

A Review and Summary of Walter Schumm's *Same-Sex Parenting Research: A Critical Assessment*

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Same-Sex Parenting Research: A Critical Assessment is authored by Walter R. Schumm, Ph.D., professor in the Kansas State University *School of Family Studies and Human Services*. Dr. Schumm has conducted research on gender identity, sexual identity, sexual attraction, and same-sex relationships and parenting since 1999. He has published 39 scholarly articles on GLBT topics (cf. Appendix A in Schumm's book for a list). In *Same-Sex Parenting Research*, Schumm masterfully accomplishes three goals. First, Schumm explains how quality, ethical research *is* done. Second, Schumm reviews what social science research to date *does*—and does *not*—tell us about same-sex parenting (SSP). Finally, he examines and critiques the use of social science research concerning SSP in society.

I. An analysis of how social science research has been and ought to be conducted.

Schumm's first goal is the heart and soul of this book. This first section alone could be published as a research primer. It is invaluable to *all* readers in that it defines *what* science is and *how* science should be conducted, including the need for investigators to suspend their worldview biases in the process. Schumm explains that he wrote *Same-Sex Parenting Research* "to show how research (on SSP and *any* issue) can be studied in greater depth and detail than often done"—i.e., in a genuinely scientific manner. This goal includes teaching future researchers in general, and graduate students in particular, to improve their scientific research methodology and "become much

better at assessing scientific literature and engaging it with deeply critical thinking.” He also hopes that “even a few newspaper or other media reporters”—and dare we add, judges, politicians, and social policy activists—“might catch some of this scientific spirit with respect to their own investigations” (p. 14–15).

In Chapters 1–3 and Appendix D, Schumm gives particular attention to *how* “honest” research in general, and SSP in particular, ought to be done. A sampling of some of Schumm’s comments from these introductory is warranted. In Chapter 1 (*Background*), in addition to offering an overview of the book and its organization, he describes his concern about the cultural and specific SSP-focused “threats” to the conduct of genuine science. He discusses his perception that “scholarly caution” has been “abandoned” and “honest” social science “compromised” on this topic.

In Chapter 2 (*Social Science Theory*), Schumm reviews a number of theoretical areas relevant to the study of SSA. These include concerns about contemporary cultural struggles over the meaning of “Traditional Sexual Morality,” “marriage,” and happiness.” He also stresses the need to distinguish between “harm” and “difference.” In effect, well designed and executed studies that conclude children with SSP experience no harm may still reveal “significant” differences between children raised by same-sex and heterosexual parents. For example, children who are raised by same-sex parents *do* appear to develop non-heterosexual feelings, thoughts, behaviors and identities more often than do children raised by opposite-sex parents (see Chapters 8–10 in Part 3). Schumm clarifies that whether such scientifically documented differences are equated with harmfulness depends upon the reigning cultural worldview, not upon science. Science merely reveals what is; science alone cannot and

does not dictate what should be done. The latter falls within the moral and philosophical realm not the scientific.

A particular gem of Chapter 2 is Schumm’s discussion of the relevance of the *Time Preference Exchange Theory* (TPEX). This is a “mathematical model of morality,” which is important to consider when interpreting the results of research on human behavior. In this model, “delayed gratification” (i.e., making “choices based to some extent on how long it will take for the rewards or costs they expect to occur”) is studied under four different *time preference* “decisions.” For example, Type A decisions “result in positive outcomes in both the short and the long run for everyone concerned,” while Type D involve both short- and long-term negative outcomes. Type B decisions result in “positive *short-term* benefits but often have *long-term* negative outcomes.” A decision classified as Type C “involves short-term sacrifices or costs but yields long-term positive benefits,” sometimes posthumously. Type B & C decisions are more likely to be culturally and morally controversial, while Types A & D are not. Schumm applies the TPEX Model to heterosexual versus SSP and other relevant issues (cf. pp. 33–42).

