



## Facing the Downstream Effects of Same-Sex Parenting

**"A compassionate society seeks to help and assist orphaned children, but no reasonable society intentionally deprives those children of a mother or a father."**



In March, 2013, the British paper *The Independent* ran an article entitled, "Children in gay adoptions at no disadvantage: Research confirms same-sex couples are just as good at parenting as heterosexuals." The article, based on a study at Cambridge University, concluded there was "no evidence" to support the claim that children's masculine or feminine tendencies were affected by having gay or lesbian parents, nor were the quality of their family relationships significantly different.

The studied outcomes, however, were limited to children four to eight years of age, so that any later effects, as they passed through puberty, for example, and "came of age," were not included. Common sense, however, begs the question: how capable would two men be at helping their adopted daughter with very female matters pertaining to growing up and maturing physically? For daughters this is often an issue requiring ongoing support, communication and sharing. It's not something men can just read up on in a book; it can be a delicate, personal matter, closely connected to a young woman's sense of self-identity, and it's reasonable to conclude that there are real advantages to the empathy shared between a mother and her daughter.

Although *The Independent* claims this was the first study to look at how children in non-traditional families fared when compared with heterosexual households, at least two other major studies addressing the question were published during 2012, one by Mark Regnerus, a sociologist at the University of Texas at Austin, and the other by Loren Marks, a researcher at Louisiana State University. Both studies presented compelling evidence countering the claim that a child's psychosocial growth is equally supported in lesbian and gay environments as it would be in heterosexual parenting environments.

Common sense, instead of common clichés, ought to serve as our starting point in discussions about adopting children. One of the clichés we hear is that adopting children is really just a matter of the "rights of parents." As Phoebe Wilson noted in an article in the *New Woman*: "If adoption is going to be debated as a 'right,' then the rights of the child (innocent and defenseless) are the rights that must prevail. Adoption exists for the benefit of the child, not for the couple who adopts him." Same-sex couples who seek to adopt a child can

# Making Sense of Bioethics

## Facing the Downstream Effects of Same-Sex Parenting

doubtless be motivated by the best of intentions and by genuine compassion for the plight of an orphan. Yet Wilson goes on to explain the deeper reasons that need to motivate adoption:

“A child in need of adoption is a child who is in extraordinary and abnormal circumstances: he is a child without parents. Adoption seeks to “create,” from a social and legal point of view, a relationship similar to what would be natural for the child, meaning a family relationship: mother, father, child. This relationship would not be, for example, two fathers and a mother, or three women, or a single man because this does not exist in the natural biological filiation. The love and affection of one, two or five people isn’t enough. In order for a child to develop into a well balanced and fully mature person, he needs the presence of a father and a mother.”

In recent years, adults who were raised by same-sex couples have started to recount and write about some of their childhood experiences. Robert Oscar Lopez, who has de-

scribed himself as a “bisexual Latino intellectual, raised by a lesbian, who experienced poverty in the Bronx as a young adult,” now works as a professor at California State University. He described the notable challenges he faced growing up:

“Quite simply, growing up with gay parents was very difficult.... When your home life is so drastically different from everyone around you, in a fundamental way striking at basic physical relations, you grow up weird.... My peers learned all the unwritten rules of decorum and body language in their homes; they understood what was appropriate to say in certain settings and what wasn’t; they learned both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine social mechanisms... I had no male figure at all to follow, and my mother and her partner were both unlike traditional fathers or traditional mothers.... [B]eing strange is hard; it takes a mental toll, makes it harder to find friends, interferes with professional growth, and sometimes leads one down a sodden path to self-medication in the form of

alcoholism, drugs, gambling, antisocial behavior, and irresponsible sex. The children of same-sex couples have a tough road ahead of them — I know, because I have been there.”

A compassionate society seeks to help and assist orphaned children, but no reasonable society intentionally deprives those children of a mother or a father. That is, however, what placing them into a same-sex home invariably does.

*Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D. earned his doctorate in neuroscience from Yale and did post-doctoral work at Harvard. He is a priest of the diocese of Fall River, MA, and serves as the Director of Education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. Father Tad writes a monthly column on timely life issues. From stem cell research to organ donation, abortion to euthanasia, he offers a clear and compelling analysis of modern bioethical questions, addressing issues we may confront at one time or another in our daily living. His column, entitled “Making Sense of Bioethics” is nationally syndicated in the U.S. to numerous diocesan newspapers, and has been reprinted by newspapers in England, Canada, Poland and Australia.*

