



Why Gender Matters to Parenting

All Families Are Not Created Equal

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IN DECEMBER 2010, THE NORTH CAROLINA SUPREME COURT DEALT THE HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT A MAJOR SETBACK IN ITS ATTEMPTS TO REDEFINE THE FAMILY IN THE TAR HEEL STATE BY RULING THAT “SECOND-PARENT” ADOPTION IS NOT LEGAL HERE. THE LANDMARK CASE, *BOSEMAN V. JARRELL*, INVOLVED A CUSTODY DISPUTE BETWEEN FORMER STATE SENATOR JULIA BOSEMAN AND HER FORMER PARTNER, MELISSA JARRELL, OVER JARRELL’S BIOLOGICAL SON, WHO WAS CONCEIVED THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION WHILE THE TWO WOMEN WERE COHABITING. IN ITS 5 TO 2 DECISION, THE HIGH COURT VOIDED THE ADOPTION—WHICH TWO LOWER COURTS HAD PREVIOUSLY UPHELD—BECAUSE IT SAID THAT THE LEGAL PROCEDURE BOSEMAN USED TO ADOPT THE CHILD IS NOT ALLOWED UNDER NORTH CAROLINA LAW.¹

The importance of the *Boseman* decision cannot be overstated. If just a few more Supreme Court justices had ruled the other way, North Carolina could very well have become the 10th state (plus D.C.) to allow second-parent adoption—a legal tactic homosexual activists are using nationwide

to open the door for same-sex couples to adopt children.² The *Boseman* case is a prime example of the ongoing attempts by homosexual activists and their allies to redefine the core institutions of marriage and the family. Their efforts are fueled by the lie that gender does not matter to marriage and parenting, and that society will thrive even when its fundamental institution—the family—is stripped of its core meaning and purpose.

This is not the last time that the question of same-sex parenting will come up in North Carolina. Now more than ever, pro-family advocates need to be armed with a response to the false claim that gender is irrelevant to marriage and parenting. As the debate over marriage continues in North Carolina and nationwide, pro-family advocates must be able to articulate why the natural family—consisting of a married father and mother—is still the best environment for raising healthy children.

Questioning Gender

In his controversial decision to overturn California’s marriage amendment, Proposition 8, U.S. District Judge Vaughn Walker made a number of

radical assertions about parenting that deserve to be answered. For example, Judge Walker wrote:

- “The gender of a child’s parent is not a factor in a child’s adjustment.”³
- “Indeed, the evidence shows beyond any doubt that parents’ genders are irrelevant to children’s developmental outcomes.”⁴

Are Judge Walker’s “findings” true? Are mothers or fathers essentially irrelevant to child wellbeing? Aside from the fact that Judge Walker is an openly homosexual man, the following points will show that his conclusions are based more on advocacy than real evidence.

Same-Sex Parenting

Homosexual rights proponents often trot out so-called “scientific” evidence to support their claim that the gender of parents is “irrelevant” to parenting. But the body of evidence to date on the effectiveness of same-sex parenting is neither vast, nor trustworthy. Same-sex parenting has not been around long enough to conclusively study and determine how it impacts children over the long term. In the few studies that do exist, there are significant flaws in the research. For example:

- As Glenn Stanton at Focus on the Family points out in his review of the research, most studies involve very small sample sizes of children, with the vast majority from white, well educated, and economically successful lesbian couples. Very few studies have been conducted on children raised by two homosexual men, simply because homosexual men are not as likely to be raising children as homosexual women.⁵
- A 2001 review of 49 same-sex parenting studies found significant methodological flaws in all of them, including: missing or inadequate comparison groups; self-constructed, unreliable, and invalid measurements; and missing and inadequate statistical analysis.⁶
- A more recent review of hundreds of same-sex parenting studies was conducted by sociologist Steven Nock of the University of Virginia, who concluded that “1) all of the articles I reviewed contained at least one fatal flaw of design or execution, and 2) not a single one was conducted according to generally accepted standards of scientific research.”⁷
- The flaws in the existing same-sex parenting studies that have been identified by researchers include: no nationally representative sample; limited outcome measures; reliance on maternal reports (with many studies relying on a lesbian mother’s report of her parenting skills and her child’s well-being, and not on more objective measurements); and no long-term studies.⁸

