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Children with same sex parents thriving

The world’s largest report on the children of same sex couples reveals that they are thriving. Perhaps not revelatory news for the many happy families with same-sex parents, but an important landmark in beating the still rampant discrimination against them from right wing and religious groups.



In February 2013, Tory Welsh Secretary David Jones said in [a TV interview](#): “I regard marriage as an institution that has developed over many centuries, essentially for the provision of a warm and safe environment for the upbringing of children, which is clearly something that two same-sex partners can’t do.” Though he was rightly lambasted by the [left-wing media](#) as perpetrating hate speech, it was a disturbing example of how accepted his homophobic views are that he was allowed to air them on television.

This latest report, then, is timely and important. While same-sex couples shouldn’t have to keep asserting that their parenting is as valuable and competent as any heterosexual couple’s, the sad fact remains that there are still plenty of people out there who doubt their capabilities. And it seems that they can’t rely on high profile celebrities to champion their case either: both Rupert Everett and Elton John – himself a father to two children born through surrogacy – have spoken out against gay parenting; Elton John was quoted as saying it was “heart-breaking” his son would grow up without a mother and Rupert Everett, known for his outspoken opinions, said that he couldn’t “think of anything worse than being brought up by two gay dads”.

Better communication

The Australian Study of Child Health in Same-Sex Families is the world’s largest attempt to study how children raised by same-sex couples compare to children raised by heterosexual couples. According to a preliminary report on the study of 500 children across the country of Australia, these young people are not only thriving, but also have higher rates of family cohesion than other families. The study looked at important indicators including self-esteem, emotional behaviour and the amount of time spent with parents. Children of same-sex couples actually scored higher than the national average for overall health and how well the family gets along. The researchers hypothesised that if a student experiences stigma at school, the families of same-sex couples are “generally more willing to communicate and approach the issues”, resulting in a closer family dynamic.

Lucy Corkhill is a freelance writer and hosts art and writing workshops from her windswept cliff-top home. She worked for many years as a therapist specialising in pregnancy, birth and the post-natal period. She lives with her husband, their two year old son, a dog, three cats and loads of spiders.

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Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (as of 26th June) recently changed his long-held views against same-sex marriage, saying in a blog post that his concerns when rejecting a 2009 proposal were to do with the children of same-sex couples. This latest piece of research reveals that his concerns were unfounded.

Unfounded anxieties

On UK soil, [a recent study](#) by the University of Cambridge's Centre for Family Research was published by the British Association of Adoption and Fostering. 130 adoptive families in Britain with gay, lesbian and heterosexual parents were studied, and researchers found that it was the similarities in experience, rather than the differences, that stood out. The research showed that children do not suffer any disadvantage and that the vast majority were not bullied at school (though the study only concentrated on families with children aged between four and eight, and it was recognised that these problems were more likely to occur in secondary school-aged children).

The study went on to conclude that "there was no evidence" to support speculation that children's masculine or feminine tendencies are affected by having gay or lesbian parents. The quality of relationships and the experience of family life in general were similar for children adopted by heterosexual or same-sex couples. Professor Susan Golombok, director of the Cambridge centre and report co-author, said: "What I don't like is when people make assumptions that a certain type of family, such as gay fathers, will be bad for children. The anxieties about the potentially negative effects for children of being placed with gay fathers seem to be, from our study, unfounded." One of the reasons cited for the success of adoptions by same-sex couples was that they were less likely to have experienced infertility and "were more likely to come to adoption as their first choice".

Encouragement

The Government's adoption advisor, Sir Martin Narey, hopes that the study will encourage more lesbian, gay and transgender people to consider adopting. Speaking on the eve of [LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week](#), he said: "I have seen how LGBT people, who tend to come to adoption as their first choice for becoming parents, bring determination and enthusiasm to it. Many more gay adopters need to be encouraged to come forward."

Whilst I'm in favour of the fact these studies are being undertaken and are breaking down outdated modes of thinking, I am struck by a disappointment that we still live in a society where there is a 'need' for them. As I watch the (thriving) children of our same-sex couple friends (adopted, conceived through surrogacy, and through sperm donation), it seems incredibly unfair that these capable and amazing parents still have to, in some way, prove themselves, when parenting itself presents more than enough challenges to be getting on with. Despite negative Luddite views from political parties, the fact that people are speaking out about the increasingly diverse form families take in the 21st century gives me hope. Families come in all shapes and sizes; what's important is that children are raised with love, compassion, kindness and awareness. It's time we accepted that a parent's sexual orientation has absolutely nothing to do with whether they can provide their child with a happy and loving childhood.

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3/3