

# **THE USUAL SUSPECTS - CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FATHERS' RIGHTS GROUPS**

## **American Fathers' Coalition, American Coalition for Fathers and Children, The Coalition of Parental Support, and Fathers' Manifesto**

By Trish Wilson, © 1998

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[For approximately two years, until early 1998, I hosted an America Online folder entitled "Exposing Anti-Feminist Men's Groups," which was a feminist discussion about the misogyny inherent in the father's and men's rights movement. The folder was in an area called TalkWomen, where I used the pseudonyms "Asherah" and "WLVAsh." Michele Delo, who wrote the message below, is a director of the American Coalition for Fathers and Children. She was not the first fathers' rights activist to have posted messages in my folder. Fathers' rights activists posted primarily to attack anyone who disagreed with them, and to disrupt feminist discussion, as they do all over the Internet.]

Subject: Re:Demands?

Date: Tue, Nov 4, 1997 11:28 AM

From: MDCDelo

Message-id: [board-c-folder-000f3374-msg-000e2ccf-at-34774b54@aol.com]

It is unfortunate that someone is DEMANDING that something be done here on this board. Thankfully I see, in rereading my own posts, that I have ASKED and REQUESTED but never demanded that people do certain things. Perhaps demands, like personal attacks, could be removed from the board?

While we are waiting to read information from Ash about "father's right groups", with of course the name of the reputable mainstream (not feminist or anti-feminist) researchers cited, lets agree that it only applies to the specific father's rights groups studied and named. My organization, the American Coalition for Fathers and Children, is fairly new and has not yet been studied by any university or established think tank. There may be some confusion about the name, as a group called the American Fathers Coalition is also located in Washington DC. Although the American Fathers Coalition has on occasion done lobbying on our behalf, they were specifically instructed not to use sex, race, religion or politics as factors in the discussion of our issues. If they did so, it was without our permission and in violation of our mission statement and company

policies.

While I do look forward to Ash's posts regarding other father's rights groups, they are not here to argue their own cases and so it will be a one sided dialog; I am certainly not going to attack or defend groups of which I have no personal knowledge although others may feel comfortable doing so . In the interest of having a DISCUSSION, and since I am right here and willing to read and post daily, it would seem more appropriate to address the anti-woman words and actions of my group - if any can be documented. And if none can be documented, perhaps as a courtesy we can begin to discuss father's rights groups individually instead of clumping them all together. Some may in fact be anti-woman or anti-feminist, and if so they deserve to be called to public account. Let's find those specific groups and work to change their methods of operation; then we would all be further ahead.

Michele Delo

[A message entitled "Bennett Watch - Day One" was written by me in response to a fathers' rights activists' repeated messages, "Trish Watch - Day 1," "Trish Watch - Day 2," "Trish Watch - Day 3," etc., which he had posted demanding immediate response to Delo's messages. Each message had become progressively more rude. At the time, I had been away for several days at a convention. I had wondered if I should let him drive himself into a tizzy, and post as far as "Trish Watch - Day 50." Such abhorrent behavior by fathers' rights activists is very commonplace, and quite contradictory to the placid, professional demeanor they attempt to project in their promotional material, especially if they intend on impressing state legislatures.

After several posts "demanding" that I provide information about fathers' rights groups, Delo never responded to the half dozen messages I did post (including this one), all of which detailed the true, misogynistic agenda of both American Coalition for Fathers and Children, and its lobbying arm, American Fathers' Coalition.]

Subject: AFC/ACFC

Date: Fri, Nov 7, 1997 10:57 AM

From: WLVAsh

Message-id: [board-c-folder-000f3374-msg-000f826e-at-34774b54@aol.com]

Stuart Miller is the Senior Legislative Analyst for the American Fathers Coalition. He is also with the American Coalition of Fathers and Children. AFC is the lobbying arm of ACFC. He is a signatory of [Fathers' Manifesto](#).

AFC and ACFC have misrepresented research and statistics to give the impression that men and fathers experience great gender bias when it comes to divorce issues. They also support sloppy material that insists [women are just as abusive as men](#), that mothers are most likely to severely injure or kill their children, and that [single mother homes and "fatherlessness"](#) are the [number one causes of social ills in this country](#). Both organizations have websites. A large number associated with both organizations are [signatories of Fathers' Manifesto](#), including Stuart Miller. Fathers' Manifesto is a tome to male supremacy. It advocates for "father custody - no exceptions," the repeal of women's right to vote, and [elimination of "all transfers of asset" such as alimony, child support, AFDC, HUD, food stamps, and other programs that assist women and children](#), especially those living in or near poverty.

