

# THE CHRONICLE

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[Home](#) [Blogs](#) [Percolator](#)

Previous

← [Mystery Human Ancestor Found in African Genes](#)

Next

## Controversial Gay-Parenting Study Is Severely Flawed, Journal's Audit Finds

July 26, 2012, 10:57 pm

By [Tom Bartlett](#)



Mark Regnerus

The peer-review process failed to identify significant, disqualifying problems with [a controversial and widely publicized study](#) that seemed to raise doubts about the parenting abilities of gay couples, according to an internal audit scheduled to appear in the November issue of the journal, *Social Science Research*, that published the study.

The highly critical audit, a draft of which was provided to *The Chronicle* by the journal's editor, also cites conflicts of interest among the reviewers, and states that "scholars who should have known better failed to recuse themselves from the review process."

Since it was published last month, the study, titled "How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships?," has been the subject of numerous news articles and blog posts. It has been used by opponents of same-sex marriage to make their case, and it's been blasted by gay-rights activists as flawed and biased.

The study's author, Mark Regnerus, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, even made [the cover](#) of *The Weekly Standard*. In the illustration, he is strapped to a Catherine wheel that's being tended by masked torturers.

Like Regnerus, the editor of *Social Science Research*, James D. Wright, has been at the receiving end of an outpouring of anger over the paper. At the suggestion of another scholar, Wright, a professor of sociology at the University of Central Florida, assigned a member of the journal's editorial board—Darren E. Sherkat, a professor of sociology at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale—to examine how the paper was handled.

Sherkat was given access to all the reviews and correspondence connected with the paper, and was told the identities of the reviewers. According to Sherkat, Regnerus's paper should never have been published. His assessment of it, in an interview, was concise: "It's bullshit," he said.

Among the problems Sherkat identified is the paper's definition of "lesbian mothers" and "gay fathers"—an aspect that has been the focus of much of the public criticism. A woman could be identified as a "lesbian mother" in the study if she had had a relationship with another woman at any point after having a child, regardless of the brevity of that relationship and whether or not the two women raised the child as a couple.

Sherkat said that fact alone in the paper should have "disqualified it immediately" from being considered for publication.



Darren E. Sherkat

In his audit, he writes that the peer-review system failed because of “both ideology and inattention” on the part of the reviewers (three of the six reviewers, according to Sherkat, are on record as opposing same-sex marriage). What’s more, he writes that the reviewers were “not without some connection to Regnerus,” and suggests that those ties influenced their reviews.

He declined to be more specific in an interview, saying that he was obligated to protect their identities. “Obviously,” he concluded, “the reviewers did not do a good job.”

At the same time, he sympathizes with the task of the overburdened reviewer inclined to skim. Because of how the paper was written, Sherkat said, it would have been easy to miss Regnerus’s explanation of who qualified as “lesbian mothers” and “gay fathers.” If a reviewer were to skip ahead to the statistics in the table, it would be understandable, he said, to assume that the children described there were, in fact, raised by a gay or lesbian couple for a significant portion of their childhoods.

In reality, only two respondents lived with a lesbian couple for their entire childhoods, and most did not live with lesbian or gay parents for long periods, if at all.

The information about how parents are labeled is in the paper. Regnerus writes that he chose those labels for “the sake of brevity and to avoid entanglement in interminable debates about fixed or fluid orientations.” Sherkat, however, called the presentation of the data “extremely misleading.” Writes Sherkat: “Reviewers uniformly downplayed or ignored the fact that the study did not examine children of identifiably gay and lesbian parents, and none of the reviewers noticed that the marketing-research data were inappropriate for a top-tier social-scientific journal.”

He also had harsh words for [an accompanying paper](#) in the same issue by Loren D. Marks, an associate professor of family, child, and consumer sciences at Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge. Marks wrote a review of papers that had been published on the children of same-sex parents, taking the authors of those papers to task for using “small convenience samples” that are not generalizable, among other failings.

Sherkat writes that the Marks paper is “a lowbrow meta-analysis of studies” that was “inappropriate for a journal that publishes original quantitative research.” Sherkat, in an interview, said that Marks didn’t perform a true meta-analysis of the studies and instead simply wrote summaries of the results. Marks could not be reached for comment.

That said, Sherkat did not find that the journal’s normal procedures had been disregarded, or that the Regnerus paper had been inappropriately expedited to publication, as some critics have charged. He also vigorously defended Wright, the editor. “If I were in Wright’s shoes,” he writes, “I may well have made the same decisions.”

