

CHILDREN IN RAINBOW FAMILIES

SUMMARY

This article discusses rainbow families, families formed by one or two same-sex attracted persons raising a child or children. It examines the findings of different research studies undertaken internationally (primarily in the USA and Western Europe) focusing on whether children growing up in rainbow families differ from children growing up in other family forms. The research findings demonstrate that there are no statistically significant differences between children being raised by rainbow families and other family forms with regard to the formation of gender identity, gender roles, emotional and cognitive development, or psychological and behavioural adjustments. However, the health and well-being of children growing up in rainbow families does depend on the (fear of) stigmatization and discrimination against these children in society.

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INTRODUCTION

Through its examination of social reality, the scientific community has been observing the pluralisation of family forms for quite some time now (Sieder, 1998). Nevertheless, there are some individuals and social groups who do not recognize this plurality's right to existence. The concept of the rainbow family (German *Regenbogenfamilien*, Slovenian *mavrične družine*, Croatian *dugine obitelji*) has become established internationally to identify families where the parents are not heterosexual (Zaviršek & Sobočan, 2012). The Australian materials intended for pre-school teachers entitled "Introducing rainbow families: a guide for early childhood services" (2010) contains the following definition of rainbow families: "...there are increasing numbers of children who come from families with same-sex parents – sometimes called 'rainbow families'. Rainbow families ... come in different shapes and sizes. Children may have two mums or dads, or any combination of parents or co-parents caring for the children. It is also important to remember that some sole parents are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Some rainbow families may include known donors or surrogates in their extended families, and some are created through fostering. Rainbow families are as diverse – in socio-economic background, disability, language, culture and religion – as all ... families" (ibid.: 1).

Rainbow families are, therefore, the same as all families. However, these families are sometimes the victims of prejudice and stereotyping related to the conviction that homosexuality and bringing up children in rainbow families constitute a social deviation from "normality" (Biblarz & Stacey, 2006). The two-parent heterosexual family is promoted as the ideal type of family, the norm from which the deviation is measured, the point from which "the Other" is identified. The position of this family form is "... naturalized and normalized, it is the point at which a certain form turns from the natural towards the unnatural, from the normal to the deviant" (Urek, 2005:157). In addition, "... this particular family type has repeatedly been promoted as the 'ideal', and has often been depicted as the only 'real' family type, in contrast to other family types that are constructed as less desirable and less able to meet the needs of children" (Short et al., 2007: 5). Yet through the pluralisation of family forms the families with two heterosexual parents have gradually, but persistently, been losing their position as the "natural" and "ideal" form of family life (Calhoun, 1997). The phenomenon of same-sex families has changed the social meaning of parenthood: the child's parents do not necessarily need to be in a heterosexual relationship (Švab, 2010). It has also undermined the idealized image of children growing up in "normal" families that consist of a (biological) father and mother, a notion that is supported by neither scientific findings nor the reality of everyday life.

In the last few decades the debate focusing on this “specific” family form – the family with one or two same-sex attracted adults and a child or children, that is, the rainbow family – has often been imbued with various value, ideological and political charges. They centre around the question of whether or not same-sex attracted people actually have the right to form a family. The answer to this question is not irrelevant – not only because of the ethical, ideological and political implications that it has, but also because of the legal and formal implications that give or deny this family form (and especially the children living in it) the rights and duties which each specific society confers on so-called “real” families. In Australia it has been observed that since the late 1990s (as in some other countries, e.g. see Biblarz & Stacey, 2006), “the notion that all children ‘need’ or ‘do better’ with both a mother and a father has repeatedly been used as justification for retaining or even extending discrimination in the area of family-related laws and policies, such as who should have access to fertility services and who should be able to get married” (Short et al., 2007: 5). This can also be observed in our own geographical area, Eastern Europe. Those who argue against rainbow families gaining the same rights and having the same duties to children, against the view that the state has the duty to ensure the potential for the realization of these rights and duties, and against the right of rainbow families to the same treatment as other forms of family life enjoy, e.g. families with two (social and/or biological) parents and children, single-parent families, etc., base their arguments on the assumption that only one “real” family form exists, i.e. the family with two parents of the opposite gender who care for children. Such a family is presumed to be the only form of family life that can provide children with the environment for “healthy” development – the more a family moves away from the traditional two-parent heterosexual family, the greater the perceived risk to the child (Golombok, 2000).