Miller himself won custody of his children when his ex-wife tried to move from northern VA to MD. Shortly

before that time, he was nearly jailed for contempt of court for [nonpayment of child support](#), but other arrangements were being made to make him pay arrearages. To my knowledge, those arrearages were still due after the switch in custody but he never paid them. From what I understand (strictly anecdotal), Miller wasn't expecting to actually win custody. He -- with his free fathers' rights lawyer who came to VA from the midwest just to take on his case -- expected to lose and then hold himself up as the Poster Boy for Fathers Rights. Didn't work out that way. He still lives in his parents' basement and claims he had to close down his business due to repeated court battles. He continues to galavant all over the country, speaking at various fathers' rights rallies. He spends much of his time writing Op-Ed essays full of fathers' rights propaganda. Who takes care of his children while he's doing all of this? His parents? Miller's antics are definitely eye-opening regarding his point of view when it comes to fathering.

A common method of taking the focus off of their agenda of male supremacy (and rewards for women who agree with that stance), is to state that the issue is not "fathers' rights" or "mothers' rights" but "children's rights." Holding women to the public as spokespersons for the fathers' rights agenda is a very common tactic used by this movement. The notion is that women may temper any suspicion if it is they, not the men who actually run the organizations, who spout those views. Dianna Thompson, Executive Director of ACFC, presented the "it's children's rights" slight-of-hand in ["Fathers Rights Aren't Just For Fathers."](#) which is available on the ACFC articles page. She states the oft-repeated and completely invalid fathers rights correlation condemning single mother homes as the direct cause of "...social pathologies like dropping out of school, criminality, and suicide." Poverty, lack of adequate attention paid to the children, abandonment by the father, and nonpayment of child support are a few of the major factors that have an effect on children. The single mother is not the cause of the problems in and of herself. Thompson writes that "children, need, deserve, and want shared parenting," when plenty of studies have not only proven that shared parenting (a cozy euphemism for joint physical custody) is harmful for children, but that it is very difficult for the parents to maintain, and is very expensive; much more expensive than the most common form of custody: mother sole physical and legal custody. Thompson especially faults custodial mothers who supposedly win custody from "a father who had been the primary caregiver," and then proceeds to place the child in daycare while she advances in her career. Who cares for the children when this mythic primary caregiving father is at work? His mother? His new wife? Very few fathers had been primary caregivers during their relationships with the mother.

The general tone of her article is that women must stop whining about wanting to have it all. On the ACFC homepage is the quote "We must now grant to fathers the same right to be in the family as we have granted to women in the workplace." Notwithstanding that "we" (who the heck are "we?") have never "granted" women any right to access to the workplace, or to the family for that matter, there is no comparison between the two notions presented. Despite the claims of fathers' rights activists, fathers have not been taking on the bulk of childrearing in the way all mothers -- including those who work outside the home at a second job -- have been doing. That mothers have been taking on the childrearing is the primary reason mothers are awarded custody of the children in approximately 80% of all divorces.

Does Thompson discuss how fathers may improve their relations with their children? Does she adequately illustrate how fathers may "be in the family?" No, she doesn't.

Rather than discuss childrearing, Thompson proceeds to condemn women who divorce for their greed over wanting that child support money -- she refers to this as a "tremendous financial incentive." Notwithstanding that the average child support award is approximately \$3,000 PER YEAR, child support is a necessary reimbursement to the custodial parent, primarily the mother. This reimbursement never covers the costs of caring for the child, and it is certainly not used to fund expensive trips to the Bahamas, or purchases of fancy clothing, as many fathers' rights activists, and those with a similar mind-bend but no connection to a specific group, have often complained. The main issue here is that these particular men, as well as their second wives

and girlfriends, no longer have control over the ex-wife; therefore, they will attempt to keep a stranglehold on how much child support (if any) she is to receive, and how she is allowed to spend it. Monthly itemized lists, detailing down to the penny how child support is spent, has been recommended by fathers' rights activists to state legislatures. Those recommendations have been wisely turned down.

