

IS THERE AN OPTIMAL ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

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Where is the best place to raise a child? What environment(s) will most likely produce children who are healthy physically and emotionally, who do well academically and become productive, ethical citizens? Sounds like an easy question, but it is not.¹ Answers are complex and controversial, and there is no agreement among child and family scholars on what factors contribute to positive child outcomes.² The concepts of diversity, pluralism, multiculturalism, and political correctness have so blurred the lines between what we thought we knew about healthy families and what most people now believe that it is impossible to give a simple unqualified answer to the question, "In what environment is a child most likely to turn out well?"

This author, however, believes there are six factors that foster healthy human development in any society: (a) *family structure* (e.g., a single-parent home, a foster-care family, a two-biological-parent family, lesbian parents, a stepfamily, etc.); (b) *family processes* (e.g., touch and gestures, family rules, ways to show physical affection,

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1. See generally Paul R. Amato, *Family Change: Decline or Resilience?*, in SOURCEBOOK OF FAMILY THEORY & RESEARCH 112 (Vern L. Bengtson et al. eds., 2005) (discussing the family-resilience and family-decline perspectives and the impossibility of favoring one perspective over the other); David Popenoe, *Scholars Should Worry About the Disintegration of the American Family*, 39 CHRON. HIGHER EDUC., Apr. 14, 1993, at A48 (examining the decline of the American family).

2. See generally DAN KINDLON & MICHAEL THOMPSON, RAISING CAIN: PROTECTING THE EMOTIONAL LIFE OF BOYS (2000) (setting out to answer the question about what boys need that they are not getting and urging parents to help boys cultivate emotional awareness and empathy); Timothy J. Biblarz & Judith Stacey, *How Does the Gender of Parents Matter?*, 72 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 3, 4 (2010) (analyzing findings from studies comparing two-parent families with same-sex or heterosexual co-parents and single-mother with single-father families).

how decisions are made, the style of child discipline such as authoritative versus authoritarian, how power is shared or distributed among family members); (c) *environmental inputs* (e.g., television, friends, internet, schools, religious organizations, and governmental family policies); (d) *human agency* (e.g., the ability to make moral choices, free will to choose good over evil, right over wrong); (e) *one's genetic and spiritual endowment*; and (f) *the influence of God* (i.e., a supreme being who rules and reigns on Earth and in Heaven and mettle in the affairs of humanity).³

All individuals live in a complex web of these six interacting elements even if one does not believe in the sixth one. How we turn out depends upon the decisions we and others make as we navigate and interact in and across these six elements. Some individual outcomes (e.g., mental and physical well-being) turn out better than others depending on the healthy or unhealthy attributes in each of the six domains. In this Article I will explore the original question—"Where is the best place to raise a child?"—and attempt to present a simple answer—but it will not be amenable to most child and family scholars.

I propose that there is no absolutely right or wrong answer to the question, only individual and small-collective perspectives shared by some and rejected by others. Almost anyone's answer to the question at hand can be supported by empirical data and shored up by one's own preferences and personal biases. In fact, this author believes that most empirical questions about human behavior are explained by a combination of actual data (that has many limitations) and by the hidden (or unacknowledged) values and biases of the investigator. Thus, we, collectively as behavioral scientists, know less than we think we do about almost any human behavior, but we are afraid to admit it. Academics are not the humble, squeaky-clean,

3. See generally STEPHANIE COONTZ, *THE WAY WE NEVER WERE: AMERICAN FAMILIES AND THE NOSTALGIA TRAP* (2000) (examining two centuries of American family life and questioning "myths" that may burden contemporary families); Gene H. Brody et al., *The Strong African American Families Program: Translating Research into Prevention Programming*, 75 *CHILD DEV.* 900 (2004) (conducting study on rural African American mothers and their children based on which factors protect youths from early alcohol use and sexual activity); John DeFrain & Sylvia M. Asay, *Strong Families Around the World: An Introduction to the Family Strengths Perspective*, 41 *MARRIAGE & FAM. REV.* 1 (2007) (pointing to a set of qualities that describe the characteristics of a "strong family"); Robert Kaita, *Foreword* to DEAN L. OVERMAN, *A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD* xix (2009) (explaining the irony for doubts as to the existence of God based on science when it is "the very regularity and comprehensibility of the universe" which not too long ago demonstrated "His benevolence").

objective, impartial, and unbiased investigators of truth as many regular folk suppose.

There is extensive documentation of major changes in family forms and functioning in the past fifty years,⁴ but these changes are not necessarily considered to be unhealthy or dysfunctional.⁵ In addition, many family scholars make it quite clear that there is pathology and dysfunction in the classic nuclear family (i.e., a working father, a full-time homemaker mother, and dependent children) that is often overlooked.⁶ This perpetuates the “myth” that children are best reared in two-biological-parent families.⁷ We are told by the majority of social and behavioral researchers that we should not hold up the traditional nuclear family as the ideal environment for raising children.⁸

4. See generally SHIFTING THE CENTER: UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY FAMILIES (Susan J. Ferguson ed., 3d ed. 2007) (compiling articles showing historical changes and family variations); Irma Arriagada, *Changes and Inequality in Latin American Families*, 37 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. STUD. 511 (2006) (highlighting changes that have affected family in a wider analytical context in Latin American societies); Ruben van Gaalen & Frans van Poppel, *Long-Term Changes in the Living Arrangements of Children in the Netherlands*, 30 J. FAM. ISSUES 653 (2009) (discussing demographic and social processes over the years in the Netherlands that have radically changed the number of parents that children grow up with); Abbie E. Goldberg & Katherine R. Allen, *Imagining Men: Lesbian Mothers' Perceptions of Male Involvement During the Transition to Parenthood*, 69 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 352 (2007) (showing preferences of lesbian parents and their concerns regarding male involvement in their children's lives); Fumie Kumagai, *Forty Years of Family Change in Japan: A Society Experiencing Population Aging and Declining Fertility*, 41 J. COMP. FAM. STUD. 581 (2010) (showing instances of family transformation regardless of location in the world); Angela R. Wiley & Aaron Ebata, *Reaching American Families: Making Diversity Real in Family Life Education*, 53 FAM. REL. INTERDISC. J. APPLIED FAM. STUD. 273 (2004) (discussing how family life educators can address issues of diversity in developing and conducting programs for families).

5. See Ramona Faith Oswald et al., *Decentering Heteronormativity: A Model for Family Studies*, in SOURCEBOOK OF FAMILY THEORY & RESEARCH, *supra* note 1, at 143, 148–49 [hereinafter Oswald et al., *Decentering*]; Ramona Faith Oswald, *Resilience Within the Family Networks of Lesbian and Gay Men: Intentionality and Redefinition*, 64 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 374, 375–76, 381 (2002) (reviewing the resilience processes of gay and lesbian family networks that enable members to endure and thrive); see also Karen Seccombe, *“Beating the Odds” Versus “Changing the Odds”: Poverty, Resilience, and Family Policy*, 64 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 384, 384–85, 387 (2002) (discussing poverty and its affect on families); see generally JUDITH STACEY, BRAVE NEW FAMILIES (1998) (studying how traditional families have now been changed to a variety of different relationships not necessarily defined by blood ties or traditional gender roles).

6. See, e.g., Jaime L. Marks et al., *Family Patterns of Gender Role Attitudes*, 61 SEX ROLES 221, 222 (2009) (stating that “representative samples of U.S. couples found that husbands hold more traditional gender role attitudes than their wives,” but “[t]his is not surprising, given that concepts of male privilege and dominance are inherent in traditional views of gender roles”).

7. See Timothy J. Biblarz & Judith Stacey, *Ideal Families and Social Science Ideals*, 72 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 41, 42 (2010) (reasoning that “social science research does not and cannot support the claim that children need both a mother and a father parenting together”).

