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Peggy Drexler

## In Praise Of The People Behind The Numbers

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A note showed up in my e-mail the other day. It was from somebody who - well, let's just say he is not a fan.

He pointed out the published results of a 20 year study at Sweden's Uppsala University that showed active and regular engagement with father figures benefits children.

The fact that he shared that study with me - and so many writers covered it - tells me that we are still ensnared in the either/or arguments about preferred and lesser families - where parents are judged less by what they put into the job, but the numerical correctness they bring to it.

The back story - and the reason I received the e-mail - is that in 2005, I published a book called *Raising Boys Without Men - How Maverick Moms Are Creating the Next Generation of Exceptional Men*.

I wrote the book, in part, because I grew up without a father, sparking a lifelong interest in family dynamics. I also wrote in hopes that my research would shed some beneficial light on the essential wellness of nontraditional family structures that the defenders of the traditional structures are so quick to dismiss.

When the book came out, I was called an "abomination," a "misguided liberal zealot", a "dunce", a "femi-Nazi" and invited to "do us Americans a favor and move to Europe." My new e-mail pal was comparatively mild - simply pointing out my naivete and bias.

Then and now, and unfortunately for some time to come, we are prone to seizing on big numbers to apply judgment on individual lives.

The question is: why?

Will seizing on studies as proof of the rightness of two parent families mean fewer one parent families? Will it mean fewer same sex parent families?

To those who see the decline of the traditional families contributing to smaller and smaller circles as our society goes down the drain, some recent numbers might ease your angst.

A recent Census study shows that seven in ten children live with two parents, two-thirds live with married parents and six in 10 live with biological parents.

Even better news for those who like to stamp family structures as "approved" or "denied," is that the rise in single parent families since late 60s appears to have leveled off in the 90s.

So maybe we're not all going to hell after all.

But what about the three in 10 children who do live with a single parent? What about the 2.1 million single fathers heading households? What about the 65,000 adopted children being raised gay parents?

Are they, by definition, parentally-challenged?

Pick an argument, and there will be statistics somewhere to support it. But let's remember, behind the numbers, behind the trends, and between the battlements on the left and right are people just trying to live their lives.