

by Glenn T. Stanton

Vast Differences

A new study on children raised by parents in same-sex relationships is out—and its findings won't be popular in the mainstream media.

In striking down California's constitutional amendment defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman in 2010, federal Judge Vaughn Walker confidently declared that his reason for banning the democratically decided will of the people was that "children raised by gay and lesbian parents are as likely as children raised by heterosexual parents to be healthy, successful

and well-adjusted. The research supporting this conclusion is accepted beyond serious debate."

Reading any article in any mainstream news source on research published in the last five years on the well-being of children in households headed by parents in same-sex relationships would lead just about anyone to the same conclusion.

The problem is, that conclusion is wrong.

It is stunning how absolutely uncritical and lazy our nation's journalists and commentators have been regarding this body of research. Scholars who find that things are all thumbs-up for children in same-sex-parented homes are quoted, unchecked and verbatim, from their press releases. That is not hyperbole. Scholars who find that things might be not all so rosy for these kids don't get much press—and when they do, they are bludgeoned mercilessly and unprofessionally by reporters and peers. They are attacked personally in their character, intentions and professional standing.

What is most astonishing is that the studies that are so viciously attacked are genuinely head and shoulders above most others on this question in terms of research methodology, sample size and diversity of population. Two are worth noting in that their strength and quality are as robust as the abuse that's been hurled at them.

Educational Outcomes

The newest of these, published in the December 2013 edition of *Review of Economics of the Household*, was conducted by an economist from Canada's Simon Fraser University. Using data from Canada, Doug Allen sought to examine the “no difference” conclusion of many studies, journalists and cultural elites as it relates to educational success.

Using an impressively large and diverse population sample, Allen's findings reveal that children raised by gay or lesbian couples are only about 65 percent as likely to have graduated from high school as their peers raised in married biological families. In comparing various family forms, Allen explains that, “In all cases, the odds of a child with gay or lesbian parents completing high school are lower, by a considerable margin, compared to children of married opposite sex parents.”

This is true, even though, as Allen explains, “gay and lesbian homes are characterized by high levels of parent education” which would otherwise be a strong indicator of elevated graduation rates among offspring. Children of parents who are high school graduates are almost twice more likely to graduate than those whose parents are not.

While an underlying premise of the virtue of same-sex families is that gender difference doesn't really matter, this study revealed that it very much does. Girls raised by two dads tended to attain less in education than girls raised by two moms; boys raised by two moms achieved less than boys raised by two dads.

“Based simply on these unconditional measures,

sons do better with fathers and daughters do better with mothers,” Allen explains bluntly. Curiously though, there was not as dramatic a gender difference in these measures with boys and girls being raised by a single parent. It appears that having two parents of the same sex does make a difference compared to having just one of either sex. And that difference is negative, at least when it comes to educational success.

Wait, There's More

As alarming as Allen's findings are, they pale in comparison to those revealed by Mark Regnerus, a professor at one of the leading schools of sociology, the University of Texas at Austin. Regnerus launched a multi-study program called the New Family Structure Study (NFSS), examining the human well-being outcomes of various new family forms.

The first form he examined was same-sex homes; he published these findings in the journal *Social Science Research* in 2012. His article was accompanied by published responses from a collection of mainstream sociologists. While they were critical of a few important points—as academics always are—they generally praised his methodology as well as his unique and needed ground-breaking contribution to the literature on this topic. Prior to the study's beginning, Regnerus arranged for academic sociological and demographic peers from five different leading American universities to review his methodology to catch any blind spots or oversights it might contain.

Any fair reader of his journal article can see that Regnerus was careful and diligent in being balanced and guarded in his statements and conclusions. He was very willing to make many qualifications on con-

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clusions so readers would receive them with the care and measure they deserve.

His study is peerless in the strength of its population sample, both in size and representation. Nearly all other studies on same-sex parenting have such miniscule and severely non-representative populations that no substantive conclusions can or should really be drawn from them. One leading family sociologist—Paul Amato from Pennsylvania State University—bluntly referred to these previous studies' individual and collective statistical strength as “feeble.”



Family instability. The NFSS, as well as other studies conducted by lesbian activist scholars, finds that lesbian relationships are dramatically more likely to break up than heterosexual relationships. This is true even in parts of the world that are highly affirming of same-sex relationships. And the research is very clear that family instability has a dramatic negative impact on the well-being of children.

Dependence on public assistance. At some point in their childhood, 69 percent of the children raised by mothers in lesbian relationships were on public assistance, compared

Regnerus' study is the first to use a large, nationally representative population sample; in fact, it is the largest population sample examining same-sex homes, asking this breadth of questions of respondents.

He primarily addresses what he calls the “no difference” thesis that is presented in the existing gay family literature and which has become a near truism in the current public discussion.

The Findings

So what did he find? Regnerus' conclusive statements from his study are:

- The NFSS “suggests that notable differences on many outcomes do in fact exist. This is inconsistent with claims of ‘no differences’ generated by studies that have commonly employed far more narrow samples than this one.”
- “But this study, based on a rare, large probability sample reveals far greater diversity in experience of lesbian motherhood (and to a lesser extent, gay fatherhood) than has been acknowledged or understood.”
- “Nevertheless, to claim that there are few meaningful statistical differences between the different groups evaluated here would be to state something that is empirically inaccurate.” (The “different groups” he examined are lesbian, gay, married intact biological, heterosexual, blended, divorced and single-parent families.)

