

## THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD: DUAL GENDER PARENTING

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I APPRECIATE DR. WILLIAMS' SCHOLARLY review of the research on homosexual parenting and its implications for children. May I begin with a bit of history? A few years ago, I received two booklets in the mail. An anonymous letter accompanied the booklets. The booklets were: *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate*. At first, I thought they were a joke. Then as I read them, I realized they were serious. Those two books served as an impetus for my interest in parenting and differential effects of children, an interest that was heightened last year with an article in the *American Psychologist*, the flagship journal of the American Psychological Association. I share with you here a few quotes from that article, entitled "Deconstructing the Essential Father." The authors argue that neither mothers nor fathers are essential to child development and that responsible fathering can occur within a variety of family structures (Silverstein and Auerbach). The article came on the heels of another politically-motivated article in the APA-approved journal whose conclusions indicated that adult-adolescent sex may fall within the normal range of human sexual behavior and that sex abuse may not be "as harmful." Among other things, the authors suggested that a willing sexual encounter between an adult and a child be labeled simply adult-child sex, a value neutral term instead of child-sexual abuse or molestation (Rind, Tromovitch and Bauserman).

A firestorm of controversy erupted at the American Psychological Association (APA) Headquarters where they received 27,000 petitions. The article was condemned by both houses of Congress, and the APA came close to being censured by both houses of Congress, an unprecedented event. Although the article on deconstructing father did not generate quite as much controversy, it added to the erosion of the APA and psychologists in general. Let me share a few more quotes from the article with you. The authors proceeded to make a case (not based on research) for homosexual parenting. Then, to their credit, they make the following statements:

We acknowledge that our reading of the scientific literature supports our political agenda. Our goal is to generate public policy initiatives that support men in their fathering role, without discriminating against women and same-sex couples. We are also interested in encouraging public policy that supports the legitimacy of diverse family structures, rather than policy that privileges the two-parent, heterosexual, married family.

Further, the authors state:

We also realize that some of the research we cite to support our perspective will turn out to be incorrect. Harroway (1989) pointed out that as research paradigms evolve to reflect diverse gender, ethnic, class, and cultural perspectives, much of the established body of scientific fact has turned out to be science fiction. Fischhoff (1990) identified two options for psychologists in the public arena: helping the public define their best interests or manipulating the public to serve the best interests of policy makers (Silverstein and Auerbach).

With this political backdrop, I would like to lead you through a brief review of the literature that demonstrates that heterosexual parenting is best for children; why, if Heather has two mommies, it's not the same as if Heather has a dad, or why daddy's roommate doesn't quite make up for a mother.

There are gender-linked differences in child-rearing skills. Men and women contribute differently to their children's development. Children of parents who are sex-typed are more competent (Baumrind). Research clearly demonstrates that the most effective parenting approach is one which is both highly demanding and highly responsive (Baumrind). Psycho-social maturity and competence among humans consists of the integration of communion, which is defined as the need to be included, connected, and related, and agency, or the drive for independence, individuality, and self-fulfillment. Children need expressive and instrumental parenting, or roots and wings, so to speak. Communion and union are extremely difficult for either a man or woman alone to combine effectively (Greenberger). Children learn about male-female relationships by seeing how their parents relate to each other. Children learn about trust, intimacy, and caring between the sexes. More importantly, parental relationships provide children with a model of the most meaningful heterosexual relationship that the great majority of individuals will have during their lifetimes—marriage.

Fathers do things differently from mothers. Fathers' parenting styles are not only highly complementary to what mothers do, but by all indications are important in their own right for optimum child rearing. For example, complementarity is provided by mothers who are flexible, warm, and sympathetic, and fathers who are more directive, predictable, and consistent. Both dimensions are critical for an efficient, effective, balanced, and humane child-rearing regime.

Research suggests that mothers are more able to read an infant's facial expressions, handle with tactile gentleness, and soothe with the use of the voice (Rossi). Mothers provide comfort with gentleness and emotional acceptance with toddlers, while men are more active, arousing, and overtly stimulating in nurturing activities; fathers foster certain physical skills and emphasize autonomy, individuality, and independence. Mothers tend to be responsive, fathers firm; mothers stress emotional security and relationships, fathers focus on competition and risk-taking behaviors; mothers express more concern for the child's immediate physical and physiological well being, fathers are more concerned for the child's long run autonomy, independence, and self-management (Popenie). Fathers tend to emphasize overt play more than care-taking. Play in various forms among the young appears critical for later developments (Yogman).

