

“Changing face of parenting”

As the 20th century ended many social movements and opinions have changed in the United States regarding the rights of gay and lesbian parents and the rights that have been denied to them concerning marriage, adoption, and raising children.

Data from the 1990 census show that about 22 percent of lesbian partners and about five percent of gay male partners had children in their households. Of the 783,100 same sex couples reported in 2014, the number of lesbian and gay male couples with children increased to 23.7 percent for lesbians and more than doubled for gay male couples at 10.4 percent.

According to Keely Hultz, an Ohio University alumnus and mother of two children, these figures are not surprising. “Women are the ones that have the babies and have the maternal instinct whether they are gay or not,” said Hultz. “My best friend helped me to have a child and agreed I would be the main caregiver.” The ACLU reports that researchers estimate that the total number of children nationwide living with at least one gay parent ranges from six to 14 million.

Most children who have one gay or lesbian parent were in a heterosexual relationship that either still exists or has dissolved according to the report “The Effects of Marriage, Civil Union, and Domestic Partnership Laws on the Health and Well-being of Children” by Pediatrics, the Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Hultz’s lover and current partner Kat Hammond was married and had a child while she was married to a guy. “We stayed together for the kids but we both knew the relationship was not one that we both wanted,” said Hultz. “He was gone a lot on business trips and I did my own thing. I always knew that I was bi, but until I Keely I did not know that a real relationship with a woman was completely possible.”

In fact, 21.5 percent of lesbians have had their children biologically while for gay men the number is much lower at 10 percent. Same sex couples are more likely to have children from previous relationships compared to their opposite sex counterparts with 62 percent of lesbians having their children from a previous relationship.

Gay adoptions and fostering have also increased in the gay community reported the Williams Institute of UCLA with over 2,600 same sex partners fostering over 3,000 children in the US.

Andrew Stuart, a librarian at Ohio University and his partner Harvey Ballard fostered their son Dave at the age of 16. Dave was in a drug rehab and his mom at the time could not take care of him so they stepped in. "Dave is over 30, but to this day we are his parents," said Stuart. "We have grandchildren and are a large part of each other's lives even though Dave is much older. We spend all the holidays together and his mother's family has started to accept us."

Life Long Adoptions, an organization that helps gay and lesbian couple adopt or foster children, say that over 40 percent of all agencies and 83 percent of public agencies have had at least one gay or lesbian client. However, over one third of the agencies have rejected lesbian and gay applicants due to religious beliefs or belief that gay couples are not suitable to raise children but many psychologists today contest that way of thinking.

The American Academy of Pediatrics released a statement supporting same sex adoptions and fostering because "Children thrive in families that are stable and that provide permanent security, and the way we do that is through marriage," said Benjamin Siegel, who co-authored the policy statement.

Siegel goes on to state that gay couples choose to have kids because straight couples have so many "oops" babies and are more motivated and committed, gay couples nurture the neediest with 60 percent adopting across the races, and the upbringing teaches them empathy and open mindedness,

and kids appear to do better in school with higher GPAs, and children of gay couples have a boost of confidence.

“When the parental relationship works the children thrive because of the great role models they have and the parent’s sexuality has no importance,” said Rachel Farr from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Gay adoption is now legal in all 50 states with Mississippi being the last state to lift its ban on gay and lesbian adoptions and making it one of the largest proportions of its population to have children at 26 percent with over 21 percent of same sex couples in 2014 have step or adopted children.

“Another thing that has changed is how people have changed their minds regarding same sex couples and their ability to raise children,” said Hammond.

The latest Gallup poll supports Hammond’s opinion showing that in 1992, 63 percent of Americans said that same sex couples should not be able to have children or adopt and 29 percent said they were. Fast forward to 2014, the complete opposite has been reported. Over 60 percent of people polled said that same sex couples should have children or adopt while 35 percent said they should.

The trend of gay parenting approval has also mirrored the trend of gay couples having the right to marry. In 1996, 27 percent of Americans polled said that same sex marriages should be recognized by law while 30 percent said that gay couples have the right to adopt. In 2014 those numbers increased drastically with 63 percent agreeing that same sex couples should have the right to adopt and 55 percent said same sex marriages should be recognized by the law.

“I definitely think that the changing opinion has to do with the younger generations” said Stuart. “My partner and I have been together for 30 years and have seen a lot of changes in the gay community

and the right to marry and have children is definitely one of the most exciting things to happen to the gay community. “

The most recent Gallup poll seems to back up Stuart’s claim. In the 18 to 29-year-old age group, 77 percent believe same sex couples should have children and adopt while 59 percent of those over 50 believe that gay couples should have children.

Per the Williams Institute at UCLA, there are more than 16,000 same sex couple raising an estimated 22,000 and the numbers keep going up. Changing attitudes along with how younger people are becoming more and more accepting of the gay and lesbian community have created a huge influx of people feeling more comfortable with themselves and having children when less than ten years ago that was not the option for gay couples in the United States.

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