Even supporters of same-sex “marriage” have raised doubts about the validity of these studies. For example, Jonathon Rauch and William Meezan, two

openly homosexual scholars who support same-sex “marriage,” could only recommend four same-sex parenting studies that they deemed “methodologically rigorous.” They wrote in an article published by Princeton and the Brookings Institute that, “Virtually no empirical evidence exists on how same-sex parents’ “marriage” might affect their children.”⁹

Much of what has gone wrong with same-sex parenting research could be explained by observations found in the 2005 book, *Destructive Trends in Mental Health: The Well-Intentioned Path to Harm*. The editors are two psychologists who are described as lifelong liberal activists. They conclude that psychology has surrendered its professionalism and science to political correctness. They offer the 1973 and 1974 decisions to reclassify homosexuality as an example, writing that:

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association yielded suddenly and completely to political pressure when in 1973 it removed homosexuality as a treatable aberrant condition. A political firestorm had been created by gay activists within psychiatry. ... Psychiatry’s House of Delegates sidestepped the conflict by putting the matter to a vote of the membership, marking the first time in the history of healthcare that a diagnosis or lack of diagnosis was decided by popular vote rather than scientific evidence.¹⁰

Married Mom and Dad Best

Other than the fact that there are very few studies on same-sex parenting, and those that exist are flawed and therefore questionable, what evidence is there to contest the claim that gender does not matter to parenting? A robust body of evidence shows that the natural family is the best environment for raising children compared to *all* other family forms. In fact, thousands of studies from a variety of disciplines (medicine, sociology, psychology and economics) have reached the same consensus: children do best when raised by their biological opposite-sex married parents.¹¹ And contrary to claims by homosexual activists and their allies, these

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studies do not just show that kids need *any two* parents, but that they need *both a mother and a father* to thrive. For example:

- The nation's leading non-partisan child advocacy organization, Child Trends, concluded, "An extensive body of research tells us that children do best when they grow up with both biological parents in a low-conflict marriage. ... Thus, it is not simply the presence of two parents, as some have assumed, but the presence of *two biological parents* that seem to support child development."¹²
- After examining family status and child well-being, including children raised by same-sex parents, the Center for Law and Social Policy concluded that: "on average, children do better when raised by two married, biological parents who have low-conflict relationships."¹³

Creating Broken Families

Homosexual marriage proponents, such as Judge Walker in the Proposition 8 trial, dismiss this evidence, arguing that most of it is based on studies of single parent or divorced families. However, what these studies of broken families highlight is the importance of both parents to a child's well-being. In particular, this research shows the critical role that fathers play in a child's life.

Research on fatherless children has shown us that losing that vital connection to one's father can cause lifelong harm. That is because every child has a hole inside his or her heart that only a mother's love and a father's love can fill. When one parent is missing, for whatever reason, a child spends his or her entire life feeling half-empty. Just ask any child that has been raised in a broken home, or any single mother who has raised a fatherless child. Family scholar and author, Maggie Gallagher, who spent years raising her eldest son on her own, describes father-hunger as "an ache in the heart, a gnawing anxiety in the

gut ... a longing for a man, not a woman, who will care for you, protect you, show you how to survive in the world."¹⁴

So what does homosexual parenting have to do with broken families? It has everything to do with it because homosexual parenting *creates* broken families. What is important to remember in this debate is that lesbian or gay parenting situations create either motherless or fatherless homes for children. Essentially, the legalization of same-sex "marriage" and same-sex adoption involve manipulating the norm that society will embrace for future generations as the best family environment for children.