In Chapter 3 and Appendix D, Schumm reviews methodological issues that impact the quality of research and the strength of its conclusions. With regard to SSP research, both pro and con, he mentions two notable limitations that must be corrected. In national samples of US citizens, how the government codes “same-sex” leads to very ambiguous interpretations of the data. In such studies, “same-sex” does not necessarily reflect only those who identify as LGBT. Heterosexual identifying individuals may constitute a same-sex household. Examples include but are not limited to, for example, a mother and daughter, or two brothers. In addition, when a person is asked to name her or his “sexual orientation” (SO), given the ambiguity of this

term, it is not possible to know how similar are those who so self-identify. Schumm recommends that when researchers try to assess a person's SO, that a person is asked to clarify if this includes same-sex attractions, thoughts, behaviors, and identity.

For example, a parent who identifies as "gay/lesbian" and who does *not* engage in same-sex sexual gratification behaviors is likely very different from a parent who *does*.

Like a good scientist, Schumm also includes *Future Research* sections, in which he suggests studies to clarify questions not adequately answered by existing research. For example, Schumm describes the need for "equivalence" between groups in order to definitively assess whether there are any significant differences between them. Studies comparing children raised by lesbian parents with those raised by heterosexual commonly are inadequate because the "convenience samples" of lesbian parents in general are better educated, wealthier and report fewer adult psychological difficulties than do the heterosexual parents. Similarly, he questions the validity of relying solely upon parent evaluations of their children, rather than objective measures of the children's well-being, in order to offset parents' "social desirability" or potential intent to impress the researcher.

In his critique of reviewers of SSP literature, Schumm questions why most tend to cite *only* older studies which support their pre-conceived conclusion, and typically fail to mention studies which either contradict or fail to replicate the pro-SSP studies. Schumm points out this may occur due to ignorance, intent to deceive or capitulation to judicial, political, or social activists. Ultimately, what matters, Schumm argues, is that readers develop a healthy "skepticism" when reviewing studies and literature reviews of culturally/politically charged topics, like same-sex marriage or SSP.

For example, he exhorts readers to "be *skeptical*" (emphasis in original) if "a so-called scientist argue(s) that every piece of research ever done by anyone in any country has supported their view of the world" (p. 47). Or, "be *skeptical*" when either a scientist is unable "to point to research that is for and against a particular conclusion for a given research question" and/or "cannot point to research or a researcher with whom they disagree without somehow feeling obligated to "discredit" that researcher" (p. 48). Or, "be *skeptical* . . . (w)hen you hear a so-called scientist state that research is simple and clear, without much in the way of complexity," instead of being willing to "dig deep" and "not be content with superficial analyses of what may be very complicated" (p. 50). Or, "be *skeptical* . . . when public viewpoints are dismissed by a presumably elite group of scientists who presume they know better than everyone else" (i.e., when they dismiss "common sense") (p. 51).

To his credit, Schumm "walks his talk" in his writing. While he disputes the oft heard claim that science reveals "no differences" between same-sex and opposite sex parents, and the children they raise, he presents all of the available studies, *including* those that do not support his position. His analysis of the work of authors who hold a divergent view is respectful even in the face of suffering ad hominem attacks from some of those same authors. In addition, he makes it a point to alert readers to where *he* is conjecturing, often writing, "It is possible (*speculation* only) that . . ." (p. 88, emphasis in original).

II. WHAT social science research does and does not reveal about same-sex parenting (SSP).

Schumm details what is and is not known about SSP in Parts 2–5 of *Same-Sex Parenting Research*. Most of these chapters (4–12) are organized in the following

manner. He first summarizes *what is claimed* to be true about the relevant topic concerning SSP. Then, he reports *what actually is known*. Schumm accomplishes this as he critiques the methods used by the commonly cited research and literature reviews, then applies the same analysis to relevant studies that are often omitted. After reviewing what *has* been claimed and what responsible science actually *reveals*, Schumm details the *Limitations* of all of the studies, recommends *Future Research* to clarify remaining questions, and then summarizes *Conclusions to date*. Part 2 focuses upon what is known of same-sex parents. It tackles such questions as *How Many Same-Sex Couples Are Raising Children; Family Stability; Same-sex Parents as Sexual Abusers*, and the *Values and Behaviours¹ of same-sex parents*. Part 3 addresses what is known about the children of same-sex parents in terms of their *sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender roles*. Part 4 reviews what is known about the children of same-sex parents in terms of their mental health and related issues, including *mental health in general, drug and alcohol abuse, educational attainment, crime and conduct problems, sexuality, self-control/delayed gratification, and other child outcomes*. Part 5 is unique in that it considers the claim that same-sex marriage has no *negative consequences*.

