

Evaluating Scientific Claims in Family Research

Thinking critically about research evidence goes beyond rote memorization of authors' names and reported findings. It involves the ability to draw conclusions from evidence and consider alternative interpretations of research findings. Below you will find hypothetical examples of research findings. Based on your understanding of research design, determine whether or not the conclusions appear justified. If not, use the following code to identify the major flaw or flaws that lead you to believe the conclusions are questionable or even misleading.

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| A | Confuses correlation with causation |
| B | Over generalizes |
| C | Sample may not be representative of the population of interest |
| D | Recollections of past events may not be accurate |
| E | Experimenter bias may slant the results |
| F | Results may not generalize to natural conditions |
| G | Subjects were not assigned randomly to groups, so differences may be due to subject characteristics rather than the experimental (independent) variable |
| H | Experimenter failed to control for subject expectancies |
| I | No major flaw detected. Conclusions seem justified |

- _____ 1 A researcher conducts a survey of attitudes toward gay parenting among students on your campus by polling every third person who enters the library.
- _____ 2 A researcher observes the young men at a bar are more likely to approach young women after they have had an alcoholic drink and concludes that alcohol increases self-confidence in heterosexual interactions.
- _____ 3 A researcher finds that women report less frequent conflict with their siblings during their adolescence than do men and concludes that adolescent sibling conflict / fights occurs only among teen males.
- _____ 4 An investigator assigns married couples (married ~2 years) at random to either discuss a recent conflict using expressive language or discuss a recent conflict using instrumental language. Finding significantly less couple satisfaction in resolving the dispute in the instrumental condition, the investigator concludes that instrumental language is less effective in resolving marital conflicts under these conditions.
- _____ 5 An animal behaviourist argues that nonhuman primates are naturally temperamental toward their parents based on evidence that chimpanzees and other primates at the local zoo frequently fight with their parents.
- _____ 6 An investigator finds that men who use an authoritarian parenting style (characterized by high control and low acceptance) were more likely to have fathers who were abusive than were men who used any other form of parenting style. The investigator concludes that growing up with an abusive father leads to poor parenting abilities.
- _____ 7 A therapist interviews the parents of a group of lesbians in therapy and determines that the parents' personalities fit the profile predicted by the therapist's theoretical model of parents of lesbians.