

NATIONAL POST

Losing the right to a mommy and daddy

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By Barbara Kay

"I believe children have the right to a mother and a father, and preferably their biological parents." These words -- I agree with them, and so do the UN Conventions of the Child -- were once the equivalent of saying you believed in peace on Earth and goodwill toward men.

But in postmodern societies obsessed with gender equity, as ours has been for the past quarter-century, "mother and father" and "biological parents" have become politically incorrect locutions when joined to "children's rights." Just ask the author of my opening statement, the McGill University bioethicist Margaret Somerville, whose honorary doctorate at Ryerson College last June was jeopardized on its account.

"Words matter," says Elizabeth Marquardt in an interview. Marquardt, the author of *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce*, is a Chicago-based affiliate scholar at the Institute for American Values, and director of the Center for Marriage and Families. She is the keynote speaker in Ottawa tomorrow at the Institute of Marriage and Family's first annual family policy conference, a one-day session addressing a 50-strong complement of MPs, senior staff, NGO representatives and other decision-makers around social policy and family issues. Her topic: "The Revolution in Parenthood -- The Emerging Global Clash between Adult Rights and Children's Needs."

By "words matter," Marquardt is referring to Canada's gay marriage law, Bill C-38, which includes a provision to erase the term "natural parent" and replace it across the board with "legal parent" in federal law. At one stroke, she says, the locus of power in identifying a child's parents precipitously shifted to the state, from the civil society that preceded it.

In her report, released Monday across North America and Europe, Marquardt details the ripple effect from emerging reproductive technologies and gender-neutral redefinitions of parenthood. Her research revolved around the question of "Who is parenthood for -- adults or children?" She cites troubling global evidence that adults' rights are privileged over children's. Among many diverse examples: In New Zealand and Australia, influential law commissions propose that children conceived through sperm or egg donation have three legal parents; in Quebec the female partner of a biological mother in a same-sex union is noted as the "father" on the birth certificate; judges in several states in the U.S. have seized on the notion of "psychological" parenthood to award legal parent status to adults (invariably women) not related to the child by blood, adoption or marriage.

When the cultural zeitgeist dictates that children's interests can be fully served in any caring environment, who are the winners and who the losers in the switch from natural to legal parenthood? The winners are homosexual couples, single women seeking social approval for mate-free motherhood, as well as ideologues promoting state control of social norms and the de facto feminization of society. The losers are children -- especially at-risk boys, whose social failures are disproportionately linked to fatherlessness -- and fathers, who through law and cultural attitudes are relegated to virtual dhimmi status in a female-controlled social order.

Marquardt conducted extensive interviews with adult children conceived through sperm donation by strangers, a first in this field of research. Many reveal the negative effects of fatherhood's marginalized role: Some subjects call themselves "lopsided" or "half-adopted" or, in cases of lesbian unions, "queer spawn." One used the term "kinship slaves." Joanna Rose, an Australian interviewee, asks why everyone "flips out" when the wrong baby is taken home from hospital, but assumes donor-conceived children are fine: "I believe that the pain of infertility should not be appeased at the expense of the next generation."

This report -- whose findings range far beyond the parameters of a single column -- is, with a promised second look at gay marriage legislation in prospect, a timely springboard to public discussion and debate. Marquardt concludes, "When society changes marriage, it changes parenthood.... The legalization of same-sex marriage, while sometimes seen as a small change affecting just a few people, raises the startling prospect of fundamentally breaking the legal institution of marriage from any ties to biological parenthood."

Words do indeed matter. Ponder the implications of these: Honour thy Progenitor A and thy Progenitor B (and, where applicable, Progenitor C). Brave new world -- or a postmodern version of child sacrifice on the altar of neo-pagan deities Feminism and Gender Equity?