

review articles, they then concluded that "in summary, the neoconservative position [whatever that is] is simply wrong about the biological basis of observed differences in parenting behavior" (p. 400). To have reached such a conclusion in a purportedly scientific article, using such insubstantial evidence, simply takes one's breath away.

When the article went on to discuss human marriage behavior, the use of evidence shifted from being inadequate to being simply wrong. Drawing from a recent report on violence by intimates (U.S. Department of Justice, 1998), they found that "murders of women by their intimate partners decreased by 40% between 1976 and 1996" (p. 402) and concluded that "as marriage has declined over the past two decades, so has intimate violence" (p. 402). Thus, in their minds marriage doesn't protect women from domestic violence, as most scholars have concluded, but it actually promotes such violence. Yet what the report actually shows is that the recent decline has been almost entirely among Black men; the incidence of intimate murder of White women by their boyfriends or other nonmarital intimates has actually increased.

Similarly, they misinterpreted data on child abuse from the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (Sedlack & Broadhurst, 1996) to make it seem as if the greatest risk to children is their birth parents. The report found that 78% of children who suffered maltreatment, both neglect and abuse, were maltreated by a birth parent, but of course the overwhelming majority of children live with their birth parents. What one needs to know is not the percentage of children but the incidence of abuse—the chances or risk factor that a child living with a birth parent will be abused compared with the chances of abuse for a child living with a nonrelated parent. That calculation would come up with an entirely different answer and would be in agreement with what other scholars have found. After these few misinterpreted citations, Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) reached another of their mind-boggling conclusions: "In summary, we do not find any empirical support that marriage enhances fathering or that marriage civilizes men and protects children" (p. 402).

Finally, Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) turned to the importance of fathers. It is difficult to overemphasize the carelessness of their reading of the research in this area. In seeking to minimize the im-

portance of fatherhood, they even unearthed a study (Engle & Breaux, 1998) that purported to have found "the potential costs of father presence" (p. 403) in the home; according to Silverstein and Auerbach, the study contended that with resident fathers, "the consumption of family resources in terms of gambling, purchasing alcohol, cigarettes, or other nonessential commodities, actually increased women's workload and stress level" (p. 403). What they overlooked are decades of solid empirical studies showing that divorce often hurts children, that father involvement is greater for fathers in two-biological-parent families, and that biological fathers are more involved with their children behaviorally and emotionally than are nonbiological fathers. Their contention that, in general, fatherless families may be better for children than fathered families has to be considered one of the most misguided conclusions ever to issue from the social sciences.

It is clear that Silverstein and Auerbach's (1999) article was cobbled together mainly—in the authors' own words—"to create an ideology that defines the father-child bond as independent of the father-mother relationship" (p. 405). It is sad, even heartrending, the lengths to which these authors went to distort the overwhelming evidence and undeniable truths about fatherhood to serve their own agendas. If the American Psychological Association wants to publish such an ideological piece, fine, but it should not believe that it is contributing at the same time to the advance of social science knowledge—much less to the interests of our nation's children.

REFERENCES

- Engle, P. L., & Breaux, C. (1998). Fathers' involvement with children: Perspectives from developing countries. *Social Policy Report: Society for Research in Child Development*, 12, 1-23.
- Nsamenang, B. A. (1992). Perceptions of parenting among the Nso of Cameroon. In B. S. Hewlett (Ed.), *Father-child relations: Cultural and biosocial contexts* (pp. 321-343). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Popenoe, D. (1999). *Life without father: Compelling new evidence that fatherhood and marriage are indispensable for the good of children and society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sedlack, A. J., & Broadhurst, D. D. (1996). *Third national incidence study of child abuse and neglect*. Washington, DC: National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Silverstein, L. B., & Auerbach, C. F. (1999). Deconstructing the essential father. *American Psychologist*, 54, 397-407.
- Smuts, B. B., & Gubernick, D. J. (1992). Male-infant relationships in nonhuman primates: Paternal investment or mating effort? In B. S. Hewlett (Ed.), *Father-child relations: Cultural and biosocial contexts* (pp. 1-31). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- U.S. Department of Justice. (1998). *Violence by intimates: Analysis of data on crimes by current or former spouses, boyfriends, and girlfriends*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Correspondence concerning this comment should be addressed to David Popenoe, Rutgers University, 25 Bishop Place, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1181. Electronic mail may be sent to dpopenoe@rci.rutgers.edu.

DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.55.6.679

Not Quite Right

Martin Daly and Margo Wilson
McMaster University

In "Deconstructing the Essential Father," Silverstein and Auerbach (June 1999) misrepresented what is known about rates of child abuse at the hands of stepparents versus genetic parents. They first asserted that a study we conducted (Daly & Wilson, 1985) demonstrated only that children living with stepfathers incurred elevated rates of abuse, but "could not specify" (p. 402) the identity of the abusers. They then claimed that research by Malkin and Lamb (1994) has revealed that "biological caretakers, in both stepfamilies and biological families, were more likely to engage in serious physical abuse than stepparents. Nonbiological caretakers, in contrast, committed minor abuse" (p. 402). None of these claims are correct.

The study we conducted (Daly & Wilson, 1985) indeed focused primarily on differential risk in relation to household composition, but it also clearly demonstrated that stepparents perpetrate child abuse at substantially higher rates than do genetic parents. This finding is not unique: Numerous studies, conducted in many countries and using many measures of maltreatment, have shown the same thing (for reviews, see Daly & Wilson, 1996, 1999). Malkin and Lamb's (1994) article is uninformative regarding who was more likely to engage in serious physical abuse than whom, because the analyses consisted entirely of cross-tabulations within a sample of abuse cases and did not incorporate the population-at-large data that

would be necessary to compute rates. In fact, rates of abuse by stepparents vastly exceed abuse rates by genetic parents, for both severe and relatively minor abuse, in the data set analyzed by Malkin and Lamb.

Silverstein and Auerbach's (1999) confusion in these matters apparently derives from an incomprehension of the concept of rates. They cited evidence that the absolute numbers of "birth parents" surpass "parent substitutes" among child abusers, as if this constituted evidence that birth parents are the greater menace. But of course that is not the implication, because many more children live with their birth parents than with parent substitutes, and the younger the child, the less likely he or she is to have a stepparent. Thus, for example, (putative) genetic fathers have been found to outnumber stepfathers (at least slightly) as perpetrators of fatal baby batterings in Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and the United States. However, babies hardly ever have stepfathers, and in each of these four countries, the likelihood that a baby living with a stepfather will be beaten to death by him has been found to be more than 100 times greater than the corresponding likelihood for a baby living with its genetic father.

We (in Daly & Wilson, 1999) noted that many social scientists seem to find the fact that stepparents mistreat children at much higher rates than do genetic parents distasteful, and we suggested that this distaste has motivated recurrent misrepresentations of the facts. Silverstein and Auerbach's (2000) article appears to be a case in point.

REFERENCES

- Daly, M., & Wilson, M. I. (1985). Child abuse and other risks of not living with both parents. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 6, 197-210.
- Daly, M., & Wilson, M. I. (1996). Violence against stepchildren. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 5, 77-81.
- Daly, M., & Wilson, M. I. (1999). *The truth about Cinderella*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Malkin, C. M., & Lamb, M. E. (1994). Child maltreatment: A test of sociobiological theory. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 25, 121-134.
- Silverstein, L. B., & Auerbach, C. F. (1999). Deconstructing the essential father. *American Psychologist*, 54, 397-407.

Correspondence concerning this comment should be addressed to Martin Daly, Department of Psychology, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4K1. Electronic mail may be sent to daly@mcm.ca.