A Natural Desire

In 2002, comedian Rosie O'Donnell was leading a crusade to legalize homosexual adoption in Florida. During an interview with Diane Sawyer on ABC News, she admitted that her adopted son Parker, who was being raised by Rosie and her female partner, had expressed a desire for a dad. "And would it be easier for them if I were married to a man?" Rosie asked in the interview. "It probably would. But as I said to my son, Parker, 'If you were to have a daddy, you wouldn't have me as a mommy because I'm the kind of mommy who wants another mommy.'"¹⁵

Like O'Donnell, many homosexual activists often dismiss the natural desire of children for a mother and father as mere childish whims, or the result of societal pressure, or as something children will eventually get over. However, this natural desire for the opposite-sex parent is clearly something deeper, as evident in a memoir written by openly gay writer and activist, Mark Matousek. In *The Boy He Left Behind*, Matousek, who was raised by a single mother, describes his lifelong search for his father, who left when he was just a boy. Consider the five questions Matousek wants to ask his lost father: "Why did you leave me? Where did you go? How does a man act? Am I good? How should I live now?"¹⁶

Later in the book, Matousek writes, "When it comes to the workings of a man's heart, the instinct he'd have for finding the door and knowing how to enter the world—the things a woman can't teach a boy, no matter how hard she tries—I was completely stumped. ... There was no one around to explain what to do with this masculine power, which felt ... too big, too loud, too fierce, too hard, too wild, too much in every single way." He adds, "I improvised the best I could, invented myself from bits and pieces of what I saw in the men around me, but the results were more like *paper-mache* than the solid article."¹⁷ While Matousek's book is by no means intended to be supportive of the traditional family, his lifelong search for his father is a powerful testimony to the critical importance of both opposite sex parents to child well-being.

In a more recent example, a national study on young adults conceived through sperm donation, including a small sample of lesbian couple families,



found a recurring theme among these young people of “*looking for my father everywhere.*” According to the 2009 study:

- Among the young adults raised by lesbian couples, over one-third agreed “it is wrong to conceive a fatherless child.”
- Also, 33 percent said that when they see friends with biological moms and dads they feel sad.
- Nearly half of these young adults said, “My sperm donor is half of who I am.”¹⁸

The above examples are reminders that all children—no matter how they are conceived or into what type of family environment they are born or adopted—desire to know where they came from, who they look like, where they get certain characteristics, and most importantly, to know and be known by their own mother and father.¹⁹

Necessary Differences

Finally, it is important to come back to a very simple biological fact that has not changed, despite breakthroughs in reproductive technology. It still takes a male and a female—even in a lab—to make a baby, and it takes a mother and father to raise one successfully. Brain research, parenting studies, and frankly human experience testify to a simple, yet powerful truth—men and women differ not only physically, but also mentally and emotionally, and men and women parent in unique and equally necessary ways.

Sociologist David Poponoe, former director of the National Marriage Project, wrote in his book, *Life Without Father*, “Beyond being merely a second adult or third party, fathers—men—bring an array of positive inputs to a child, unique and irreplaceable qualities that women do not ordinarily bring. Despite their many similarities, males and females are different to the core. They think differently, and act differently. . . . By every indication, the expression of these differences is important for child development.”²⁰

For example, Dr. Poponoe notes that, in general, fathers serve as: protectors and providers; as role models, especially for boys—teaching boys how to be men, and teaching girls how to relate to men. When it comes to interacting with babies, fathers tend to encourage freedom by holding babies further away, facing out to the world, or over their shoulders, or bouncing them up and down. Fathers put more emphasis on rough and tumble play, and encourage independence. And they have a brief, direct communication style.²¹

Mothers, on the other hand, generally tend to be nurturers, and they will hold babies close, cradling them, and sheltering them from the world. They get down on a child’s level when they play. Mothers encourage emotional security and personal safety, and they tend to talk more openly and stress relationships.²²

