

# The children are not all right:

social science evidence for how same-sex marriage, contraception and abortion harm children (just as the Church teaches).

ICJF Conference, Casa Tra Noi, Rome, Italy

December 10, 2022

The Rev. D. Paul Sullins, Ph.D.



The Catholic University of America



The Ruth Institute

For a copy of this presentation and all cited sources, send an email request to [sullins@cua.edu](mailto:sullins@cua.edu) or [psullins@ruthinstitute.org](mailto:psullins@ruthinstitute.org).



# Are these statements in conflict?

- ▶ Paul VI, Address to Members of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, (September 1967): "Far be it from Christians to be led to embrace another opinion, as if the Council taught that nowadays some things are permitted which the Church had previously declared intrinsically evil. Who does not see in this the rise of a depraved moral relativism, one that clearly endangers the Church's entire doctrinal heritage?" (AAS 59 (1967), 962)
  
- ▶ From "Theological Ethics of Life" (2022) (per Zenit):  
"Theological and scientific reflection must go beyond what is already known, to be able to address the changing times in which we are immersed."

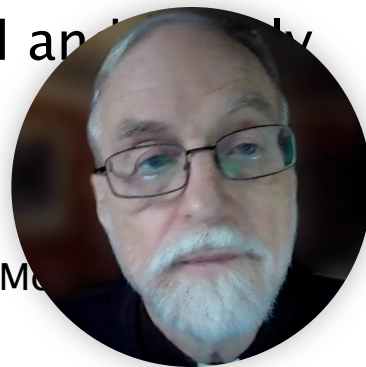


# NULLIFYING NATURE

Contraception, abortion, and homosexual relations (CAH) are similar and related practices inimical to life, in that they all contravene the natural operation of the body – specifically, the fertility of women’s bodies. In all three practices, the realm of bodily autonomy is expanded toward unconditioned freedom, in an attempt to counter the threat to the (post)modern order of what Mellor and Schilling describe as the “dangerous unpredictability of humanity’s embodied potentiality which is constantly threatening to break through the rational barriers constructed around humanity.”<sup>4</sup>

- ▶ By contraception, a woman (and her partner) can enjoy sexual relations without the complication of pregnancy;
- ▶ by abortion, she can enjoy sexual relations assured to be without the complication of a child;
- ▶ by homosexuality, she can enjoy sexual relations without the complication of a man.

The effect of such simplification is to rationalize sexual relations, conforming them both to the personal conditions of life in industrial capitalism and to the cultural ideals of advanced modernity. Significantly, all three related practices have become widely practiced and socially acceptable only in the last century or so.





# CONTRAVENING CHILDREN

CAH achieves this adaptation with modernity, of course, largely by dispensing with children. As any young parent can attest, children greatly complicate life in the rationalized modern systems of education, consumption, and labor. The removal of children eases the demands on personal life and expedites the functioning of social systems oriented to orderly and rational behavior. CAH is thus, at root, a set of strategies for the removal of children from social life. Contraception–abortion, if practiced consistently, results in a family with no children; homosexual relations, if practiced universally, results in a society with no children.



**Unimpeded man–woman relations orient adult desire to the possibility of children.**



**OS Couples always (with a few exceptions) may conceive children, and most do.**

**90% of U.S. heterosexual married couples produce children; 54% are currently raising children.\***

**\*Pew Research Center analysis of the Current Population Survey, published January 9, 2018**

**Same–sex relations orient the possibility of children to adult desire**



**SS Couples never (with a few exceptions) can conceive children, and most do not.**

**Only 27% of lesbian couples, and 14% of gay male couples, are raising children.**

**\*Sullins 2015, Table One, showing data from American Community Survey.**





# CHURCH: CHILDREN NEED (have a right or moral claim to) THEIR OWN MOTHER AND FATHER

Donum Vitae (1987): “The child has the right to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up within [conjugal heterosexual] marriage: **it is through the secure and recognized relationship to his own parents that the child can discover his own identity and achieve his own proper human development.**”<sup>6(secII.A.1)</sup> **Thus every child has the fundamental right “to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents”.**<sup>6(secII.B.7)</sup>

The child has the right to the care, not of persons simply because they are heterosexual, nor of any heterosexual partners, but of his or her **own joint biological parents**, whose act of conception must involve natural heterosexual relations. This is equivalent to saying that the child has the right to married parents, since for the partners “marriage involves reciprocal respect of their right to become a father and a mother only to each other.”<sup>6(secII.A.1)</sup>



# Robust research confirms the importance of natural parents for children

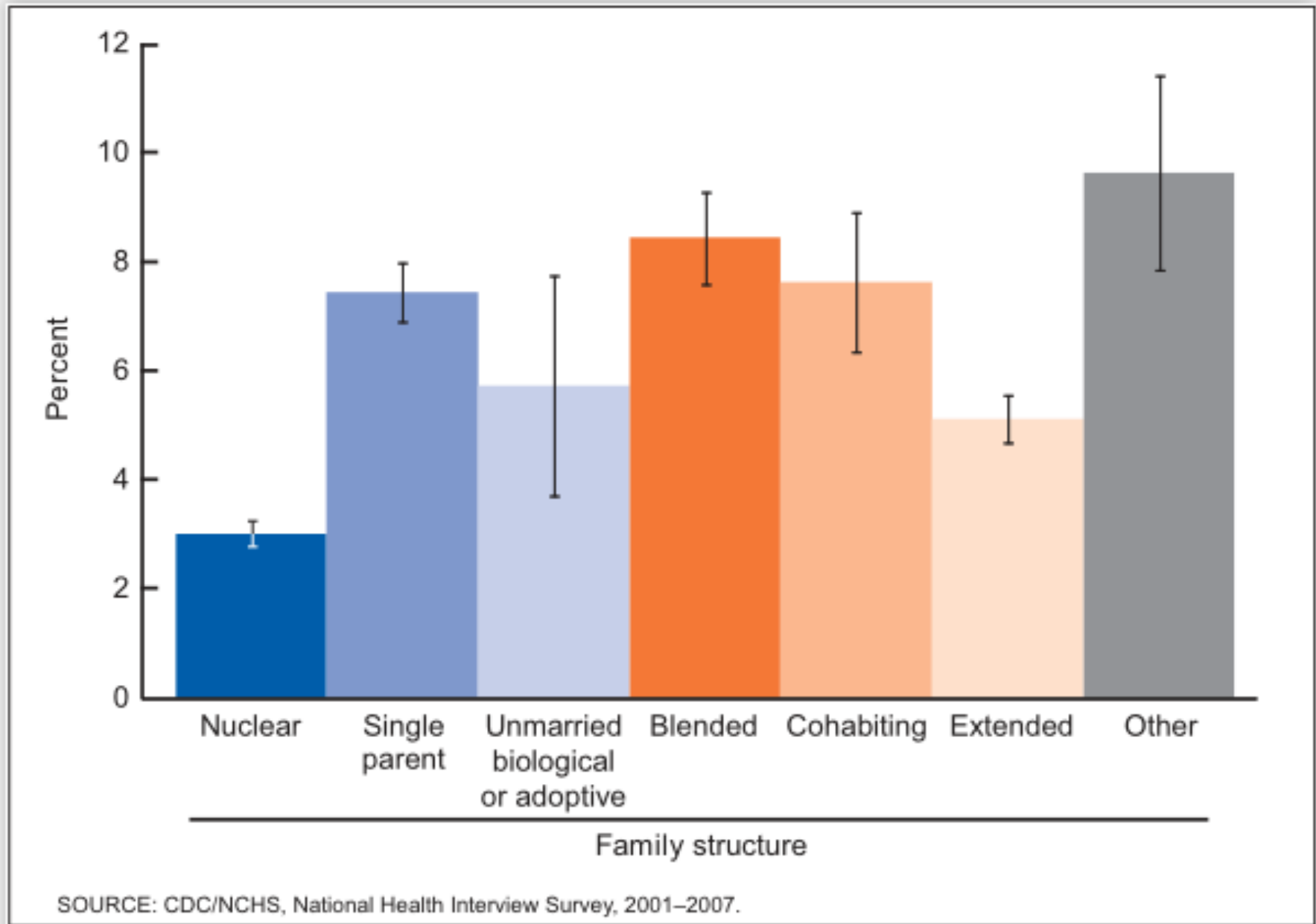
“First, research clearly demonstrates that family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps children the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage. Children in single-parent families, children born to unmarried mothers, and children in stepfamilies or cohabiting relationships face higher risks of poor outcomes than do children in intact families headed by two biological parents.”