But is that really true? Are children who live in a family with two parents of the opposite gender really less exposed to different risks than children who live in a rainbow family? Are these children really “healthier” than children growing up in a rainbow family? Are these children really less “deviant” than children growing up in a rainbow family? This article will attempt to provide answers to these questions by reviewing the research studies that have examined children in single- and/or two-parent rainbow families. Using these findings, the article will try to demonstrate that – despite the apparent methodological deficiencies in the research studies – statements regarding the risks that children from rainbow families supposedly face, that is, statements on the supposed risks and problems children raised in these families have to deal with, cannot stand up to serious scrutiny. Nevertheless, debating these issues is important. Only on that basis will it be possible to establish democratic legislation that will not exclude individuals because of their personal

circumstances, such as nationality, race, gender, language, sexual orientation, religion, and political and other convictions, and that will ensure each individual equality before the law and the protection of his or hers rights.

HOW DOES GROWING UP IN RAINBOW FAMILIES AFFECT CHILDREN AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT?

Patricia Morgan argues against the right of homosexual individuals to form families, writing that "... a well-established and growing body of evidence ... shows that both mothers and fathers provide unique and irreplaceable contributions to the raising of children. Children reared in traditional families by a mother and father are happier, healthier, and more successful than children raised in non-traditional environments" (2002: 95). However, the author forgot that she was referring to the data comparing children from single-parent families (usually the result of the parents' divorce) with children from conventional nuclear families. Let us not dispute, for the time being, the findings on the happiness, health and success of children in single-parent and traditional nuclear families or the methodology of the research studies, but it is nevertheless important to emphasize that the authors of such studies did not study the effect of the parents' sexual orientation on their children, but rather the differences between children living with both parents and children living with one parent. As a consequence (while ignoring everything else), these conclusions cannot be referred to when discussing children from rainbow families.

Among the research studies of children growing up in rainbow families we have been unable to trace a single paper that demonstrates empirically that the homosexuality of one or both parents has a negative impact on their children's development. There are, however, differences between children growing up in different family forms, but the differences are not statistically significant. A research study was carried out in Australia in which Sotirios Sarantakos (1996) compared a sample of 174 children living in families formed by a child and both partners with at least one of the parents being the child's biological parent. He studied 58 children of married heterosexual couples, 58 children of cohabiting heterosexual couples and 58 children living in two-parent rainbow families (47 in lesbian and 11 in gay families). The author concluded that as far as school achievement was concerned the children of married heterosexual couples were the most successful. The children from the other two family forms were less successful at school, but there were no statistically significant differences among the sample groups. The children growing up in rainbow families were more successful in social sciences, demonstrated greater social autonomy and participated more in household chores than

the children from the other two forms of family life. But these differences were not statistically significant either. Based on this research study it is therefore impossible to claim that growing up in a two-parent rainbow family has a negative influence on a child's development.

Moreover, Millbank (2003) pointed out that "Some research suggests that lesbian and gay families are in some respects better for children than heterosexual families ... Research on the division of parenting and household labour among lesbian co-parents and gay-co-parents has shown a distinct pattern of equality and sharing compared to heterosexual parents, with corresponding positive well-being for the partner's relationship with each other, and the child's adjustment" (Millbank, 2003: 546–547). Research studies show that "... gay and lesbian parents tend to be more responsive to their children, more child oriented, and more egalitarian in their sharing of the workload, characteristics associated with a more positive child outcome" (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002: 67). The study carried out by Rachel H. Farr, Stephen L. Forssell and Charlotte J. Patterson (2010) comparing homosexual and heterosexual families with adopted children showed that the processes within the family outweigh the family's structure. The study investigated child development and parenting in 106 families headed by 27 lesbian, 29 gay and 50 heterosexual couples (80% white, $M = 42$ years) with young adopted children (41% white, $M = 3$ years). They used systematic methods to recruit lesbian and gay parenting couples, as well as a comparison group of heterosexual parenting couples, from many locations across the United States. All the couples had young children who had been adopted in infancy through one of a small group of private adoption agencies (ibid.: 167). Regardless of the parents' sexual orientation the children thrived best when growing up in families where the parents used effective educational techniques and were satisfied with their partnerships. Family process variables such as parenting stress, parenting strategies and couple relationship satisfaction were significantly associated with the assessments of the children's behavioural problems. In comparison, parental sexual orientation was unrelated to the children's adjustment (ibid.: 177).

