Same-sex parents in Israel: Social and psychological aspects

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Homosexuality and psychology/psychiatry

- Homosexuality as a pathology (DSM, 1952/1968)
- The removal of the diagnosis of “homosexuality” from the second edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM, 1973)
- Homosexuality as an alternative life-style
- More academic research involving gay men and lesbians

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Two basic positions regarding homosexuality

1. Essentialism

   Innate (studies of twins, genes, brain structures) vs. learned (psychoanalytical approaches and behavioral approaches), and explanations that combine the two

2. Social constructionism
Non-essentialist research agenda

- Exploring associations between core developmental tasks (such as self-acceptance of sexual orientation, self-disclosure, couplehood, and parenthood) and psychological well-being among LGB individuals
- Mental health indicators, unique hostile-world scenarios, and coping strategies among LGB individuals.
- Couplehood and parenthood challenges and strengths
- Children being raised in same-sex families
Re-examination of the family concept

► The post-modern era:
reexamine basic rules and assumptions in society and suggesting more contextual explanations for social and psychological phenomena.

► The 60’s and 70’s:
exploring social oppression being perpetuated by gender and sexuality essentialist explanations (Focault, 1978).

► Social constructionism.

► Today:
In response to political, technological, and sociocultural changes, the family unit is in the heart of political, legal, and sociological debate.
Re-examination of the family concept (2)

- Women’s liberation movement
- Sexual revolution
- Developments in technology of fertility medicine
- Emphasis on values of self-fulfillments and freedom
- Reducing in the stigma related to raising a child out of marriage
- In light of more liberal environment, more gay people come out of the closet
- Increase in social legitimacy to raise children in same-sex families

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Same-sex families in Israel

- Gay men/lesbians who become parents through heterosexual relationship
- Lesbians who use sperm donation (HMO support)
- Shared parenting conducted in agreement with a heterosexual or lesbian woman
- Surrogacy services abroad (Israeli law allows surrogacy for heterosexual couples but not for gay couples)
- Adoption

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Israeli societal context and homosexuality

- Relatively **progressed legislation** alongside same-sex marriage being not acknowledged. Surrogacy, to be conducted in Israel territory, is not optional for same-sex couples.

- **Patriarchal society**, which still adheres to masculine stereotypes that are further strengthened by the continuous warfare conditions.

- Reliance of the Jewish religion on the **biblical law** which firmly denigrates homosexuality.

- Studies showed that Israeli students were found more homophobic than American students who studied in Israel; homonegativity was found prevalent in the high school environment.
Homosexuality is no barrier to regular **military service** in Israel (where a mandatory military draft is effective at the age of 18), and yet occurrences of harassment, bullying and violence may particularly target gay men and lesbians in the army.
Higher birth rates in comparison to other countries (e.g., 3 children on average in Israel, 2 in France, 1.5 in Switzerland, Italy, Japan)

HMO funding for fertility treatments

Meaning of children and reproduction in the context of a relatively new country and holocaust surviving

The encounter between the Israeli context, parenthood, and homosexuality: encouraging parenthood vs. posing multiple difficulties for gay men to become fathers.
Frequencies of the desires and likelihood estimations of Israeli gay men regarding fatherhood and couplehood

- 183 gay men aged 19–50 | 68.2% expressed a strong desire to be fathers, rating this aspiration as 7 or above on the 10-step scale | Only 31.1% of those reporting a strong desire to be a parent assessed their chances of parenthood as high. Why?

- Low likelihood estimations of fatherhood were a predictor of depression (stronger than self-rated health status or economic status).
The Gap Between Fatherhood and Couplehood Desires Among Israeli Gay Men and Estimations of Their Likelihood (Shenkman, 2012, JFP)

Table 3

Intercorrelations for Fatherhood Desires, Fatherhood Likelihood Estimations, Depression, and Subjective Well-Being Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Desires</th>
<th>Estimations</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>SWLS</th>
<th>PAS</th>
<th>NAS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desires</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimations</td>
<td>.76**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.22**</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWLS</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>-.53***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAS</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.16*</td>
<td>.71***</td>
<td>-.34***</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  $n = 153$. Data were missing for 0–4 cases in particular variables. Reported are Pearson correlations. SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; PAS = Positive Affect Scale; NAS = Negative Affect Scale.  
* $p < .05$.  ** $p < .01$.  *** $p < .001$.  

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Studies among heterosexuals

Heterosexual married adults, or adults in cohabitating relationships, usually reported lower psychological distress and higher subjective well-being in comparison to single adults. Why?

Being in relationship:

- Raises self-esteem,
- Increases feelings of competence,
- Provides emotional support,
- Provides economic and social benefits

Increase in happiness
Parenthood and happiness

► Does happiness increase or decreases when becoming parents?