Kristin Anderson Moore, Susan M. Jekielek, and Carol Emig, "Marriage from a Child's Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do about It?", *Child Trends Research Brief*, June 2002 (Emphasis added)

(Though woke science increasingly denies it.)



Evidence from the CDC in 2010: Serious emotional difficulties were lowest for children with joint biological married parents. About twice as high with any other family arrangement.



**Figure 27. Percentages of children aged 4–17 who had definite or severe emotional or behavioral difficulties, by family structure: United States, 2001–2007**





# Same-sex parents can't fulfill what's best for children

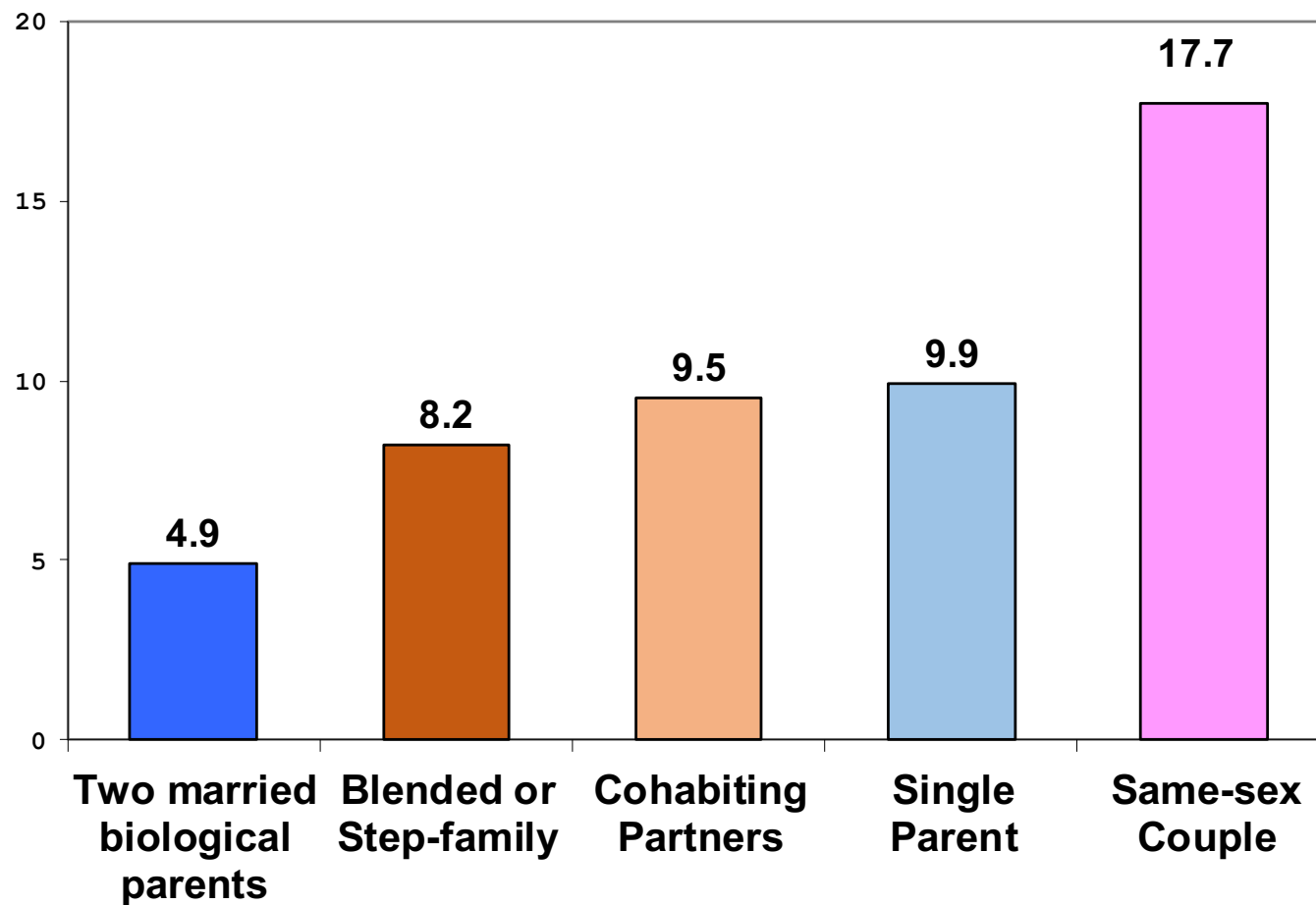
Catholic teaching asserts that such partnerships are less able to provide nurturing homes for their children: “As experience has shown, the absence of sexual complementarity in [same-sex] unions creates obstacles in the normal development of children who would be placed in the care of such persons. They would be deprived of the experience of either fatherhood or motherhood...in an environment that is not conducive to their full human development.”<sup>5</sup>

Pope Francis: “Children mature seeing their father and mother like this; their identity matures being confronted with the love their father and mother have, confronted with this difference,” Francis said (Address to Rome Conference on Parents, June 15, 2015)



NHIS 1997–2013: Emotional health was best for children with joint biological married parents. Emotional health was worst for children with same-sex parents.

Child Emotional Problems (in percent)  
Comparing Opposite-Sex and Same-Sex Parent Families



Source: National Health Interview Survey (CDC-NCHS) 1997-2013. (N=207,007). Data are a representative sample of all U.S. children. Contrasts are adjusted for child sex, age, race, and parent education and income. All contrasts shown are statistically significant.