Father's play is likely to be both physically stimulating and exciting since it consists of rough-and-tumble play, which by the way, is one of the factors that is predictive of later gender identity problems and homosexual development. Father's play resembles an apprenticeship or teaching relationship. Mothers play tends to take place more at the child's level. Notice that more mothers talk baby talk than fathers do. Mothers provide the child the opportunity to direct the play, to be in charge, to proceed at the child's own pace. Children seem to prefer their fathers' more physically arousing style of play (Clark-Stewart). Benefits of fathers' play have emerged in child development areas ranging from management of emotions to intellectual and academic achievement. Father's play is related to the development of socially acceptable forms of behavior that do not include violence and aggression, but rather self-control. Children who roughhouse with their fathers usually quickly learn that biting, kicking, and others forms of physical violence are not acceptable and will not be tolerated. They learn that enough is enough. Children learn critical lessons such as how to recognize and manage highly charged emotions in the context of playing with their fathers. Fathers give children practice in regulating their own emotional clues and responding to them appropriately (Cromwell and Leper). Certain forms of play in childhood are crucial to controlling later anger expression and aggression. It is interesting that self-control is a trait notably lacking among adult criminals.

There are significant gender differences in the competition, risk-taking, and independence areas. Fathers tend to stress competition, challenge, initiative, risk-taking, and independence. Mothers stress emotional security, warmth, and personal safety. For example, on the playground fathers will try to get the child to swing higher, while mothers will worry about possible dangers. In communications, fathers' conversations tend to be briefer, more directive and focused; less often face-to-face, more often related to issues of independ-

ence and autonomy. Mothers are more likely to share feeling, engage in extended conversations that are less directive and more verbally encouraging. The content of the mothers' communication emphasizes interpersonal relationships (Popenoe). Male and female differences show up in the ways in which infants are held. Mothers use touch in order to soothe and give a child comfort. Fathers more often use touch to excite or stimulate. When a mother lifts her infant, she wraps the child up toward her breasts, providing comfort, warmth, protection, and security. By contrast, a father may well hold the child at arm's length in front of him and make eye contact, toss the infant in the air, turn the infant around so that the child's back is against the chest, or prop the child up to look back over his shoulder. Each of these "daddy holds" underscores a sense of freedom (Shapiro).

Fathers' and mothers' styles are complementary. Fathers express more concern for the child's long-term development, while mothers focus on the child's immediate well being. What is clear is that children have dual needs that must be met: one for independence and the other for relatedness, one for challenge and the other for support (Popenoe). In the discipline area, fathers are seen as being more powerful, threatening, demanding, and authoritative. Fathers, without mothers' special understanding, rely on rules and principles. The disciplinary approach of fathers tends to be firm, while that of mothers tends to be more responsive. Mothers' discipline varies more from time to time, involves more bargaining, is adjusted to the child's mood and context, and is more often based on a more intuitive understanding of the child's needs and emotions of the moment. Mothers are often accused of being too soft, while fathers are accused of being too arbitrary and rigid. Fathers have been seen as disciplinarians of the last resort (as in, wait until father comes home). Gilligan says that father versus mother disciplinary approaches are rooted in fundamental differences between men and women in their moral senses. Men stress justice, fairness, and duty based on relationships. Jean Piaget found that girls are more concerned with relationships and boys with rules. When the emotional and context-tailored parenting approach of mothers falls short, the fathers' rules, regulations, and natural authority come into play. Fathers set limits; they must be followed. Fathers are more effective than mothers in getting quick action when needed.

The critical contributions of mothers to the healthy development of children have been long recognized. Recent research validates the importance of the fathers in the parenting process. Dr. Alfred Masser, a psychiatrist at Northside hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, noted that more and more children seeking psychiatric help are suffering from father hunger. Father hunger is related to most social nightmares—from boys with guns to girls with babies. No welfare plan can cut poverty as thoroughly as a family with a mother and

father. In one study, men encouraged their children's curiosity in the solution of intellectual and physical challenges, supported the child's persistence in solving problems, and did not become overly solicitous with regard to the child's failures. Another study found that six-month-old infants whose fathers actively played with them got higher scores on the Baily Test of Mental and Motor development (Pruett). Infants whose fathers spend more time with them are more socially responsive and better able to withstand stressful situations than infants relatively deprived of substantial interaction with their fathers (Parke).

Not any second adult will suffice. A second female cannot provide a male role model or provide the qualities that are especially applicable: the development of self-control and empathy. For example, children living with a mother and a grandmother fared worse as teenagers than did those adolescents living with just a single parent (McLanahan and Sandefur). Stepfathers cannot ordinarily take the place of biological fathers. Men who are father-deprived in life are more likely to engage later in rigidly over-compensatory masculine, aggressive behaviors (Billler). Erik Erikson, the noted development psychologist, concluded that a father's love differed quantitatively from a mother's love. According to Erikson, a father's love is more on the edge, more dangerously expressed, because their love is more expectant, more instrumental than that of mothers. Fathers focus on the importance of extrafamilial socializing, the need to provide instrumental leadership, the importance of establishing and enforcing rules and standards regarding acceptable and unacceptable emotions and behaviors; fathers themselves absorb hostility and anger from their children.

