

New study suggests that same-sex parents are judged more harshly than heterosexual parents

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Is there a double standard for gay parents? A new study published this month by a Binghamton University research team suggests that gay parents are being judged more harshly than straight parents.

Members of Binghamton University's Interdisciplinary Research Group for the Study of Sexuality and Gender conducted a study of people's reactions to the parenting behaviors of gay and straight parents. Their results showed a clear pattern of negative reactions from [study participants](#) towards a gay couple engaging in exactly the same negative parenting behaviors as a straight couple.

Research Associate Professor Sean Massey and Instructor Ann Merriwether of Binghamton, and Justin Garcia from The Kinsey Institute at Indiana University, published the results of their study earlier this month in the *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*.

"We noted that when parents displayed favorable parenting behaviors like comforting an upset child, gay and straight parents were judged in a similar, positive manner," said Massey. "However, if parents got frustrated - raised their voice or slapped their child on the hand, the gay parents were judged more negatively than the straight parents."

Massey says this marked difference in the study groups' reactions is significant. While no parent is perfect, the researchers believe that

holding gay parents to a different standard adds additional stress to the already stressful job of [parenthood](#). It can also negatively affect their chances of adopting or becoming [foster parents](#).

"We feel that it is very important for [social workers](#) and adoption counselors to be made aware of the effects of modern anti-gay [prejudices](#) and they need to educate themselves and develop policies that help protect against these potential [biases](#)," said Massey.

There is a serious shortage of people stepping up to foster or adopt the hundreds of thousands of children who are in the system waiting to find a new foster family or adopted family. The gay community is a resource for many of these children but this study indicates that if judged more harshly than their straight counterparts, gay parents are at a disadvantage.

"Raising awareness of these attitudes is a critical step in being able to utilize a potentially valuable pool of prospective adoptive and foster parents," said Massey, "but it is also vital to improving the day to day lives of our families and our children."

On Thursday, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a policy statement supporting same-sex marriage and reiterating its support for the adoption of children by gay families. The researchers say that with strong support for gay marriage coming from the medical and psychological professional organizations, and with increasing support among the general public (58% of whom now support same-sex marriage), the next frontier for gay rights may be same-sex parenting. Massey says although overt and hostile prejudice may indeed be diminishing, modern, subtle prejudice continues to affect the lives of lesbians, gay men, and their families.

"Prejudicial judgments, however subtle, that serve to limit access of these families to potential support and resources, ultimately harm today's

youths," says Massey.

The researchers strongly encourage the continued exploration of the effect this subtle prejudice has on the wellbeing of same-sex families and how best to work toward its elimination.

More information: The study was published in this month's issue of the *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* and can be viewed through the journal's website: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1550428X.2013.765257

Provided by Binghamton University

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