Because the reviewers were unanimously positive, Wright had little choice but to go ahead with publication, according to Sherkat. He goes on: “My review of the editorial processing of the Regnerus and Marks papers revealed that there were no gross violations of editorial procedures—the papers were peer-reviewed, and the ‘peers’ for papers on this topic were similar to what you would expect at *Social Science Research*.”

As for accusations that Wright was part of a conservative conspiracy, as some have suggested, Sherkat deems that “ludicrous.”

Sherkat was an early critic of the paper, even before he was chosen to conduct the audit. He also said in an interview that he had “little respect for conservative religiosity” and believes that Regnerus and some other socially conservative scholars push a political agenda in their academic work. In a [paper published last year](#), he wrote about how religion and political affiliation affects support for same-sex marriage.

“There should be reflection about a conservative scholar garnering a very large grant from exceptionally conservative foundations,” he writes in the audit, “to make incendiary arguments about the worthiness of LGBT parents—and putting this out in time to politicize it before the 2012 United States presidential election.”



James D. Wright

Sherkat considers Regnerus to be “a bright young scholar,” and, years ago, he wrote a letter of recommendation for him. Sherkat believes that Regnerus, whom he has known for two decades, made a decision to push a conservative political agenda in his academic work a number of years ago, and that this paper is evidence of it.

Regnerus wrote in a [blog post](#) that he is “at a point in my career where I’m less concerned about making my professional peers happy.”

Regnerus declined to sit for an interview, citing the University of Texas’ continuing inquiry into the paper. But when asked by e-mail if Sherkat was a fair arbiter in this case, he replied: “He was appointed to undertake the audit. I won’t offer subjective perceptions of fairness or lack thereof.”

Wright, the editor, provided *The Chronicle* with a draft of his response to the controversy, which will also appear in the November issue of the journal. He writes that two of the six reviewers were paid consultants to the New Family Structures Study, of which this paper is a part (in addition, two of the three commentators on the paper in the journal had been paid consultants on the new-family study, a fact that was divulged at the time the paper was published).

Wright mentions that they made this known to him, assured him it would not affect their judgment, and said that he trusts his reviewers to “check their ideological guns at the referee’s door.” He notes, too, that it’s not unusual for scholars who have been consultants at some point on a project to later serve as referees.

Wright has suffered sleepless nights since the publication of Regnerus’s paper, and has received a steady stream of angry e-mails, from both colleagues and irate strangers. In his response, he writes that accusations that he was trying to foster gay-bashing are “hurtful and preposterous” and that he also believes, along with critics of the paper, in civil rights for gay people and lesbians.

In his audit, Sherkat reveals that all the reviewers declared that the paper would generate “enormous interest.” Enormous interest leads to citations and downloads, which is how a journal’s relevance is judged. The higher the impact of its papers, the greater its prestige. Wright acknowledges that he was excited about the interest the paper would no doubt inspire, and he wonders in retrospect if “perhaps this prospect caused me to be inattentive to things I should have kept a keener eye on.”

That excitement was backed up by unanimous positive support from all reviewers. As Sherkat writes: “[I]t is unfair to expect Wright to hear the warning sirens when none were sounded by the reviewers.”

Wright points out (as Regnerus himself wrote) that the paper could be read as supportive of gay marriage because it seems to indicate that more-stable households produce less-troubled children. “This does not sound like spiteful gay-bashing to me,” Wright contends in his response. “It sounds like a perfectly reasonable conclusion.”

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 **Robert Oscar Lopez** 10 hours ago

Wow, the lynch mob moved quickly.

This is truly very sad. I apologize to Mark Regnerus on behalf of my country and profession. His study pointed out serious flaws with prior research, which was biased (and often funded) with bias in the opposite direction.

As a card-carrying bisexual, I find it sad that gays have now imposed a singular model of what constitutes a happy GLBT life. You have to be a gay version of Ozzie and Harriet, you need to follow one politically advantageous model, you can't have difficulties or hardships in your life, because that makes you somehow not "representative" of who gay people are. That's what I am seeing in the article above, as gay activists discounted a vast range of people from the definition of "lesbian mother" and "gay father," literally censoring any scholarly discussion of life experiences that deviate from the orthodox narrative of middle-class gay normalcy, no matter how common it is for people not to fit into their categories.