This was confirmed by the findings of a research study carried out by David Lick, Charlotte Patterson and Karen Schmidt (2013), which included 91 adults who grew up with at least one openly gay or lesbian parent. The subjects ranged in age from 18 to 61 years ($M = 27.6$ years, $SD = 7.2$ years), and on average they were 7.6 years old ($SD = 5.2$ years) when they learned that a parent was gay or lesbian. Most had lesbian mothers (69%) and identified themselves as heterosexual (60%) and female (75%) (ibid.: 237). The participants responded to measures of recalled social experiences as well as current depressive symptoms, positive and negative effects, and life satisfaction. They reported differing social experiences, e.g. stigma,

as a function of their sex, family type, gaylesbian parent's sex and the age at which they learned that a parent was gay or lesbian. Despite such diverse experiences, the participants reported no significant differences in long-term psychological adjustment. Despite the fact that some of their recalled social experiences predicted psychological adjustment in the long term, most of the participants had developed into psychologically healthy adults. In fact, the authors did not uncover any statistically significant differences in overall well-being as a function of family characteristics. They concluded that it could be the case that children of gay and lesbian parents learn to cope with difficult social experiences, leading to positive overall adjustment. Indeed, the sample perceived their social experiences as becoming significantly more positive over the life course, with less stigma and more benefits related to their family situation() during adulthood than during earlier developmental periods (ibid.: 245–250).

The problem then does not lie in the form of family life in whichthe child grows up, but in social environments that do not recognize the right of certain family forms to exist. Excluding some family forms supposedly justifies the damage that living in an “unrealunnaturalabnormal” form of family life is thought to have on achild's development. As the *Australian Psychological Society (APS)* maintains, “the research indicates that parenting practices and children's outcomes in families parented by lesbian and gay parents are likely to be at least as favourable as those in families of heterosexual parents, despite the reality that considerable legal discrimination and inequity remain significant challenges for these families” (Short et al., 2007: 25).

The impact of growing up in rainbow families on children's gender identity, gender roles and sexual orientation

Charlotte Patterson (2006.) highlighted the fact that the first research studies conducted in the late 1970s and in the 1980s on the topic of children growing up in rainbow families included children who were born in marriage and lived with a lesbian mother after divorce and children who, after divorce, lived with a heterosexual mother. The author does not state whether both forms of the families were single-parent or reorganized families,nor does she say what or how many studies were conducted during the specified period.However, Patterson noted that these studies showed that there were “... few significant differences” between the populations under consideration (2006: 241). The author believed that this was a consequence of the fact that these children's early childhood was spent with their familiesand therefore had the same pattern of important others. That this argument

is not sufficient is demonstrated by the studies of children who had neither been born nor had ever lived in heterosexual families. Such research studies were first undertaken in the United States of America in the 1990s. Patterson drew attention to the findings of a study called the "Bay Area Families Study" which examined a group of children aged between four and nine years who had been born to or adopted by single lesbian mothers. She collected data during home visits and conducted interviews. The responding mothers also completed a questionnaire (ibid.). The author did not specify at what age the children from the sample had been adopted or if they had lived in a form of family life or in foster care before they had been adopted. The author did not state the number of children who had participated in the research study either. Nonetheless, the study showed that children who had been born to or adopted by single lesbian mothers had more frequent contact with a wide variety of adults of both genders, both inside and outside the family, than children living with heterosexual mothers. She stressed that the children had similar self-concepts and preferences for the same games as children living with heterosexual mothers, and they also played with peers of the same gender. Additionally, the results of standardized measuring of social competencies and behavioural difficulties revealed that the children living in single-parent families with a lesbian mother did not differ from the representative sample of American children of the same age living in single-parent families with a heterosexual mother.