8. See Rosie Harding, *Sir Mark Potter and the Protection of the Traditional Family: Why Same Sex Marriage is (Still) a Feminist Issue*, 15 FEMINIST LEGAL STUD. 223, 224–25, 227–28, 231–

This message comes across loud and clear in Stephanie Coontz's book, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*,⁹ or in Karen Hansen's *Not-So-Nuclear Families: Class, Gender, and Networks of Care*,¹⁰ or in a text by Valerie Lehr, *Queer Family Values: Debunking the Myth of the Nuclear Family*.¹¹ The seemingly deplorable conditions in many traditional nuclear families are depicted in popular movies such as the 2002, *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*¹² or the 2010 indie hit *Blue Valentine*.¹³ And the functionality of lesbian families is shown in the new hit movie *The Kids Are All Right*.¹⁴ As Celeste explains:

In *The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, the stay-at-home mother, Vivian, is an alcoholic, driven to drinking because she was forced into the role of homemaker when she had wanted to have a career in the city. She married a man she did not love and has children because this was the expectation of the time. She suffers from depression and alcoholism because she is overwhelmed with the responsibility of being the perfect mother and wife.¹⁵

Commentators on the demise and dysfunction of the traditional nuclear family are everywhere: in academia, in the medical and mental health fields, in the government, in religion, and in the entertainment media. Rabbi Balfour Brickner stated:

The nuclear family as we once knew it has crumbled. In its place a new understanding of family is emerging. That mythic television family of yesteryear, the happily married monogamous wife and husband, two drug-free children and a dog, living in a three-bedroom, two-bath house [in a quiet] suburban development somewhere, hardly exists anywhere anymore. In fact, the reality is

34 (2007); Oswald et al., *Decentering*, *supra* note 5, at 148; cf. Stan J. Knapp & Camille S. Williams, *Where Does Queer Theory Take Us?*, in SOURCEBOOK OF FAMILY THEORY & RESEARCH, *supra* note 1, at 626, 626–27 (discussing “queer theory,” which seeks to displace mainstream heterosexuality as a base for judging family normality).

9. COONTZ, *supra* note 3.

10. KAREN V. HANSEN, *NOT-SO-NUCLEAR FAMILIES: CLASS, GENDER, AND NETWORKS OF CARE* (2005).

11. VALERIE LEHR, *QUEER FAMILY VALUES: DEBUNKING THE MYTH OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY* (1999).

12. *DIVINE SECRETS OF THE YA-YA SISTERHOOD* (Warner Brothers 2002).

13. *BLUE VALENTINE* (Incentive Filmed Entertainment 2010).

14. *THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT* (Focus Features 2010).

15. Celeste, *The Myth of the Nuclear Family*, YAHOO! VOICES (May 8, 2007), <http://voices.yahoo.com/article/233526/the-myth-nuclear-family-328577.html>.

radically different. The most recent US census reveals that the marriage rate is declining precipitously, only 24 percent of households are made up of a married couple and children, . . . [t]he number of unmarried couple households [continues to rise]. . . [m]ore children are being born to or adopted . . . by couples in such arrangements. It is almost the norm for gay and straight couples to live together unmarried and more widowed or divorced older folk find new partners and cohabit without marriage. . . . [G]ay marriages [have] erupted across the land creating gay families that raise children in familial settings where, much to the dismay of braying religious fundamentalists, the kids are doing just fine with two mommies or two daddies.¹⁶

Caryl Rivers, a professor of journalism at Boston University, looked back through American history and noted: "Conservatives extol the mom, pop, and kids family model and describe it as traditional. But Americans throughout history were not particularly child-friendly or chaste. Serial marriages and illicit sex were common, as were births to unmarried women."¹⁷ Dr. Katherine Rake, the British government chief spokesperson on children and families and head of the United Kingdom's Family and Parenting Institute, in 2009 warned that the traditional family model is no longer the norm and any government attempts to rescue it are futile.¹⁸

Thus, in the age of sophisticated science and in a society that values diversity and pluralism, it is irresponsible and disingenuous to hold on to old stereotypes and ideals about traditional families without scientific data to support their veracity.¹⁹ For example, a typical heterosexual two-married-parent family with three kids and a dog could have problems: the dad is overworked and absent, the mother is an alcoholic and neglectful, and there is constant marital conflict seen by the children.

Thus, professionals concerned with children and families (e.g., therapists, lawyers, teachers, doctors, social workers) should be

16. Balfour Brickner, *The Death of the Nuclear Family: Towards a New Sexual Ethics in America*, 25 CONSCIENCE, June 22, 2005, at 41.

17. Caryl Rivers, *Iconic 'Nuclear' Family Is a Work of Fiction*, WOMENSENEWS.ORG (May 30, 2001), <http://www.womensenews.org/story/commentary/010530/iconic-nuclear-family-work-fiction>.

18. Sophie Borland, *Nuclear Family Is 'On the Way Out', Government Advisor Warns*, MAIL ONLINE (Nov. 30, 2009, 10:20 AM), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1231955/Traditional-nuclear-family-broken-says-Government-advisor.html?printingPage=true>.

19. Cf. Robert M. Marsh, *Civilizational Diversity and Support for Traditional Values*, 8 COMP. SOC. 267, 268 (2009) (explaining that although Western societies are moving towards modern values, the proportion of people in the world with traditional values may be increasing).

careful and cautious about what is held up to the public as the ideal environment for raising children. According to many child and family scholars, there is not much one can say about what is best for children in terms of family form or functioning. Child well-being depends upon a myriad of factors (or variables) that play out in a variety of contexts and no single prescription can be written for turning out a happy and healthy child.²⁰

On the other hand, it is hazardous to believe everything published in scientific journals and scholarly books. It has long been known that scientific data always has limitations.²¹ We assume the authors are unbiased and objective, and that their statistics have not been manipulated to support a pet theory, but scientists are value driven and they have their social and political agendas to pursue like everyone else. If scientists pick the right samples, get a large enough sample, and use preferred measurement instruments and statistics, a social scientist can find support for whatever he or she is looking for. Scientists and scholars of any stripe are not to be completely trusted because they are human and inevitably have biases and personal values that influence their work—whether they admit it or not.²² Psychologists have shared social views with which they decide to back certain policies “rather than on the basis of empirical evidence.”²³ Their public statements on gay and lesbian issues may be grounded in personal belief rather than in empirical data.²⁴ Walter Schumm reviewed much of the literature on lesbian parenting and concluded, “It appears clear that value biases have dramatically influenced how social scientists: evaluate scientific literature, develop their

20. See PETER K. SMITH ET AL., UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN’S DEVELOPMENT 67–83(4th ed. 2003); J. Shucksmith et al., *Models of Parenting: Implications for Adolescent Well-Being Within Different Types of Family Contexts*, 18 J. ADOLESCENCE 253, 254, 259, 262 (1995).

21. See Michael L. Callahan et al., *Positive-Outcome Bias and Other Limitations in the Outcome of Research Abstracts Submitted to a Scientific Meeting*, 280 JAMA 254, 254 (1998); James H. Price & Judy Murnan, *Research Limitations and the Necessity of Reporting Them*, 35 AM. J. HEALTH EDUC. 66, 66–67 (2004); see generally MARTEN SHIPMAN, THE LIMITATIONS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH (4th ed. 1997).

22. See James E. Alcock, *Prejudice or Propaganda*, 29 J. THEORETICAL & PHIL. PSYCHOL. 80, 80–84 (2009); Carolyn Wood Sherif, *Bias in Psychology*, 8 FEMINISM & PSYCHOL. 58 (1998); Brent D. Slife & Matthew Whoolery, *Are Psychology’s Main Methods Biased Against the Worldview of Many Religious People?*, 34 J. PSYCHOL. & THEOLOGY 217, 220–22 (2006); Brent D. Slife & Jeffrey S. Reber, *Is There a Pervasive Bias Against Theism in Psychology?*, 29 J. THEORETICAL & PHIL. PSYCHOL. 63 (2009).

23. Michelle M. Martel, *The Ethics of Psychology’s Role in Politics and the Development and Institution of Social Policy*, 19 ETHICS & BEHAV. 103, 109 (2009).

24. See *id.* at 109–10.

theoretical models, and conduct their research in the area of lesbian/gay parenting.”²⁵

I. EXAMPLE OF SCIENTIFIC BIAS IN FAVOR OF HOMOSEXUAL FAMILIES

Here is a recent example of what I believe to be scientific bias. The paper I will critique is, “How Does the Gender of Parents Matter?” published by Timothy Biblarz and Judith Stacey in the prestigious *Journal of Marriage and Family*.²⁶ There are several reasons why I believe their paper is flawed.