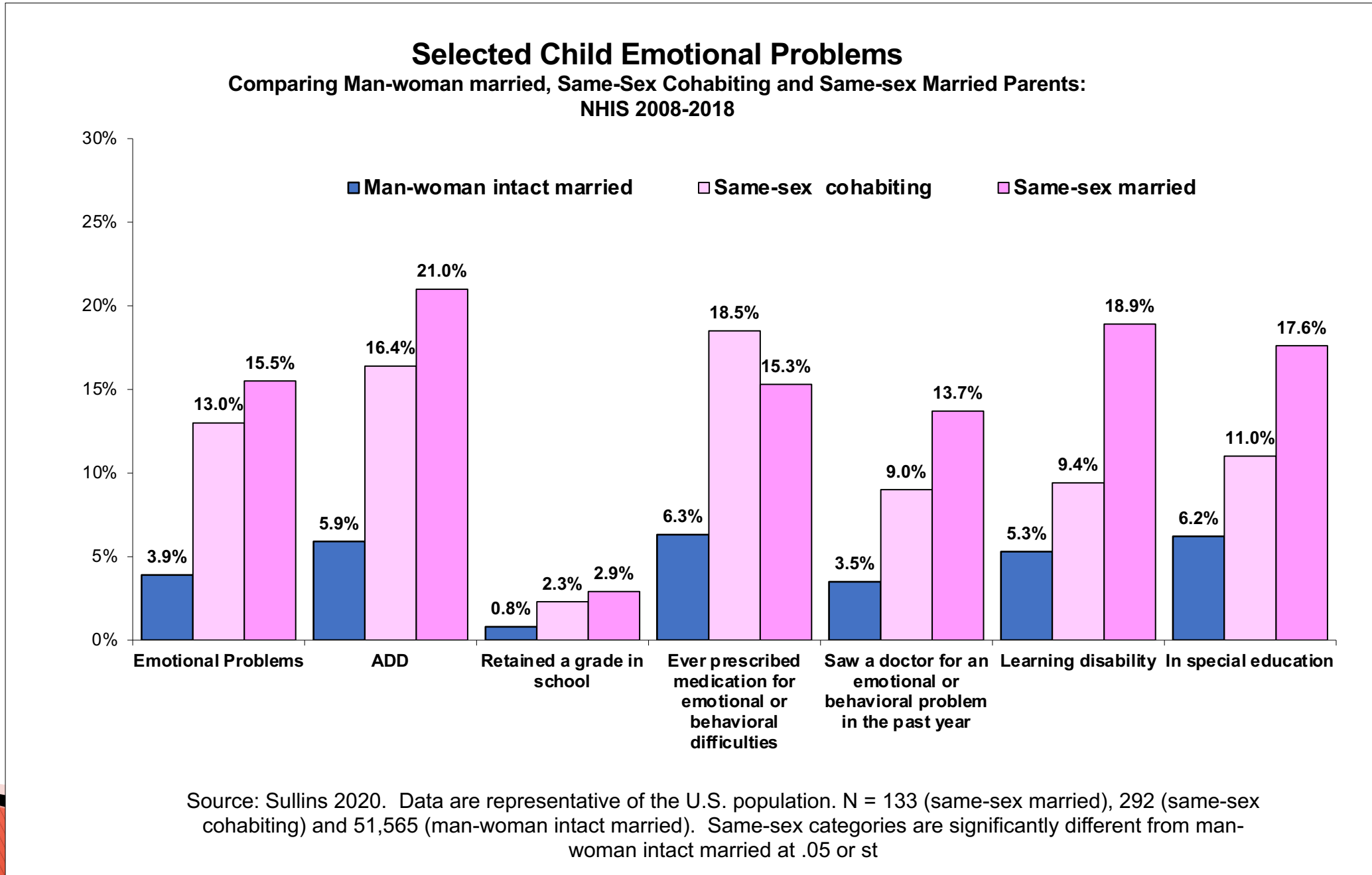


# RESULTS



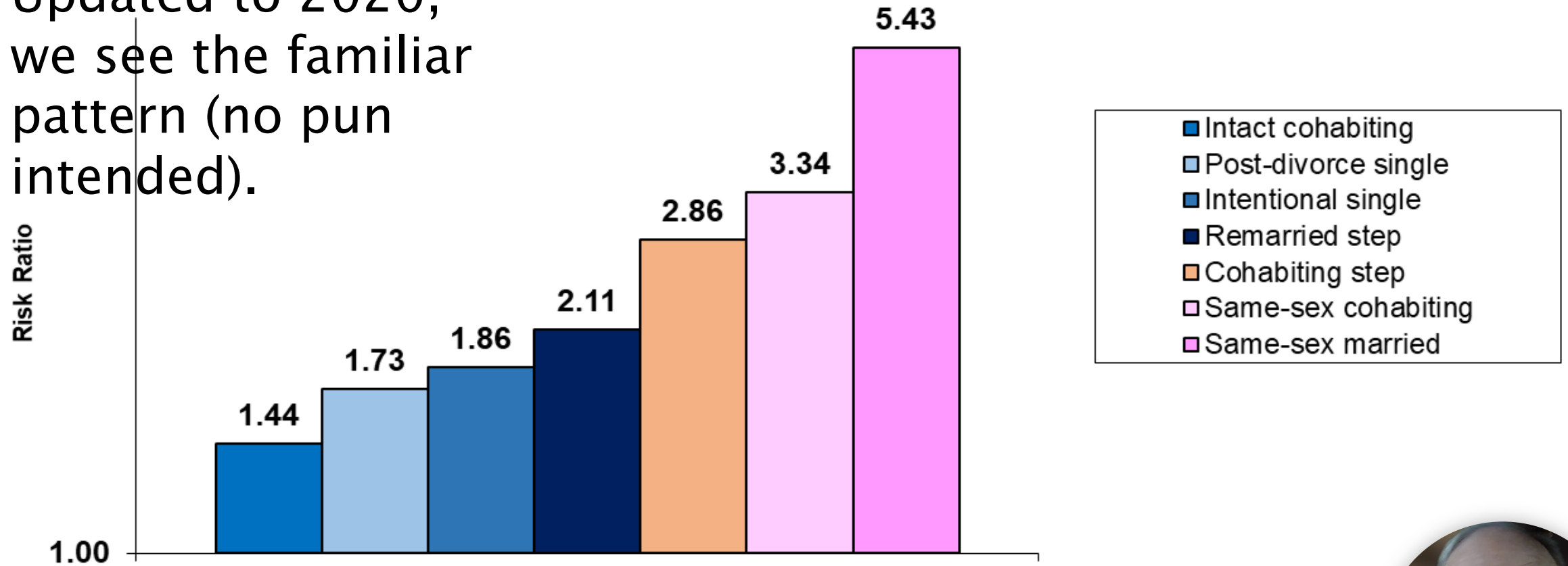
# 2018: Child outcomes are worse with same-sex parents ...

...especially if they are married



**Figure 2:**  
Risk by family structure of serious emotional problems compared to nuclear (intact married) families: NHIS 2008-2018

Updated to 2020,  
we see the familiar  
pattern (no pun  
intended).



