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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) [Marquardt, E. \(2011\) One Parent or Five: A global look at today's new intentional families](#)
Family Scholars | 30 October 2011

2) [Institute for American Values \(2011\) Are intentional families \[sic\] necessarily good for children? Major report raises new questions about 'intentional parenthood' and child well-being](#)
Institute for American Values press release | 06 October 2011

3) [Marquardt, E., Glenn, N. E. and Clark, K. \(2010\) My Daddy's Name is Donor: A new study of young adults conceived through sperm donation](#)
Family Scholar | 07 July 2010

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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

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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...

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