

20 Studies that Shook Up Child Psychology

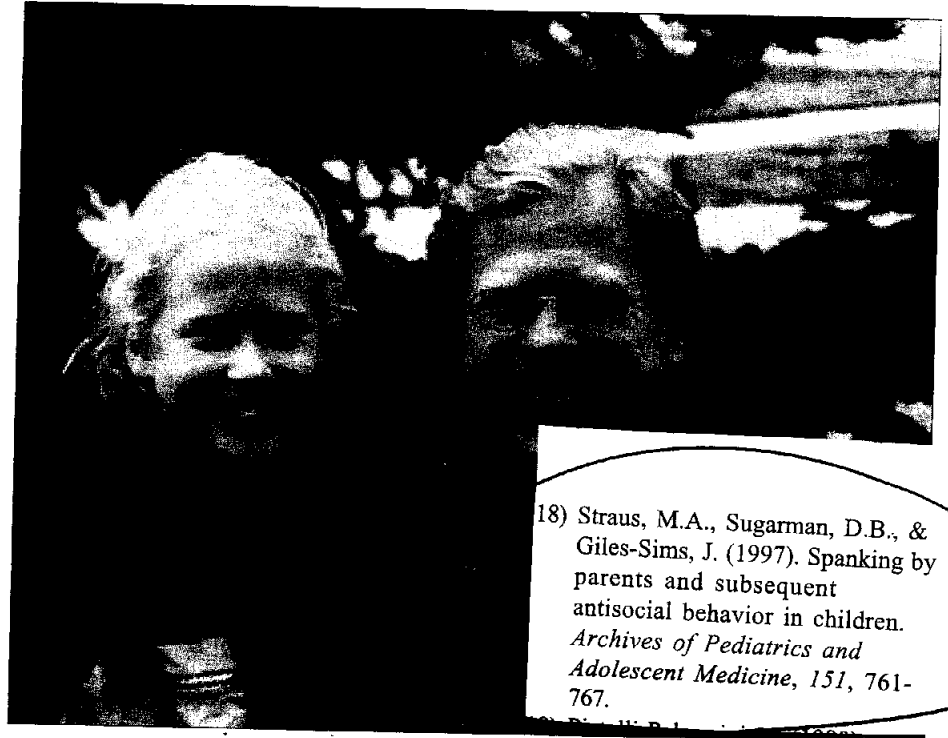
Wallace E. Dixon, Jr.
Heidelberg College

It's probably a truism to say that scientific advances rarely come about as a result of a bunch of scientists sitting around the dinner table nodding in amicable agreement about the latest scientific findings. Instead, scientific progress is usually the product of considerable debate, disagreement, and even downright contentiousness between the scientists.

Occasionally, the results of a study are viewed by the scientific community to be so preposterous that they must be wrong. At other times, it's not the results that are controversial, but the interpretations of them made by the author. Still, in either case I suppose science benefits because the surrounding controversy stimulates additional research, even if said research is designed for the sole purpose of contradicting the original, controversial work.

In an effort to compile a list of the most controversial child psychological investigations, I surveyed SRCD doctoral-level members about which studies they regard as "Most Controversial" in the field of child psychology. I defined controversial studies as those "that resulted in a great deal of conflict in some venue or forum," and that might have "caused controversy among child developmental researchers and theorists" or "between the child development research community and the lay public."

Based on SRCD member responses, the Rank Ordered List of the 20 Most Controversial Studies Published since 1950 are:



Wallace E. Dixon, Jr. and daughter Rachel

- 1) Herrnstein, R.J., & Murray, C. (1994). *The Bell Curve*. New York: Free Press.
- 2) Jensen, A. (1969). How much can we boost IQ and scholastic achievement? *Harvard Educational Review*, 39, 1-123.
- 3) Belsky, J. (1988). The "effects" of infant day care reconsidered. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 3, 235-272.
- 4) Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 5) Harris, J.R. (1998). *The Nurture Assumption: Why children turn out the way they do*. New York: Free Press.
- 6) Skinner, B.F. (1957). *Verbal Behavior*. New York: Appleton-Century Crofts.
- 7) Melzoff, A.N. (1977). Imitation of facial and manual gestures by human neonates. *Science*, 198, 75-78.
- 8) Scarr, S. (1992). Developmental theories for the 1990s: Development and individual differences. *Child Development*, 63, 1-20.
- 9) Klaus, M.H., & Kennell, J.H. (1983). *Parent-infant Bonding*. St. Louis, MO: Mosby.
- 10) Scarr, S. & Weinberg, R.A. (1976). IQ test performance of black children adopted by white families. *American Psychologist*, 31, 726-739.
- 11) Bell, S.M., & Ainsworth, M.D. (1972). Infant crying and maternal responsiveness. *Child Development*, 43, 1171-1190.
- 12) Baillageon, R. (1987). Object permanence in 3.5- and 4.5-month-old infants. *Developmental Psychology*, 23, 655-664.
- 13) Stevenson, H.W., Chen, C., & Lee, S.Y. (1993). Mathematics achievement of Chinese, Japanese, & American children: Ten years later. *Science*, 259, 53-58.