

Chapter 24

Children of Same-Sex Couples

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ABSTRACT

As the United States becomes more accepting of sexual minority people, more opportunities have become available for same-sex couples to become parents. Blended families with a new stepparent, planned families via insemination, as well as adoption and fostering are changing what defines a family. As the definition of a family changes, so must the ways in which schools interact with each family type. The shared experiences of sexual minority parents and their children are explored, and recommendations for schools are made.

SUPPORTING THE CHILDREN OF SAME-SEX COUPLES

The definition of what constitutes a family is rapidly changing from the original mother, father, and children to many various other forms, including single parents and children, two mothers and children, two fathers and children, and multiple parents and children. As family structure continues to transform and broaden away from the traditional nuclear family definition, the impact this has on students, both positively and negatively, needs to be considered as researchers continue to expand and refine theories and practices related to students and their families. Farr (2017) explains that research over the last 30 years has shown that the cognitive and socioemotional development of children raised by same-sex parents is equivalent to that of children raised by heterosexual parents and these children have a comparable psychological adjustment as compared to their peers raised by different-gendered parents (see also Fedewa, et al., 2015; Biblarz & Savci, 2010). But as the child begins school, a new set of stressors affects all families, and it is important to understand how stigmas and prejudices affect this new type of family and to explore the microaggressions that children face in school and explore their resiliency in dealing with them (Farr, Crain, et al., 2016; Prendergast & MacPhee, 2018). For example, does the family feel welcomed and supported in the school environment, are the parents singled out or excluded, is the child bullied for having same-sex parents, or if there was a divorce, is the child adjusting to the new family dynamics (Farr, 2017). These are all topics that require further exploration by researchers

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to form evidence-based teaching modalities in the educational systems, as well as evidence-based approaches for school counselors. When same-sex parents enroll their child in school, it is important to understand the various issues that they experience being a minority group and to help them navigate the educational system for themselves and for their children, encouraging and supporting their own advocacy for their families.

The culture in America is trending towards more acceptance of minority people. While there remains benefits to the wealthy, white, heterosexual majority culture, opportunities have arisen for minorities that were not present in the earlier part of the 20th century. In 1968, Bill Jones became the first single gay man to adopt a child in the state of California and also one of the first nationwide, although he was advised to keep his sexuality undisclosed (Rudolph, 2017). In 1979, a California gay couple jointly adopted a child for the first time in the United States (Rudolph, 2017). The first state to allow same-sex couples to jointly adopt was New Jersey in 1997, and Florida was the last state in 2010 to allow gay and lesbian couples to jointly adopt children (Rudolph, 2017). In 2015, laws changed allowing same-sex marriages to occur which opened the door to adoption and fostering and eliminated any bans preventing same-sex couples from having that privilege (Rudolph, 2017). According to Gates (2013), same-sex couples who consider themselves married are more than twice as likely to be raising children as same-sex couples who just consider themselves a couple. In order to be effective, we need to have an understanding of this unique population's experiences, both for the parents as well as for the children, so as to help them navigate the challenges this group will encounter as the children grow and mature.

Through his report compiled in 2013 on the various statistics representing LGBT parenting in the United States, Gates reported that approximately 3 million LGBT Americans are parents, and approximately 6 million Americans have an LGBT parent, or approximately 2% of the population. He further explains that, "More than 111,000 same-sex couples are raising an estimated 170,000 biological, step, or adopted children" (Gates, 2013, p. 1), which is 24% of female couples and 10% of male couples. In addition to these figures, Gates states that a same-sex couple is four times more likely than different gendered couples to be raising an adopted child and six times more likely than different gendered couples to be raising a foster child, making this one of the largest growing types of families. As this growing population of families navigates school and other daily interactions, educators, counselors, and school systems will need to understand their specific issues and needs to support them effectively.

BARRIERS TO SAME-SEX PARENTING

When looking at the laws or reasons cited against same-sex parenting, those opposed state concerns for the welfare and well-being of the child involved. Opponents state that the child needs a mother and a father to develop and mature in a normal fashion (see Farr, 2017; Farr, Oakley, & Ollen, 2016). However, research does not support those concerns. Farr and Farr, Oakley, and Ollen explain that a review of 30 years of research on the outcomes for children of same-sex parents showed that these children develop at the same rate as those raised by heterosexual parents and also have positive outcomes like their peers (see also Biblarz & Savci, 2010). These studies go onto explain that same-sex parented children are no more likely than their different-sex parented peers to experience problems with behavioral issues, academic accomplishments, peer relationships, gender development, romantic relationships, or sexual identity (see also Biblarz & Savci, 2010). Ray and Gregory (2001) also reviewed studies completed in the US and the UK and found that there was no significant difference between children of same-sex parents and those

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