Thompson refers to "the war on fathers," and "fatherlessness" as being major concerns affecting American society. "Fatherlessness" is a misnomer -- most of the fathers in question are very much alive, yet they choose to avoid their responsibilities, despite repeated and baseless claims of "visitation interference," another favorite complaint of the fathers' rights movement. The vast majority of fathers do well by their children, and they are not represented by the fathers' rights movement. Fathers rights activists and supporters are part of a loud movement of disgruntled men and women who wish to continue their campaigns of power and control over their former partners after those women left the marriage. When not campaigning to eliminate or reduce child support obligations, they petition for custody arrangements that benefit no one but themselves. They also promote specious "research" supposedly indicating that men and women are equally abusive of each other, and that single mother homes cause all social ills.

Fathers rights groups such as ACFC do not act in the best interest of children. They act in their own best interests, to the detriment of how their lobbying will affect those around them, most importantly their own children.

Subject: Re:Spectral Evidence

Date: Tue, Nov 4, 1997 11:38 AM

From: WLVAsh

Message-id: [board-c-folder-000f3374-msg-000e2d66-at-34774b54@aol.com]

Quoted from [N.O.W.'s Action Alert on the Fathers' Rights Movement](#): "WHEREAS the objectives of these groups are to increase restrictions and limits on custodial parents' rights and to decrease child support obligations of non-custodial parents by using the abuse of power in order to control in the same fashion as do batterers..."

Some of the custodial parental restrictions proposed by fathers' rights groups, including those groups that are the subject of this article, are as follows. When fathers' rights groups speak of these restrictions, they don't cite the real reasons they are supported, such as reduction or elimination of child support and weakening of laws designed to protect women and children from abusers. They claim they want to see these restrictions passed because "children need both parents" and because "fathers have rights, too."

\*Referring to rebuttable presumption for joint custody primarily as a means of lowering child support and/or maintaining control over the mothers decision making processes, especially if the man had been abusive in any way.

\*Use of visitation guidelines to lower child support (he has to get that 35% visitation in order to get that immediate reduction in child support payments, even though the mother still has primary legal custody, which is where all the responsibilities lie).

\*Moveaway laws that prevent the mother from moving for any reason yet do not affect the father even if his move completely disrupts visitation.

\*Use of "expert testimony" such as Parental Alienation Syndrome and Malicious Mother Syndrome, neither of which are recognized by the AMA or the APA. Such dubious medical "syndromes" are used to denigrate a mothers behavior with an invalid medical syndrome.

\*Support of "second spouse" laws that would enable a father to force a court to include his ex-wife's new husband's income as total income thereby lowering dad's child support payment.

\*Support of "second spouse" laws that favor the father after he remarries. He wants to have a family with his new wife but can't afford to do so as long as he's shelling out all that child support, so he petitions the court for reduction based on "change of circumstance."

\*Elimination of alimony laws, which are really a moot point since only about 15% of women receive alimony anyway. They don't get much, they don't get what they are awarded, and it isn't enforced.

\*Excessive litigation as a means of impoverishing the mother into involuntary compliance.

\*Mandatory mediation when it is not appropriate, such as one person (usually the man) having much higher income and can control the proceedings, or when the parties are too busy fighting to come to an agreement. Also, an abuser can use mediation to control his partner, intimidating her to do things his way. Mediators focus on getting an end result, regardless of whether or not that result is in everyone's best interests. It's also possible a woman may not learn of her legal rights with a mediator. Training is a problem as well. Anyone can throw out a shingle and work as a mediator. There needs to be some quality control.

\*Friendly Parenting Provisions, which relate to custody. The parent who is deemed more likely to encourage the relationship between parent and child is the one who should get custody. This one came about primarily due to mothers who either experienced domestic violence or strongly suspected child abuse and were either very reluctant or outright refused the father access to the children. These were not vindictive mothers seeking revenge. They had valid reasons for withholding visitation. Rather than rely on "friendly parenting provisions," the proper authorities should investigate these cases properly.

\*Covenant marriage laws. Those are new. The one in the news recently is from Alabama. Makes it harder to get divorced but doesn't fix the marriage problems. Especially harmful to women in abusive marriages. They can't get out. The main reason covenant marriages are getting press is due to the fact that women initiate the vast majority of divorces.