Mothers, on the other hand, are more emotionally expressive, integrative, and nurturing as childrearsers, and their love is more accepting and unconditional. Fathers view themselves more than mothers as involved in the inculcation of standards and values and in the discipline of their children (Wardle). Research suggests that fathers have determining influence on the academic achievement and intellectual development of their children (Radin). Paternal affection has been positively correlated with adolescents having more friends, more supportive relationships, and more stability in those relationships. In addition, fathers in the home are associated with lower incidents of adolescent sexual involvement (Wardle).

There has been substantial research on the roles of fathers in the lives of their female children. They provide male role models, accustoming their daughters to male-female relationships. Engaged and responsive fathers actively play with their daughters and guide them to challenging activities. They protect them and provide them with a sense of physical and psychological security. Females with adequate fathers are more able to develop constructive heterosexual relation-

ships based on trust and intimacy. A number of studies have found girls involved with fathers have a stronger internal locus of control. They are more independent and self-possessed, more likely to perceive themselves as in control of their own fate. Stronger internal control has been found to be associated not only with levels of problem behaviors, but also with higher academic achievement and overall self-worth. Father-deprived girls "Show precocious sexual interest, derogation of masculinity and males, and poor ability to maintain sexual and emotional adjustment with one male," (Draper and Harpending). The unique contributions of fathers as role models demonstrate that fathers help their children gain greater individual competence and personal maturity.

Sons typically learn how to be a man through identifying and bonding with their fathers. Sons learn about male responsibility and achievement, assertiveness, independence, and how to relate acceptably to the opposite sex. Fathers are especially important for controlling adolescent boys. The discipline, power, and authority that men bring to rearing boys are very difficult for women alone to achieve. Daughters learn from their fathers how to relate to men and that they are worthy of love. They learn about assertiveness, independence, self-reliance, and achievement. Girls with supportive fathers are, in general, more successful in their chosen careers or fields of endeavor.

Wardle completed a review of the literature and concluded:

Separation of children from their fathers is the leading cause of declining child well being in our society. It is also the engine driving our most urgent social problems, from crimes to adolescent pregnancy to child abuse to domestic violence against women. Fatherhood is a fragmenting role. The two main consequences of fatherlessness in American society are rising youth violence and declining child well-being.

It has been observed that boys with fathers rarely commit crimes; fatherless boys commonly commit crimes. As one commentator notes:

Surveys of child well-being repeatedly show that children living apart from their fathers are far more likely than other children to be expelled or suspended from school, to display emotional and behavioral problems, to have difficulty getting along with peers, and to get in trouble with the police.

According to a 1990 study commissioned by the Progressive Policy Institute, the "relationship between crime and one-parent families is so strong that controlling family configuration erases the relationship between race and crime and between low income and crime."

Alan Hawkins presents a wonderful argument for the importance of the marital relationship and marital intimacy as the cornerstone of generative fathering, defined more

richly as responsible fathering or positive paternal involvement. Bill Doherty provides support to Hawkins argument as he notes, "that the most immediate cause of breakdown of father-child relations is the breakdown of male-female relations in marriage." He concludes that:

The historical records suggest that contemporary fathers are more ideologically committed to generative fathering than any generation in history, but the deterioration in the male-female relation in marriage and co-parenting has short-circuited what should be the golden era of fathering in the United States.

While we do not have the time here to review the differences between homosexual relationships and heterosexual relationships, it is clear that there are significant differences in terms of homosexual behavior and heterosexual behavior—radical differences. Most significant is the number of partners, monogamy, and proneness toward mental and physical disease. A study of more than 5,000 homosexual men reported in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* in August 1987 found that 69–83 percent of these men reported fifty or more partners. Other studies report a much higher number of partners. The best study to date on the monogamy of homosexual relationships is that of McWhirter and Mattison, reported in the *Male Couple*. The authors themselves are a homosexual couple, one a psychiatrist and the other a psychologist. After much researching, they were able to locate 156 male couples in relationships that lasted from one to thirty-seven years. Two-thirds of the respondents had entered the relationship with either the implicit or explicit expectations of sexual fidelity. The results showed that of those 156 couples, only seven had been able to maintain sexual fidelity and none had been together for more than five years. In other words, the researchers were unable to find a single male couple who was able to maintain sexual fidelity for more than five years. They concluded, "the expectation for outside sexual activity was the rule for male couples and the exception for heterosexuals. Heterosexual couples lived with some expectation that their relationships were to last 'until death do us part,' whereas gay couples wondered if their relationships would survive."

