



WORSE THAN ²GAY DADS

From within our community or from the mouth of Rick Santorum, gay parents often come under fire and that can be a challenge for our children.

On January 6, 2012 former Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum suggested that children are better off with a father in prison than being raised by lesbian parents. Citing the work of an anti-poverty expert, Santorum said, “He [the “expert”] found that even fathers in jail who had abandoned their kids were still better than no father at all to have in their children’s lives.”

Santorum continued to say that gays raising children amounts to “robbing children of something they need, they deserve, they have a right to. You may rationalize that that isn’t true, but in your own life and in your own heart, you know it’s true.”

This weary diatribe isn’t surprising from Ricky.

However, on September 15, 2012, gay actor Rupert Everett shared in an interview, “I can’t think of anything worse than being brought up by two gay dads.” In a *Sunday Times* piece, Everett said that he agrees with his own mother that children “need a father and a mother.”

Really? Why the *Ozzie and Harriet* comment from a gay man?

At the core of Everett’s comment is not only self-hatred in the form of internalized homophobia, but also ignorance of how the definition of “family” continues to grow and change.

The 2010 Census revealed there are approximately 13.7 million single parents in the United States today, and those parents are responsible for raising 21.8 million children (approximately 26 percent of children under 21 in the U.S. today). According to the Williams Institute (an LGBT think tank based out of UCLA), 22 percent of LGBT people in the U.S. are currently raising children. And, as of 2008, a record 49 million Americans, or 16.1% of the total U.S. population, lived in a family household that contained at least two adult generations or a grandparent and at least one other generation, according to the Pew Research Center.

More than statistics that confront Santorum and Everett’s outdated views, qualitative research confirms that children don’t “need a father

and a mother;” rather, they need engaged, supportive adults who care about them.

In the 1995 documentary, *Ballot Measure 9*, Portland’s Kathleen Sadaat makes the excellent point that “the downfall of America isn’t that Heather has two mommies.” Instead, Sadaat continues, “It’s that Heather has a mommy and a daddy who aren’t paying attention to her – that Heather has a country who isn’t paying attention to her.”

So if Heather’s two mommies aren’t the worst thing for her, could it even be that Heather may have an advantage? Psychologist Abbie Gold’s research makes the point that the accidental pregnancy rate for heterosexuals is almost 50 percent. Her study concludes that gay parents “tend to be more motivated, more committed than heterosexual parents on average, because [most of them] chose to be parents.”

Psychologist Peggy Drexler’s research demonstrates that children raised by gays and lesbian parents not only perform equally well in school as their peers with heterosexual parents, but that the children of gay and lesbian parents are “more self-aware, more adept at communicating their feelings, and exhibit more empathy for people different from themselves.” Her research shows that children of gay and lesbian parents develop skills in “thinking independently and standing up for what they believe in. This distinguishes them from many children with straight parents.”

So, Rupert Everett, there are much worse things than being raised by two men: abuse, neglect or perhaps the movie, *The Next Best Thing*.

The biggest challenge for children raised by gay and lesbian parents is not their parents, but homophobic laws and attitudes like Santorum’s and Everett’s. As Drexler concludes in her research: “Gay and lesbian parents represent not the worst-case scenario, but the best.” §

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