

**Focus on the Family's
Refutation of Jennifer Chrisler's
"Two Mommies or Two Daddies Will Do Fine, Thanks"
Time (December 14, 2006)**

The following is a rebuttal of the major points in (Family Pride Executive Director) Jennifer Chrisler's essay, "Two Mommies or Two Daddies Will Do Fine, Thanks" (*Time*, December 14, 2006). There is very little she gets right.

1) "They (FOF) have adjusted their language so that it is less vitriolic."

Chrisler offers no evidence for the "extremist" or "vitriolic" statements she accuses Dr. Dobson of making. That's because there are none. Dr. Dobson is respectful of all people and only challenges the *ideas* he believes are harmful. What's more, Focus on the Family is careful to use sound, universally-recognized social science research to support its positions.

2) "According to the 2000 census, the vast majority — more than 75% — of American children, are being raised in families that differ in structure from two married, heterosexual parents and their biological children."

This is wrong.

First, Chrisler uses an extremely narrow definition of family as an ideal on this point, precisely what she accuses Dr. Dobson of doing.

Dr. Dobson's own family does not fit into this narrow category as he and his wife adopted one of their children. Does that mean that Dr. Dobson has an "alternative family" outside the traditional scope of the nuclear family? It does if you define terms as narrowly as Chrisler does.

Second, anyone can go online to the U.S. Census Bureau's recent data and learn that in 2001, 71 percent of children lived in a two-parent home and 67.6 percent lived with two-married parents. Of the children living with two parents, 88 percent lived with their biological mother and father, and only 10 percent lived with one biological and one step-parent.¹

In fact, the Urban Institute, a liberal child advocacy organization, reports that a child is more likely to be living with her married parents today than in the mid 1990s, rising 2.5 percentage points since that time.²

¹ Rose M. Kreider and Jason Fields, "Living Arrangements of Children: 2001," *Current Population Reports*, U.S. Census Bureau (July 2005) table 2, p. 2. Accessed December 15, 2006
<http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/p70-104.pdf>

² Gregory Acs and Sandi Nelson, "The More Things Change? Children's Living Arrangements Since Welfare Reform," *The Urban Institute*, October, 06, 2003. Accessed December 15, 2006
<http://www.urban.org/publications/310859.html>.

It's possible that Chrisler misread the data: Her mistaken 75 percent figure perhaps was derived by contrasting how many children are living with married, biological parents in proportion to *all* U.S. households. Of course, the proportion of children living in two-parent homes relative to all households would be much lower. However, the correct way is to examine this is to contrast the living arrangements of children living in two-parent married homes with the living arrangements of all U.S. *children* rather than all U.S. households. *Time* should have caught this obvious mistake.

3) “We are a nation of blended families and multi-generational families, adoptive and foster families, and families headed by single, divorced parents, unmarried parents, same-sex couples and more.”

The primary question, which Chrisler fails to ask, is, “Are all these diverse family forms equal in their ability to provide for the important well-being measures for adults, children and society?” They are not.

Research over the last few decades is clear that single-parenting, step-families, divorce and cohabitation have been more harmful than helpful to both adults and children. Society's experiment with family over the last 30-40 years has been a well-documented failure if the primary measure is the elevation of human well-being.³

4) “Dr. Gilligan stated emphatically that it [Dr. Dobson's *Time* article] constitutes ‘a complete distortion of my work’ and went on to say that there is nothing in her research that would support Dobson's stated conclusion.”

Dr. Gilligan, in her letter to Dr. Dobson referred to by Chrisler, offered no example of *how* Dr. Dobson incorrectly used her research. She accused him without evidence.

Dr. Dobson did *not* enlist Dr. Gilligan as an opponent of same-sex parenting. He merely stated that she asserts, “mothers tend to stress sympathy, grace and care to their children, while fathers accent justice, fairness and duty.” He used her work to illustrate that mothers and fathers are different.

³ David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage are Indispensable of the Good of Children and Society*, (New York: The Free Press, 1996); Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*, (New York: Doubleday, 2000); Judith Wallerstein, *et al.*, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*, (Hyperion, 2000); E. Mavis Hetherington, *For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered*, (W.W. Norton, 2002); Nicholas Zill, “Understanding Why Children in Stepfamilies Have More Learning and Behavior Problems Than Children in Nuclear Families,” in Alan Booth and Judy Dunn, eds., *Stepfamilies: Who Benefits? Who Does Not?* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994); Michael Stiffman, *et al.*, “Household Composition and Risk of Fatal Child Maltreatment,” *Pediatrics*, 109 (2002), 615-621; Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Linda J. Waite, *ed.*, *The Ties That Bind: Perspectives on Marriage and Cohabitation*, (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine De Gruyter, 2000); David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know about Cohabitation Before Marriage*, The National Marriage Project, Rutgers University, 2002; W. Bradford Wilcox, *et al.*, *Why Marriage Matters, Second Edition: Twenty Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, (New York: Institute for American Values, 2005).

