

PRESS RELEASE

June 19, 2014

FOR: IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement from SPSSI member Rachel Farr on today's March for Marriage on the National Mall.

There Is no Case for Discrimination

Today's "March for Marriage" on the National Mall is a last ditch effort to salvage the case against gay marriage by arguing that it causes actual harm to real people—in this case, the children of gay and lesbian unions. Sponsored by The National Organization for Marriage (NOM), the march is dedicated to the proposition that "marriage matters because kids deserve both a mom and a dad." Or as a scheduled speaker from the co-sponsoring Heritage Foundation has written, marriage equality denies "the significance of both mothering and fathering to children."

The problem with these claims is that there is no empirical evidence to substantiate them. Decades of psychological, sociological and economic research has yet to discover a single measurable difference in the well-being of children raised by lesbian and gay parents and children raised by heterosexual parents. Studies since the late 1970s have found no discernible difference in cognitive skills and academic achievement, emotional and behavioral characteristics, gender development, or relationships with peers and romantic partners.

- For instance, Michael Rosenfeld used 2000 Census data to compare children from a variety of family structures that included 2,000 with lesbian mothers and 1,500 with gay fathers. He found that there were no differences in grade retention among children from different family structures. Similarly, Jennifer Wainright and colleagues discovered in anationally representative study of about 90 teens in the United States, published in 2004, that academic outcomes were similar for those with same-sex female parents and those with different-sex parents.
- Researchers Charlotte Patterson, Abbie Goldberg, Nanette Gartrell and Susan Golombok have all spearheaded major studies investigating parenting and children's outcomes in families with lesbian and gay parents and all have found strikingly similar results: Children and adolescents do not differ in behavioral, social, or emotional adjustment on

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the basis of their parents' sexual orientation and gay and lesbian parents are just as effective in their parenting roles as heterosexual parents.

- The one study that reportedly found differences between children of same and opposite sex parents was so methodologically flawed that the journal that published it later reprimanded its author; its findings were debunked by the academic community and discredited in courtrooms.

In research on adopted children conducted with my colleagues Charlotte Patterson and Stephen Forssell, I found no significant differences between the 56 young children adopted by same-sex parents and the 50 adopted by heterosexual parents in terms of behavior problems or gender role behavior. In addition, we found that same-sex and opposite-sex parents were not significantly different from one another in terms of levels of parenting stress, parenting techniques, or couple relationship satisfaction.

But even if there aren't quantifiable differences in outcome, aren't children best served by having parents who bring gender-specific styles to their parenting? Michael Lamb, a psychologist at the University of Cambridge, has exhaustively reviewed this question. He says that "nothing about a parent's sex determines the capacity to be a good parent," and that there is "no evidence that children *need* relationships with parents of both sexes to develop normally." Rather than some particular constellation of gendered characteristics in both parents, what children need from their parents is love, warmth, support, stability, consistency and guidance.

NOM is free to oppose marriage equality on the basis of its own moral and religious commitments. What it can't claim is that preserving marriage as between "one man and one woman" will in any way affect the well-being of children. The research warrants no cause for discrimination against lesbian and gay parents.

Rachel Farr is Research Assistant Professor with the Rudd Adoption Research Program in the Psychology Department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

For more SPSSI information about same-sex parenting, see here: <http://bit.ly/1pmz76o>

For more SPSSI information about adoption among same-sex couples, see here: <http://bit.ly/1ynMbfY>