

June 22, 2010

To: Jim Daly and Interested Students of the Family

Re: Are Men Necessary?

An analysis of three new articles on the status of men in society...

- Hannah Rosin, "The End of Men," *the Atlantic*, July/August 2010.
- Nanette Gartrell and Henny Bos, "US National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study: Psychological Adjustment of 17-Year-Old Adolescents," *Pediatrics*, 126 (2010) 1-9.
- Pamela Paul, "Are Father's Necessary?" *the Atlantic*, July/August 2010.

Are still men necessary? Of course, this is a silly question.

But in my general research reading last week, it was a recurring theme in various sources, from the *Atlantic* to the journal *Pediatrics*.

The *Atlantic's* cover this month laments "the End of Men" and *Pediatrics* features a new longitudinal study asserting that children living with two lesbians fare *better* than kids raised by a mother who does so with a man, as does an additional piece by Pamela Paul in this issue of the *Atlantic*.

The *Atlantic* "End of Men" piece actually gets it more right than the other two articles.

Atlantic: The End of Men?

Hannah Rosin - a rare journalist who can delight as often as she can infuriate - has written the *Atlantic's* new cover story "The End of Men" which sports the subtitle: "How Women are Taking Control of Everything." Rosin's thesis is provocative and has a great deal of truth behind it: women are indeed overtaking men in a great many influential ways of late in society:

- **Baby Sex-Preference:** Increasingly, those getting pregnant through artificial insemination and choosing the sex of their child are going for girls by a margin of 50 to 75 percent.
- **Higher Education:** Women now earn 60 percent of both the bachelor's and master's degrees, about half of all law and medical degrees, and 42 percent of all MBAs. Men are more likely than women to hold only a high-school degree!
- **Employability:** Earlier this year, for the first time in American history, women were employed at higher rates than men.
- **Job Retention:** Three quarters of the jobs lost in the last two years were lost by men, with the hardest hit industries being decidedly male: construction, manufacturing and high-finance.
- **Growth Industries:** Men dominate only two of the 15 job categories projected to grow over the next decade: janitor and computer engineering.



- *Management Positions:* Women hold 51.4 percent of managerial and professional jobs, up from 26 percent in 1980. One third of today's physicians are women, as well as 45 percent of law-firm associates.
- *Earnings at the Top:* While only 3 percent of Fortune 500 companies are headed by women, these women out earn their male counterparts by 43 percent on average, receiving bigger raises as well.

Are these factors true because women are excelling or because men are falling behind or both?

One analyst remarked of these declining trend-lines, that men "are just failing to adapt."¹ Rosin reports the international nature of the problem, explaining the Japanese are in "a national panic" over the rise of the male "herbivores" as they call them— young men who are "acting cartoonishly feminine" and pathetically docile.²

Ashley, a cute 24 year-old grad students observes of her male peers, "Guys high-five each other when they get a C, while girls beat themselves up over a B-minus. Guys play video games in their rooms while the girls are at study hall." She reflects and wonders, "In 2012, I will be Dr. Burrell. Will I have to deal with guys [as potential mates] who don't even have a bachelor's degree?" The odds are increasingly against her. (Note that Ashley is successfully pursuing her career dream, but she also cares whether she will find a man who is at least an equal. For most young women today, a man is not like a bicycle to a fish! They still want them very much, but they want good ones.)

A female college senior remarked – on assessing the pool of men around her – many guys "are the new ball and chain."

