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Examining Redding's (2001) Claims About Lesbian and Gay Parenting

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In his article, Redding (March 2001) argued that conservatives and their views are “vastly underrepresented in psychology” (p. 205). He cited examples throughout his article of “liberal bias” that have problematically influenced research methods, interpretations, and use. Although I cannot comment on every aspect of his article because of the limitations of my own expertise, I do have several reactions to his section on gay and lesbian parenting. If this section of Redding’s article is representative of the other sections, I have serious concerns about the conclusions he has drawn.

Redding (2001) presented the research supporting gay and lesbian parenting as an example of research that has been tainted by liberal biases. He did this first by pointing to issues of “small sample sizes, nonrepresentative and self-selected samples, reliance on self-reports subject to social desirability biases, and lack of longitudinal data” (p. 207). By suggesting that the entire body of research examining outcomes of children raised by gay and lesbian parents is questionable for these reasons, he raised the bar for psychological research to unrealistic levels. If all of psychological research were held to this standard, much of it would be discounted. Imagine discarding the vast majority of studies in the field of psychology that use self-report measures! Consider the tiny minority of researchers who are able to obtain longitudinal data.

Redding’s (2001) critique also failed to consider an important issue when conducting research with sexual minorities: Lesbian and gay parents face social stigmatization and may have fears of being too openly public

about their parenting statuses because of custody concerns. This stigma and these fears can make lesbian and gay parents a more difficult sample for researchers to obtain. Such difficulties may result in the need for self-selected samples. Of course, researchers cannot be sure if such samples are representative of the entire population of lesbian and gay parents, just as they cannot be sure that convenience samples of freshman psychology students are representative of all Americans. Does this mean that such studies should not be completed? Clearly, it means psychologists should be cautious about generalizing from the results of just a handful of these studies. Redding (2001) cited only 3 studies on gay and lesbian parenting; however, 43 empirical studies exist in this area (American Psychological Association, 2001). The strength in the interpretation of results of each of these studies is in considering the findings as a whole. Patterson (2001) noted that despite some limitations of specific studies, all of the empirical research findings are consistent with the conclusion that lesbian and gay individuals can be fit and effective parents. She also provided a logical rebuttal to each of the methodological flaws suggested by Redding.

Redding’s (2001) second point used to challenge the validity of research on lesbian and gay parenting suggested that “advocates . . . often fail to consider fully the potential importance of having both male and female nurturance and role models for children” (p. 207). Not only is this argument fallacious in its disregard for the fact that children are exposed to nurturing adults and role models of all sexes well beyond the scope of their nuclear families, but he backed it up with four rather questionable citations. Given that he has criticized the quality of research on gay and lesbian parenting, it is interesting that he supported his hypothesis regarding the need for male and female influences within the nuclear family with no empirical support. Rather, he cited two articles published in legal journals, a book chapter, and a literature review (see Redding, 2001, p. 207). Thus, after questioning the validity of a body of research with over 40 published studies, Redding was able to offer no empirical support for his own proposition. Surprisingly, in the book chapter he cited to support his claim (Booth & Crouter, 1998), the authors concluded that research on the effects of fathers on children is inconclusive, ranging from no effects and small effects to rather large ones. This is hardly sound support for Redding’s ideological counterpoint. Rohner’s (1998) review is equally inconclusive and therefore is equally dubious as support for Redding’s parenting hypothesis.

Redding (2001) did not adequately acknowledge the relativity inherent in defining

something as liberal or conservative. Although he reported having used politically conservative, politically liberal, and politically centrist raters for his content analysis of the *American Psychologist*, he failed to tell readers how he measured these political orientations in his raters. Presumably, however, it involved some form of self-report, and this would undoubtedly raise his own stated concerns about social desirability effects, particularly if his raters were students. Regardless, it is paramount to consider a person's relative social position in understanding that person's perception of liberal or conservative topics.

For example, consider how a gay or lesbian researcher might perceive the political orientation of psychologists and the American Psychological Association in light of the paucity of research on sexual minorities in professional journals. Buhrke, Ben-Ezra, Hurley, and Ruprecht (1992) conducted a content analysis on six major journals in counseling psychology to determine the percentage of articles that dealt with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) issues. From 1978 to 1989, the journal representing the greatest coverage of LGB issues had 28 articles on LGB concerns out of 1,474 total articles. The three journals published by the American Psychological Association combined had only 8 articles on LGB issues out of 3,008 articles. One journal had no articles on LGB issues in this 12-year period. Recently, several colleagues and I extended this content analysis through the 1990s and found similar results regarding the percentage of articles on LGB issues: two journals had 1% or less, two journals had 2% or less, one journal had 3%, and one journal had 5% (Rooney, Perez, Paul, & Schmidt, 2001).

Ultimately, Redding's (2001) arguments regarding gay and lesbian parenting as an example of research fraught with liberal biases are weak. In forwarding his arguments, he leaned on the type of scholarship that he criticized, namely articles that lack firm empirical support. Readers might consider reviewing the other sections of his article with equal scrutiny.

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