First, there are biased samples in much of the research. There are serious sampling problems with many of the studies that underlie their thesis that lesbian couples are superior to heterosexual couples in couple satisfaction and in parenting ability.²⁷ For example, take the research by Gartrell and Bos, which compared children’s development in homosexual and heterosexual families.²⁸ Dr. Dean Bryd, a clinical psychologist, criticizes the sample by saying that the lesbian mothers were not randomly selected and were composed of mostly white, college-educated, highly-paid professionals.²⁹ They were recruited from lesbian venues and probably would not have volunteered if their children were not well-adjusted.³⁰ The comparison sample of two-parent families was poorer and less educated and contained more minorities.³¹ Comparing the children from such discordant groups is not appropriate and gives advantage to the lesbian parent’s children. Non-probability sampling issues have plagued gay and lesbian research studies for decades.³²

In another study by Bos and Sandfort comparing children’s gender identity in lesbian and heterosexual families, the lesbian families were recruited from “a Dutch interest group for gay/lesbian parents, and by presenting information about the study during meetings organized

25. Walter R. Schumm, *Are Two Lesbian Parents Better than a Mom and a Dad? Logical and Methodological Flaws in Recent Studies Affirming the Superiority of Lesbian Parenthood*, 10 AVE MARIA L. REV. 79, 118 (2011).

26. Biblarz & Stacey, *supra* note 2.

27. *See id.* at 5.

28. Nanette Gartrell & Henny Bos, *U.S. National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study: Psychological Adjustment of 17-Year-Old Adolescents*, 126 PEDIATRICS 1 (2010).

29. A. Dean Byrd, *Opinion: New Lesbian Parenting Study Makes Claims Unsupported by the Evidence*, LIFESITENEWS.COM (Jul. 30, 2010, 11:15 AM), <http://www.lifesitenews.com/news/archive/ldn/2010/jul/10073012>.

30. *See id.*

31. *Id.*

32. *See generally* Schumm, *supra* note 25.

by Dutch healthcare centres about lesbian and gay parenthood.”³³ The process of selecting the heterosexual families was not explained. Of those contacted only an average of thirty-five percent of the heterosexual families were willing to participate.³⁴ So again, as evident in the Biblarz and Stacey paper, there is a sampling bias in favor of lesbian volunteers who know the state and condition of their children in advance of the survey.

Second, Biblarz and Stacey dismiss two decades of research that shows that fathers and mothers make unique and important contributions to child development.³⁵ It is quite clear, however, that Biblarz and Stacey, and many other social scientists, believe that fathers are not essential to child development.³⁶ For example, Alicia Crowl, Soyeon Ahn, and Jean Baker state in their meta-analysis of studies comparing children reared in heterosexual and non-heterosexual families: “[C]hildren raised by same-sex and heterosexual parents were found to not differ significantly in terms of their cognitive development, gender role behavior, gender identity, psychological adjustment, or sexual preferences.”³⁷

Third, Biblarz and Stacey claim the superiority of lesbian families over heterosexual parents on a variety of child outcomes.³⁸ In Table 1

33. Henny Bos & Theo G.M. Sandfort, *Children’s Gender Identity in Lesbian and Heterosexual Two-Parent Families*, 62 SEX ROLES 114, 117 (2010).

34. *Id.*

35. See ROSS D. PARKE, FATHERHOOD, THE DEVELOPING CHILD 1–3, 12–13 (Jerome Bruner et al. eds., 1996) (explaining why fatherhood benefits men and children); DAVID POPENO, LIFE WITHOUT FATHER 8, 10, 13–14 (1996) (discussing the important role of fathers in children’s lives); KYLE D. PRUETT, FATHERNEED: WHY FATHER CARE IS AS ESSENTIAL AS MOTHER CARE FOR YOUR CHILD (2000); Paul R. Amato & Fernando Rivera, *Paternal Involvement and Children’s Behavior Problems*, 61 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 375, 376 (1999); Philip A. Cowan et al., *Promoting Fathers’ Engagement with Children: Preventive Interventions for Low-Income Families*, 71 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 663, 663–64, 676–77 (2009); Maayan Davidov & Joan E. Grusec, *Untangling the Links of Parental Responsiveness to Distress and Warmth to Child Outcomes*, 77 CHILD DEV. 44, 52–55 (2006); Erin K. Holmes et al., *Meta-Analysis of the Effectiveness of Resident Fathering Programs: Are Family Life Educators Interested in Fathers?*, 59 FAM. REL. 240, 240, 249 (2010); Michael E. Lamb, *Fathers: Forgotten Contributors to Child Development*, 18 HUM. DEV. 245, 245–46, 259–60 (1975); Charlie Lewis & Michael E. Lamb, *Fathers’ Influences on Children’s Development: The Evidence from Two-Parent Families*, 18 EUR. J. PSYCHOL. EDUC. 211, 211–12 (2003); Sara McLanahan, *Growing Up Without a Father*, in LOST FATHERS: THE POLITICS OF FATHERLESSNESS IN AMERICA 85, 85–87 (Cynthia R. Daniels ed., 1998).

36. See Goldberg & Allen, *supra* note 4, at 361–62 (exploring lesbian parents’ concerns regarding male involvement in their children’s lives, but stating that “these women were not imagining ‘fathers’ for their children; they were imaging men”); Louise B. Silverstein & Carl F. Auerbach, *Deconstructing the Essential Father*, 54 AM. PSYCHOLOGIST, no. 6, 1999, at 11–12, 14.

37. Alicia Crowl et al., *A Meta-Analysis of Developmental Outcomes for Children of Same-Sex and Heterosexual Parents*, 4 J. GLBT FAM. STUD. 385, 398 (2008).

38. Biblarz & Stacey, *supra* note 2, at 8 tbl.1.

of their paper, the authors display quite a list of published research studies that seem to indicate the superiority of lesbian mothers.³⁹ Yet, they make this curious statement after Table 1: “[F]or every finding of significant difference [between lesbian families and heterosexual families] there were roughly four or more findings of no significant difference that we do not display.”⁴⁰ In other words, for every one study that indicates lesbian couples make better partners and parents than a husband and wife, there are four or more studies that found no differences in child outcomes!

Yet, batting only one out of four, they proceed to extol the virtues of lesbian parents over heterosexual parents. First, lesbian couples “enjoy greater equality, compatibility, and [relationship] satisfaction . . . than their heterosexual counterparts.”⁴¹ In addition, Biblarz and Stacey claim that lesbians are superior parents because “[c]omothers typically bestow a double dose of caretaking, communication, and intimacy” above and beyond heterosexual parents.⁴² They claim that the data indicates that lesbian parents are more available to their children, set less strict limits on children, use less harsh punishment, show more respect for a child’s autonomy, are more aware of what is going on in their children’s lives, spend more time in play with their children, and show more “[w]armth, affection, [and] attachment.”⁴³ The authors even assert that “growing up without a father did not impede masculine development but enabled boys to achieve greater gender flexibility,”⁴⁴ which to me means that boys raised by lesbian mothers are more likely to consider homosexuality and casual sex as viable choices.

Biblarz and Stacey summarize their paper by stating unequivocally that lesbians provide a “double dose of . . . middle-class ‘feminine’ . . . parenting” superior to heterosexual parenting.⁴⁵ They conclude, “In fact, based strictly on the published science, one could argue that two women parent better on average than a woman and a man.”⁴⁶ Fiona Tasker, a colleague, adds: “[N]onheterosexual parents on average indicated significantly better relationships with their children

39. *Id.*

40. *Id.* at 8.

41. *Id.* at 11.

42. *Id.* at 17.

43. *Id.* at 7 tbl.1.

44. *Id.* at 14.

45. *Id.* at 11.

46. *Id.* at 17.

than did heterosexual parents.”⁴⁷ Biblarz and Stacey believe that research to date does not support the claim that compared to other family forms, families headed by married, biological parents are best for children.⁴⁸

They conclude: “[T]o be true to the best scientific evidence, one should say: Compared to all other family forms, families headed by (at least) two committed, compatible parents are generally best for children.”⁴⁹ This blanket statement is made despite the views of many other family researchers that “[t]here is near-uniform agreement that offspring who grow up in two-biological-parent families have fewer behavioral problems . . . , more self-esteem, and better grades than children with absent [or without fathers].”⁵⁰ This reminds us that “twenty-four million American children now grow up without fathers, a phenomenon that is directly linked to every major social pathology of our time, from violent crime to substance abuse.”⁵¹

There are hundreds of published papers and books that demonstrate the advantages of a two-biological-parent family in raising healthy and high-achievement children. *Figure 1* provides a visual picture of this. There are two bell curves in the graphic, one representing children from intact, two-biological-parent families, and one curve representing children in all other types of families. The horizontal axis indicates the number of children beginning at zero at the bottom and hundreds of thousands at the top. The vertical axis represents child achievement in almost any area of psychosocial, cognitive, or interpersonal development. Achievement could be any variable such as school grades, relationship with peers, entry

47. Fiona Tasker, *Same-Sex Parenting and Child Development: Reviewing the Contribution of Parental Gender*, 72 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 35, 36 (2010).