Rosin notes that "the modern economy is becoming a place where women hold the cards" and it seems as if men are not keeping up.³

Glenn's Take: While I don't think these trends portend "the end of men" – humanity, and the male half of it, is a little more robust than that – I do think that Rosin highlights some important trend lines that should not be dismissed. Anthropologists note, for various reasons, that manhood is more of a taught/learned behavior than healthy womanhood is in all cultures. Girls become good women more naturally than boys become good men. And if a culture does not intentionally teach young boys how to become healthy men, they are more likely to become adult boys, and thus, a serious social problem. Rosin notes this: "Allowing generations of boys to grow up feeling rootless and obsolete is not a recipe for a peaceful future." And this is not good news for women. Ask any group of smart young women today how they decide between all the great choices in the pool of eligible young men and they get the joke. Ask the same of young men, and many will struggle with admitting they are intimidated by the success and achievement of the young women they really desire. *Every culture has to be in the business of manufacturing good men out of good boys. We are not doing that today!* Rosin's article is a reporting on the indicators of this fact. This is both a problem and an opportunity!

And I don't perceive that young women are increasingly dominating in higher education and the job market because they are necessarily hyper-ambitious, but in part because they know they have to make a way for themselves because being able to depend on a man is not as likely because of both the state of men today as well as an increasingly challenging economy. Truth we cannot ignore.

Pediatrics: Daddies Don't Matter?

Two major studies on lesbian parenting have been published in serious academic journals in 2010, both asserting that - not only do kids raised by lesbian moms do well - but in fact do *better* in some important areas of development than kids raised by a mom and a dad!⁴

¹ Hannah Rosin, "The End of Men," *the Atlantic*, July/August 2010, p. 66.

² Rosin, "The End of Men," p. 70.

³ Rosin, "The End of Men," p. 60.

⁴ Timothy J. Biblarz and Judith Stacey, "How Does Gender of Parents Matter?" *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72 (2010) 3-22; Nanette Gartrell and Henry Bos, "US National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study: Psychological Adjustment of 17-Year-Old Adolescents," *Pediatrics*, 126 (2010) 1-9.



In fact, this new study in *Pediatrics* – published by the American Academy of Pediatrics – found that kids whose lesbian parents break-up don't face any harm from the break up. You read that correctly! This is what the study states in its abstract about the supposed superior outcomes from lesbian homes:

“According to their mothers’ reports, the 17-year-old daughters and sons of lesbian mothers were rated *significantly higher* in social, school/academic, and total competence and *significantly lower* in social problems, rule-breaking, aggressive and externalizing problem behavior than their age-matched counterparts in [a] normative sample of American Youth.”⁵ (emphasis added)

And

“Within the lesbian family sample, no...differences were found among adolescent offspring...whose mothers were still together and offspring whose mothers had separated.”⁶

If this data is to be believed, this means that lesbian homes are now the new super-homes for kids!

First, apparently children raised by two lesbian moms do better than kids in heterosexual parents at receiving the good and avoiding the bad in life. Wow!

Second, even if a child's two moms split, these kids seem to be completely unaffected, Teflon-like, by this dramatic family change! This is in dramatic contrast to what mountains of research has consistently found when children's mothers and fathers end their relationships; the negative impact upon children is significant both in degree and duration.

Are we really to believe that we disadvantage children by giving them fathers as active participants in their lives, rather than minimally as sperm-donors?

That is exactly what this and another piece in this month's *Atlantic* says. Pamela Paul, in “Are Fathers Necessary?” quotes the Biblarz/Stacey study (published in January 2010), “based strictly on the published science, one could argue that two women parent better on average than a woman and a man...” She ends her piece with this requiem, “The bad news for Dad is that despite common perception, there's nothing objectively essential about his contribution. The good news is, we've gotten used to him.”⁷

Glenn's Take: *Oh, where to start!?*

First, one could *only* reach such a remarkable conclusion if she relied *only* on very recent and methodologically challenged studies conducted by researchers who concentrate primarily on activist, lesbian research, ignoring the massive body of mainstream research on how fathers make numerous unique and essential contributions to their children's well-being and development.⁸

Second, all students of the family should note one little rhetorical sleight of hand the gay and lesbian family researchers use, which is demonstrated in an assertion in this new study:

“Subsequently, studies have shown that there are no significant differences in psychological development between children who are reared in lesbian and heterosexual households.”⁹

Statements like this are deceptive and have served as the foundational conclusion in research on lesbian parenting. The primary problem is it gives no indication as to what *form* of heterosexual households they are comparing the lesbian households to. It is essentially saying “children in lesbian homes show no

⁵ Gartrell and Bos, 2010, p. 1.