III. The (mis)use of the social science to meet SSP judicial, legislative, and social policy goals.

After acknowledging that he is “a scholar, not a lawyer or a politician,” Schumm explains that it is the purpose of his book—and the purpose of social science in general—to directly “address issues of fact and social science theory,” *not* to answer “legal or

political questions” (p. 53–54). At the same time, he comments throughout the book when he perceives that the particular author of either a study or a review of the study appears to be sacrificing the scientific method to the demands of “SSP advocacy.” Schumm likewise comments when it appears that judges, legislators, and/or social policy activists have misinterpreted or misused well-publicized research or reviews which appear to support their apparent goals, while ignoring research which does not.

Throughout his book, Schumm shares some personal encounters in which he was confronted with the misuse and misrepresentation of SSP social science research. The prominence given to political agendas and group think that he encountered in these cases remains particularly discouraging for those dedicated to rigorous social science and discovering truth. Schumm’s comments in Appendix C (*Fair Fight?*) and Appendix E (*Lessons Learned at Trial(s)*) are particularly worth reading.

For example, he describes the different set of rules by which “progressive” vs. “conservative” social science expert witnesses had to play in the State of Florida trial regarding SSP. He notes that while the judge had ordered each “side” to prepare and provide beforehand a complete statement of their summary of the research, for examination by the other side, this order was not enforced fairly. While Schumm did as ordered, the “progressive” side provided nothing. So, while the “progressives” could painstakingly review the “conservative” case before it was presented, the “conservatives” had no idea what case the “progressives” would make, until they made it during the actual hearing. And, the judge simply allowed the “progressives” to get away with their noncompliance to his order with no

¹ Some words, like “behaviour,” reflect British English spellings of the words, since *Same-Sex Parenting Research: A Critical Assessment* was published in the UK.

penalty and with the advantage of being able to prepare their rebuttal while the “conservatives” couldn’t—an (Un)Fair Fight indeed!

In Chapter 2 (*Social Science Theory*, p. 37–41), Schumm discusses the practical personal and cultural consequences of “legalized” same-sex marriage and parenting. *In the past, cultural, legislative, and judicial recognition and respect for the “biological . . . , as well as social differences, between men and women,”* led them to recognize and reward:

the inherent sacrifices that biology and society virtually forced upon heterosexuals, especially those who wanted children, and were open to providing them with various forms of compensation for those risks, costs and limitations on their freedoms.” But by deciding to reward everyone equally, regardless of the risks, costs or loss of freedoms, the courts, in my assessment, have created inequality (in terms of legal benefits relative to risks and costs) for the many in order to create an apparent equality of outcomes for a few (p. 39).

Schumm comments further that the courts’—and legislatures’—effective denials of:

the costs and risks of *heterosexuality* may well have the effect of turning *heterosexuals* and their children into the actual “second-class citizens” in terms of no longer getting the respect (or legal support) they deserve for the extra risks they take and costs they assume . . . relative to homosexuals . . . , ultimately for the sake of society’s long-term outcomes.” (p. 39, *emphases added*)

Another way of looking at such issues is the “playing by the same rules” approach. . . . [S]ame-sex couples . . . want the same benefits as heterosexual couples but want to play (and biologically can play) by different rules because for them, there are no risks of pregnancy. Thus, they don’t want to play by the same rules or take the same risks, but they want the same benefits of the game. (p. 40)

