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### Author

Karp, Reanna

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Undergraduate

# Same Sex Couples Influence Their Children:

## Sexual Orientation & Emotional Well-Being

By Reanna Karp

### **Abstract**

The main purpose of this paper is to provide strong supporting reasons explaining how same sex parents do not influence their children's sexual orientation and/or emotional well-being. In addition, the evidence supporting this claim demonstrates that the influence that same sex parents do have on their children is associated by how much love and support is given. Overall, this paper will review background, context including specific information about same sex parents and if they influence their children's sexual orientation and/or emotional well-being, and will provide limitations of these studies along.

### **Background:**

“In 2001, the Netherlands became the first country to legally recognize same-sex marriages” as stated in the article “When Gay People Get Married, What Happens When Societies Legalize Same-Sex Marriage” (Hull, 2010). Since then, there are now sixteen countries that have approved legal same sex marriage laws, including the United States, in which sixteen

states have been approved as seen on a website called Freedom to Marry published in 2003. With a rise in same sex marriages, there is also a rise in same sex couples having children. In the year 2005, the article “Same-Sex Parent Families and Children’s Academic Achievement” showed us that “an estimated 270,000 children lived in households with two same-sex parents” (Potter, 2012).

With this rise, however, there unfortunately are many people who are still opposed to the idea of same sex couples having children. The article “What About the Children? Arguments Against Lesbian and Gay Parenting” written by Victoria Clarke in 2001, provides us with an example that the British have actually “accused lesbians as making a mockery of motherhood” (Clarke, 2001). Guido Pennings continues by explaining, “the main argument against same sex parenting is that the setting goes against the best interest of the future child” in the article titled “Evaluating the Welfare of the Child in Same-Sex Families.” Further research shows that those who “lack of support for gay and lesbian couples raising children – and a similar lack of support for same sex marriage, may be connected with perceptions of a gay or homosexual threat” which was stated by Amy Becker in “What’s Marriage (and Family) Got to Do with It? Support for Same-Sex Marriage, Legal Unions, and Gay and Lesbian Couples Raising Children.

On the contrary to this group of believers, the article “Same-Sex Parent Families and Children’s Academic Achievement” written by Daniel Potter in 2012, explains that “advocates argue that children’s development is unaffected by living with same-same parents and have cited mounting evidence supporting their claim.” Nonetheless, numerous studies have been able to disprove these concerns of how same sex couples do not influence their child’s sexual orientation and/or emotional well-being.

## **CONTEXT:**

### SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Social theories, as seen in the article “Children Raised in Fatherless Families from Infancy: Family Relationships and the Socioemotional Development of Children of Lesbian and Single Heterosexual Mothers” say that “imitation of, or identification with same-sexed models, together with differential reinforcement of sex-typed behaviour, constitute the basis of psychosexual development (Golombok et al., 2006). In further explanation, this statement assumes that children learn sexual identification actions based on who raises them. This leads to a concern that children who are raised by same sex couples will be more inclined to want to be involved in same sex relations as well, due to the influence of the parent. Those who are opposed to same sex couples having children claim “that children need to be exposed to both-sex parents for healthy emotional and psychological development” (Potter, 2012). Furthermore, it is assumed that it would be hard for boys to learn masculine characteristics if they were raised by lesbian mothers, and would be hard for girls to learn feminine characteristics if they were raised by gay fathers. Though there is currently not enough evidence to show that there is no direct affect between same sex families and the masculinity of a boy and femininity of a girl. However, the article “Children in Lesbian and Single-Parent Households: Psychosexual and Psychiatric Appraisal,” supports the idea that same sex parents still “show a normal psychosexual development” (Golombok, Spencer & Rutter, 2006). The term “normal” in this case is a child who was raised in what is known as a traditional family, including a mother and a father.

Also, there is great concern to children of same sex parents because they are being influenced by 'atypical' sexual behaviour, such as seeing two men kissing instead of a woman and man. Though admitting that exposing children to sexual behaviours can have a slight impact on their development, it is concluded to be doubtful that it is a strong enough influence on their sexual orientation. (Golombok et al., 2006). These behaviours can be seen by comparing children raised in heterosexual families to children raised in same sex families. For instance, there are children who are raised in heterosexual families, but are not influenced by their parents as seen when the child chooses to participate in a same sex relationship.