In the rush to present gays as normal, activists have brushed over the fact that being gay is very hard, and for reasons that are only partly due to stigma. By hiding the hardships that come with the lifestyle, gays make it that much harder to converse openly about the best way to find happiness for people regardless of their orientation. I still think civil unions are a better route than marriage. I still think cooperative foster care working with the biological parents (and committing to improving the biological parents' lives as opposed to just taking their kids' custody) is better than pushing a bizarre heteronormatized system of surrogacy, blind adoptions, and exclusive custody. You can love your kids and do all the best for them, but chances are if you insist on raising them exclusively in an all-gay home environment without any contact with a third party who's a biological parent, you are adding unnecessary hardship.

Regenerus's study could have occasioned a frank conversation about these things and fostered more honesty. Instead we have silence and everyone being dumbstruck while thousands of kids are dragooned into a gay parenting system that is making a lot of people increasingly uneasy, with good reason.

It's a Pyrrhic victory. Drive obvious observations like the ones put forward by Regnerus into the shadows, and then the dissimulation and deception metastasize. You can silence scholars who disagree, but you can't eliminate the basic reality that growing up being raised by a gay couple is harder than being raised by a straight couple. Slather layers of polish on your arguments and the underlying truth will corrode the whole project from within.

35 people liked this. [Like](#)



**bunga7** 3 hours ago

Out of curiosity, Robert, where did you get your "bisexuality card?" Having looked over some of your publications, you clearly have a bias as well. Perhaps, like Regenerus, you should admit that bias. I would expect that being a scholar you'd know better than to make statements ("...but you can't eliminate the basic reality that being raised by a gay couple is harder...") without rigorous studies, using strong methodologies. Instead, you let your own bias show through. One of the first things we learn as young scholars is to leave your bias at the door. If Regenerus was unable to do so, and clearly he wasn't, he should have stuck to other subject matter.

28 people liked this. [Like](#)



**JD Eveland** 2 hours ago

Speak for yourself. I'm sorry that your life as a bisexual man is so cripplingly awful that you just can't resist letting everybody else know about it. As a gay man of many years standing, and a sort-of-straight man before that - and incidentally, the father of a wonderful, happy, eminently successful daughter - I must say that my life is certainly no harder than anyone else's, and a heckuva lot less hard than many. Projecting one's own miseries onto the whole population of LGBT parents with no support except for loud assertion is hardly a recipe for sound public policy recommendations. Even less sound is constructing meretricious pseudo-studies out of bad data, sneaking them into a journal by fudging and faking the review process, and then complaining loudly about "research discrimination" when found out. Regnerus could not have written so many lies dressed in social science suits by accident or even stupidity - it was clearly an exercise calculated to mislead from the start. Lopez is just one more ideological false-flag operation aimed at fighting a rear-guard action against the truth.

39 people liked this. [Like](#)



**jcisneros** 41 minutes ago

Dr. Lopez, you simply cannot have it both ways. I have read a fair sampling of your postings

here, and you most often use your bisexuality in a pejorative way. In one posting you talked about coming to grips with your sexuality through prayer and reflection and then went on to state that your prayer and reflection brought you back to a heterosexual marriage and life.

Far be it from me to criticize how you live your life. I too, in my early years faced an uphill battle because of who and what I am (now an openly gay man). In my teenage years as a Roman Catholic I was deeply closeted, I prayed for change, I prayed to be made straight. It took until I was 22 for me to come to realize that I am what I am, and there is nothing wrong with being gay. Well, actually that was the beginning of my personal acceptance of what I am...not a clearly defined moment.

Believe me Robert, I am sympathetic. People and circumstances surrounding life can be terribly crushing. But those circumstances of my life are part of what makes me who I am.

But I am not sympathetic to Mark Regnerus. He demonstrably "cooked the books" with his study. He sought a specific result and manipulated his study to make it meet his expectations. He took money from people whose agenda is to deny equality to LGBT folks and he somehow found a way to get his paper refereed by people sympathetic to his beliefs. Even if Dr. Regnerus had nothing but the best of intentions...which I am fairly confident he did not, taking money from conservative anti-gay forces puts an agenda in play. Something you and other conservatives always accuse us liberals of...putting an agenda in play. Everyone has a bias, and everyone has an agenda, Dr. Lopez, regardless of political ideology. How responsible scholars acknowledge and deal with those biases is part of the process of research and publication.

Let us be frank for a moment. Being a parent is difficult. Children do not come issued with owners' manuals. Gay and straight parents both have hard roads ahead of them, and gay and lesbian parents do have the added burden of social opprobrium from certain quarters.

