

## **Take The Children Out Of Anti-Gay Arguments**

By Todd Huffman

Published: Tuesday, February 20, 2007, Eugene *Register-Guard*

Families in America today come in all shapes and sizes. Be they unwed mothers raising their children alone, divorced or separated parents raising their children in split fashion, remarried parents raising their children and stepchildren, or grandparents parenting again, American families of the 21st century are much more diverse than the standard one-mom, one-dad, 2.1-children model of yesteryear. Americans today give almost no second thought to this bewildering variety of family structures.

Except for the same-gender parent family structure.

Almost no issue is as polarizing as whether to grant or deny gays and lesbians the right to marry. Meanwhile, as the debate rages onward in statehouses and houses of worship, in courtrooms and living rooms, more same-sex couples are quietly and lovingly and responsibly raising children than ever before.

Between 1 million and 6 million children in the United States are being reared by committed lesbian or gay couples, an estimate that may even be low. Nearly one-quarter of same-sex couples are raising children, in at least 96 percent of all counties in the United States. What was once unheard of has become another fact of American life.

Most children who have one or two gay or lesbian parents were born in the context of a heterosexual relationship that has been dissolved. Either or both partners may have found new partners of the same or different gender.

Alternatively, more and more gay and lesbian couples are bringing children into long-term partnerships through adoption, artificial insemination and surrogacy.

Opponents of gay marriage frequently argue that children who grow up in same-sex parent households are harmed. It is, they argue, an unnatural upbringing.

However, the vast consensus of decades of study shows that children born to and raised by lesbian and gay couples seem to do just as well in every measure of health and well-being as children whose parents are heterosexual.

Put simply, there is ample evidence that conscientious and nurturing adults - whether they are men or women, heterosexual or homosexual - can be excellent parents.

Those opposed to gay marriage often point to studies showing that children raised in families headed by a father and a mother fare much better in childhood, and later as adults.

But such studies are not applicable here, because they compare families with opposite-sex parents to single-parent families, not with those headed by a same-gender couple. In fact, some studies have shown that children of single heterosexual parents have more difficulties than children being responsibly reared by two parents of the same sex.

Opponents of gay marriage further argue that raising a child in a same-gender parent household leads to gender-identity confusion, and increases the likelihood of homosexual orientation. But this line of thinking is plainly a fallacy - if gay parents will raise gay children, then straight parents would raise only straight children.

Homosexual orientation is not related to psychopathology. There is no basis on which to assume that a parent's homosexual orientation causes gender-identity confusion in the child or induces a homosexual orientation. Time and again, studies have borne this out.

Notwithstanding the complex cultural, moral and religious issues related to same-gender couples and their children, the case for denying same-sex couples legal access to civil marriage - and all its attendant benefits, rights and privileges - cannot and must no longer be defended by claiming the best interest of the child. The child's best interest is served foremost by attachment to committed, nurturing and competent parents, regardless of the parents' sexual orientation.

Decades of study have demonstrated no risk to children as a result of growing up in a family with one or more gay parents. What has been consistently demonstrated is what common sense tells us: that greater stability and nurturance within a family system, irrespective of the parents' gender, predicts greater security and fewer behavioral problems among children.

Gay and lesbian people have been raising children for many years, and will continue to do so. Our society cannot vote this fact away at the ballot box. But societies do change, and ours will one day give no second thought to homosexual parents, and to granting the security of two legally recognized parents that their children deserve.

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