A research study of children growing up in single-parent families with lesbian mothers showed a more critical attitude of the mothers towards their children's sexual conformity. Their children were "liberated" from traditional sexual scripts. This means, for instance, that the lesbian mothers in the study did not teach their daughters to be passive and submissive (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). The research conducted by Robert-Jay Green (cf. Stacey & Biblarz, 2001: 168) demonstrated that the daughters of lesbian mothers dressed, played and behaved in ways that are not traditionally ascribed to their gender more frequently than daughters of heterosexual mothers. Moreover, they showed more interest in activities associated with the characteristics socially ascribed to men and women, and they also participated in activities ascribed to both genders, whereas the daughters of heterosexual mothers showed more interest in the activities traditionally perceived as female. It should be noted that, when analyzing the results, the authors did not take into account the fact that Belcastro et al. subsequently drew attention to a potentially important issue: in most cases (39 out of 50), a year and a half after their divorce the lesbian mothers lived together with a female partner, while in the same period only four heterosexual mothers out of 40 lived with a male partner (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001: 168). It is thus not clear whether the difference between the groups originated from this fact, and if it did, to what degree. Jan Steckel (Sta-

cey & Biblarz, 2001: 168) ascertained that the daughters from two-parent lesbian families showed more interest in becoming doctors, lawyers and astronauts than daughters from two-parent heterosexual families. In comparison with sons from heterosexual mothers' single-parent families, sons from single-parent lesbian families behaved in less "traditionally male" ways in that they were less aggressive. The author assumed that when choosing their professions these men followed social expectations about what professions are suitable for men more than the daughters of single lesbian mothers while being less limited by these expectations than the sons of single heterosexual mothers. It should be noted, however, that neither study took account of the conventional level of statistical significance ($p < 0.05$ for two-way tests) for small samples, which makes it much more likely for the rejection of the null hypothesis to fail (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001: 168).

Analyzing the findings of various research studies, William Meezan and Jonathan Rauch (2005) concluded that there is no evidence that during adolescence and adulthood children from gay and lesbian families turn out to be more insecure about their sexual orientation (identity) than children from heterosexual families, nor are they same-sex attracted more frequently. Patterson (1992) found that the occurrence of children of same-sex orientation in rainbow families equals that in the general population, which is about 10%. We should emphasize, however, that the data – or, to be more precise, the estimates – that are available in the literature on the topic of the incidence of homosexuality in the general population vary considerably. Gary Gates (2011) of the Williams Institute in the United States stressed that studies from various nations, including the US, covering varying time periods and age groupings have produced a consistent range of 1.20–5.60% of the adult population. At the same time, however, the 2000 US Census data showed that 22% of lesbian-headed households and 10% of gay-headed households had a child under the age of 18 (Reczek & Rothblum, 2012: 461). Whatever the case, there is no exact data on the share of homosexuals in the general population, children growing up in rainbow families or their sexual orientation in adulthood. Based on the available research we nonetheless dare to conclude that life in rainbow families is not a factor resulting in a higher incidence of homosexuality among children from these families. As a matter of fact, we believe such shares to be irrelevant. What is important is the individual's acceptance of their own sexual identity and social openness to various sexual orientations and identities. Be that as it may, Meezan and Rauch (2005.:104) pointed out that the only difference that the research studies have demonstrated is that children – especially lesbian mothers' daughters – are more accepting and open to different sexual identities (gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual, etc.) and are more willing to question their own identity than children from heterosexual families.

The effect of growing up in rainbow families on children's behaviour and well-being

Raymond Chan and Barbara Raboy and Patterson (1998), studied 80 families of which 55 were two-parent lesbian families and 25 were two-parent heterosexual families where the mothers had been artificially inseminated by a sperm donor, meaning that only one of the parents was biologically related to the child. The participating children averaged seven years of age. The families received questionnaires by post and these questionnaires were also distributed to the children's teachers. Having analysed the parents' responses, one of the authors of the study several years later concluded that "Children of lesbian and heterosexual parents showed similar, relatively high levels of social competencies, as well as similar, relatively low levels of behaviour problems ..." (Patterson, 2006: 242). The parents' answers were additionally supported by those of the responding teachers. On the basis of that study, Patterson concluded that "Parental sexual orientation was not related to children's adaptation" (ibid.).