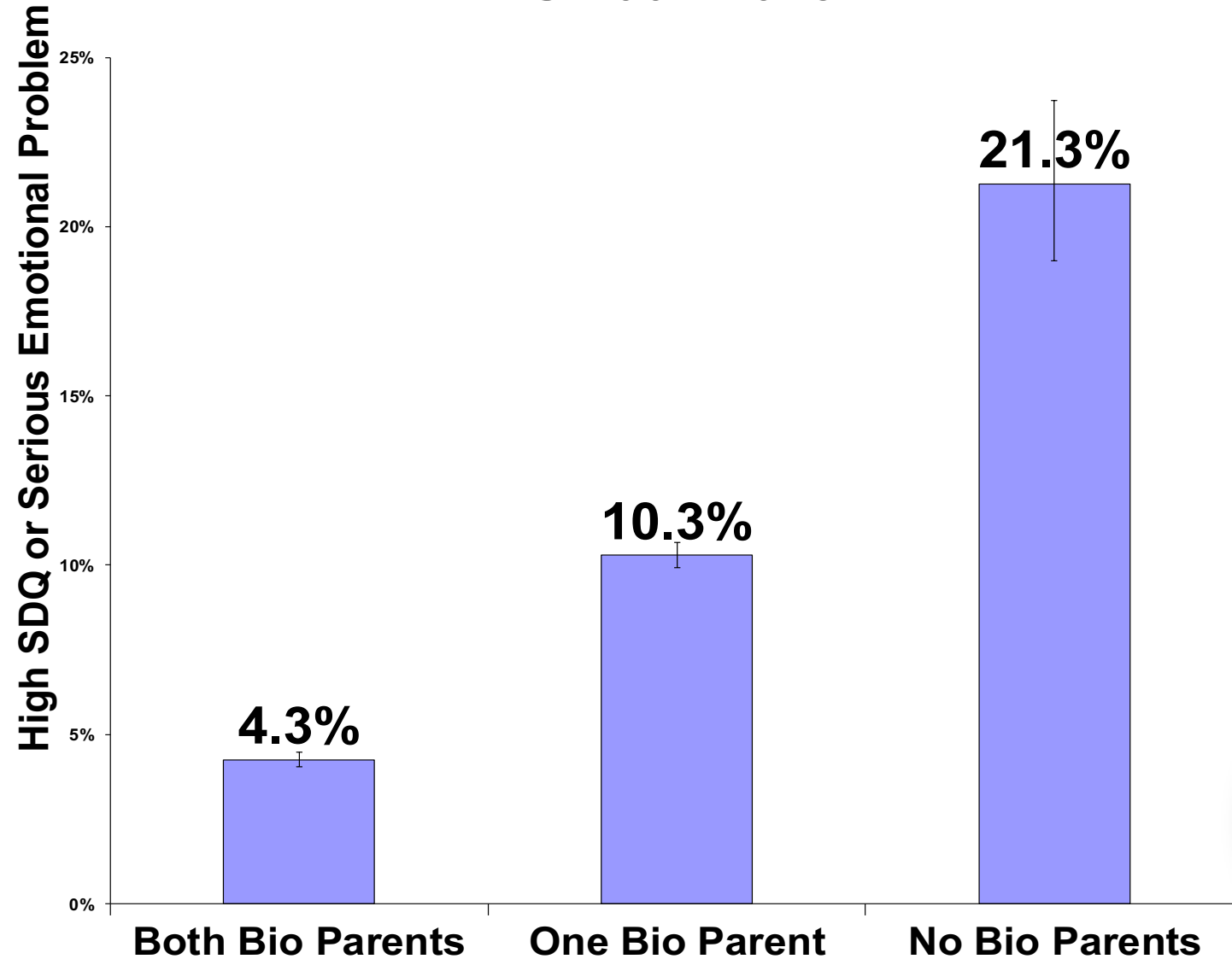
Shown are odds ratios estimated from logistic regression models adjusted for parent education and income, child race, sex and age, sex of respondent and survey year. All contrasts are different from nuclear at .001 except for post-divorce single, which is





The Church's idea that children need their joint biological parents, accounts for all the difference by family types.

## Child Emotional Problems by Biological Parentage: NHIS 2001-2013



# Contraception also harms children.

If moral theologians are stepping away from the idea of intrinsic evil and moving to a justification of contraceptive use that involves context or consequences, then they must consider all the consequences. And one of the sure, predictable consequences of the use of contraception will be the conception of children by couples who affirmatively do not want that child.

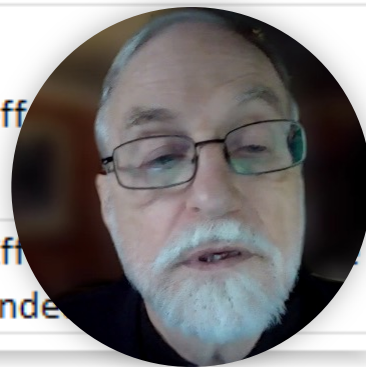
This counter-intuitive conclusion results from two well-known (but seldom acknowledged) mechanisms, by which contraceptive use often leads to more of what it is alleged to prevent.



# 1. No contraception prevents pregnancy perfectly.

Most couples using condoms will become pregnant within 3 years; using the Pill, in under 6 years.

Contraceptive Failure Rate - American Pregnancy Association			
Method	How it is Used	Failure Rate (average use)	Risks & Side Effects
Abstinence	No sexual intercourse and no type of contact between the male and female sexual organs where bodily fluids could be exchanged	0%	No Side Effects
Oral Contraceptives (estrogen/progestin)	Taken daily by women to suppress ovulation, change cervical mucus, and change the lining of the uterus to prevent implantation of a fertilized egg	9%	Nausea, headaches, weight gain, depression, irregular bleeding, acne, blood clots *Women who smoke are advised not to take oral
Condom – Male	A sheath, often made of latex rubber, covering the erect penis to block the passage of sperm	18%	No Side Effects (unless allergic)
Fertility Awareness	Using the menstrual cycle and other tools to predict ovulation and abstaining from intercourse during these expected fertile times	25%	No side effects
Nothing/Chance	No birth control method	85%	No Side Effects of unintended pregnancy



Source: American Pregnancy Association ([www.americanpregnancy.org](http://www.americanpregnancy.org))



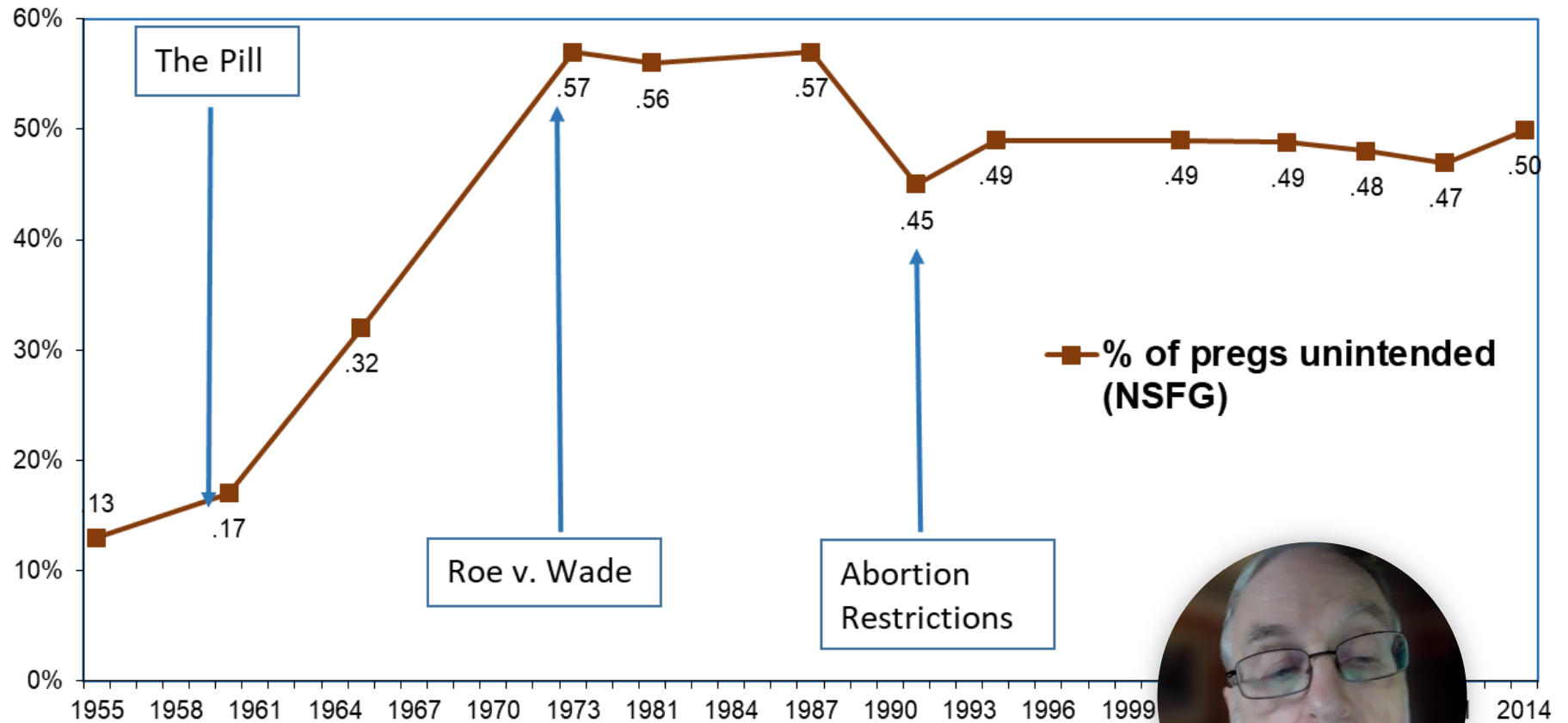
# 1. Contraception use leads to greater risky sexual activity.