This is reasonable. Dr. Gilligan, in her 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*, became a founder in the “difference feminism” school by explaining that men and women are different in their moral thinking and behaviors. This is what Gilligan is famous or infamous for, depending on your school of thought. Many feminists were incredulous that Gilligan implied there are deep, intrinsic and meaningful differences between men and women. That is precisely what Dr. Dobson referred to: the difference in men and women as parents.

5) “It is true that there is 30 years of research about families headed by lesbian and gay parents... The fact is that research findings on these issues overwhelmingly testify to the success of gay families as nurturing environments for children’s growth and development.”

This research is not as conclusive as Chrisler states. In fact, researchers favoring same-sex parenting indicate that this body of research is limited and not very strong in terms of the number of methodologically rigorous studies available.

For instance:

- A 1994 study explained, “Unfortunately, the research to date has limitations, including small sample size, non-random subject selection, narrow range of socioeconomic and racial background, and lack of long-term longitudinal follow-up.”⁴
- Authors of the 2002 study by the American Academy of Pediatrics qualify their conclusions by explaining, “Research exploring the diversity of parental relationships among gay and lesbian parents is just beginning.” What is more, “the small and nonrepresentative samples studied and the relatively young age of most of the children suggest some reserve.”⁵
- A 2001 literature review of leading studies on how children fare in same-sex homes (written by same-sex family supporters) recognized that, “Thus far, no work has compared children’s *long-term* achievements in education, occupation, income, and other domains of life.”⁶ (emphasis in original)
- William Meezan and Jonathan Rauch, two strong supporters of same-sex marriage, have provided perhaps the most recent review of the research on how same-sex parenting could impact children. In their fair and careful article — published jointly by Princeton University and the Brookings Institute — they could only recommend four studies out of the total body of current research examining same-sex parenting as

⁴ M.A. Gold, E. Perrin, D.Futterman, S.B. Friedman, “Children of Gay or Lesbian Parents,” *Pediatrics in Review*, 15 (1994) 354-358.

⁵ Ellen C. Perrin, MD, “Technical Report: Coparent and Second-Parent Adoption by Same-Sex Parents,” *Pediatrics*, Vol. 109 No. 2, (2002) p. 343.

⁶ Judith Stacey and Timothy Biblarz, “(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?” *American Sociological Review* 66 (2001): 164-167, p. 172.

“methodologically rigorous.” Elsewhere in their article, they conclude, “In other words, virtually no empirical evidence exists on how same-sex parents’ marriage might affect their children.”⁷

- In the same paper, Meezan and Rauch recognize:

What the evidence does not provide, because of the methodological difficulties we outlined, is much knowledge about whether those studied are typical or atypical of the general population of children raised by gay and lesbian couples. We do not know how the *normative* child in a same-sex family compares with other children.⁸ (emphasis in original)

In fact, Meezan and Rauch, given the lack of conclusive research, recommend our nation “try same-sex marriage on a limited scale — without, so to speak, betting the whole country.”⁹ They endorse a “limited, localized experiment” where the impact of same-sex parenting could be examined for a longer period of time: marriage in Massachusetts, civil unions in Vermont and Connecticut and neither in New Hampshire. They explain that the current policies of each of these states offer “a near ideal natural laboratory.”¹⁰ Although we would never endorse such a social experiment, their conclusions are much more circumspect than Chrisler’s.

6) “Dobson claims...that ‘children do best on every measure of well-being when raised by their married mother and father.’ To say that Dobson is misinformed here would be inaccurate. He is simply lying.”

Mountains of diverse and methodologically rigorous research have been published on how married mothers and fathers benefit children. Dr. Dobson is neither misinformed nor lying. It is Chrisler who is uninformed.

The child advocacy organization, Child Trends, examining the question of how family structure impacts child well-being, concludes:

An extensive body of research tells us that children do best when they grow up with both biological parents in a low-conflict marriage... Thus, it is not simply the presence of two parents, as some have assumed, but the presence of *two biological parents* that seem to support child development.¹¹ (emphasis in original)

The Center for Law and Social Policy examined the same question on family status and child well-being. They report:

⁷ William Meezan and Jonathan Rauch, “Gay Marriage, Same-Sex Parenting, and America’s Children,” in *The Future of Children* 15 (2005): 104, 105, 107.

⁸ Meezan and Rauch, 2005, p. 104

⁹ Meezan and Rauch, 2005, p. 110.

¹⁰ Meezan and Rauch, 2005, p. 110.

¹¹ Kristin Anderson Moore, et al., “Marriage From a Child’s Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do about It?” *Child Trends Research Brief*, June 2002, p. 1-2.