In an article titled "Evaluating the Welfare of the Child in Same-Sex Families," it is bluntly stated how many who are opposed to the idea of same sex couples having children feel that "being homosexual is a mental illness," and that "bringing up a child in a homosexual family in a homophobic society is completely against the welfare of the child" (Pennings, 2011). In response, the article "Anticipation of the Sexual and Gender Development of Children Adopted by Same Sex couples" rebuts with how "research has nonetheless indicated that parental homosexuality does not foster gender identity confusion or homosexual orientation in children and adolescents" (Gato & Fontaine, 2013).

***I am not my parents:*** "Your family being different is different than something like your favourite colour. It's about you, but it's not about you. It shouldn't matter but I guess sometimes it does" (Welsh, 2011)

This quote is taken from "Growing up in a Same Sex Parented Family: The Adolescent Voice of Experience" where researchers interviewed a group of adolescent's ages 13-15 who were raised by same sex parents. From this quote, it is noted that this idea of same sex marriages and family shouldn't be a big deal, but in this society it is. Also, interviewees admits that there is a difference between those being raised by same sex parents and those being raised by opposite

sex parents, however, it does not mean that is who they are as an individual. They admit that it is a part of who they are, but it's not all of who they are. For example, just because their parent's favorite colour is red, doesn't mean that their favorite colour will be red too (Welsh, 2011).

After thoroughly looking at this information, the graph clearly demonstrates some expected findings such as daughters tending to be more interested in both feminine and masculine activities, and sons showed a tendency to be slightly less masculine in some respects. The figure to the right shows us a comparison study that specifically focused on gender behaviours/preferences and sexual behaviour/preferences. Although there are subtle differences, there are no significant results that indicate a true difference in children raised by same sex parents when compared to children of opposite sex parents. (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

### EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

*“Research has shown that the adjustment, development, and psychological well-being of children is unrelated to parental sexual orientation and that children of lesbian and gay parents are as likely as those of heterosexual parents to flourish” (APA, 2004) (Patterson, 2006)*

In a study that is explained in “Growing Up in a Same-Sex Parented Family: The Adolescent Voice of Experience” adolescents that were raised by same sex parents were interviewed. The majority of the participants “reported that middle school has been the most difficult time in their lives (Welsh, 2011). From this statement, there are concerns that children of same sex couples have tended to endure more teasing from other children because their parents are not opposite sex parents. “Although this is confirmed in some studies, the magnitude of the stigmatization is not such that it results in hampered emotional functioning or more behavioural problems” (Pennings, 2011).

To further adhere to what current concerns may be regarding the emotional well-being of children from same sex families, research has proven that “lesbian and single heterosexual mothers may be subject to other pressures such as social stigma, and lack of social support, that may interfere with the parenting role, and their children may be vulnerable to emotional and behaviour problems as a result” (Golombok, Tasker, & Murray, 2006). After this article addresses why those against same sex families may feel subject to their reasons, it then continues to calmly rebut by providing strong evidence to prove that their concerns are irrelevant. The article uses a comparison study to show that “the children raised by lesbian and single heterosexual mothers show no evidence of problems in their emotions, behaviour, or relationships (Golombok et al., 2006). Also from this study, we see the “general population of UK, from which it was tentatively concluded that these children were as well adjusted as children in father present families” (Golombok et al., 2006).

Overall, it is important to recognize that “the findings suggest that parental sexual orientation is less important than the qualities of family relationships” (Patterson, 2006). This quote, taken from the article “Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents,” is further supported by Pennings as he “shows the importance of good relationships between the parents, and between the child and the parent(s) in his article. He states that, “a strong desire for parenthood and warm and supportive relationships are frequently put forward as true determining factors for the child’s well-being.”