Children Need Adults, Not Polemics

Janice D. Yoder,
Melba J. T. Vasquez, and
Phyllis A. Katz

*Society for the Psychology of Women,
Division 35 of the American
Psychological Association*

Louise B. Silverstein and Carl F. Auerbach (June 1999) constructed a compelling argument, integrating a myriad of findings from cross-species, cross-cultural, and social science research, questioning widely accepted but seldom critically analyzed folk wisdom that claims biological fathers, within the context of heterosexual marriage, are essential to positive child development. They concluded that children indeed need at least one (but preferably two) responsible, consistent caretakers with whom they maintain a positive emotional connection. The biological connection of the child to these caretakers is irrelevant, as are other relational bonds held by caretaking adults (e.g., heterosexual marriage, divorce, gay partnerships). Furthermore, fathers' involvement exists on a continuum such that fathers residing with their children are not necessarily involved by virtue of their proximity nor are separated fathers necessarily disconnected by virtue of their distance.

Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) are keenly aware of the sociopolitical implications of their argument and carefully drew a blueprint for social change that is solidly grounded in the research-based case they built. They offered three important recommendations: separating fathering from heterosexual marriage so that men can play important roles in children's lives without limiting these bonds to biological fathers in intact marriages; reframing societal institutions so that fathers' involvement in children's lives is encouraged and valued; and extending governmental supports to include all caretaker-child bonds, including nonmarital and nonbiological contexts.

Silverstein and Auerbach (1999) situated their arguments as counterpoints to what they called neoconservative ideology, building on the propositions commonly set forth by this perspective. This is typical of good science; researchers often lay out competing theories, derive contrary hypotheses, and review the existent literature to simultaneously debunk one view and construct a case in support of its competitor. This is what stimulates scholarly debate, a goal openly espoused by Silverstein and Auerbach. The integrity of this

process is undermined, however, when misinformed, value-laden, accusatory debate takes place in the misinformed, nonreviewed public arena of the media.

The theme that was picked up in the mainstream media was that fathers are irrelevant (see, e.g., Chavez, 1999; Jacoby, 1999). Nowhere in Silverstein and Auerbach's (1999) article is such a sweeping oversimplification made. The disclosure of the authors' values was used by critics to undermine the scientific merit of the work. The underlying assumption on which such criticism rests is a naive one, namely, that policy-relevant research can ever be free of values (Hoshmand, 1999; Hoshmand & O'Byrne, 1996; Hoshmand & Polkinghorne, 1992; Kidder & Fine, 1997; Prilleltensky, 1997). The myth of value-free science and the importance of disclosing personal values that influence research agendas have been widely acknowledged. More insidiously, dismissing the conclusions of scientists by acting as if their values render their work hopelessly biased suggests that only those who share the values and the methodological stance of the critics will be considered objective (Mednick, 1989).

We believe that these strategies ironically work to further support Silverstein and Auerbach's (1999) stated contention that a "backlash against the gay rights and feminist movements" (p. 399) undermines a genuine concern for children. If children truly do come first, why should a debate about children's well being be so threatening that some attack its forum? Public mudslinging cannot, and must not, be an acceptable response to research-grounded debate.

REFERENCES

- Chavez, L. (1999, July 25). Further unraveling a fraying bond. *Denver Post*, p. H2.
- Hoshmand, L. T. (1999). Locating the qualitative research genre. In M. Kopala & L. Suzuki (Eds.), *Using qualitative methods in psychology* (pp. 15-24). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hoshmand, L. T., & O'Byrne, K. (1996). Reconsidering action research as a guiding metaphor for professional psychology. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 24, 185-200.
- Hoshmand, L. Y., & Polkinghorne, D. E. (1992). Redefining the science-practice relationship and professional training. *American Psychologist*, 47, 55-66.
- Jacoby, J. (1999, July 26). Attack on fatherhood a political screed masquerading as science. *Boston Globe*, p. A15.
- Kidder, L. H., & Fine, M. (1997). Qualitative inquiry in psychology: A radical tradition. In D.