48. Biblarz & Stacey, *supra* note 2, at 17.

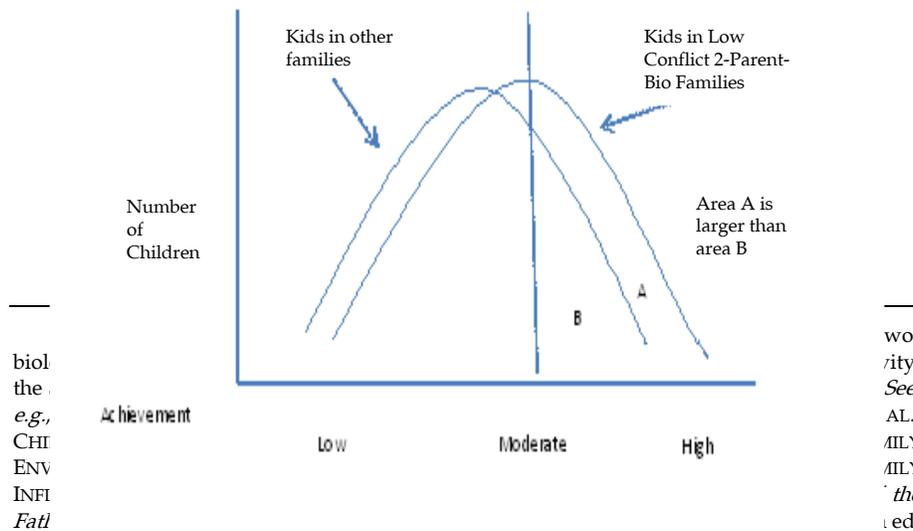
49. *Id.*

50. Alan Booth et al., *Father Residence and Adolescent Problem Behavior: Are Youth Always Better Off in Two-Parent Families?*, 31 J. FAM. ISSUES 585, 599–600 (2010); see generally STEPHEN BASKERVILLE, *TAKEN INTO CUSTODY: THE WAR AGAINST FATHERS, MARRIAGE, AND THE FAMILY* (2007) (discussing the premise that a successful human society is based on a two-parent family structure); Stephen Baskerville, *Freedom and the Family: The Family Crisis and the Future of Western Civilization*, 22 HUMANITAS 168 (2009) [hereinafter Baskerville, *Freedom*] (examining the historical perspective of family and survival of the family in the future); Melanie H. Mellers et al., *Perceptions of Childhood Relationships with Mother and Father: Daily Emotional and Stressor Experiences in Adulthood*, 46 DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOL. 1651 (2010) (examining “the unique associations of recalled childhood experiences of mother-child and father-child relationship quality,” and finding positive outcomes in childhood and adulthood from the combined relationship); Camila Alves Peres et al., *Family Structure and Adolescent Sexual Behavior in a Poor Area of São Paulo, Brazil*, 42 J. ADOLESCENT HEALTH 177 (2008) (discussing the importance of fathers on the emotional experiences of children).

51. Baskerville, *Freedom*, *supra* note 50, at 178.

into college, self-esteem, volunteerism, or low rates of alcohol, delinquency, and drug use. The average effect of hundreds of studies has clearly shown that children from two-biological-parent families, on average, do better than children raised in other environments, and this is reflected in *Figure 1*.

FIGURE 1.
CHILD OUTCOMES BY FAMILY TYPE⁵²



2004); Callie E. Langton & Lawrence M. Berger, *Family Structure and Adolescent Physical Health, Behavior, and Emotional Well-Being*, 85 SOC. SERV. REV. 323, 323–57 (2011); Charlie Lewis & Michael E. Lamb, *Fathers' Influences on Children's Development: The Evidence from Two-Parent Families*, 18 EUR. J. PSYCHOL. EDUC. 211, 211–28 (2003); Kristin Anderson Moore & Laura H. Lippman, *Introduction and Conceptual Framework*, in WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED TO FLOURISH? 1, 1–12 (Kristin Anderson Moore & Laura H. Lippman eds., 2005); Kristin Anderson Moore & Brett Brown, *Preparing Indicators for Policymakers and Advocates*, in 27 INDICATORS OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING: UNDERSTANDING THEIR ROLE, USAGE AND POLICY INFLUENCE 93, 93–104 (Asher Ben-Arieh & Robert M. Goerge eds., 2006); Dennis K. Orthner et al., *Marital and Parental Relationship Quality and Educational Outcomes for Youth*, 45 MARRIAGE & FAM. REV. 249, 249–69 (2009); Jennifer S. Parker & Mark J. Benson, *Parent-Adolescent Relations and Adolescent Functioning: Self-Esteem, Substance Abuse, and Delinquency*, 39 ADOLESCENCE 519, 519–30 (2004); Bali Ram & Feng Hou, *Changes in Family Structures and Child Outcomes: Roles of Economic and Familial Resources*, 31 POL'Y STUD. J. 309, 309–30 (2003); Ronald L. Simons et al., *Explaining the Higher Incidence of Adjustment Problems Among Children of Divorce Compared with Those in Two-Parent Families*, 61 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 1020, 1020–33 (1999); Katherine H. Zeiders et al., *Family Structure and Family Processes in Mexican-American Families*, 50 FAM. PROCESS 77, 77–91 (2011).



Fourth, the authors downplay the fact that lesbian and gay couples, especially male couples, have higher rates of breakup, infidelity, substance abuse, and spousal abuse than married heterosexual couples;⁵³ and when a family breaks apart, children are at greater risk for a variety of ills.⁵⁴ Walter Schumm, in a recent review of relationship stability of lesbian mothers versus heterosexual mother families, concluded that after about ten years in a couple relationship, “37.8% of lesbian couples . . . separated compared with 15.7% of heterosexual couples [I]t appears that the odds of lesbian couples breaking up are over three times greater than the odds of heterosexual couples breaking up.”⁵⁵

53. See Lawrence A. Kurdek, *Relationship Outcomes and Their Predictors: Longitudinal Evidence from Heterosexual Married, Gay Cohabiting, and Lesbian Cohabiting Couples*, 60 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 553, 555 (1998) (analyzing relationship dissolution among lesbian couples); Lawrence A. Kurdek, *What Do We Know About Gay and Lesbian Couples?*, 14 CURRENT DIRECTION PSYCHOL. SCI. 251, 253 (2005) (discussing rate of relationship dissolution among gay and lesbian couples); Patrick C. McKenry et al., *Perpetration of Gay and Lesbian Partner Violence: A Disempowerment Perspective*, 21 J. FAM. VIOLENCE 233, 234–35, 240 (2006) (discussing higher rates of alcohol abuse among same-sex partners which leads to violence among those couples); Letitia Anne Peplau & Adam W. Fingerhut, *The Close Relationships of Lesbians and Gay Men*, 58 ANN. REV. PSYCHOL. 405, 411–12, 414–15 (2007) (stating that data from Norway and Sweden, where registered same-sex partnerships are available, suggest that lesbian couples have the highest rates of dissolution); Michael J. Potoczniak et al., *Legal and Psychological Perspectives on Same-Sex Domestic Violence: A Multisystemic Approach*, 17 J. FAM. PSYCHOL. 252, 252, 258 (2003) (suggesting that same-sex domestic violence happens at least as much as opposite-sex domestic violence); Helen A. Smith et al., *Sexual Abuse, Sexual Orientation, and Obesity in Women*, 19 J. WOMEN’S HEALTH 1525, 1529 (2010) (reporting higher rates of spousal abuse among lesbian women compared with heterosexual women).