But Regnerus's study was not designed to expose and put scholars in a place where a productive debate about those particular difficulties would be possible. His study was designed to authoritatively disqualify gays and lesbians as parents, that was what those conservative think tanks paid him to do.

~JC

4 people liked this. [Like](#)



**dashwood** 10 hours ago

Sherkat is not an appropriate person to have conducted a review of the publication process. The fact that he was a member of the editorial board of Social Science Research and "an early critic of the paper" makes him an inappropriate choice to have conducted this inquiry in the first place. He is hardly a detached observer here, and it is irresponsible to have placed him in a position to conduct this inquiry.

What kind of incompetent inquiry is this? You have an original critic of the paper who then becomes an evaluator of the degree to which the publication process was conducted in an appropriate professional manner on a paper on which he was an early critic. The evaluator would seem to have a political agenda himself, insofar as the unpleasant things that he has to say about religious conservatives would seem to predispose him toward a particular view on these matters. Is this a person who could be expected to practice scholarly detachment and render an unbiased judgment on a paper that presented findings that would seem to stand in such sharp contrast to the views of someone with such contempt for religious conservatives? Further, the evaluator falls all over himself to praise and defend the editor of the journal, who we know asked him to conduct the inquiry in the first place. For Sherkat to cast such aspersions on the editorial process and then to suggest that he might have done the same thing if he were editor suggests a considerable amount of muddled thinking on his part. Either the editorial process is flawed or it is not.

From this story, it appears that Sherkat suggests that the editorial process was fine but that the decision to publish the Regnerus was not. The fact is that this is one person's opinion of the publishability of the Regnerus and Marks papers, and in making this a headline story the Chronicle has made far too much of one person's opinion. In Sherkat we do not have a detached scholarly observer. It is an embarrassment to Editor Wright and to Social Science Research to have created an inquiry to be conducted in this manner by a single biased observer who is a member of the SSR editorial board and who had already expressed an evaluation of the Regnerus paper.

If there was a problem with the publication process of the journal, asking a single editorial board member known to be a critic of the paper that was the subject of the inquiry in the first place is completely inappropriate and, arguably, unethical. The editor should have asked a group of leading sociologists who represent a diversity of opinion and who were completely divorced from the operation of the journal to conduct the inquiry. That this was not done calls into serious question this entire sordid process.

48 people liked this. [Like](#)



**benno** 3 hours ago

 Sherkat should slither back into his spandex and "break-a-way" from this pack.

He was hardly disposed to be objective about anything more than the direction his butt was pointing and about as "forward-thinking".

6 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **Lisa Kazmier** 7 hours ago

Robert here clearly identifies his agenda, so much so that he cannot recognize a serious methodology issue in defining who the subject was in this "study." If a child is not raised significantly or solely by a gay/lesbian couple, I don't understand how this case qualifies. There's little input. A woman who possibly had a fling counts? There should have been a domicile standard. The cause and effect here is dubious without some reasonable certainty that the couple had an influence on the child for a sizable part of his/her upbringing. I don't see the science here at all with such a low, arbitrary categorization of gay parenting. Of course, anyone with a stake in this study won't point out a glaring issue like this. Did the editor really need help figuring this out? Yikes.

22 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **Angela Flynn** 4 hours ago

I'd say Regnerus will be very happy with his citation rating after this :)

7 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **bethelcollege** 3 hours ago

Dr. Sherkat's cv is available online. It's enormously impressive, demonstrating the range of his professional accomplishments. I do note some relevant publications that may suggest his perspective:

Sherkat, Darren E. Powell, Melissa, and Greg Maddox. "Religion and Opposition to Same Sex Marriage." Sherkat, Darren E. "Bad Samaritans: Christian Sectarianism and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment"

Sherkat, Darren E., Kylan DeVries, and Stacia Creek. 2010. "Religion, Race and Support for Same-Sex Marriage." *Social Science Quarterly*.91:80-98.

Sherkat, Darren E. 2000. "'That They Be Keepers of the Home': The Effect of Conservative Religion on Early and Late Transitions into Housewifery." *Review of Religious Research*. 41:344-458.

Sherkat, Darren E. and Alfred Darnell. 1999. "The Effect of Parents' Fundamentalism on Children's Educational Attainment: Examining Differences by Gender and Children's Fundamentalism" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 38:23-35.

Darnell, Alfred and Darren E. Sherkat. 1997. "The Impact of Fundamentalism on Educational Attainment." *American Sociological Review*. 62:306-315.

