

Institute of Marriage and Family Canada
Institute for the Study of Marriage, Law and Culture
Institute for American Values
Institute for Marriage and Public Policy

For Release at 9:00 a.m. on September 25, 2006
Contact: Mary Schwarz, Mary Schwarz Communications – (917) 526-3115
Dave Quist, executive director IMF Canada – (613) 565-3832

Groundbreaking new report says global changes in law and reproductive technologies are redefining parenthood in ways that may hurt children

Donor-conceived children available for interviews or guest appearances

With a vote in Parliament to revisit the federal same-sex marriage law pending, a new report from leading family experts in Canada and the U.S. is being released that finds that worldwide trends in law and reproductive technologies are redefining parenthood in ways that put the interests of adults before the needs of children. “The two-person, mother-father model of parenthood is being changed to meet adults’ rights to children rather than children’s needs to know and be raised, whenever possible, by their mother and father,” according to the report, *The Revolution in Parenthood: The Emerging Global Clash Between Adult Rights and Children’s Needs*. (To see the full report, go to <http://www.imfcanada.org/issues/revolution-parenthood>)

Trends driving the worldwide revolution in parenthood include high rates of divorce and single-parent childbearing, the growing use of egg and sperm donors, support for same-sex marriage, and increasing interest in group marriage arrangements. Moreover, these trends are proceeding at breakneck speed as reproductive technologies advance, as science continues pushing the boundaries on baby-making and as new groups demand the right to marry. For instance, scientific research in Britain and elsewhere with the DNA in eggs and sperm is raising the possibility that children could be born using the genes from just one person, from two same-sex parents, or from three parents.

Based on the emerging stories from the first generation of donor conceived children, and the

large body of social science evidence showing that children, on average, do best when raised by their own married mother and father, the report is calling for a moratorium or “time-out” on further changes to the institution of parenthood until more research has been done about those policies and practices that will best serve the interests of children.

The report is being released in the U.S., Canada, and Europe by the Commission on Parenthood's Future, which is composed of a politically diverse group of leading family scholars in the U.S. and Canada, and will be discussed several days after its release at the first policy conference of the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, to be held in Ottawa on Thursday, September 28, 2006. Speakers will include Elizabeth Marquardt, principal investigator of the new report.

The report features the experience of the first generation of children conceived with the use of donor sperm, who are just now beginning to speak out about their experience. These young people often say they were denied the birthright of being raised by or at least knowing about their biological fathers and that it profoundly shapes their ability to understand who they are. After finding out she was conceived with donor sperm, a 14-year-old girl in the United States wrote to Dear Abby that, “It scares me to think I may have brothers and sisters out there, and that [my biological father] may not care that I exist.” Olivia Pratten, a 24-year-old Canadian woman who does not know her sperm donor father will respond to the report at the conference.

“In law and culture, the new idea is that children are fine with any one or more adults being called their parents so long as the appointed parents are nice people. But how do children feel about the brave new world of parenthood? Do fathers and mothers matter to children? Does how they feel matter?” asks the report’s author, Elizabeth Marquardt.

“Radical changes to our public norm of parenthood in law and public policy are challenging one of the most fundamental tasks of human culture, namely the struggle to forge strong healthy connections between children and their biological parents,” says Dan Cere, director of the Institute for the Study of Marriage, Law and Culture, one of the four think tanks sponsoring the report, and professor of Religion, Ethics, and Public Policy at McGill University. “Breaking ranks with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Canadian law now elevates the rights of adults to children over the rights of children to their birth parents.”

* * *

Available Spokespersons for Interviews or Guest Appearances

ELIZABETH MARQUARDT is director of the Center for Marriage and Families at the Institute for American Values, a non-partisan think tank focused on children, families, and civil society in New York City. She is the first major divorce researcher who is herself a child of divorce, and her book published last fall, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce*, received widespread attention from the U.S. media. She has discussed her research on the *Today Show*, *The CBS Early Show*, *CNN*, *Fox*, *PBS*, *NPR*, and numerous other television and radio programs. Her essays and op-ed pieces have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and elsewhere. She lives near Chicago with her husband and two children.

DANIEL CERE is a professor of Religion, Ethics and Public Policy at McGill University. He is also the director of the Institute for the Study of Marriage, Law and Culture. Cere’s recent

publications include *The Future of Family Law* and *Divorcing Marriage* (co-edited).

Donor-conceived children are also available for interviews or guest appearances upon request. Call Mary Schwarz at (917) 526-3115.

* * *

Below is additional information in bullet format for your convenience about the changes that are redefining the two-parent, mother-father model of parenthood according to the report:

- In Canada, judges have already been asked to recognize three legal parents for children. In one decision involving a lesbian couple who wanted the biological father recognized as a third parent, the judge noted that he wanted to grant their petition and was only prevented from doing so by existing laws. Commissions in New Zealand and Australia -- as well as U.S. judges -- have proposed allowing children conceived with the use of sperm or egg donors to have three legal parents, without addressing the real possibility that a child's three legal parents could "break up" and feud over the child's best interests.
- Influential legal commissions and legal scholars in Canada and the U.S. are throwing their weight behind the legalization of "group marriage" arrangements such as polygamy and polyamory, which involves intimate relationships of three or more people. In a development that shocked many Canadians last winter, two government studies released by the Justice Department recommended the decriminalization of polygamy. And in Canada and the U.S., a significant number of today's legal scholars are arguing, as one columnist summarized, that "the abuses of polygamy flourish amidst the isolation, stigma, and secrecy spawned by criminalization." In other words, polygamy per se is not a problem, only "bad" polygamy.
- New marriage laws are limiting the ability of law and culture to affirm children's real needs for their mother and father (rather than two "parents"). The law that passed same-sex marriage in Canada last year also erased the term "natural parent" across the board in federal law, replacing it with the term "legal parent." With that little-noticed change the focus of the law dramatically shifted from the mother and father who make the baby to the adults the state decides are a child's appropriate parents. The legalization of same-sex marriage in Spain and other jurisdictions is also resulting in the removal of references to natural parents – or mothers and fathers – from the law.

- Scientific research around the world with the DNA in eggs and sperm is raising the possibility that children could be born from one genetic parent, two same-sex parents, or three parents. Headlines recently announced research at leading universities in Britain and New Zealand that could enable same-sex couples or single people to procreate. British scientists have been granted permission to create a human embryo with three genetic parents, and last year, a team in Scotland tricked an egg into dividing and created a embryo without a genetic father. Japanese scientists have already created a mouse with two genetic mothers and no father.

Of course, there is a very real and urgent role for the state to assign legal parenthood through adoption. But the existence of legal adoption was never meant to suggest that children do not care who their fathers and mothers are, or to justify the intentional separation of children from biological fathers and mothers before the children are even conceived.

Do mothers and fathers matter to children? The debate is upon us.