As Dr. Poponoe writes: “children instinctively realize that the world is made up of two sexes, that each sex possesses biological and psychological

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traits that balance and complement the other, and that each sex brings something unique and important to children’s lives.”²³

Conclusion: Gender Matters

Children recognize the importance of having both a mom and a dad, and they instinctively realize that something *necessary* is missing when one opposite-sex parent is absent, even in same-sex parenting situations. Attempting to say otherwise, simply to satisfy the desires of some adults, disregards the basic needs of every child, and what thousands of studies across a variety of disciplines have shown to be the best family environment for raising the next generation. Within the family, children learn what it means to be men and women, and how to relate to the opposite sex and to the world in general. The family is also where children form the gender norms and values that will define future generations. Gender (two opposite-sex parents) not only matters to parenting, it remains the essential ingredient, along with marriage, to raising healthy children and building a strong society.

State laws ought to recognize and protect the natural family in their efforts to provide the legal framework for a strong and healthy society. Lawmakers in North Carolina must resist the use of the law for social experimentation, especially ongoing attempts to: redefine marriage, change adoption laws to allow homosexuals to adopt, and/or incorporate concepts such as “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” into public school classrooms. Instead, lawmakers should support measures that strengthen the natural family, such as the Marriage Protection Amendment, restrictions on adoptions by homosexual couples and single individuals, and pro-family educational policies that teach respect for *all* without promoting gender and sexual confusion. The goal of public policy in North Carolina should be to strengthen, not deconstruct, the family model that remains the best environment for producing and sustaining the next generation of citizens—the natural family. ❖

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ENDNOTES:

- 1) NCFPC, "Court Rules Same-sex Adoption Void," Special Report, 12/21/10, as found at: <http://www.ncfamily.org/stories/101221s1.html>
- 2) Human Rights Campaign, "Second-Parent Adoption," as found at: <http://www.hrc.org/issues/2385.htm>. (9 states plus D.C. currently allow gay couples to adopt through second-parent adoption, either through statute OR state appellate court rulings).
- 3) Perry v. Schwarzenegger, pg. 95, Factual Finding # 70.
- 4) Ibid., pg. 127.
- 5) Stanton, Glenn, "Are Kids Really All Right? What the Research Really Says About the Parents Kids Need," Focus on the Family, 2010.
- 6) Lerner, Robert and Althea Nagai, Ph.D., No Basis: What the studies don't tell us about same-sex parenting, 2001.
- 7) From Steven Nock's testimony to Attorney General of Canada. Cited in: Gallagher, Maggie and Joshua Baker, "Do Mothers and Fathers Really Matter? The Social Science Evidence on Marriage and Child Well-being," Institute for Marriage and Public and Policy, February 2007.
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- 9) William Meezan and Jonathan Rauch, "Gay Marriage, Same-Sex Parenting, and America's Children," in *The Future of Children*, 15 (2005): 104, 105, 107. Cited in, Stanton, Glenn, "Are Kids Really All Right? What the Research Really Says About the Parents Kids Need," Focus on the Family, 2010.
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- 12) Kristin Anderson Moore, et al., "Marriage From a Child's Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do about It?" *Child Trends Research Brief*, June 2002, p. 1-2.
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- 16) Matousek, Mark, *The Boy He Left Behind: A Man's Search for His Lost Father*, New York: Riverhead Books, 2000, pg. 24-25.
- 17) Ibid, Matousek, pg. 133.
- 18) Marquardt, Elizabeth, Norval Glenn and Karen Clark, "My Daddy's Name is Donor: A New Study of Young Adults Conceived Through Sperm Donation," Institute for American Values, 2010 (see pg. 11 in particular)
- 19) Ibid.
- 20) Poponoe, David, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society*, New York: The Free Press, 1996, pg. 139-140.
- 21) Ibid., pg. 146, see chapter 5.
- 22) Ibid.
- 23) Ibid. pg. 8.