What about the behaviour and well-being of older children and adolescents growing up in gay and lesbian families? Patterson looked for the answer to this question in an analysis of the data from "The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health)" and complemented this with interviews with individuals selected from a representative sample of over 12,000 adolescents and their parents. The adolescents were interviewed at school and their parents were interviewed at home. The sample was drawn after asking parents if they were married or in a relationship similar to marriage. Those who replied with the latter were asked about the gender of the person they were in the relationship with. Using this method, they identified 44 12- to 18-year-olds living in rainbow families. The author did not provide information about whether the children lived in lesbian or gay families. Data about them was compared to data about a comparable group of adolescents living in heterosexual families. The only statistically significant difference between the two groups of adolescents was that the adolescents living in two-parent rainbow families had a stronger sense of being connected to their school friends than the adolescents living in two-parent heterosexual families. The two groups showed no differences in relation to drug use, delinquency or exposure to bullying. There were likewise no differences in the variables pointing to children's psychological well-being, e.g. self-image and anxiety, their school achievements, e.g. average grades, and their problems related to school, or the variables pointing to family relationships, e.g. adults' care for children. The likelihood was the same for both adolescent groups to have been in a love relationship in the 18 months before the research study was conducted (ibid.). The author concluded her

interpretation by stating that “not only is it possible for children and adolescents who are parented by same-sex couples to develop in healthy directions, but – even when studied in an extremely diverse, representative sample of American adolescents – they generally do” (Patterson, 2006: 242).

Similar conclusions were drawn by the researchers working on the “Australian Study of Child Health in Same-Sex Families (ACHESS)”, which began in 2012 and is scheduled to be completed in 2014. The “Interim Report” refers to the “data on 500 children aged 0–17 years from 315 index parents. For 80% of the children a female parent completed the survey, 18% were completed by a male parent, with 2% having another gendered parent. These parents describe a range of sexual orientations including homosexual, gay, lesbian and bisexual. Ninety-three percent of parents are currently in a relationship. ... On measures of general health and family cohesion children aged 5 to 17 years with same-sex attracted parents showed a significantly better score when compared to Australian children from all backgrounds and family contexts. For all other health measures there were no statistically significant differences” (Australian Study of Child Health in Same-Sex Families, 2013: 1).

What do longitudinal research studies and meta-analyses of the studies tell us about the effects of living in rainbow families on children?

A longitudinal research study including the adult children of lesbian mothers and a control group was carried out by Susan Golombok and her collaborators in 1983 and 1997. The sample of adult children of lesbian mothers participating in the research in 1997 included 25 sons and daughters of lesbian mothers and 21 sons and daughters of heterosexual mothers, all of whom had already participated in Golombok’s research in 1983. In the study done in 1983 the authors found that in terms of sexual preferences, stigmatization, gender role behaviour, behavioural adjustment and gender identity, there were no differences between the two groups comprising children aged 5 to 17 years, of whom the first group (37 children) lived in single- or two-parent lesbian families and the comparative group (38 children) lived with single-parent heterosexual mothers. The only difference between the two groups of children in 1983 was that more children of heterosexual mothers had symptoms of mental health problems than children from families with lesbian parents (Golombok & Tasker, 1996, Anderssen, Amlie & YitterØy, 2002: 338). The research study conducted in 1997 showed no differences between the two compared groups (ibid.).

Alicia Crowl, Soyeon Ahn and Jean Baker (2008) carried out a meta-analytical study examining the lives of children in gay and lesbian single-parent families and the effect this family form has on child development. The meta-analysis included 19 research studies conducted between 1979 and 2005. The studies the authors included in their meta-analysis had to fulfil demanding criteria regarding the comparability of children from rainbow families with children from heterosexual families. The total number of participants included in the analyses was 564 for same-sex parent families and 641 for heterosexual parent families. The mean age of the children represented in the studies was 10.4 years (range 5–24 years). The authors stated that “in sum, children raised by same-sex and heterosexual parents were found to not differ significantly in terms of their cognitive development, gender role behaviour, gender identity, psychological adjustment, or sexual preferences. For the outcome that was significantly different between children of same-sex and heterosexual parents, the finding was in favour of same-sex parents. For the outcome of parent–child relationship, same-sex parents reported having significantly better relationships with their children than did heterosexual parents” (Crowl, Ahn & Baker, 2008: 398).