Due to “risk compensation”, aka “moral hazard”.

In the US, it was thought the Pill would make “every child a wanted child,” but after its 1960 introduction unintended pregnancies doubled; they doubled again after abortion was legalized.

Contraceptive use has led to fewer children, but a higher proportion of unintended children.

**Figure 1**  
Percent of pregnancies that were unintended, United States 1955-2011

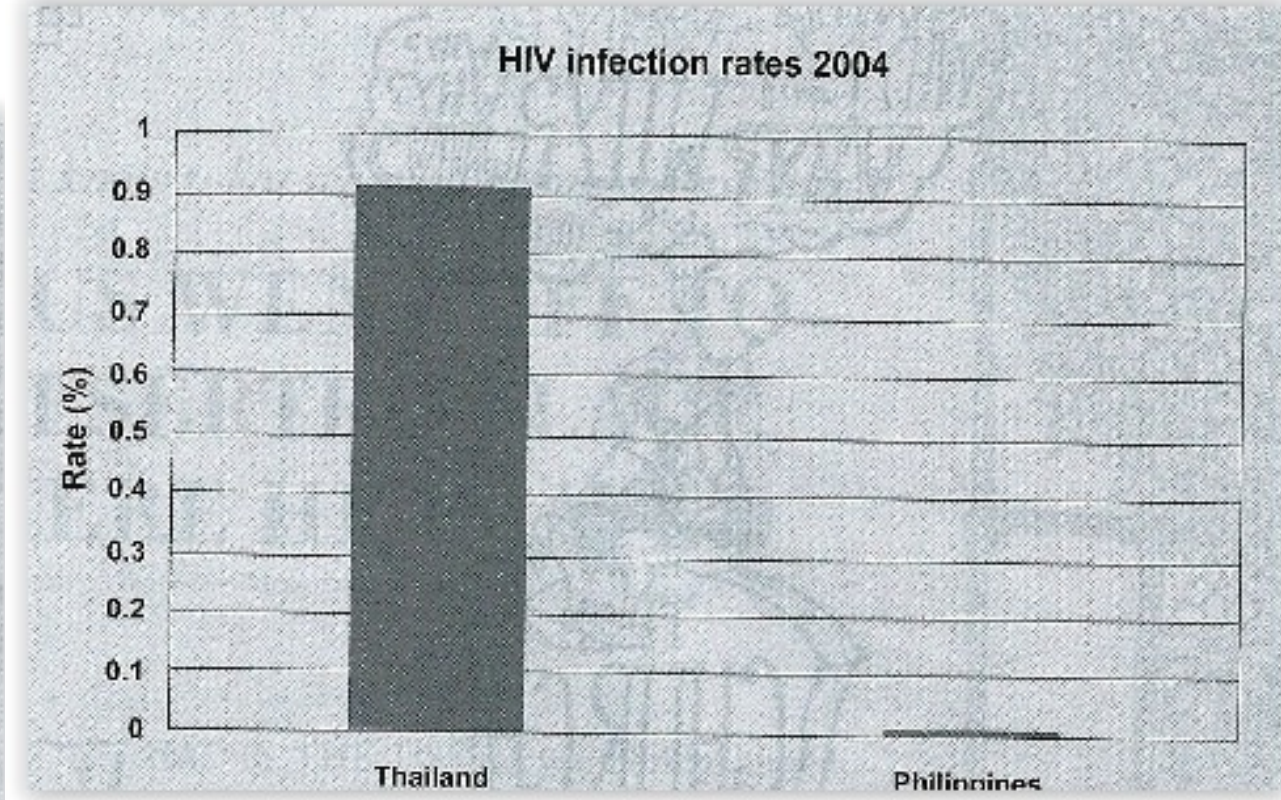
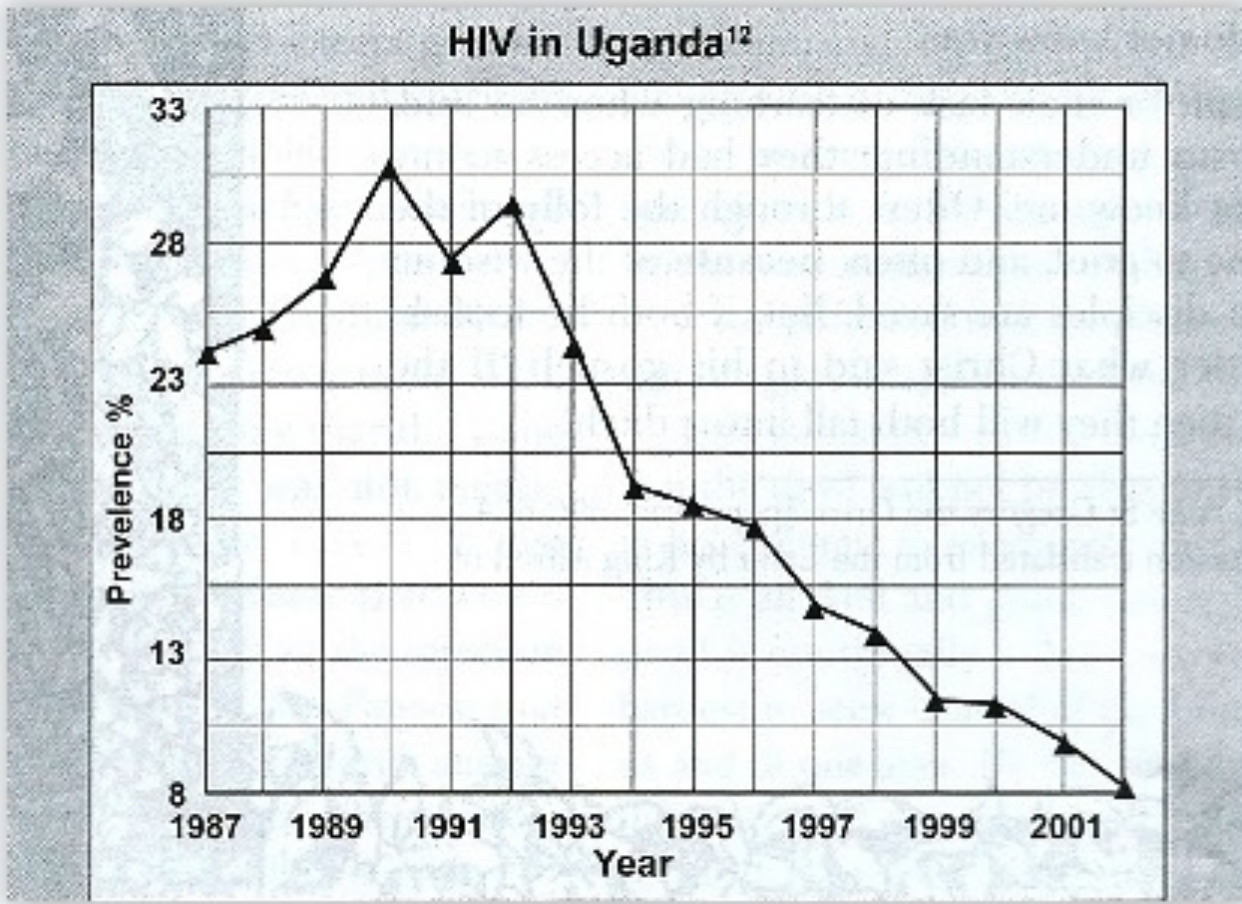


Source: Growth of American Families surveys 1955, 1960; National Survey of Family Growth





# Condoms increased AIDS transmission; abstinence reduced them to almost zero.



# Unintended pregnancies have negative consequences for children -- and their mothers

“Unintended pregnancy ... is associated with high rates of negative consequences for mother, partner and the baby. These groups of women are more exposed to suicide and depression rate, poor nutrition during gestation, mental health issues, unstable family relationships, experiencing physical and psychological violence, risk of miscarriage and having low birth weight infants and delayed onset of prenatal care.”