On a more personal note, in the Prologue, Schumm first mentions that “[t]here are many people to whom I owe much gratitude for encouraging me in my life and even in the production of this book.” Then he adds: “I hesitate to mention them by name lest they come under attack for having any association with me. Some very Christian scholars have gone out of their way to avoid any association with this book because of the stigma or discrimination they fear (p. 13).” Later in the book, he writes: “Some may think that I am opposed to same-sex marriage because I am a conservative or because I am somehow ‘religious’” (p. 40). He clarifies: “[M]y view is that my primary concern is when courts create inequality by treating things that are different as if they were the same in terms of short and long-term costs, risks, and benefits” (p. 40–41).

Schumm recounts unprofessional ways in which apparently “progressive” social scientists have attempted to marginalize his own work (Appendix B: *Discredited?*). Unfortunately, Schumm and other social scientists attempting to be authentically scientific in their research on SSP are not alone in receiving unpleasant, ill-founded criticism. Researchers and professionals in other professions likewise have received irresponsible personal and professional attacks because of the counter-cultural,

politically incorrect implications of their work.²

While Schumm acknowledges his Christian faith, he clearly documents that his criticism of the mainstream claims regarding SSP is rooted in science—not his religion. At the same time, he deftly discusses “theoretical” and “moral” issues that result in acrimonious debate due to a clash of worldviews—namely Christianity and secular humanism. Competent scientists of all faiths and worldviews must have a place in the public arena or else public debate is unacceptably biased. This point has been made before.³

Final Remarks

Sadly, the art and science of medicine and mental health, like our culture, have fallen prey to moral relativism and political correctness. In *Same-Sex Parenting Research*, Walter Schumm painstakingly reminds us of the qualities which authentic, responsible scientists must possess in order to produce rigorous, trustworthy scientific results about *any* topic, and *SSP in particular*. Schumm’s book is an excellent review of *all* of the research on SSP—such as it is—which clearly documents that, in fact, same-sex parents and the children whom they raise are significantly different in important ways from opposite sex parents and their children. For these reasons, *Same-Sex*

Parenting Research warrants a close read by all.

Certainly, the members of the Alliance’s Public Education; Ethics, Family & Faith; and Research Divisions—and non-members who support these Divisions’ concerns and goals—will find Walter Schumm’s book of particular interest. Also, college students, professors, researchers, mental and medical healthcare professionals, laypersons, and involved judicial, legislative, political and social policy professionals—all who are concerned about both the *what* and the *how* of “honest,” truly professional research in the area of SSP and any concern of the social sciences—are encouraged to get a copy and read. Even those with no interest in SSP would walk away a better person by reading the first three chapters, for they would learn how social science *is* and *ought* to be conducted. To paraphrase a well-used saying, for any professional or lay person genuinely interested in reading a book about what we know about SSP and how we *do*—or *can*—know it, *Same-Sex Parenting Research* is the book for you!

References

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² For example, Dr. Jodi Gilman, M.D., assistant professor at Harvard University’s *Center for Addiction Medicine*, has received “hate mail” for daring to study and publish politically and culturally “incorrect” research showing the differences between the brains of users and non-users of marijuana and the harm caused by its use (Sushrut Jangi, MD, 2015).

³ Abbott and Byrd (2009) are academics who have written from an explicitly Christian worldview about how to encourage and support persons who want themselves or their loved ones to develop a heterosexual “sexual orientation.” In their writing, Abbott and Byrd offer an important perspective about the validity of Christian-based approaches in particular to studying, reporting, and intervening in such areas of human concern. They assert the need for both professional and non-professional readers to:

understand that all people—including scientists, mental health professionals, and educators—have overarching worldviews that guide their theories and direct their interventions into the physical and psychological realms of human life. Our worldview, which includes Christian ideas and principles, is no less legitimate than theirs; it’s just different! It should be accepted on equal footing with other major worldviews. Our Christian viewpoint is one of many, but is not an illegitimate stepchild to the nonreligious or secular worldviews that dominate psychology, education, and mental health (p. 8).

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