Parents, in comparison to non-parents, reported to be less satisfied with life, with friends, with marriage life, with physical health, reported to be less happy, more anxious and depressed (McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Umberson & Gove, 1989)

► Common costs of being a parent

1. Financial costs
2. Career costs
3. Social costs
Parenthood and happiness

- Is the decline permanent?
- When will it go back up?
- Why?

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Parenthood and happiness

Findings on the decline on happiness are in apposed to:

- Ancient wisdom that kids are the prime source for happiness
- Massages in the Media that idealize the transition to parenthood
- Psychological developmental theories that present the transition to parenthood as a main road with growth, integration, and health.

How can we settle this
The parenthood paradox

- Psychological welfare = subjective well being + meaning in life
- Becoming a parent usually leads to:

Subjective well-being

Meaning in life

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Does the parenthood paradox exists among gay fathers?

- “Kids Are Joy”: Psychological Welfare Among Israeli Gay Fathers (Shenkman & Shmotkin, 2014, JFI)

- Compared to gay men who were not in relationship and gay men who were not fathers at the moment, gay men in relationship and gay fathers (whether being in either condition or in both together) would present higher subjective well-being, lower depressive symptoms, and higher meaning in life.

Subjective well-being

Meaning in life
Does the parenthood paradox exists among gay fathers? (2)

- Two hundred and four gay men aged 19 to 79 years ($M = 36.0$, $SD = 11.90$).
- 45 participants identified themselves as fathers: 25 (55.6%) were in relationship and 20 (44.4%) were not.
- Out of the other childless participants, 43 (27.04%) were in relationship and 116 (72.96%) were not.
Does the parenthood paradox exists among gay fathers? (3)

Table 2
Multivariate Analysis of Covariance of Couplehood (In Relationship Versus Not In Relationship) by Fatherhood (Fathers Versus Non-fathers) for Psychological Welfare (Age Controlled)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Wilks' lambda</th>
<th>Dependent measure</th>
<th>Descriptives</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Partial eta squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couplehood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.782**</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWLS</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>F(1,83)=12.05***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>F(1,83)=81</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAS</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>F(1,83)=4.74*</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>F(1,83)=10.20**</td>
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<tr>
<td>CES-D</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>F(1,83)=10.69**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fatherhood</td>
<td>.926*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1,84)=5.55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1,84)=5.63*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.809*</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWLS</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>F(1,83)=10.99***</td>
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<td>PAS</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>F(1,83)=4.52*</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAS</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>F(1,83)=0.37</td>
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<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>F(1,83)=8.07**</td>
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<tr>
<td>CES-D</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>F(1,83)=3.43+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.946</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>F(1,84)=4.55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>F(1,84)=1.15</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.870</td>
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<td>SWLS</td>
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<td>F(1,83)=5.54***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>F(1,83)=1.39+</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>F(1,83)=3.13+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>F(1,83)=8.03**</td>
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<tr>
<td>CES-D</td>
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<td></td>
<td>F(1,83)=4.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.978</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>F(1,84)=1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F(1,84)=1.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=88. Data were missing for 0-2 cases in particular variables. SWLS=Satisfaction With Life Scale, PAS=Positive Affect Scale, NAS=Negative Affect Scale, HS=Happiness Scale, CES-D=Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale, PL=Purpose in Life Scale, PG=Personal Growth Scale.

* p<.05.  ** p<.01.  *** p<.001.  + Marginally significant (p=0.10)
Does the parenthood paradox exists among gay fathers? (4)

- The study identified higher psychological welfare among gay men who were in relationship or who were fathers as compared with gay men who were not in these life conditions
- The “parenthood paradox” may not exist among gay fathers
- The ancient wisdom that “kids are joy” gets reinforcement from a gay men sample
- Positive psychological outcomes for gay fatherhood
- However, no representation for the surrogacy pathway that dramatically increased in Israel
Fatherhood among gay and heterosexual men

- Larger sample of gay and heterosexual men.
- Main focus on:
  - Self-perceived parental role
  - Basic need satisfaction in the relationship
  - Subjective well-being, depression, meaning in life
  - Personality

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Gay dads are happier (Erez & Shenkman, 2016, *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*)