54. See Susan L. Brown, *Family Structure and Child Well-Being: The Significance of Parental Cohabitation*, 66 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 351, 351–52 (2004); Roy F. Oman et al., *A Youth Development Approach to Profiling Sexual Abstinence*, 27 AM. J. HEALTH BEHAV. S80, S81 (2003) (identifying familial cohesion and parental monitoring as factors that influence adolescent sexual behavior); Roy F. Oman et al., *Does Family Structure Matter in the Relationships Between Youth Assets and Youth Alcohol, Drug and Tobacco Use?*, 17 J. RES. ADOLESCENCE 743, 743, 757 (2007) (discussing results of a study that indicate associations between assets and risk behavior among youths varied depending on whether the youth lived in one or two-parent households).

55. Walter R. Schumm, *Comparative Relationship Stability of Lesbian Mother and Heterosexual Mother Families: A Review of Evidence*, 46 MARRIAGE & FAM. REV. 499, 504 (2010).

Biblarz and Stacey seem to assume or imply that all lesbian couples get along well and have great parenting skills,⁵⁶ but the data is tentative because of small, non-random samples.⁵⁷ If Biblarz and Stacey's main argument comes down to kids do better with a "double dose of mothering" then the authors have failed to consider the effects on children in polygamist families. If two mothers are better than a mother and father, then why not have three, four, or five mothers with different temperaments, talents, and strengths to care for all the children? In addition, if you follow their logic, then gay fathers would be the worst parents because there are no women involved.

Fifth, Biblarz and Stacey fail to take an ecological perspective on child development and disregard how environmental factors affect how children turn out.⁵⁸ Figure 1 in their paper shows a variety of family structures, but structure alone does not make a healthy child. Figure 2 in their paper shows a variety of family processes which exist inside every family type and recent research indicates that healthy family processes are more important than family structure.⁵⁹ A child resides within a specific family structure (that is either an advantage or disadvantage to development) that changes over time, and is influenced by various family processes (for good or ill).

But structure and processes exist within a large ecological environment of friends, schools, the media, the internet, religion, and the macro-level cultural norms and behavioral expectations.⁶⁰ Thus, one cannot say with confidence that a particular family structure (e.g., lesbian family) is the optimal child environment. It is much more complex and child outcomes (healthy or unhealthy) result from an interaction of (1) structure, (2) function (i.e., family

56. See Biblarz & Stacey, *supra* note 2, at 17.

57. See *id.* at 6.

58. Cf. Anne L. Buffardi et al., *Moving Upstream: Ecosocial and Psychosocial Correlates of Sexually Transmitted Infections Among Young Adults in the United States*, 98 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 1128, 1128 (2008); Beth A. Kotchick et al., *Adolescent Sexual Risk Behavior: A Multi-System Perspective*, 21 CLINICAL PSYCHOL. REV. 493, 496-515 (2001) (discussing factors that influence adolescent sexual behavior and development of prevention and intervention programs to minimize the risk for negative health consequences).

59. See Robert H. Bradley & Robert F. Corwyn, "Family Process" Investments that Matter for Child Well-Being, in FAMILY INVESTMENTS IN CHILDREN'S POTENTIAL: RESOURCES AND PARENTING BEHAVIORS THAT PROMOTE SUCCESS 1, 1-32 (Ariel Kalil & Thomas DeLeire eds., 2004); Erin Calhoun Davis & Lisa V. Friel, *Adolescent Sexuality: Disentangling the Effects of Family Structure and Family Context*, 63 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 669, 672 (2001).

60. Cf. Jelani Mandara et al., *Predictors of African American Adolescent Sexual Activity: An Ecological Framework*, 29 J. BLACK PSYCHOL. 337, 338, 351 fig.3 (2003) (explaining ecological framework to study factors related to adolescent sexual activity among African Americans).

processes), and (3) environmental influences as presented in Figure 3 of Mandara's article.⁶¹

As part of an ecological perspective, there is another element that is rarely or never considered by social and behavioral scientists as a determinate of human behavior, and that factor is human agency.⁶² A child's development is not just an outcome of what others do to the child, but a child (after about the age of 8–10) possesses agency, the ability to make independent choices and decisions in whatever environment the child resides.⁶³ Yes, past family and environmental factors restrict and constrain personal choices and freedom of action, but future moral behavior is not absolutely determined by the past or present contributors to child development. Children (after a certain age), like adults, can make choices and decisions independent of past or present conditioning and experiences.⁶⁴

II. LIMITATIONS OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

My last reproof is more general in scope, but it applies to many of the studies cited in the Biblarz and Stacey paper. There is a *dirty little secret* in social science research that most non-scientists do not understand, but is critical when the layperson tries to interpret social science research reports. Social scientists are often like the five blind men feeling the elephant.

The story of "The Blind Men and the Elephant" is a parable about how people tend to understand only a small part of any specific thing, but claim their individual interpretation is correct. It is an ancient story told by the Buddha, the Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama, circa 450 BC:

61. *Id.* at 351 fig.3.

62. See Leon Kuczynski & C. Melanie Parkin, *Agency and Bidirectionality in Socialization: Interactions, Transactions, and Relational Dialectics*, in HANDBOOK OF SOCIALIZATION: THEORY AND RESEARCH 259, 260–61, 271, 278 (Joan E. Grusec & Paul D. Hastings eds., 2007); cf. Roy F. Baumeister et al., *Choice, Free Will, and Religion*, 2 PSYCHOL. RELIGION & SPIRITUALITY 67 (2010) (discussing the benefits of religion and its support of the capacity for free will or agency that guides choices and behaviors reflecting civilized restraint).

63. See Albert Bandura, *Toward a Psychology of Human Agency*, 1 PERSP. PSYCHOL. SCI. 164, 169–70 (2006); Dawson Church, *The Genie in Your Genes: Epigenetic Medicine and the New Biology of Intention* 13–21 (2008).

64. See Jeffrey M. Schwartz & Sharon Begley, *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force* 290–322 (2002); see generally David Shenk, *The Genius in All of Us: Why Everything You've Been Told About Genetics, Talent, and IQ Is Wrong* (2010).

A number of disciples went to the Buddha and said, "Sir, there are living here in Savatthi many wandering hermits and scholars who indulge in constant dispute, some saying that the world is infinite and eternal and others that it is finite and not eternal, some saying that the soul dies with the body and others that it lives on forever, and so forth. What, sir, would you say concerning them?" The Buddha answered, "Once upon a time there was a certain raja who called to his servant and said, 'Come, good fellow, go and gather together in one place all the men of Savatthi who were born blind . . . and show them an elephant.' 'Very good, sire,' replied the servant, and he did as he was told. He said to the blind men assembled there, 'Here is an elephant,' and to one man he presented the head of the elephant, to another its ears, to another a tusk, to another the trunk, the foot, the back, tail, and tuft of the tail, saying to each one that that was the elephant. When the blind men had felt the elephant, the raja went to each of them and said to each, 'Well, blind man, have you seen the elephant? Tell me, what sort of thing is an elephant?' Thereupon, the [man who was] presented with the head answered, 'Sire, an elephant is like a pot.' And the [man] who had observed the ear replied, 'An elephant is like a winnowing basket.' [He] who had been presented with the tusk said it was a ploughshare. [He] who knew only the trunk said it was a plough; others said the body was a grainery; the foot, a pillar; the back, a mortar; the tail, a pestle; the tuft of the tail, a brush. Then they began to quarrel, shouting, 'Yes it is!' 'No, it is not!' 'An elephant is not that!' 'Yes, it's like that!' and so on, till they came to blows over the matter. Brethren, the raja was delighted with the scene. Just so are these preachers and scholars holding various views blind and unseeing In their ignorance they are by nature quarrelsome, wrangling, and disputatious, each maintaining reality is thus and thus."⁶⁵

When social and behavioral scientists study a child or family phenomenon (i.e., an elephant), they discover only parts of the elephant, yet make exaggerated claims about the nature of the beast from only knowing a portion of its true reality. Biblarz and Stacey claim they know the reality of a lesbian family and how it produces better child outcomes than a dual gender biological family,⁶⁶ yet they only hold the trunk, or the ear, or the tail of the elephant. When scientists do comparisons between groups, or do correlations between variables, the typical outcomes are small group differences or small

65. *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, SANDRA DODD, <http://sandraddodd.com/theblindmenandtheelephant> (last visited Feb. 9, 2012) (citing UDANA 68–69).