Sherkat, Darren E. and John Wilson. 1995. "Preferences, Constraints, and Choices in Religious Markets: An Examination of Religious Switching and Apostasy." *Social Forces*. 73:993-1026.

Ellison, Christopher G. and Darren E. Sherkat. 1995. "The Semi-Involuntary Institution Revisited: Regional Variations in Church Participation Among Black Americans." *Social Forces*. 73:1415-1437.

Wilson, John and Darren E. Sherkat. 1994. "Returning to the Fold." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 33:148-161.

Ellison, Christopher G. and Darren E. Sherkat. 1993. "Conservative Protestantism and Support for Corporal Punishment." *American Sociological Review*. 58:131-144.

9 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **fiscalwiz** 2 hours ago

I was really impressed with the first reference -- until I realized that the guy who pitched for the Braves was Greg Maddux, not the Greg Maddox who is a co-author.

4 people liked this. [Like](#)**signspotter** 3 hours ago

The study is even more flawed than this article describes. The key measure was based on adult respondents (a) knowing about, (b) recalling, and (c) reporting that an adult parent had a same-sex affair, not on whether the respondent's parent actually had a same-sex affair (let alone was in a long-term same-sex relationship). His core finding, then, is that adults who recall -- whether accurately or not -- that one parent had a same-sex affair have worse outcomes, on average, than adults who grew up in intact families, the majority of which are heterosexual. Regnerus had better measures of LGBT households available, but chose not to use them.

That being said, accepting grant money from conservative foundations is not grounds for dismissal. Neither is hawking careless summaries of your research to Slate or the conservative media. And neither is publishing a scientifically flawed study. (Heck, the conservative's favorite poster child for climate change denial, Ed Wegman, is a known plagiarist, and he still has his job.)

23 people liked this. [Like](#)**BeauVinescat** 0 minutes ago

Thanks--yours is the rational, scholarly approach to a critical review, unlike the McCarthyite, smear by association ad hominemists who have filled these forums lately.

[Like](#)**Owen Caterwall** 2 hours ago

I'm not a social scientist and I don't have a dog in the fight, but here's what I do know: ideology and strongly held beliefs will color and even distort factual information in order to support those convictions. I would be wary of any scholar who comes to his or her research attempting to develop evidence for a political agenda.

The horse has escaped the barn (sorry for the cliché); it will now be almost impossible to engage in rational discourse in the public arena as citation to the article in questions will continue to be made regardless of the final peer consensus as to methodology.

The shame is that while this may be an "academic" topic to the authors, it will resonate in the lives of people who have no desire other than to raise their children to have happy, fulfilling and accepted lives. And the irony is that the very politicians who decry higher education as effete citadels of elitism will now use the product of those institutions to drive the prejudice of citizens who will never be a party to the debate over the soundness of that product.

21 people liked this. [Like](#)**interface** 2 hours ago

One of the many terrible damages of institutionalized bigotry and discrimination is its ability to distort the conversation, at every level. I speak from another fight for equality, in which biological differences have been a weapon in the hands of those who feared losing their privilege, instead of a means of facilitating a more just society. LGBT parents will have real equality when they have the freedom to be just as imperfect as hetero parents. Their struggles are real, and a frank discussion should be used to help those who, in addition to the struggles faced by all parents, also have to contend with a society that imposes unnecessary and unequal hardship on them.

And in the context of yet another fight for equality, I've found it very helpful when presented with "here's what's wrong with this group" information to ask the question: "What's your point?" The honest response, "I need a justification for discrimination" is rarely openly forthcoming, but almost always obvious.

If what is written above is true, it seems likely to me that Regnerus produced a study that supported what he had already decided was the truth, and not for the purpose of helping LGBT parents and their children.

22 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **ardvaark** 2 hours ago

We have to have a serious discussion about the state of the science of reviewing. It is not good, and this is a serious problem.

19 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **inlibrarian** 2 hours ago

It seems to me that the obvious next step is for a sociologist to carry out a better designed study on the subject: A study of families whose parents self-identify as being in same sex relationships. It would be very interesting to compare long-term relationships and shorter-term relationships and the impact on children.

6 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **fiscalwiz** 2 hours ago

It doesn't seem to me that the guy doing the "audit" had the degree of independence needed to do an independent audit. He appears to have no more standing than the initial referees.

It's way too late to do an actual blind peer review but it should be possible to do a better independent test than the one outlined here.