Multivariate Analysis of Covariance of Group (Gay Fathers Versus Heterosexual Fathers) for Subjective Well Being (Coupelhood and religiousness Controlled)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Wilks' Λ</th>
<th>Dependent measures</th>
<th>Descriptives</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Partial eta squared</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>.894**</td>
<td>Gay fathers (N=84) Heterosexual fathers (N=84)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M   SD              M   SD</td>
<td>F(1,164)=7.14**</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>8.75</td>
<td>1.16               8.26</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTS</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>1.02               5.11</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>F(1,164)=15.05****</td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.86               3.49</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>F(1,164)=9.72***</td>
<td>.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWLS</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>1.17               4.72</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>F(1,164)=9.51***</td>
<td>.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.56               2.69</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>F(1,164)=1.93</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAS</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>0.48               1.74</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>F(1,164)=0.16</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N=168. Data were missing for 0-2 cases in particular variables. SAS= The Self Anchoring Scale, DTS= The Delighted - Terrible Scale, HS=Happiness Scale, SWLS=Satisfaction With Life Scale, PAS=Positive Affect Scale, NAS=Negative Affect Scale.

*p< .05. **p<.01. ***p<.005. ****p<.001.
Figure 1. The interaction effects of self-perceived parental role and sexual orientation (heterosexual and gay) on meaning in life, indicated by personal growth (1a) and purpose in life (1b).
Shenkman (2016), *Journal of Social & Personal Relationships*

Figure 1. The interaction effect of basic need satisfaction in relationship and sexual orientation (heterosexual and lesbian) on personal growth.
Middle-aged and older gay men: Struggles

- **Negative inflictions of labeling homosexuality** as a pathology before its removal from the DSM (Brotman, Ryan, & Cormier, 2003; Morrow, 2001). Related to staying in the closet and becoming a hidden population (Kimmel, 2014)

- To carry the **burden of long-standing stigma**, discrimination, internalized homophobia, and victimization, may correlate with higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, feelings of anger, substance use, and symptoms of post-traumatic disorder (Barnes & Ephross, 1994; D'Augelli, & Grossman, 2001; Herek, Gillis, Cogan, & Glunt, 1997; McCabe, Bostwick, Hughes, West, & Boyd, 2010)

- **Youth glorification** prevalent among gay men community. More prominent in middle-aged and older (Erdley et al., 2014; Kimmel, 2014)
Middle-aged and older gay men: Resiliency

- Crisis competence (Kimmel, 1978)
- Immunizing role-loss (Francher & Henkin, 1973)
- Reconstruction of social roles (Friend, 1991)
- Coping with homophobia > ageism (Friend, 1991)
- Families of choice (Friend, 1980)
Children who grow up in same-sex families are no different from those raised by heterosexual parents on various cognitive and affective measures as well as in regard to the development of their sexual orientation (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Patterson & Chan, 1996).

Gay men and lesbians are exposed to homophobia and labeling processes. Their children are also exposed to the burden of social stigma, discrimination and exclusion processes, which may lead to the experience of anger and shame (Gartrell et al., 2005).

Children in same-sex families tend to show better ability in expressing emotions and more openness to social and cultural diversity (Mitchel, 1998).

Tend to develop less stereotypical gender role perceptions than children being raised in heterosexual parent families (Dunne, 2000; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).
Practitioners who work with same-sex families

- **Re-examination** basic psychoanalytic concepts such as Oedipus complex, identification with the same-sex parent, the good-enough mother, and primary maternal preoccupation, in the context of same-sex families (Shenkman, 2016, *Psychoanalytic Psychology*).

- **Emphatic failures** among practitioners working with same-sex families.

- It would be of value to include **special instruction** on gay families and gay clients in training programs for clinicians, particularly in light of the fact that these populations are growing and increasingly seeking therapy.
Dear Mrs. [Erased]

I gather from your letter that your son is a homosexual. I am most impressed by the fact, that you do not mention this term yourself in your information about him. May I question you why you avoid it? Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of sexual development. Many highly respectable individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest men among them (Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.) It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime and cruelty too. If you do not believe me, read the books of Havelock Ellis.

By asking me if I can help, you mean, I suppose, if I can abolish homosexuality and make normal heterosexuality take its place. The answer is, in a general way, we cannot promise to achieve this. In a certain number of cases we succeed in developing the blighted germs of heterosexual tendencies, which are present in every homosexual; in the majority of cases it is no longer possible. It is a question of the quality and the age of the individual. The result of treatment cannot be predicted.

What analysis can do for your son runs in a different line. If he is unhappy, neurotic, torn by conflicts, inhibited in his social life, analysis may bring him harmony, peace of mind, full efficiency, whether he remains a homosexual or gets changed. If you make up your mind he should have analysis with me - I don’t expect you will - he has to come over to Vienna. I have no intention of leaving here. However, don’t neglect to give me your answer.

Sincerely yours with best wishes,

Freud
Same-sex parents in Israel: Social and psychological aspects

Thank you for listening