66. See Biblarz & Stacey, *supra* note 2, at 8 tbl.1.

correlations between variables. For example, in a fictional *comparison study* the math scores of children for a non-random sample of children from three family types could produce these results: kids in lesbian families scored an average of 55.3 on the math exam; those in heterosexual two-parent families scored 53.8; and kids in single-parent-mother families scored 47.2. On the surface it looks like the kids from lesbian families win.

In a comparison study, depending on how the sampling was done (random or convenience samples) and the number of kids in each group (e.g., 20, 40, 80, or 120), these scores could be significantly different or not. Such a study would need to be replicated, which is rarely done. And even if the scores were statistically different, the practical value of a one-point difference (55 for the lesbians' kids versus 54 for the heterosexuals' kids) may not have any practical relevance in school because both scores are above average.

In addition to comparison studies, the other method of studying elephants (i.e., any child or family phenomenon) is *correlational research*. The approach is used because researchers cannot manipulate the independent variables they want to study. For example, let us say researchers want to study the effects of divorce on child well-being or the difference between children who have a single mother or a single father. The independent variable is "divorce" in the first case or "sex of single parent" in the latter. Scientists cannot create these situations; they cannot cause some families to divorce and make other families stay married, or they cannot create some single-parent families with dads and others with moms. If one cannot control the independent variable then an experiment cannot be done and the only recourse is a correlational study.

The typical outcome of a correlational study, even with large random samples is small, averaging about $r = .20$. The risk of teen suicide, let us say was measured on a 1 to 5 scale (1 being low risk and 5 indicating high risk), and one's sexual orientation was measured on a 1 to 5 point scale (1 indicating an exclusively heterosexual orientation and 5 indicating an exclusively homosexual orientation). A correlation can range from $r = 0$ that indicates that two variables are not related to each other, up to $r = 1$, indicating the one variable completely predicts the other variable. A correlation of $r = .58$, $p < .001$ would indicate that sexual orientation is a very good predictor of teen suicide. The implication of this correlation is that the more likely the teen reports as exclusively homosexual, the more likely the teen would think about trying to commit suicide.

Now let us say, some researchers did a study on teen suicide and sexual orientation using a random sample of 10,000 teenagers across the United States. They have a large representative sample and excellent methodology. The correlation between risk of suicide and sexual orientation turns out to be $r = .28, p < .001$. That is a significant finding. Yet, to interpret the correlation, one must square the number .28, which then becomes .08, which means that roughly eight percent of the variation in risk for suicide can be predicted or explained by knowing the teen's sexual orientation score.

It also means that ninety-two percent of the risk for suicide cannot be understood by knowing the teen's sexual orientation score. In other words, knowing eight percent of the elephant is not much! There is a lot more to the elephant than knowing only the sexual orientation (i.e., the tail of the elephant). The point of this example is that just because one study finds significant differences between groups, or a significant correlation between variables, the results, in reality, may be very limited and have little practical relevance. One must look at the overall picture of the elephant painted by hundreds of studies over many years.

III. SUMMARY SO FAR

Let me summarize what I have said so far. Healthy child development can occur (1) in a variety of family types (or structures), (2) when exposed to a variety of healthy family processes such as warm supportive parents who use inductive discipline, (3) when protected or sheltered from harmful environmental factors (e.g., poor, high-crime neighborhoods; toxic air, food, and water; inadequate schools, anti-social peers, pornographic media, etc.), and (4) when exposed to healthy environmental influences (e.g., high-quality schools, benevolent religions, enlightening educational media, high-functioning peers, supportive government child and family policies, etc.).

I have also stated that social science research has flaws and limitations and cannot be completely trusted to be unbiased and objective. Often times the results of research are small group differences or small correlations which reveal only a small part of the phenomenon under study.

IV. A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Let us go back to the original question: "What is the best environment for optimal child development?" The first problem

becomes what are healthy, functional child outcomes most wanted by parents and by society? All environments produce outcomes, but not all outcomes are equally regarded as desirable by all parents, psychologists, teachers, government officials, religious leaders, and social scientists. For example, in the Biblarz and Stacey article a prized outcome of lesbian parents is a child with a flexible gender identity (“Am I male or female?”), flexible sexual orientation (“Am I straight, gay, bisexual, or something else?”), and the freedom to experiment with both gender identity and sexual orientation.⁶⁷ That would not be considered a positive or healthy outcome by many parents.

So let us begin with a list of desired child outcomes—that most reasonable and rational people could agree upon—and then work in reverse by then asking what family processes are most likely to produce these desired child outcomes, and in what family structures are these family processes most likely to occur? Let me give you an example of what I am talking about. A few years ago I published a paper entitled “Family Predictors of Well-Functioning Midwestern Adolescents.”⁶⁸ I sent out 300 surveys to the teens that were listed in local newspapers as being outstanding because of four characteristics: (1) a high GPA (82% had a 4.0 GPA), (2) involvement in extracurricular activities, (3) leadership qualities, and (4) high moral character or integrity as perceived by high school teachers.⁶⁹ These kids possessed four highly-desirable outcomes. When I looked at the demographic data on the sample, I discovered that ninety percent of these high-achievement teens came from families with two biological parents.⁷⁰ And the teens in this study rated their parents high on parental warmth and support.⁷¹ In this study, the family process was *parental warmth and support* and the family structure was *two-biological-parent family*.⁷² Of course one study does not prove a point, but it is an example of looking at the question of what is best for children from a different angle.

A scientist could pick any group of smart, emotionally healthy, accomplished teens or young adults, and ask about their families. What types of families do the majority come from? What emotional

67. Biblarz & Stacey, *supra* note 2, at 8 tbl.1, 13–15.

68. Douglas A. Abbott et al., *Family Predictors of Well-Functioning Midwestern Adolescents*, 15 GREAT PLAINS RES. 267 (2005).

69. *Id.* at 269.

70. *Id.*

71. *Id.* at 270.

72. *See id.* at 267–70.

processes are common in these families? Also, ask the youth if their fathers were *instrumental or incidental* in their development.⁷³

If this approach to research was used more often, I believe we would find more direct answers to the question of what is the optimal environment for children. This type of research might cut through all the smoke and mirrors of social science research that tends to show few if any differences in child outcomes for children raised in any type of family environment.⁷⁴

I believe that such data would support the proposition that healthy, high-functioning children are most often found in the two-biological-parent families.⁷⁵ Certainly, children in other family types can and will excel emotionally and intellectually, but I believe that such positive outcomes are less likely to occur in other family types. There are, however, many who would disagree, and they will cite many published studies to support their view.⁷⁶

I asked seven colleagues in child development and family studies this question: “List your top five teen development outcomes.” Here is a composite list of a dozen characteristics in no particular order:

73. Cf. WHY FATHERS COUNT: THE IMPORTANCE OF FATHERS AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT WITH CHILDREN (Sean E. Brotherson & Joseph M. White eds., 2007) (providing helpful background information through a series of contemporary scholarship on fathers and fathering, and making the case for the importance of fathering in a child’s development).

74. See, e.g., Paul Florsheim et al., *Family Relationships, Parenting Practices, the Availability of Male Family Members, and the Behavior of Inner-City Boys in Single-Mother and Two-Parent Families*, 69 CHILD DEV. 1437, 1438, 1444–45 (1998). Compare Erini Flouri & Ann Buchanan, *Early Father’s and Mother’s Involvement and Child’s Later Educational Outcomes*, 74 BRIT. J. EDUC. PSYCHOL. 141 (2004) (studying early father involvement and its relation to high attainment levels in children), with Paula Fomby & Andrew J. Cherlin, *Family Instability and Child Well-Being*, 72 AM. SOC. REV. 181 (2007) (discussing results of study which tested the “instability” hypothesis (i.e., children who experience multiple disruptions in family structure may fare worse) and the “selection” hypothesis (i.e., multiple transitions and negative outcomes may be associated with each other through common causal factors seen in the parents’ antecedent behaviors)).

