

# ...with Susan Golombok

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## One moment that changed the course of your career

In 1976 I read an article in the feminist magazine *Spare Rib* about lesbian mothers losing custody of their children when they divorced, on the grounds that the children would develop psychological problems if they grew up in a lesbian family. The author of the article asked for a psychologist to carry out an independent study of the children. I was taking a master's degree at the time and rooting around for a project. I volunteered and more than 30 years later I find myself still carrying out research on lesbian mother families.

## One book that you think all psychologists should read

*Attachment* by John Bowlby. We are much more likely to read critiques of Bowlby's theories than the original work. Although his views had a negative impact on the lives of women after the Second World War by putting pressure on mothers to stay

at home with their children, he writes beautifully and compellingly about the interactions between infants and their mother. This aspect of his work has been lost to those not closely involved with the study of attachment relationships.

## One pet hate

The tendency for psychologists to study narrower and narrower aspects of a phenomenon to the point that their research becomes totally meaningless to anyone other than the three other individuals in the world who are pursuing the same futile question.

## One proud moment

I feel proud when the research of my team has an impact on policy and legislation in relation to family life, e.g. by informing debate on aspects of the Children Act and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act.

## One challenge

In my area, it's to convince others – particularly policy-makers – that just because people hold strong opinions about families does not necessarily mean that they



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are right. For example, the relationship between single parenthood and outcomes for children is highly complex and has less to do with the absence of a parent than with other factors that go with single parenthood, such as low income and low social support.

## One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

Don't ever give up until the door is finally closed. Just because one person, or one group of people, is not excited by your work does not necessarily mean that others will feel the same.

## One great thing that psychology has achieved

Psychological research has challenged prejudice and discrimination based on unfounded beliefs.

## One cultural recommendation

*Central Station*, a Brazilian film about a boy who is separated from his family. It is a visually stunning, touching and endearing tale of resilience and the strength of family bonds.

## One heroine

Some time ago I was invited to give the oration for Lady Helen Brook, founder of the Brook Advisory Centres, when she was awarded an honorary degree at City University. In researching her past, I was amazed by the battle she fought against deeply prejudiced opposition in order to achieve her aim of providing contraception for young women and reducing unwanted pregnancies.

## One problem

We are losing many bright and enthusiastic young people who cannot find funding to support a PhD. We need to find financial support for a larger number of PhD students in psychology.

## One hope for the future

That more men will become psychologists.

### resource

Golombok, S. (2000). *Parenting: What really counts?* Routledge. 'This book examines the relative importance of family structure and family relationships in children's psychological well-being.'

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