“[U]nintended...childbearing ... leads to higher crime rates and poorer academic, economic, and health outcomes among children. (1)

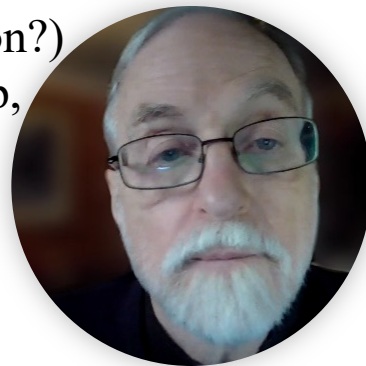
“[U]nwanted children ... more likely experience negative psychological and physical health issues and dropout of high school and tend to show delinquent behavior during adolescence. “ (2)

The unintended conception of child by partners using contraception for sexual activity, particularly in an irregular relationship, would predictably result in

- Stress that may destabilize the relationship
- Less aggressive or pro-active prenatal care
- Pressure to abort the child. (If the Church has relaxed its strictures on contraception, why not also abortion?)
- Negative relative outcomes for the child, especially if the mother commits suicide or the partners break up, as will predictably occur in a non-negligible proportion of cases.

(1) Thomas “Policy solutions for preventing unplanned pregnancy” (Brookings 2016)

(2) Yazdkhasti 2015 Unintended pregnancy and its adverse social and economic consequences (review)



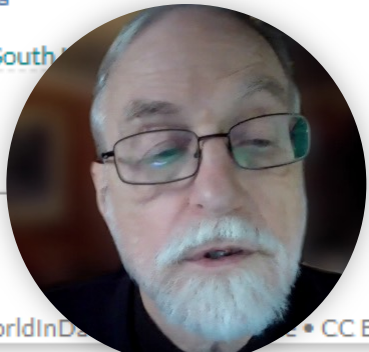
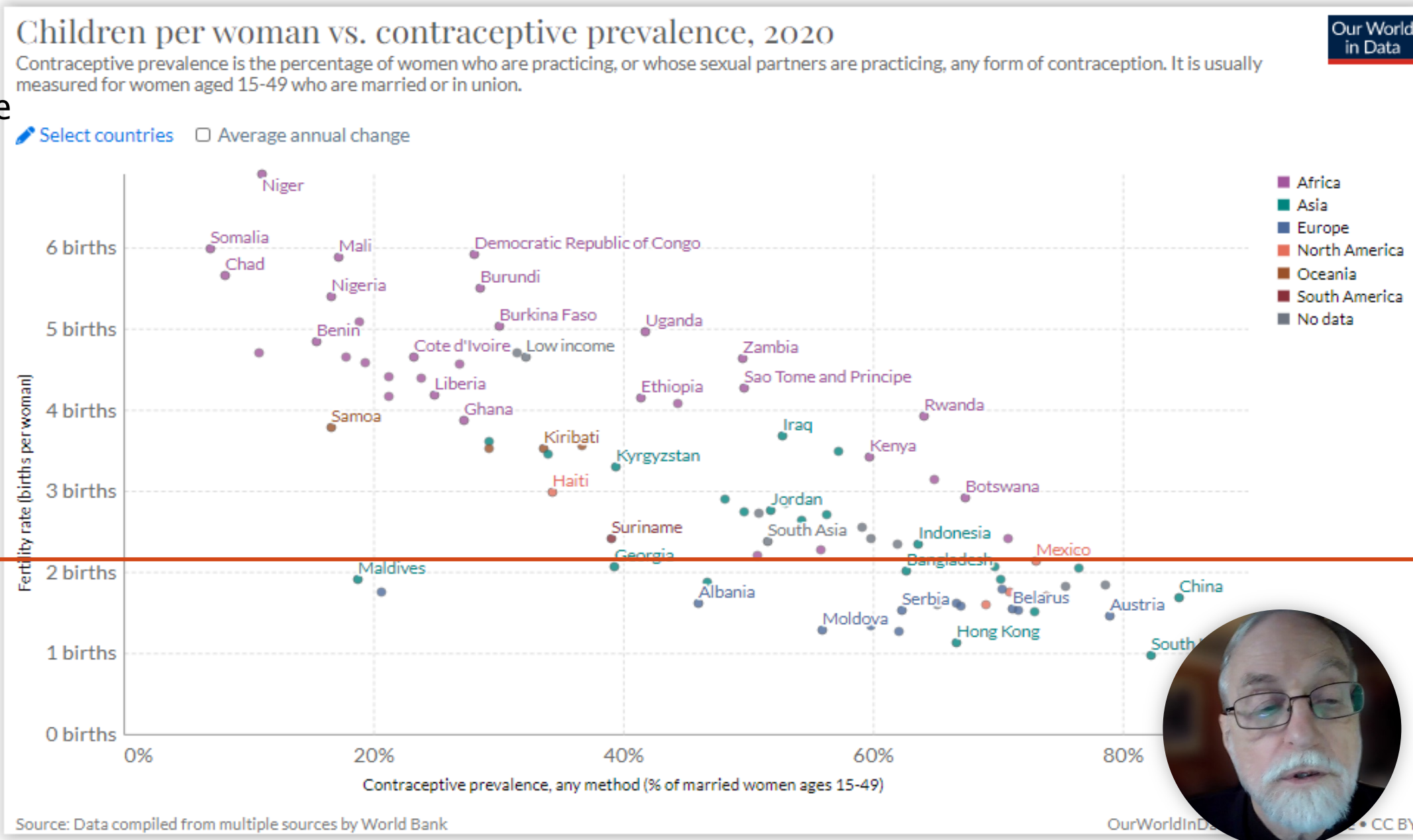


# Contraception brings death.

Not surprisingly, there is a strong negative relationship between contraceptive use and lower national fertility.

Replacement

This is married women only.