Here is a sampling of his findings on specific measures of well-being of children raised in various forms of households:

to 57 percent raised by fathers in gay relationships and 17 percent raised by their married biological mothers and fathers. Those numbers carried over to a certain degree through young adulthood, with 38 percent of young people raised by mothers in lesbian relationships still receiving public assistance, compared to 23 percent raised by fathers in gay relationships and 10 percent raised by their married biological parents.

Employment as young adults. Twenty-eight percent of young people raised by mothers in lesbian relationships reported being unemployed, compared to 20 percent of those raised by gay fathers and 8 percent of those raised by their married biological parents. Only 26 percent of the young adults raised by lesbian mothers reported being employed full-time, compared to 34 percent of those raised by gay fathers and 49 percent of those raised by their married biological parents.

Mental health issues. Nineteen percent of the children raised in lesbian or gay households reported either currently being in or having recently received therapy, compared to 8 percent of those raised by their married biological parents. Twenty-four percent of children raised by gay fathers said they had recently considered suicide, compared to 12 percent of those raised in lesbian households. Just 5 percent of children raised by their married biological parents reported recent suicidal urges.

Sexual identity and practice. Sixty-one percent of children raised in lesbian households reported being solely heterosexual, compared to 71 percent of those raised by gay fathers and 90 percent of those raised by their married biological parents. Twelve percent

of the children raised by gay fathers said they were currently in a same-sex relationship, compared to 7 percent of those raised by lesbian mothers and 4 percent of those raised by their married biological parents. “The children of lesbian mothers seem more open to same-sex relationships,” Regnerus wrote, and these findings are in agreement with many studies conducted by gay activist scholars.

Meanwhile, sexual activity with members of the opposite gender was markedly higher for children raised by parents in same-sex relationships—and

parent or adult, compared to 6 percent of those raised by gay fathers and 2 percent raised by their married biological parents. Also, 31 percent of those raised in lesbian households reported having been raped at some point, as did 25 percent of those raised in gay households; just 8 percent of the children raised by their married moms and dads said the same.

The children’s own adult families. Thirty-five percent of the children raised by gay fathers and 36 percent of those raised by lesbian mothers reported being currently married, compared to 43 percent of those raised by their married biological parents. Meanwhile, 36 percent of the kids raised by lesbian mothers and 35 percent of those raised by gay fathers reported being in cohabiting relationships, compared to just 9 percent of those raised by their married moms and dads.

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sexual activity with members of the same gender was substantially higher for them than those raised in heterosexual households. That early experimentation carried over into their adult lives, with 40 percent of the children raised in lesbian households reporting cheating on their spouse or significant other at some point, compared to 25 percent of those raised by gay fathers and 13 percent of those raised by their married biological parents.

Sexual health and safety. Twenty-five percent of the kids raised by gay fathers reported having a sexually transmitted infection at some point, as did 20 percent of those raised in lesbian households and 8 percent raised by their married biological parents. Twenty-three percent of the children raised in lesbian households reported being inappropriately touched by a

These vast differences are quite significant for well-being in that cohabitational homes are consistently shown to be markedly poorer in all measures of personal and relational health.

In terms of total number of significant differences in well-being among children raised in four different family forms compared with those being raised by their own married mothers and fathers, it is impossible to conclude that there are “no differences” among them.

Over all, lesbian-parented, hetero-step, hetero-single all showed significantly more differences than mom/dad-raised children. Those raised by fathers in same-sex relationships showed fewer (but still substantive) differences in contrast with those raised by

Number of Differences Found Between Intact, Married Mother/Father Homes And the Various Family Forms Examined by NFSS

Family Type	Total Number of Qualities Measured	Number of Statistically Significant Differences from Mom/Dad Homes	Numbers of Statistically Significant Differences, After Controls Hetero-Step
Hetero-Step	40	24	24
Hetero-Single	40	25	21
Lesbian	40	25	24
Gay	40	11	19

their married biological parents.

Concerning the difference in measures contrasted with mom/dad homes, lesbian homes are more similar to step- and single-parented heterosexual homes. This is a key finding because decades of research (as well as the findings here) show these two heterosexual family forms are dramatically more likely than intact mom/dad homes to be associated with a higher number of seriously harmful outcomes for the children of those homes. In fact, noted Rutgers sociologist David Popenoe wrote in a 1994 essay “The Evolution of Marriage and the Problems of Stepfamilies: A Biosocial Perspective” that based on serious negative outcomes, we should do everything possible to make sure stepfamilies become rare.

Given this “no-difference” idea, ubiquitous and unchallenged in the minds of cultural elites, Allen conducted a careful and exhaustive review of every study to date published on same-sex parenting. Based on this comprehensive literature review and his own study, he concludes, “As a result, there is little hard evidence to support the general popular consensus of ‘no difference.’”

Regnerus rounds out this truth, writing in his published study: “In short, if same-sex parents are able to raise children with no differences, despite the kin distinctions, it would mean that same-sex couples

are able to do something that heterosexuals in step-parenting, adoptive and cohabiting contexts have themselves not been able to do—replicate the optimal childrearing environment of married, biological-parent homes.”

He is absolutely correct. Every other family form that is not a married mother and father, raising their own biological or adopted children, differs widely in terms of optimum child well-being outcomes. And there is no arguing with the wealth of solid research that supports this conclusion. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Access Mark Regnerus’ study at <http://bit.ly/1jVakVR>

Doug Allen’s study is available at <http://bit.ly/1edWyWg>

Glenn T. Stanton is the director of global family formation studies at Focus on the Family and the author of six books on various aspects of the family. His two most recent are Secure Daughters Confident Sons: How Parents Guide Their Children into Authentic Masculinity and Femininity (Multnomah, 2011) and The Ring Makes All the Difference: The Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage (Moody, 2011).