75. See Alvin Booth et al., *supra* note 50, at 600; K. Alison Clarke-Stewart et al., *Effects of Parental Separation and Divorce on Very Young Children*, 14 J. FAM. PSYCHOL. 304, 304–15, 321–22 (2000) (finding ample evidence that child outcomes are better for married biological parents, worse for children of divorce, and worst of all for single mothers); Flouri & Buchanan, *supra* note 74, at 150 (concluding that involvement of both a mother and a father correlates to better educational outcomes for children); Sarah Halpern-Meekin & Laura Tach, *Heterogeneity in Two-Parent Families and Adolescent Well-Being*, 70 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 435, 435–37, 446, 448–49 (2008); Lewis & Lamb, *supra* note 35, at 211 (stating that “when two parents live with their children, fathers contribute to their children’s development in important ways”).

76. See, e.g., Biblarz & Stacey, *supra* note 7, at 42–43; Cowl et al., *supra* note 37, at 402; Peplau & Fingerhut, *supra* note 53, at 414–15; Fiona Tasker, *Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and Their Children: A Review*, 26 J. DEVELOPMENTAL & BEHAV. PEDIATRICS 224, 225, 229–31 (2005); Tasker, *supra* note 47, at 39.

- (1) Interpersonal skills (communicates positively with parents, friends, and others);
- (2) Pro-social (is cooperative and helpful to others);
- (3) Interpersonal competence (is empathic, sensitive, and compassionate);
- (4) Honest and truthful (has high integrity);
- (5) Kind and compassionate (willing to help others in need);
- (6) Self-regulated (able to control self and direct life towards positive outcomes, and able to resist peer pressure);
- (7) Moral (has a belief in a higher power and lives by a moral code of conduct);
- (8) Models healthy and wholesome behaviors (avoids risky or dangerous behaviors like drugs, sex, etc.);
- (9) Motivated (has a sense of purpose and is achievement orientated);
- (10) Culturally competent (has knowledge of and comfort with people of diverse ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds);
- (11) Responsible, dependable, and trustworthy; and
- (12) Goal-oriented (knows how to plan ahead and make wise decisions, feels in control of life).⁷⁷

If we can tentatively agree that these are creditable and worthy teen outcomes, then the question becomes: "How do we raise kids to possess these characteristics?" One must think about both family processes and family structure and take into consideration that all children have agency or freedom to choose. Regardless of the health and functionality of the family, a child in a great environment can still make bad choices.

So what are the conditions that would elicit these outcomes? Consider the ten listed below. Think of a swimming pool. What would you fill the pool with, assuming that the water will interact with the children's movements to produce positive outcomes outside the pool? Note that I am taking a leap of faith implying that these ten conditions are directly related to the previous twelve child outcomes. I have no research to support this. It would take hundreds of studies to demonstrate the connection between any one outcome and any one of

77. See SEARCH INST., 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS FOR ADOLESCENTS (AGES 12-18) (2006), available at <http://www.search-institute.org/system/files/40AssetsList.pdf>; see generally FAMILY INVESTMENTS IN CHILDREN'S POTENTIAL: RESOURCES AND PARENTING BEHAVIORS THAT PROMOTE SUCCESS (Ariel Kalil & Thomas DeLeire eds., 2004) (providing helpful background information in a series of chapters published by different researchers on the two broad dimensions of parental investment: resources and behaviors).

the conditions. So I know I am out on a limb with my opinion. In my defense, I am just trying to simplify things and look logically at a very complex issue.

V. CONDITIONS HYPOTHESIZED TO PRODUCE POSITIVE CHILD OUTCOMES

The following is a list of ten desired child outcomes:

- (1) Adults who model healthy lifestyles;
- (2) Appropriate discipline, rules, and supervision;
- (3) Love and support from primary caretakers;
- (4) Education, opportunities to learn and explore;
- (5) Safe home and neighborhood;
- (6) Financial support and resources;
- (7) Friends and positive peers;
- (8) Religious and/or spiritual influences;
- (9) Opportunities to work with and help others; and
- (10) Wholesome leisure activities (fun things to do).

The writer hypothesizes that the following four factors will help produce these ten desired outcomes.

A. *Teen vs. Young Adult*

Adults age 23–25 have optimal brain development, especially in the frontal cortex, which makes them better decision-makers, more likely to control impulses, able to recognize consequences to their actions, and so forth.⁷⁸ Older parents are more likely to be highly educated and have well-paying jobs simply because they had more time to pursue education and acquire the work experience that led to better-paying jobs. So this eliminates teen parents as candidates for the best family environment.

B. *Two vs. One Parent*

Two adult caretakers are better than one for a variety of reasons. Consider these advantages of two parents: (a) there is more

78. See Jay N. Giedd, *Structural Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the Adolescent Brain*, 1021 ANNA. N.Y. ACAD. SCI. 77, 78–83 (2004) [hereinafter Giedd, *Structural Magnetic*]; Jay N. Giedd, *The Teen Brain: Insights from Neuroimaging*, 42 J. ADOL. HEALTH 335, 336–41 (2008) [hereinafter Giedd, *Teen Brain*].

supervision; (b) there is more money; (c) there are two role models for ethical behavior and occupational example; (d) a viable family is modeled (assuming low marital conflict and good parenting skills); (e) a larger network of kith and kin to support the children; and (f) a “double dose” of support and unconditional love. So, in general, two parents are potentially better than a single parent in getting desired child outcomes.

C. *Opposite-Sex vs. Same-Sex Parents*

Here is where much of the contention and controversy lies given all the new research about gay and lesbian families. I propose that dual-gender parents (i.e., a father and a mother) have several advantages over same-sex parents: (a) one would avoid the issues of adoption, surrogacy, and in-vitro fertilization which can cause identity problems later for the child;⁷⁹ (b) two bio-parents model procreation which is important if one wants the human race to continue—lesbian and gay men do not reproduce enough of their own blood-related children to replace themselves;⁸⁰ (c) males and females often have different temperaments and talents that can benefit children;⁸¹ (d) mothers and fathers help feminize girls and masculinize boys so children are more likely to establish a stable gender identity and traditional sexual orientation which would eliminate much of the stress and anxiety experienced by gay youth;⁸² (e) children raised by gay or lesbian couples are “more likely to experience homoerotic attraction and homosexual relationships”;⁸³

79. Jason S. Carroll & David C. Dollahite, “Who’s My Daddy?” *How the Legalization of Same-Sex Partnerships Would Further the Rise of Ambiguous Fatherhood in America*, in WHAT’S THE HARM? DOES LEGALIZING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE REALLY HARM INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, OR SOCIETY? 47, 56–57 (Lynn D. Wardle ed., 2008); cf. Allan C. Carlson, *Marriage and Procreation: On Children as the First Purpose of Marriage*, 18 FAM. AM., no.12, 2004, available at http://www.profam.org/pub/fia/fia_1812.htm.

80. See Carlson, *supra* note 79.

81. A.D. Byrd, *Dual-Gender Parenting for Optimal Child Development*, 2 J. HUM. SEXUALITY 105, 107–09 (2010).

82. See Ariel Knafo et al., *Masculine Girls and Feminine Boys: Genetic and Environmental Contributions to Atypical Gender Development in Early Childhood*, 88 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 400, 411 (2005); Katherine A. Kivalanka & Abbie E. Goldberg, “Second Generation” *Voices: Queer Youth with Lesbian/Bisexual Mothers*, 38 J. YOUTH ADOLESCENCE 904, 904–05, 911–12 (2009); cf. Jane E. Mitchell et al., *Masculinity and Femininity in Twin Children: Genetic and Environmental Factors*, 60 CHILD DEV. 1475, 1475–76, 1483 (1989) (analyzing results of a study that show genetic influence as well as environmental influence as playing a role in the masculinization and feminization of children).

83. Richard E. Redding, *It’s Really About Sex: Same-Sex Marriage, Lesbian Parenting, and the Psychology of Disgust*, 15 DUKE J. GENDER L. & POL’Y 127, 150 (2008); see also Walter R.

and (f) adults and children in gay and lesbian families are more likely to experience mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide and substance abuse.⁸⁴ In sum: the advantage belongs to two bio-parents.