Similar conclusions were arrived at by Norman Anderssen and his collaborators (Anderssen, Amlie & Ytterøy, 2002) who carried out a meta-analysis of research studies that examined the effect of growing up in rainbow families on children. Twenty-three empirical studies published between 1978 and 2000 on non-clinical children raised by lesbian mothers or gay fathers were reviewed. Twenty of these studies reported on the offspring of lesbian mothers and three on the offspring of gay fathers. The studies encompassed a total of 615 offspring (age range 1.5–44 years) of lesbian mothers or gay fathers and 387 controls, all of whom were assessed by psychological tests, questionnaires or interviews. The analysis showed that the children from rainbow families do not differ from children from heterosexual families in terms of emotional functioning, sexual preferences, gender role, gender identity or cognitive functioning. Nevertheless, the authors did find one difference, namely that “the nine studies that cover the issue of stigmatization of children of lesbian mothers (eight studies) or gay fathers (one study) found generally that the children were not stigmatized, but they tended to be teased more than their peers” (Anderssen, Amlie & Ytterøy, 2002: 344). But in spite of that, “... the studies reported few or no incidents of serious teasing, harassment or bullying due to having a lesbian mother or gay father. ... The studies clearly indicate that the children were concerned about the chance of being stigmatized” (Anderssen, Amlie & Ytterøy, 2002: 345).

The stigmatization of children living in rainbow families

As shown earlier in this article, the ACHES studies showed that the measures of general health and family cohesion of children aged 5 to 17 years with same-sex attracted parents showed a significantly better score when compared to Australian children from all backgrounds and family contexts. For all other health measures there were no statistically significant differences but it is important to stress that the general health of these children was related to the stigmatization and discrimination. The researchers concluded that "... where there is perceived stigma, experiences of rejection or homophobic bullying, children with same-sex attracted parents are more likely to display problems in their psychosocial development" (ibid.: 2). The importance of the impact that social attitudes towards homosexuality and rainbow families have on children growing up in rainbow families is seen from the research findings from countries that are considered to be more liberal in their attitudes towards homosexuality, i.e. the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium and Canada – all of which currently allow same-sex marriage or civil partnerships. They "... do not appear to identify as many significant differences in teasing between children with same-sex attracted parents and children with heterosexual parents" (Crough et al., 2012: 2).

An international comparative research study of the situation of children from rainbow families at school was carried out in Slovenia between 2009 and 2011 (Zaviršek & Sobočan, 2012). The authors investigated whether children and adolescents from rainbow families experienced discrimination and different treatment at school because their parents lived in same-sex partnerships. The research study in Slovenia only included four young people (they attended secondary school, university or were employed) since the parents of young children were "mostly afraid that the conversation i.e. participation in the interview] could jeopardize them" (ibid.: 52). According to the authors, a further reason for the great difficulty in finding children and young people to participate in the interview was the fact that children in rainbow families in Slovenia were born mostly after the year 2005. Consequently, the majority were between two and five years old when the study was conducted (ibid.). Although the number of their interviewees were extremely low, the authors asserted that the interviewees' narratives showed that "... as a rule they did not experience direct attacks on their families or themselves, but they did feel the homophobic environment that is part of their everyday life (choosing who to tell about their family, experiencing hate speech when the topic of homosexuality arises, etc.). The forms of everyday racism they experience are also seen in the socially constructed and prescribed silence on rainbow families: it sometimes starts as early as with the family and relatives, and it continues with peers at school" (Zaviršek & Sobočan, 2012: 82).

How life in a homophobic environment, or the silence or even hate speech about rainbow families affects the health and well-being of children living in these families is something that Slovenia, Croatia and other (not only) Eastern European countries still have to look into very carefully. It is therefore the studies undertaken elsewhere that offer an answer. They also provide an answer to the question about what functions as a protective factor for the children. Crowl, Ahn and Baker (2008: 400) established that "given the negative societal and cultural messages children receive regarding their gay or lesbian parent, parents are likely to try and maintain a close relationship with their children to serve as a buffer against the prejudice and stigmatization their children may face". Therefore we can join Judith Stacey and Timothy J. Biblarz (2001) in concluding that "... there is suggestive evidence and good reason to believe that contemporary children and young adults with lesbian or gay parents do differ in modest and interesting ways from children with heterosexual parents. Most of these differences, however, are not causal, but are indirect effects of parental gender or selection effects associated with heterosexist social conditions under which lesbian-gay-parent families currently live" (ibid.: 176).