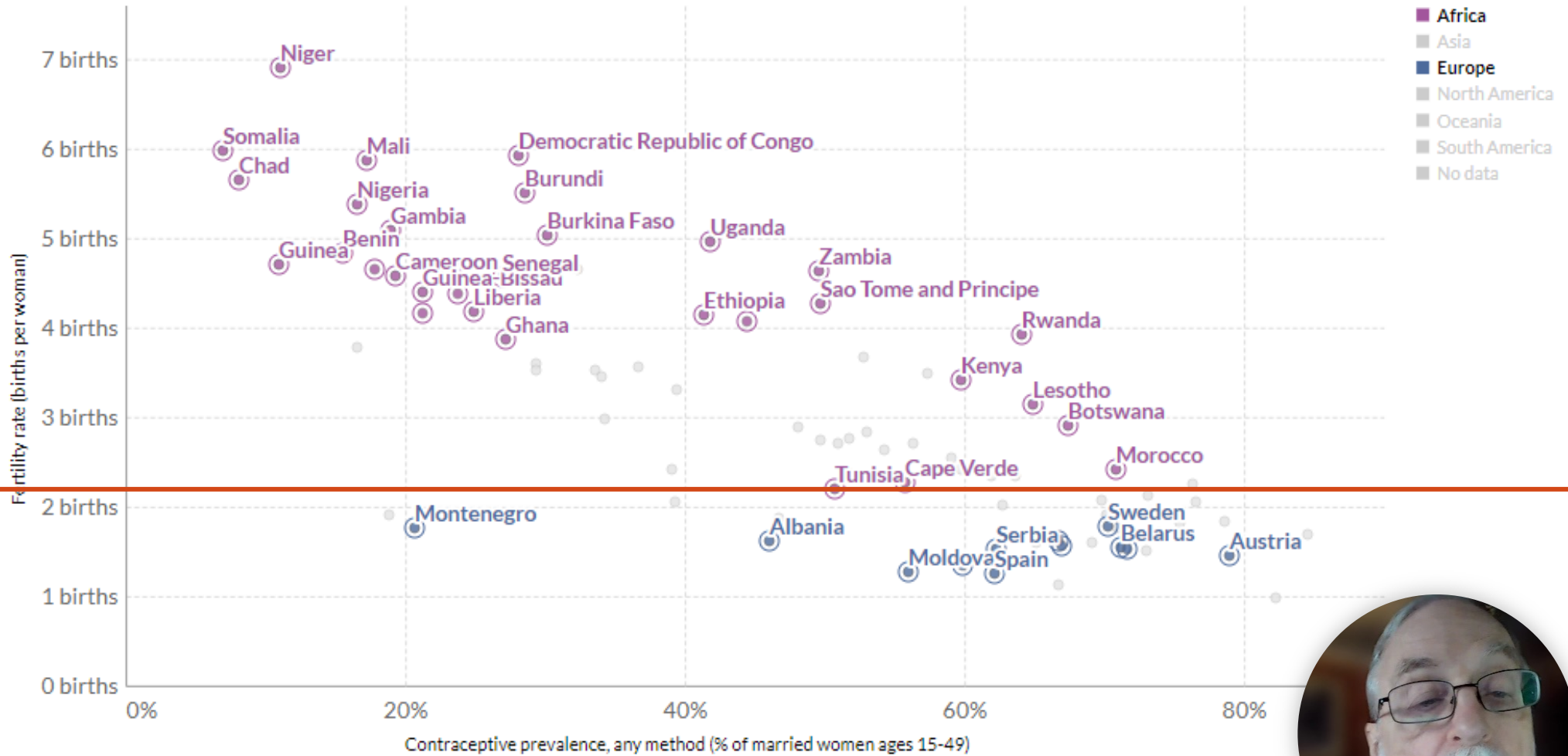


Europe  
(affluent and shrinking) vs  
Africa (poor and growing)

## Children per woman vs. contraceptive prevalence, 2020

Contraceptive prevalence is the percentage of women who are practicing, or whose sexual partners are practicing, any form of contraception. It is usually measured for women aged 15-49 who are married or in union.

Select countries  Zoom to selection  Average annual change

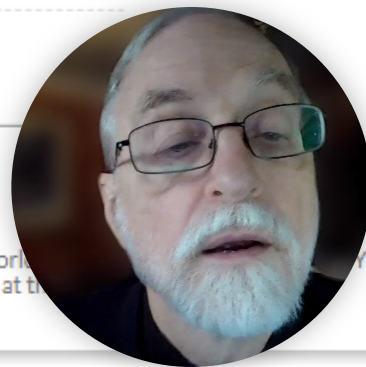


Replacement

Source: Data compiled from multiple sources by World Bank

Note: The total fertility rate is the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her child-bearing years and give birth to children at the current fertility rates.

Our World





The means of production conflict with the means of reproduction.

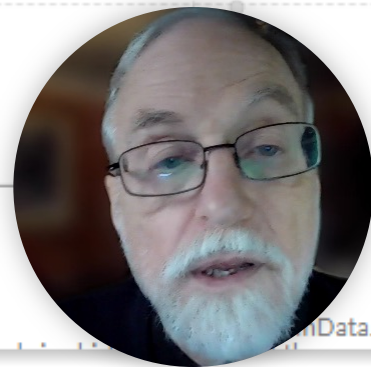
Replacement

Children (and sexual pleasure) become commodified.

## Children per woman vs. contraceptive prevalence, 2020

Contraceptive prevalence is the percentage of women who are practicing, or whose sexual partners are practicing, any form of contraception. It is usually measured for women aged 15-49 who are married or in union.

Select countries  Zoom to selection  Average annual change



Source: Data compiled from multiple sources by World Bank

Data.o



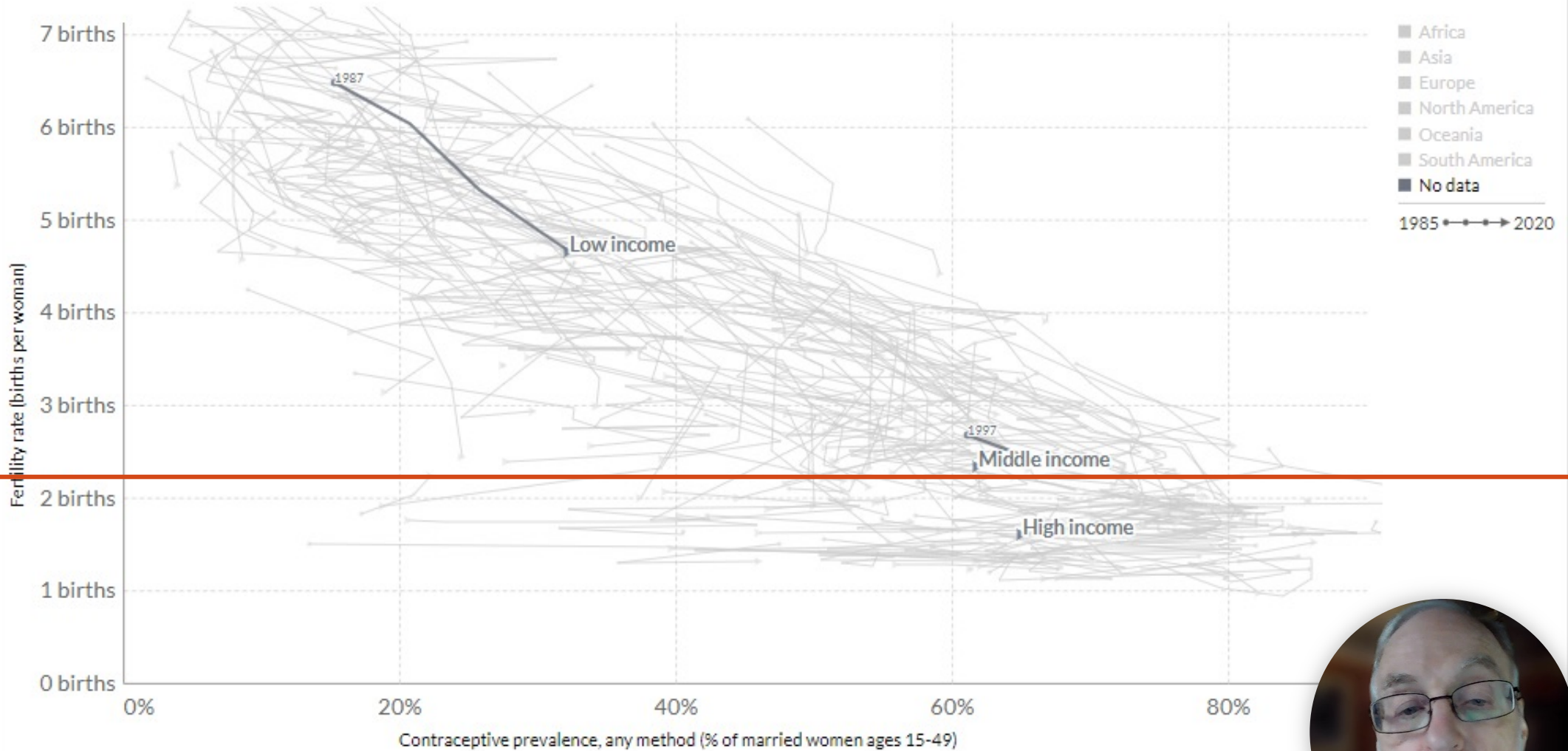
World fertility is declining as contraceptive use continues to rise in the high-fertility, low-income countries.