⁶ Gartrell and Bos, 2010, p. 1.

⁷ Pamela Paul, “Are Father's Necessary?” *The Atlantic* July/August 2010, p. 63.

⁸ Only a few such sources are: Ronald P. Rohner and Robert A. Veneziano, “The Importance of Father Love: History and Contemporary Evidence,” *Review of General Psychology* 5.4 (2001): 382-405; Kyle D. Pruett, *Fatherhood: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care for Your Child*, (New York: The Free Press, 2000); Paul R. Amato and Fernando Rivera, “Paternal Involvement and Children's Behavior Problems,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 61 (1999): 375-384; David Popenoe, *Life Without Father*, (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

⁹ Gartrell and Bos, 2010, p. 2. The AAP has said the same thing in its earlier statements in favor of same-sex parenting.

difference in development than children in some types of heterosexual homes.” It doesn’t really say anything meaningful or informative.

What kinds of hetero-households are they similar to?

Biological parents in first, intact marriage? Cohabiting biological?
Single parent? Single mother with live-in partner?
Step-family? Adoptive?

None of these lesbian studies even consider this obvious and critical question, a glaring and damning oversight.

As any student of the family literature knows, the last 30 years of research has consistently shown with a very impressive body of diverse research that there are vast and serious differences in how various heterosexual family forms either contribute to or diminish healthy child development. Some do very well and some do so poorly they should be *avoided* when possible. *Which do the lesbian homes resemble?* These recent lesbian studies can’t tell us because they never considered the question worth asking. But it is.

Third, the very small body of studies on gay families - which are nearly all focus on lesbian families - have famously been plagued with substantial methodological problems, which these two new studies recognize. But these two new studies only improve upon the situation by minute degrees. W. Bradford Wilcox, a sociologist at the University of Virginia and Director of the National Marriage Project brings a measure of sobriety to these recent findings, warning “the studies relied upon small, unrepresentative samples of same-sex and heterosexual couples. You just cannot draw strong conclusions one way or another from these studies, given their methodological limits.”¹⁰

These methodological problems are clear to even the casual reader. In this latest study, the data was collected on only 78 children through the mothers’ self-reporting on their child’s welfare. The study explains these mothers were recruited by volunteering for the study (rather than randomly selected) via announcements at “lesbian events, women’s bookstores, and in lesbian newspapers throughout metropolitan areas of Boston, Washington DC and San Francisco.”¹¹ So these were mothers from more urban and suburban areas, participants in ideological lesbian-thought culture and therefore, likely highly motivated study participants, evidenced by a remarkable 93% retention rate over the life of the study.

Is it possible these mothers, knowing they were participating in something called the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (NLLFS) could have felt inclined to be overly positive in their self-reporting? That could be one explanation for the startling and incongruent finding that children with lesbian parents face no negative impact when their mothers’ break-up.

Conclusion

Yes, men are struggling today and we have to be intentional about making sure that men and women recognize how important men are for the family and how important the family is for men. Speculating about the end of men and making sloppy conclusions in supposedly serious academic studies that fathers are unnecessary for the family - which have unfortunately been reported uncritically and verbatim far and wide in the larger press - don’t help us rise to this task.

And no culture has ever learned how to thrive without being intentional about making good men out of good boys. And ultimately, women and their children will not succeed unless we all succeed at this essential task of manufacturing men.

¹⁰ W. Bradford Wilcox, “Are Fathers Really Fungible?” FamilyScholars blog 6.14.10; <http://familyscholars.org/2010/06/14/are-fathers-really-fungible/>

¹¹ Gartrell and Bos, 2010, p. 3.