THE METHODOLOGICAL DEFICIENCIES OF THE RESEARCH STUDIES

Numerous authors have drawn attention to the methodological deficiencies of the research studies investigating the impact of parents' homosexuality on children, that is, of the impact of living in rainbow families on children. Methodological criticisms are mainly directed towards the disqualification of the findings and conclusions of the studies.

Here, we will focus on the objective shortcomings that various authors (Huggins, 1989; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Crowl, Ahn & Baker, 2008) highlighted in relation to their sampling and sample sizes. The authors stressed that the samples of children participating in the studies are often not based on random, representative samples of children from rainbow families, but rather on small, non-representative samples of children found through snowballing or the researchers' personal contacts in social networks or individual agencies. For example, in the USA (where the majority of the studies were done) the participants were predominantly children of homosexual, white, middle-class parents with a good level of education and financial status (Cramer, 1989; Crowl, Ahn & Baker, 2008). Stacey and Biblarz (2001.) noted that a lot of the studies included the children of the "transitional generation", that is, the children of gays and lesbians who became parents during their heterosexual marriages or cohabitati-

on and who started to identify as homosexual only at the time of their divorces or later. This, as the authors stress, "... makes it impossible to fully distinguish the impact of a parent's sexual orientation on a child from the impact of such factors as divorce, re-mating, the secrecy of the closet, the process of coming out, or the social consequences of stigma" (2001: 165). It is therefore important to know when the parents of these children came out and whether the children were born in heterosexual or homosexual relationships since they were raised in the different patterns of important others and had different experiences. Another methodological deficiency should be taken into account: the share of the research studies that looked at children living with lesbian mothers dominated the studies examining children living in gay families. Cowl, Ahn and Baker (2008) ascribed this to the fact that (after divorce) lesbian mothers more frequently require custody of children than fathers. Jenni Millbank (2003), however, thought that this is also the result of lesbian couples more frequently desiring a child than gay couples; as a consequence, they more frequently opt for artificial insemination or adoption.

Stacey and Biblarz (2001) believed that the methodological problems in this area of study arose predominantly because "... so many individuals legitimately fear the social consequences of adopting a gay identity, and because few national surveys have included questions about sexual orientation, it is impossible to gather reliable data on such a basic demographic question as how many lesbians and gay men there are in the general population, how many have children, or how many children reside (or have substantial contact) with lesbian or gay parents" (2001: 164). This sort of a problem is, we believe, a "problem" that is immanent in the social exclusion of diversity – not only as far as rainbow families are concerned, but in all the areas that include the phenomena "beyond the normal". That is why the first step to methodological impeccability must be the normalization and visibility of social diversities. This is, after all, what Stacey and Biblarz underlined when writing that "... because many lesbians and gay men remain in the closet, we cannot know if the participants in the studies are representative of all gay people" (ibid.). As a result it is impossible to generalize the findings of the majority of research studies to the whole population of children living in rainbow families. But that does not mean that we can reject the findings of the studies either. "However, the studies ... are just as reliable and respected as studies in most other areas of child development and psychology. They generally compare well-matched groups of children with heterosexual and lesbian or gay parents. The studies we discussed have been published in rigorously peer-reviewed and highly selective journals, whose standards represent expert consensus on generally accepted social scientific standards for research on child development" (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001: 176).

And what can be said about the methodological weaknesses of the research studies carried out in Slovenia, Croatia and the other parts of Eastern Europe? Well, not much, since there have been practically no such studies. But in societies, e.g. in Slovenia and Croatia, where homosexuality and rainbow families provoke hate speech, protests and popular referenda from other sectors of the population, we cannot expect that scientists will be able to carry out research on large samples of the population easily. These regions should definitely heed Schumm (2004) who noted several limitations that underlie this line of research. In his paper, he noted factors that researchers and policymakers should take into account when interpreting the absence of significant differences between children raised by heterosexual versus same-sex parents. Firstly, it is difficult to obtain a random representative of gay and lesbian parent. Many same-sex parents are not open about their sexual orientation, thus it is often necessary to rely on volunteer participants. However, these volunteer participants may differ in important ways from the gay and lesbian individuals who are unwilling to expose their sexual identities, thus resulting in biased samples. Secondly, much of the research conducted in this area is based on fairly small sample sizes since it is difficult to obtain subjects who are willing to participate in studies assessing the impact of their sexual orientation on their children's development. This small sample leads to low statistical power, increasing the likelihood of failing to reject the null hypotheses.

