

No Basis: What the Studies Don't Tell Us About Same-Sex Parenting,

by Robert Lerner, Ph.D. and Althea Nagai, Ph.D.

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This important new book poses a long-overdue challenge to flood of studies—often conducted by researchers who are themselves gay or lesbian, and funded by gay-friendly foundations—which are, despite their questionable experimental design, now having a dramatic impact on law and public policy.

Lerner and Nagai tackle the painstaking (and indeed, professionally risky) job of taking apart those studies. They look at them one by one to expose the flaws in sampling, design and conclusions which have led U.S. and other courts to change marriage, child custody and adoption laws.

The American Psychological Association has stated that there is no evidence of difference in social and psychological adjustment between children raised in gay households and those raised with heterosexual parents. Other professional groups have followed suit, urging that gay marriage and adoption be legalized. The American Academy of Pediatrics is the most recent association to weigh in in favor of gay adoption.

But is the conclusion of “no difference” between homosexual and heterosexual households indeed warranted?

Robert Lerner, Ph.D., and Althea Nagai, Ph.D., professionals in the field of quantitative analysis, evaluated 49 empirical studies on same-sex parenting. They found at least one “fatal” research flaw in all forty-nine studies. Some major problems uncovered in those studies including: the following:

- Unclear hypotheses and research designs
- Missing or inadequate comparison groups
- Self-constructed, unreliable and invalid measurements
- Non-random samples, including use of “friendship circles” (participants who recruit other participants)
- Samples too small to yield meaningful results
- Missing or inadequate statistical analysis

It is now routinely asserted in our courts, legal and social science journals, and the media that it makes “no difference” whether a child has a mother and a father, two fathers, or two mothers. Reference is often made to social-scientific studies that are claimed to have “demonstrated” this conclusively.

In a foreword to *No Basis*, David Orgon Coolidge Director, of the Marriage Law Project in Washington, D.C., explains that the book project was undertaken by the authors “at the



risk of damaging their professional and academic reputations.” They have not only analyzed the flaws in the current studies, but they have proposed a better way to accurately evaluate homosexual parenting.

Dr. Coolidge describes how he first became interested in analyzing this body of research:

“I first saw the need for such an evaluation back in 1996, in Honolulu, Hawaii. I sat through two weeks of testimony in the same-sex ‘marriage’ case, *Baehr v. Miike*. Almost all of the testimony was by social scientists. It raised questions I could not shake.

“Many of those questions are larger ones, such as how science and morality relate. But

other questions were more straightforward: Are these studies well-done by normal standards? Should journals publish them? Should policymakers rely on them?”

Coolidge discovered that although the studies are remarkably flawed, yet “the fact of the matter is that many people, including policymakers, are relying upon these studies in litigation, legislation, scholarly writing, and in the larger public debate.”

Social Scientists as Gay Advocates

Lerner and Nagai uncovered another very troubling fact about this body of research: the social scientists conducting these studies are rarely ever neutral about the results they hope to find:

“With one exception, the authors of these studies wish to influence public policy to support same-sex marriage and the adoption of children by homosexual couples. While the authors of these studies have every right to advocate this point of view, as do those who disagree with them, their wish means that the stakes in obtaining valid answers to these research questions are very high.”

The studies’ findings are indeed provocative, Lerner and Nagai say, but they are not strong enough to justify dramatic alterations in long-established public policies. To justify changes in public policy, studies should be strong enough that “policy makers have faith in the study’s reliability, and confidence that more research is unlikely to overturn its findings.” Relying on the wrong studies, the authors conclude, could have devastating social consequences. ■