D. *Marriage vs. Cohabitation*

Legal marriage appears to benefit children over parents living together for several reasons: (a) married parents are less likely to separate or divorce than cohabiters; (b) children are less likely to be abused or neglected than children in cohabiting families, especially if the father is not blood-related to the children; (c) married parents are more likely to be better educated and have higher paying jobs than partners who are cohabitating; (d) even if married parents eventually separate or divorce they are more likely than cohabiters to remarry and provide a more stable family; and (e) married parents are more likely to have a network of kith and kin that will help care for and support the children. All of that said, marriage is better for children than cohabitation.⁸⁵

CONCLUSION

Where is the optimal place to produce healthy and positive child outcomes? As you can see, that is not an easy question to answer anymore. There is strong opposition in the social sciences and among mental health professionals to say anything approaching this: "The best place to raise children is a two-biological, heterosexual parent family."⁸⁶ Politically-correct and liberal-minded social scientists huff

Schumm, *Children of Homosexuals More Apt to be Homosexuals? A Reply to Morrison and to Cameron Based on an Examination of Multiple Sources of Data*, 42 J. BIOSOC. SCI. 721, 737 (2010).

84. See Christopher J. Alexander et al., *Homosexuality and Risk for Psychiatric Disorders*, 14 J. GAY & LESBIAN SOC. SERVS. 103, 103, 105–06 (2001); Karen F. Trocki et al., *Tobacco, Marijuana, and Sensation Seeking: Comparisons Across Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Groups*, 23 PSYCHOL. ADDICTIVE BEHAV. 620, 620, 625–28 (2009); Jen Wang et al., *High Prevalence of Mental Disorders and Comorbidity in the Geneva Gay Men's Health Study*, 42 SOC. PSYCHIATRY & PSYCHIATRIC EPIDEMIOLOGY 414, 414–15, 418 (2007).

85. See Anne M. McMunn et al., *Children's Emotional and Behavioural Well-Being and the Family Environment: Findings from the Health Survey for England*, 53 SOC. SCI. & MED. 423, 435 (2001); cf. Rashmita S. Mistry et al., *Economic Well-Being and Children's Social Adjustment: The Role of Family Process in an Ethnically Diverse Low-Income Sample*, 73 CHILD DEV. 935, 935 (2002); Dennis K. Orthner et al., *The Resilience and Strengths of Low-Income Families*, 53 FAM. REL. 159, 165 (2004).

86. Cf. TAMMY BRUCE, *THE NEW THOUGHT POLICE: INSIDE THE LEFT'S ASSAULT ON FREE SPEECH AND FREE MINDS* (2001) (discussing how powerful leftist special interest groups are limiting our free speech rights in order to attain "equality"); L.B. Johnson et al., *Gay and Lesbian*

and puff and try to blow down the traditional family with a barrage of bombs: (1) the two bio-parent family is pathological; (2) it is unstable; (3) abuse of children is common; and (4) fathers do not help much around the house and their parenting is inferior to mothers. The litany of attacks against the two-biological-parent family goes on and on.⁸⁷ Yet there is a sizeable quantity of published research on the value of mother-child and father-child relationships.⁸⁸

So where has all the criticism of the two-biological-parent family come from? Is it valid science or is it the socio-political values of society and the elites in academia and the entertainment media industry? Many believe it is better science that has demonstrated there is no inherent advantage to children raised in two-biological-parent families. Yet, I believe it is the shift in the socio-political and moral culture that emphasizes diversity, moral pluralism, and political correctness that has undermined the veracity of the traditional family. It is clear that on certain issues (e.g., gay and lesbian families) “psychologists and psychological organizations may decide to back certain social [issues] . . . on the basis of their shared ethical principles and values rather than on the basis of empirical evidence,” and thus “psychologists . . . should be clear about the distinction between their personal opinions and values and their professional, scientific claims.”⁸⁹ This, I believe, is what is happening in the case of the rise, elevation, and advancement of the lesbian family. There are child and family scholars who want to destroy all vestiges of the traditional, biological, two-parent family because their amoral ideology will not permit it to be placed on a normative pedestal.⁹⁰ It is the new values and morals of entertainment media executives, Hollywood stars, and many in academia and the mental health professions that seek to revolutionize the traditional fabric of

Household's Perceptions of their Family Functioning: Strengths and Resiliency, 6 J. GLBT FAM. STUD. 325 (2010).

87. See, e.g., COONTZ, *supra* note 3 (making the case that we misconceive the wholesomeness and effectiveness of the traditional nuclear family and it is having negative effects today); Timothy J. Biblarz & Evren Savci, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Families*, 72 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 480, 485, 487, 492–93 (2010); Martha Albertson Fineman, *Our Sacred Institution: The Ideal of the Family in American Law and Society*, 1993 UTAH L. REV. 387, 388–89, 393–95, 397–98, 400–01, 403–05; Shane Kamsner & Marita P. McCabe, *The Relationship Between Adult Psychological Adjustment and Childhood Sexual Abuse, Childhood Physical Abuse, and Family-of-Origin Characteristics*, 15 J. INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 1243, 1244–46, 1250, 1253, 1257–58 (2000).

88. Byrd, *supra* note 81, at 107–09.

89. Martel, *supra* note 23, at 109.

90. Cf. Slife & Reber, *supra* note 22 (discussing the question of whether there is a bias against theism in the field of psychology).

American families and overthrow millennia-old Judeo-Christian values of chastity, fidelity, and heterosexuality.⁹¹

As Dr. Miriam Grossman explains:

[T]hese “experts” are hiding . . . their goal of bringing about radical social change, one [family] at a time. Their mission is to mold each [individual] into . . . “a sexually healthy” adult—as if there was universal agreement on what that is [I]t would appear that a “sexually healthy” individual is one who has been “desensitized,” who is without any sense of embarrassment or shame . . . whose sexuality is always “positive” and “open,” who respects and accepts “diverse” lifestyles, and who practices “safer sex” with every “partner.” . . . They insist they’re neutral and free of agendas . . . but those claims are bogus.⁹²

These elite, liberal, and often atheistic men and women do not want to exclude any family type from functionality! Therefore, every family type has to be shown to be equal in value to the heterosexual, two-biological-parent family, otherwise we (as a collective) are unfair, biased, racist, prejudiced, intolerant, and bigoted.

Thus, I am still left with a question: “What is the best environment to raise kids?” The current socio-political climate will not tolerate the old-fashioned belief that a two-biological-parent family is an advantage to a child’s growth and development. So we are left with the premise or supposition that almost any loving and caring environment, with at least one or more competent adults, can bring up a child to be sensitive, altruistic, compassionate, tolerant, and achievement-oriented. That is what most people in my field of child development and family studies believe, but I do not and I am not alone.⁹³

Robert Lerner and Althea Nagai reviewed forty-nine original research reports published in journals or book chapters regarding homosexual parents and their children and found no support for the hypothesis that gay families provide a superior environment for

91. Cf. STEPHEN M. BARR, *MODERN PHYSICS AND ANCIENT FAITH* (2003) (describing a war with faith that is not driven by science which discoveries are generally in line with central teachings of Judeo-Christianity; but rather, scientific materialism—a belief that there is no cause or purpose and the universe is an accidental by-product of blind material forces); OVERMAN, *supra* note 3, at xxiii, xix, xxvii, xxviii, xxix.

92. MIRIAM GROSSMAN, *YOU’RE TEACHING MY CHILD WHAT?: A PHYSICIAN EXPOSES THE LIES OF SEX EDUCATION AND HOW THEY HARM YOUR CHILD* 8, 15 (2009).

93. See, e.g., INST. FOR AM. VALUES, *WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS: TWENTY-ONE CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES* 4, 7–11, 13–18 (2002); ROBERT LERNER & ALTHEA K. NAGAI, *NO BASIS: WHAT THE STUDIES DON’T TELL US ABOUT SAME-SEX PARENTING* 3, 6–9 (2001); see generally LINDA J. WAITE & MAGGIE GALLAGHER, *THE CASE FOR MARRIAGE* (2000).

raising children because the studies were “so deeply flawed pieces of research.”⁹⁴ From my point of view, it appears that, in general, children reared in two-biological-parent, low-conflict marriages do better on average than children raised in other environments.⁹⁵

94. LERNER & NAGAI, *supra* note 93, at 9.

95. See Paul R. Amato, *The Impact of Family Formation Change on the Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Well-Being of the Next Generation*, 15 FUTURE CHILD. 75, 80, 83, 85–86, 89–90 (2005); see generally LERNER & NAGAI, *supra* note 93 (analyzing studies examining the impact of same-sex parenting on children); Kristen 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 1, 1–2, 4 (2002), <http://www.childtrends.org/files/marriagerb602.pdf>.