



REWARD YOUR INNER TRAVELER

APPLY NOW >

A World of Service®

TIME

NATION

Thursday, Dec. 14, 2006

Two Mommies or Two Daddies Will Do Fine, Thanks

An advocate for gay families says James Dobson misuses science to discredit same-sex parenting

By JENNIFER CHRISLER

The strategies of religious and political extremists like James Dobson of Focus on the Family have become more nuanced of late. They have adjusted their language so that it is less vitriolic. They now utilize terms and approaches that often have a scientific-sounding overlay and are designed to appear more reasonable than those of their earlier efforts. They use the language of "concern" instead of the language of direct condemnation. They have had to make these adjustments because — as the lives of gay people and their families have gained visibility — the previous methods of attack lost their effectiveness. Nevertheless, the science they wield, if not unsound, is misconstrued. Responding to the news of the pregnancy of Mary Cheney, the lesbian daughter of the Vice President, Dobson, writing in a [viewpoint in TIME magazine](#), put to work the time-worn tools of lies and distortion to make his argument that lesbian and gay parents are not able to provide environments for their children comparable in quality to those created by heterosexual parents.

These are the facts. 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. We are a nation of blended and multi-generational families, adoptive and foster families, and families headed by single parents, divorced parents, unmarried parents, same-sex couples and more. Despite Dobson's assertions to the contrary, there is no single "traditional" family structure in the United States.

Moreover, despite Dobson's attempt to blame this reality on "no-fault divorce," this is not a new development. Over time and across cultures, the definition of family and the arrangements in which children have been raised have varied tremendously. Dobson's idea that the nuclear family is "supported by more than 5,000 years of human experience" and constitutes "the foundation on which the well-being of future generations depends" is simply not historically accurate.

Within his commentary, Dobson directly attributes some of the points of his argument to prominent psychologist and social researcher Dr. Carol Gilligan. However, when asked about his use of her research, Dr. Gilligan stated emphatically that its inclusion 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 conclusions.

It is true that there is 30 years of research about families headed by lesbian and gay parents. However, Dobson claims that the resulting data shows 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. The people who are misinformed by these untruths are the readers of his material and those who publish his work without appropriately verifying his assertions. 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.

In terms of specific examples, Dr. Nanette Gartrell, former Harvard Medical School faculty and current Associate Clinical Professor of Psychology at the University of California, San Francisco, has conducted research on lesbian-headed families since the early 1980s. Gartrell's findings have proven that "in social and psychological development, the children [of lesbian parents] were comparable to children raised in heterosexual families." In addition, Dr. Charlotte Patterson, Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia and respected family and child researcher, 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 among children of heterosexual parents in otherwise comparable circumstances."

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. The Child Welfare League of America says, "It should be recognized that sexual orientation and the capacity to nurture a child are separate issues." The American Psychological Association goes even further: "Not a single study has found children to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents. Indeed, the evidence to date suggests that home environments provided by gay and lesbian parents are as likely as those provided by heterosexual parents to support and enable children's psycho-social growth. Gay and lesbian parents are as likely as heterosexual parents to provide healthy and supportive environments for their children."

The fundamental reality is that all parents, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, are linked in a very real way. We want our children to be safe, healthy and happy. When any of our families are politicized, it is an assault on our ability to protect ourselves, each other and our children. When people like Dobson profess "concern" for the welfare of children, while simultaneously attacking those very children's parents and family

structures, their insincerity becomes evident. If their paramount focus is truly the health and well-being of children, then we invite Dobson and his colleagues to join our fight to ensure that all loving families are recognized, respected, protected and celebrated.

Jennifer Chrisler is the Executive Director of Family Pride, the nation's largest LGBT family advocacy group, and the mother of twin boys with her wife Cheryl Jacques. They reside in Washington, D.C.

Copyright © 2006 Time Inc. All rights reserved.
Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

[Privacy Policy](#)