Stanover provides a brief summary of physical risks associated with homosexual relationships. He concludes that there is a twenty-five to thirty-year decrease in life expectancy, with higher vulnerabilities in infectious hepatitis, fatal immune diseases, and rectal cancer. Cameron, Playfair, and Wellum noted the following from their research on obituaries of homosexuals compared to heterosexual: On the average, married women died at age seventy-nine, married men died at age seventy-five, homosexual women died at forty-five, homosexual men without AIDS and without a long-term partner died at

forty-one, and homosexual men with AIDS and without a long-term partner died at age thirty-nine. Another study indicated that one-third of gay men would be HIV positive by age thirty (Goldman). Lesbians have three times the breast cancer rate of heterosexual women (Cambell). Recent studies as of last week noted that the rate of new HIV infections among gay and bisexual men in San Francisco nearly tripled in the past two years, (USA Today).

Regarding mental health, two articles appeared in the *Archives of Psychiatry*, the bible of the psychiatry profession, a few months ago. They appeared together with commentaries by Bailey, Remafedi, and Friedman, noted researchers in the area. The one article by Herrel et al concluded that "same-gender sexual orientation is significantly associated with suicidality measures." They added, "The substantially increased lifetime risk of suicidal behaviors in homosexual men is unlikely to be due solely to substance abuse or other psychiatric co-morbidity." The other study, by Fergusson et al, noted that "gay, lesbian, and bisexual young people were at increased risks of major depression . . . generalized anxiety disorder . . . conduct disorder . . . nicotine dependence . . . other substance abuse and/or dependence . . . multiple disorders . . . suicidal ideation . . . and suicidal attempts." These researchers concluded, "Findings support recent evidence suggesting that gay, lesbian, and bisexual young people are at increased risk of mental health problems, with these associations being particularly evident for measures of suicidal behavior and multiple disorder."

Of particular interest was the commentary by Bailey, whom, some of you may recognize, co-authored with Richard Pillard the twin study on homosexuality. Bailey indicated that these studies discredit former theories that suggested that "gay men undergoing therapy seemed dysfunctional, while volunteers from homophile organizations seemed well." He concluded the following:

These studies contain arguably the best published data on the association between homosexuality and psychopathology, and both converge on the same unhappy conclusion: homosexual people are at a substantially higher risk for some forms of emotional problems, including suicidality, major depression, and anxiety disorder.

Bailey notes that the preliminary results from a large, equally conducted Dutch study generally corroborate these findings. Acknowledging several theoretical explanations for the research findings, Bailey cites, "society's oppression of homosexual people"—a theory that does not seem to hold true for the Dutch study, since the Dutch society is a gay-affirming society. His other explanations are interesting. They include the possibility that "homosexuality represents a deviation from the normal develop-

ment and is associated with other such deviations that may lead to mental illness." Another theory offered by Bailey is that "increased psychopathology among homosexual people is a consequence of lifestyle differences associated with male homosexuality such as receptive anal sex and promiscuity." Bailey suggests that more research needs to be done and that it would be a shame if "sociopolitical concerns prevented researchers from conscientious consideration of any reasonable hypothesis."

Other studies report on violence in lesbian and gay male relationships. Forty-seven and one-half percent of lesbians and 29.7 percent of gay men have been victimized by a same-sex partner. This is compared to 15 percent of married couples (Wagner-Haugrud, Vaden, Magruder). I will leave the parenting implications of this research to you.

Perhaps I might conclude with a few clinically based thoughts. Mothers and fathers are important role models for their children. Children learn by watching the adults in their lives. Research suggests that children are more compliant with the parent of the same sex. Boys and girls construct their notions of sex roles from experiences with both sexes. The loss of dual gender parenting may have severe emotional consequences for the children. Furhman's research suggests that the absence of a father in the home may result in daughters having trouble relating to men throughout their lives. The importance of dual-gender parenting cannot be overemphasized. Homosexual parenting places children at risk for emotional and gender-related problems. Children in dual gender families transition through the development stages better, have stronger gender identity, are more confident of themselves, do better in school, have fewer emotional crises, and become better functioning adults. David Popenoe states it nicely, "Social science research is almost never conclusive. . . . Yet in three decades of work as a social scientist, I know of few other bodies of data in which the weight of evidence is so decisively on one side of the issue: on the whole for children, two-parent families are preferable." Although single-parent families, due mostly to divorce and children born out of wedlock, are facts of modern life, and many single parents do a wonderful job (most would say that it is harder every step of the way), the advantages of dual-gender parenting for children and society justify legal preferences for this type of parenting. Homes with a mother and a father are far better for raising emotionally stable, healthy children.

#### NOTES

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