two-
biological parent family over other family forms is supported by many other researchers (Amato, 2005; Booth, Scott & King, 2010; Brotherson & White, 2007; Byrd, 2010; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Lamb, 2010; Lewis & Lamb, 2003; Moore & Lippman, 2005; Oman, Vesely, Tolma & Aspy, 2007; Popenoe, 2009; Schumm, 2011; Waite & Gallagher, 2000).

Figure 1 is the author’s interpretation of past research comparing children reared in two-parent heterosexual families and children raised in other environments. Curve A curve represents children from two-biological heterosexual parent families, and Curve B represents children in all other family types (i.e., single parent families, remarried families, lesbian families, grandparent families, foster care families, etc.). The vertical axis indicates the number of children beginning at zero at the bottom running up to thousands at the top. The horizontal axis represents child achievement (low, moderate, high) in any area of psychosocial, cognitive, physical, or interpersonal functioning.

Achievement could be school grades, relationship with peers, parent-child harmony, self-esteem, or low rates of alcohol, delinquency, and drug use. The pattern depicted shows that children from two-biological, heterosexual families, on average, do better than children reared in other environments, see Area A compared to Area B (Acs, 2007). However, some children from non-traditional families do better on a variety of outcomes than some children reared traditional families (compare area C to area B). This fact is obvious, but obfuscates the main point: children in married heterosexual family do better in general and on average (Rosenfeld, 2010).

Figure 1: Child Outcomes by Family Type

Those in favor of homosexual parenting summarily dismiss decades of research that has demonstrated children in married mother-father families do better, on average, than children in other arrangements. Moreover, they also ignore the evidence that mothers and fathers make unique and
distinct contributions to children’s development (Holmes, Galovan Yoshida & Hawkins, 2010; Lamb, 2010). Loren Marks (2012) stated that because of the numerous flaws in research regarding children of gays and lesbians strong assertions by the APA that children of gays are faring as well as children in heterosexual families are premature and “not empirically warranted” (p. 735). Clearly, the AAP statement is based upon an ideological worldview rather than a proposition supported by empirical evidence. As Martel (2009) has eloquently stated: Psychologists and psychological organizations may decide to back certain social issues on the basis of their shared ethical principles and values rather than on the basis of empirical evidence” (p. 109, author emphasis). Homosexuality-affirmative researchers Biblarz and Stacey (2010a) admit the same weakness:

“We agree; however that ideological pressures constrain intellectual development in this field...
We wish to acknowledge that the political stakes of this body of research are so high that the ideological ‘family values’ of scholars play a greater part than usual in how they design, conduct and interpret their studies” (p. 160-161)

Three times in their short article Garrett and Lantos (2013) state that evidence suggests that children fare better on average in a heterosexual, two-biological parent family (see pages 560, 561, 562). Despite this, they conclude by contradicting the very evidence they reference and claim that “Existing data regarding the relationship between traditional marriage and the children’s well-being are, at best, inconclusive” (p. 561). We disagree. The evidence is compellingly in favor of the heterosexual, married mother-father family over other family forms.

There is strong opposition to acknowledging the advantages to children reared in a traditional family in the behavioral and social sciences and mental health (Abbott, 2011). Yet, as psychologists and medical doctors we must rise above ideology and politically correct worldviews (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010b). We should rely upon empirical data to support our positions regarding the well-being of children. If the best data to date supports that the ideal environment for child development is the married two-parent heterosexual family, and it does, then this should be held up as the gold standard without trepidation or fear of reproach by politically correct scholars.

All families should be treated with respect, compassion, and fairness under the law. The ideal family form can be achieved by many and should be encouraged. Those families that do not meet the ideal should not be stigmatized, but instead helped with supplemental economic, psychological, and medical care through private charities, as well as various state and federal programs.

Upholding the optimal standard for marriage and families encourages people to strive to achieve it. To devalue and marginalize the nuclear family unit will have the opposite effect and may
even stimulate some couples to divorce rather than work to save their marriage for the proven benefit of their children. Without an identified optimal standard the welfare of children becomes secondary to the preferences and pleasures of adults. The more disorganized and chaotic the universe of family structures becomes the more children will suffer due to the instability of these nontraditional families and the ineptitude of their parents.


Regnerus, 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(43), 752-770.