Conclusion

According to the *American Psychological Association (APA)*, the results of research suggest that the development and well-being of children with lesbian and gay parents do not differ markedly from those with heterosexual parents" (*APA Policy Statement Sexual Orientation, Parents & Children, 2004: 2*). But children do not only gain different experiences because of the family form they live in, but they also gain experiences through the ways in which their social environment accepts their families. Consequently, the normalization of the discourse on rainbow families is important since we all hear it – including the children living in such families. Perhaps this is the reason – as we have already discussed – that these children fear stigmatization and incidents in which their peers mock the sexual orientation of their parents.

Children have the right to parents, regardless of the parents' sexual orientation, but they also have the right to special protection and life in an environment where they do not need to fear discrimination or stigma. Moreover, as Stacey and Biblarz emphasized, "... social science research provides no grounds for taking sexual ori-

entation into account in the political distribution of family rights and responsibilities" (2001: 179). For this reason politicians should amend legislation so as to change the social atmosphere in which rainbow families live. Alenka Švab and Mojca Urek stressed that it is "... crucial to break down the prejudice that still comes before knowledge or – even worse – that presents itself as knowledge" (2006: 150). Such prejudice is accepting completely and uncritically that the heterosexual nuclear family as something which is – at least as far as children's upbringing is concerned – "good and unquestionable". In other words, the heterosexual nuclear family is established as the norm in relation to which all other family forms are interpreted and valued, especially those, of course, that are formed by same-sex attracted parents. This interpretative logic forces the latter to have to "prove" that they are practically "the same". In its essence, such a hierarchical model automatically implies that "the differences" between families formed by heterosexual and homosexual parents necessarily mean a deficit of the latter in relation to the former and not, for instance, different qualities of relationships and educational activities in different family forms. Thus, it fails to treat each and every one of these families in the same manner from the very beginning.

Following from what has been said, we can conclude that despite the good outcomes of growing up in rainbow families (as shown by the reviewed research studies), one of the key issues of dealing with the population of children growing up in rainbow families is the stigmatization of the population. This is all in spite of the fact that foreign studies have shown that in adulthood these individuals demonstrate good psychological adjustment, regardless of their experiences of stigmatization, which can probably be ascribed to the educational styles in their families. We believe that in our regions the research on how this population grows up should be focused on the very processes of stigmatization. At the same time, politicians and people from different professions should strive to break down the prejudices and stereotypes related to growing up in rainbow families and oppose all forms of exclusion of this population, regardless of their own ideological, religious and other personal convictions.

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DJECA U »DUGINIM« OBITELJIMA

SAŽETAK

Ovaj članak raspravlja o djeci u »duginim« obiteljima. To su obitelji koje čine jedan ili oba partnera homoseksualne orijentacije koji odgajaju jedno dijete ili više djece. U radu se analiziraju nalazi različitih međunarodnih istraživanja (prvenstveno u SAD-u i Zapadnoj Europi). Autor se fokusira na razlike djece koja su odrasla u »duginim« obiteljima u odnosu na djecu odraslu u drugim oblicima obiteljskih zajednica. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da ne postoje statistički značajnije razlike između djece odrasle u »duginim« obiteljima i djece odrasle u ostalim oblicima obiteljskih zajednica s obzirom na formiranje spolnog identiteta, spolnih pravila, emocionalnog i kognitivnog razvoja ili kod psihološke ponašajne prilagodbe. Međutim, zdravlje i dobrobit djece koja odrastaju u »duginim« obiteljima ovisi o (strahu od) stigmatizacije i diskriminacije te djece u društvu.

Ključne riječi: pluralizacija obiteljskih formi, »dugine« obitelji, dobrobit djece, stigmatizacija.