Additionally, the article “Outcomes for Children with Lesbian or Gay Parents,” demonstrates a study that was performed in Britain compared two groups: those who were raised by same sex parents and those who were raised by opposite sex parents. In this study, the researchers used questionnaires that were given to both the parents and the children. The

questionnaires asked about their emotional well-being and how they perceived the emotional well-being of the others in their family. Results from this study revealed that there were no differences between the two groups of offspring, children raised by same-sex parents and children raised by opposite sex parents. (Anderssen, Amile, & YTTEROY, 2002)

## ***CONCLUSION:***

After examining a large amount of research, we can conclude that that same sex parents do not influence the sexual orientation nor the emotional well-being of their children. Additionally, the article “(How) Does The Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?” helps us conclude that there are “no notable differences between children reared by heterosexual parents and those reared by lesbian and gay parents, and that it finds lesbigay parents to be as competent and effective as heterosexual parents”(Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

When raising children, if the parent(s) are homosexual or heterosexual do not directly affect the child. Because there are those who are still opposed to homosexuals raising children, however, we as a society must come together to do what is best for the children, including any “possible impact of certain measures on the happiness and flourishing”(Pennings, 2011).

## **SCHOOLING SYSTEM**

Recent research promotes the idea that it is smart to emphasize a strong focus on making changes in schooling systems. After concluding that there is no direct detrimental influences from the parents effecting their child’s sexual orientation or emotional well-being, researchers say how any affects upon these children will be from their school peers. This is why it is so important for schools to become more aware of this and start taking action as stated in the article “Children of Same-Sex Parents: In and Out of the Closet.” (Hart et al., 2013).



Steps taken in the schooling system should include all members of the system to make for a harmless environment for all children, especially those who do not feel safe because of their parents' sexual identity. "The need for school personnel (educators, counselors, and administrators) to be mindful of the messages that are conveyed, via what is said as well as what is left unsaid, to children and adolescents of same-sex-parented households" (Welsh, 2011)." Because of their heavy involvement within schools, "educators create a safe environment for all students" and can make a large impact on how other students treat their peers based off the knowledge they learn (Hart et al., 2013).

### LIMITATIONS

Though there is much evidence providing support in that same sex couples do not affect the sexual orientation or emotional well-being in their children's development, there is some room where alternate studies could take place.

### EXAMPLES OF LIMITATIONS:

- 1) Most studies use heterosexual couples as their control group. This can be looked at as unethical since "the homophobic atmosphere and heterosexist rule, the control group (i.e. heterosexual family) is perceived as the gold standard." (Pennings, 2011). This "gold standard" suggests "when a group does not reach the same level as the control group, it is automatically classified as substandard or inferior" (Pennings, 2011). In this context, same sex couples are given an unequal representation.
- 2) In appreciation of amount of evidence gathered, it is important to note that the illustrated reports are from couples who are open about their sexuality, therefore, wanting to promote it in a positive light. This illuminates a great portion of same sex couples that are not as open about their sexuality.

Although it was not possible to gather information from this group, there is enough evidence to firmly state that same sex parents do not influence their child's sexual orientation or emotional well-being.

## Figures

Findings on the Associations between Parents' Sexual Orientations and Selected Child (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

### **Gender Behaviour/Preferences**

-Girls' departure from traditional gender role expectations and behaviours-in dress, play, physicality, school activities, occupational aspirations 0/+

-Boys' departure from traditional gender role expectations and behaviours-in dress, play, physicality, school activities, occupational aspirations 0/+

-Boys' level of aggressiveness and domineering disposition -  
-Child wishes she/he were the other sex 0

### **Sexual Behaviour/Sexual Preferences**

-Young adult child has considered same-sex sexual relationship(s); has had same-sex +

-Young adult child firmly self-identifies as bisexual, gay, or lesbian 0

-Boys' likelihood of having a gay sexual orientation in adulthood, by sexual orientation (+)

-Girls' number of sexual partners from puberty to young adulthood +

-Boys' number of sexual partners from puberty to young adulthood -

-Quality of intimate relationships in young adulthood 0

-Have friend(s) who are gay or lesbian +

### **KEY**

+ = significantly higher in lesbigay than in heterosexual parent context.

0 = no significant difference between lesbigay and heterosexual parent context.

- = significantly lower in lesbigay than heterosexual parent context.

= borders on statistical significance.

0/+ = evidence is mixed.

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Reanna Karp is graduating this semester with a major in Psychology and a minor in Writing. Reanna played on the basketball team for UC Merced her first two years and then decided to study abroad. During her time abroad, Europe opened Reannas eyes to amazing experiences that have her craving to continue traveling. As of right now, Reanna see's herself in the future being involved in social media or broadcasting. Some of Reannas hobbies are writing poetry, spending time with family and friends, and working out.