Over the past 20 years, a body of research has developed on how changes in patterns of family structure affect children. Most researchers now agree that together these studies support the notion that, on average, children do better when raised by two married, biological parents who have low-conflict relationships.¹²

A diverse team of family scholars working collectively from the Universities of Texas, Virginia, Minnesota, Chicago, Maryland, Washington, California at Berkeley, and Rutgers University recently reviewed the existing literature and report that children who live with their married parents live longer, healthier lives, both physically and mentally, do better in school, are more likely to graduate and attend college. They are less likely to live in poverty, be in trouble with the law, drink or do drugs, be violent or sexually active, or be victims of sexual or physical violence. These children are also more likely to have successful marriage when they are older.¹³

Sara McLanahan of Princeton University, one of the world's leading scholars on how family form impacts human well-being, explains from her extensive investigations:

If we were asked to design a system for making sure that children's basic needs were met, we would probably come up with something quite similar to the two-parent family ideal. Such a design, in theory, would not only ensure that children had access to the time and money of two adults, it would provide a system of checks and balances that promote quality parenting. The fact that both adults have a biological connection to the child would increase the likelihood that the parents would identify with the child and be willing to sacrifice for that child and it would reduce the likelihood that either parent would abuse the child.¹⁴

- 7) **“(Dr. Nanette) Gartrell’s findings have proven that ‘in social and psychological developments, the children [of lesbian parents] were comparable to children raised in heterosexual families.’”**

Also

Dr. Charlotte Patterson...has determined that “there is no evidence that the development of children with lesbian or gay parents is compromised in any significant respect relative to that of children of heterosexual parents...”

Aside from the methodological problems of the current research on same-sex parenting (as explained in rebuttal #5), there is a major fundamental flaw with these conclusions.

¹² Mary Parke, “Are Married Parents Really Better for Children?” *Center for Law and Social Policy Policy Brief*, May 2003, p. 1.

¹³ W. Bradford Wilcox, et al., *Why Marriage Matters, Second Edition: Twenty Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, (New York: Institute for American Values, 2005).

¹⁴ Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 38.

These, as well as other pro-same-sex family studies, make the claim that children in same-sex homes resemble children in heterosexual homes in terms of well-being outcomes.

However, when you read these studies in full, they do not explain what kind of heterosexual family forms they are comparing the children with same-sex parents to. Is the comparison to married, divorced, single-parent, cohabiting or step-families?

These studies make no such distinction. They simply treat all heterosexual homes as monolithic. This is a fatal short-coming of these studies because there are dramatic outcome differences for children in these different homes. In some of these heterosexual family formations, the outcomes tend to be very positive. In others, they can be quite harmful. Which form do kids in same-sex homes resemble?

Given this oversight, statements from the scholars Chrisler quotes tell us nearly nothing. (Furthermore, Gartrell's study was plagued by additional serious selection problems. Data was collected from mostly college educated, upper- to middle class lesbian mothers who volunteered for the study. Data on the well-being of the children consisted almost entirely of *self-reports* by the mothers.)

However, a recent study (not cited by Chrisler) did examine data about children in same-sex homes and compared them to children in *various* types of heterosexual family configurations. It explains,

Children of gay or lesbian parents do not look different from their counterparts raised in heterosexual *divorced* families regarding school performance, behavior problems, emotional problems, early pregnancy, or difficulties finding employment. However, as previously indicated, children of divorce are at higher risk for many of these problems than children of married parents.¹⁵ (emphasis added)

Of course, this is another way of saying that children who grow up in same-sex homes do *not* look like children who live with their married mother and father; they have outcomes more similar to children of divorce.

8) “In addition, professional organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychiatric Association and the National Association of Social Workers have all issued position statements supporting same-sex parents.”

Yes, many professional organizations have issued such statements, but they did so via very small and special-interest driven committees. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) was one of the first to issue such a statement and theirs is certainly the most lengthy, being a published report, rather than merely a statement like the other organizations.

¹⁵ Parke, 2003, 5.

However, after the AAP released their initial report in 2002, its lead author sent the following email to a small group of leaders in the organization. It illustrates the reception the statement received with the larger membership of pediatricians, as well as the special-interest committee's intentions.

The AAP has received more messages — almost all of them **CRITICAL** — from members about the recent policy statement on [same-sex adoption] than it has **EVER** received on any other topic. This is a serious problem, as it means that it will become harder to continue the work that we have been doing to use the AAP as a vehicle for positive change.¹⁶ (emphasis in original).

9) “When any of our families are politicized, it is an assault on our ability to protect ourselves, each other and our children.”

Who is doing the politicizing here?

Who is fighting so hard to have Americans — like citizens in Massachusetts were forced to do — radically and permanently change our fundamental understanding that marriage is a union of the two distinct and necessary halves of humanity: male and female?

Who is trying to force our society to legally accept intentionally motherless or fatherless families, when all societies — ancient and modern, developed and primitive — recognize the value and virtue of a mother and father for a child?

It's Chrisler and her colleagues who are politicizing the family by promoting homosexual special interests which place adult wishes over societal child well-being.

¹⁶ Email memo from Ellen Perrin, MD to select AAP members, dated February 15, 2002.