Replacement

# Children per woman vs. contraceptive prevalence, 1985 to 2020

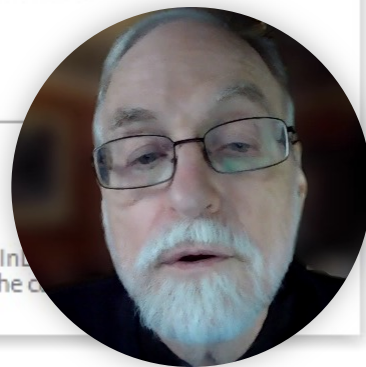
Contraceptive prevalence is the percentage of women who are practicing, or whose sexual partners are practicing, any form of contraception. It is usually measured for women aged 15-49 who are married or in union.

Select countries  Zoom to selection  Average annual change



Source: Data compiled from multiple sources by World Bank

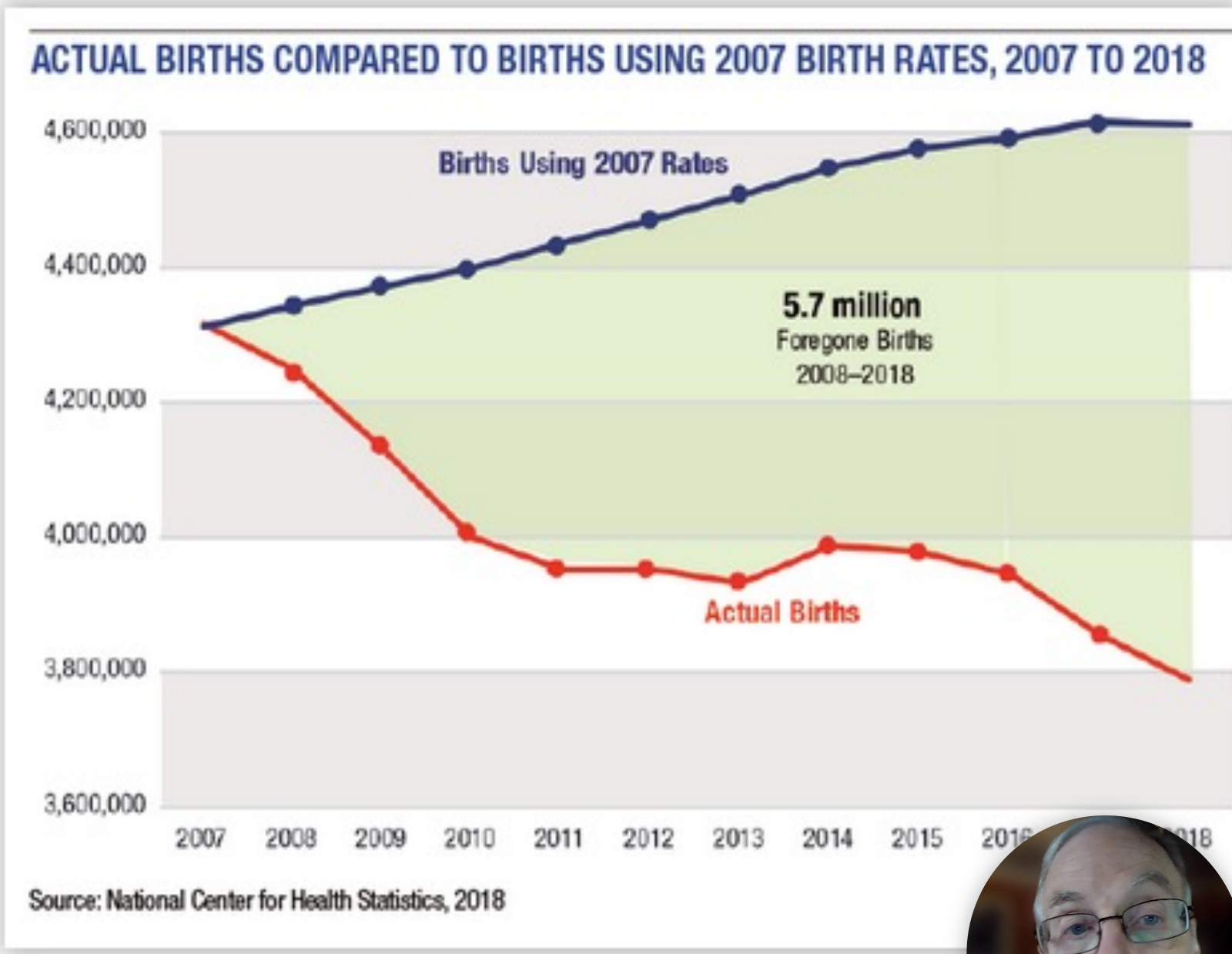
Note: The total fertility rate is the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her child-bearing years and give birth to children at the current fertility rates.



OurWorldInData

“National Center for Health Statistics data for 2018 show the lowest general fertility rate on record and just 3,788,000 births—the fewest in 32 years. There were 528,000 fewer births (12 percent) in 2018 than in 2007, just before the Great Recession began to influence births. This decline in births is entirely due to reduced fertility rates among women in their 20s and teenagers. Fertility rates remained stable or grew slightly among older women. The number of women of prime child-bearing age (20–39) actually increased by 3.2 million (8 percent) between 2007 and 2018. Had pre-recessionary fertility rates been sustained through 2018, there would have been 800,000 more births last year and 5.7 million more births over the last decade.” Johnson 2019 Carsey Center Data Brief.

In 2021 births totaled 3,659,289 – even lower.



The USA is 87% prevalence (76% among married women) and 1.8 children per woman.



# Sexual Consumerism

Pope Francis. “Our houses are filled with things but empty of children”, he said. “This is the demographic winter we are suffering”.

Pope Francis described consumerism as “a virus that attacks the faith at the roots”, because it makes us believe that life depends only on what we have, so we forget about God. “Even if the Lord comes, you just follow the appetites that come to you”, he said. The real danger is that which anesthetizes the heart, added the Pope, letting ourselves be burdened and dissipated by our needs.

Contraceptive use enables this sexual consumerism. Instead of a gift that brings new life, men and women consume each other’s bodies for their own pleasure.

Pope at Mass: Consumerism is a virus that attacks the faith, Vatican News  
December 1, 2019





- ▶ This research is supported by generous funding from the Ruth Institute. For more information on their work, web to [www.ruthinstitute.org](http://www.ruthinstitute.org) or send an email request to [info@ruthinstitute.org](mailto:info@ruthinstitute.org).
- ▶ Resources and infrastructure are graciously provided by the Catholic University of America.
- ▶ For a copy of this presentation or to share any comments or suggestions, contact me via [sullins@cua.edu](mailto:sullins@cua.edu) or [psullins@ruthinstitute.org](mailto:psullins@ruthinstitute.org).

The Rev. D. Paul Sullins, Ph.D.



The Catholic University of America



The Ruth Institute

