One Parent or Five – more of the same from the Commission on Parenthood's Future

31 October 2011
By Professor Eric Blyth
Appeared in BioNews 631

'One Parent or Five: A global look at today's new intentional families' is the latest report from the Commission on Parenthood's Future (1). Authored by 'scholar Elizabeth Marquardt, a recognised family expert', it claims to offer 'the first-ever systematic critique of the concept of intentional parenthood [by] providing a global tour of today's new intentional families... The report reveals what we do and do not know, from a social scientific point of view, about child well-being in these family structures' (2).

Many readers of BioNews will have a concept in their minds of what counts as 'systematic', and they would be entitled to expect something more robust than the offering provided by 'One Parent or Five', the sources for which comprise an eclectic mix of newspapers, TV reality shows, online chatrooms, Wikipedia, and a lunchtime conversation between the report's author and a friend – with no attempt to indicate on what basis these sources were either selected or evaluated. Inexplicably, and troublingly, given the claims made, the report makes virtually no reference to studies published in peer-reviewed journals concerning families built as a result of reproductive technologies. Beyond unsubstantiated assertion, there is no evidence of the report's 'social scientific' credentials.

'One Parent or Five' continues the Centre's onslaught against novel family forms arising from the use of new – and not-so-new – reproductive technologies for family-building; something that was evident in the Commission's earlier work, 'My Daddy's Name is Donor' (3). Wendy Kramer and I had good cause to warn of the misrepresentation in key areas of the underlying data that underpinned that report and therefore of the questionable value of its findings.

Similar cautions should be applied to the 'findings' of 'One Parent or Five', which also reiterate the message of 'My Daddy's Name is Donor'. Quite apart from the highly selective, and decidedly unsystematic, use of sources –which, despite the promise of a 'global look', is remarkably US-focused – the report's relatively minor over-simplifications and errors belie the claim to systematic scholarship. Since space is at a premium, I will cite just two: both from the UK.

First, in keeping with its general anti-gay parenting slant, it cites a 2007 report that: 'lesbians and single women in Britain are increasing their share of DI accounting for 38 percent of such treatment last year compared with 28 percent in 2003 and 18 percent in 1999'. A more meticulous analysis of these data, rather than simply rehashing the original statistics, would
acknowledge that at least part of this increase was attributable to the decreasing use of DI in favour of ICSI by heterosexual couples where the male partner has a fertility problem (the exponential rise in the use of ICSI globally is well documented). In this context, even had no more lesbians or single women sought DI, their use of it would have increased proportionally.

Second, the report asserts that in May 2008, the 'fertility treatment authority dropped the 'need for a father' clause', when in fact this resulted from a legislative change introduced by the government and endorsed by the country's lawmakers, and was not of the Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority (HFEA)'s making. Taken in isolation, misrepresentations and errors such as these might be considered relatively inconsequential; however, they do further undermine any confidence one might have in the report's overall credibility.

As with 'My Daddy's Name is Donor', 'One Parent or Five' tries to direct attention to important concerns about the current state of knowledge of a child's well-being in families built using reproductive technologies. It is certainly true that this is all-too-little and our knowledge is certainly insufficient. However, the quality of scholarship with which 'One Parent or Five' is imbued does little to address such concerns.

The desire on the part of the Commission on Parenthood's Future to make a meaningful contribution to the debate on reproductive technologies and to impact the welfare of children who are born as a consequence of them are not in doubt. However if it wishes to do so, its members should draw on their undoubted experience and expertise to ensure that future reports that are disseminated as scholarly works are of a calibre capable of withstanding the rigorous scrutiny to which such works can rightly expect to be exposed.

**SOURCES & REFERENCES**

1) Marquadt, E. (2011) One Parent or Five: A global look at today's new intentional families
   Family Scholars | 30 October 2011

   Institute for American Values press release | 06 October 2011

   Family Scholar | 07 July 2010

**RELATED ARTICLES FROM THE BIONEWS ARCHIVE**

**My daddy's name is adoption**

*16 May 2011* - *by Vince Londini*

On November 2, 2010, Elizabeth Marquardt testified before the Australian Senate. Her remarks included this statement: 'But I also want to make clear that - even with openness - the problems [allegations that donor-conceived children are more prone to social and legal trouble] do not
completely go away. There seems to be something else about knowing that the person who raised you also deliberately denied you your other parent before you were even born'...

'My Daddy's Name is Donor': Read with caution!
09 July 2010 - by Professor Eric Blyth and Wendy Kramer
The 'My Daddy's Name Is Donor' report is co-authored by Elizabeth Marquardt, director of the Institute for American Values (IAV)'s Center for Marriage and Families, who produced IAV's previous report highly critical of donor conception (1), Norval D. Glenn, of the University of Texas at Austin, and Karen Clark, of FamilyScholars.org, and published by the Commission on Parenthood's Future, a New York-based think tank, in association with the IAV, in May 2010...

First US study of attitudes towards donor conception published
10 June 2010 - by Antony Blackburn-Starza
A study into the attitudes of donor-conceived siblings has been published in the US. Said to be the first empirical study of its kind in the US...

HAVE YOUR SAY
So far 1 comment has been added.
By posting a comment you agree to abide by the BioNews terms and conditions

Syndicate this story- click here to enquire about using this story.