10 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **slac\_science** 1 hour ago

Wow. Glad I'm just a climate researcher and don't have to deal with this kind of media storm.

25 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **denlan5** 1 hour ago

Would a study of the effects of single parenting that took its data from children who recall that one of their married parents was once single be taken seriously? Beyond the kerfuffle over lax journal procedures and reviewer bias, this study was scientifically rotten at its core.

13 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **tempanon** 1 hour ago

The 1000 dollar question. Is the journal going to retrack the paper?

3 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **greeneyeshade** 54 minutes ago

Three of six reviewers opposed same sex marriage. Which means, of course that we are to believe that the other three were completely undecided about the issue of gay marriage, right?

C'mon.

4 people liked this. [Like](#)

 **embuckles** 49 minutes ago

I have a relative and several acquaintances who are child protective services social workers. Like the character "Cobra Bubbles", the social worker in the animated movie "Lilo and Stitch", the are "the ones who get called when things go wrong." Anyway, while they don't break confidentiality, they have given me appropriate insights into how the child protective services system works. They shared that sometimes they encounter homosexual parents who will often start to make accusations of discrimination. They immediately tell the homosexual parents that this is NOT about your sexual orientation. As is the same with heterosexual parents, this is ONLY about the care of the child PERIOD. In any child care situation, whether the parents are straight, gay or what have you, the only concern should be about the CHILDREN, that they are receiving good care and are safe. It is NOT about the parents/guardians and their emotional "baggage", it is about the CHILDREN and about good care of them. I also strongly feel that now that homosexuals can serve openly in the military, "Don't Ask Don't Tell" should now refer to EVERYBODY'S sexual proclivities. Sex has gotten way too much in everybody's face. I don't want to know what anybody does to get their sexual jollies in private - so long as they are not abusing a child or not abusing an adult who does not wish to be abused. TMI="too much information", "don't ask, don't tell!"

2 people liked this. [Like](#)



**Scott Rose** 2 minutes ago

Congratulations on letting the world know that you are a gay-bashing bigot.

[Like](#)



**sorrybut** 49 minutes ago

I cannot believe that Darren Sherkat was chosen to conduct this "audit." Should have been someone who would be accepted by all parties as fair and unbiased. As it is, Sherkat has a long history of difference with various people involved in this, and is not trusted by many scholars (not for his scholarly abilities, which are solid, but his own ideology and axes to grind). This should have been done by someone above the fray who is respected by all sides. As it is, I am not the least bit surprised that Darren came out reporting what he did. This is like asking Nancy Pelosi to review whether Obama's HHS mandate is constitutional or not.

7 people liked this. [Like](#)



**Per Smith** 35 minutes ago

You can disagree with Darren Sherkat's judgements about the scientific merits of the paper all you want but the facts about the conflicts of interest in the review process are clearly not fabricated and there is a serious conversation that should be had about those facts. Anyone on any side of this issue should be appalled by those conflicts of interest and should want to prevent this kind of thing from happening again. The peer review process (unlike this public investigation of it) is blind to us, the consumers of scientific research. We have to be able to trust in that process. Right now I'm losing that trust. Can you help restore it?

7 people liked this. [Like](#)



**thomascushman** 21 minutes ago

The editor of the journal made a serious mistake in choosing to do an "audit" of the paper review process in response to political pressure. If he did, indeed, get the paper reviewed according to normal, accepted procedures, then the paper should have been published. Any response should have been made as a rejoinder by critics. That is how science operates. What paper published in any journal could not be subjected to an "audit" after the fact and found to be wanting, especially when the "auditor" has an ideological history which would unfavorably dispose him toward the paper and its findings.

Also, I find it irregular to link the findings to the source of the money, since it is clear that they had no direct influence on the methodology, or the findings of the study. How many times has a paper and its author been castigated for accepting research funds from a left leaning source and been accused of biased findings as a result? If someone took money from, say, The Soros Foundation, and wrote a paper that was critical of some aspects of conservative politics in the US, would left-wing social scientists complain about "bias"? Never.

I am not an expert in the area of the paper; the methodology does seem odd to me in respect to operationalizing what constitutes a gay parent. But that choice is explained and what should have happened is that social scientists who disagree or criticize should be allowed to attack the piece, with as much firepower as they want (presuming of course that they are not led by a purely ideological agenda, which many of the critics are).

What is at stake here is the validity of the norms of science, and how we go about judging the validity and reliability of social scientific knowledge. Sociologists are always bragging about their "debunking" modality as the source of their inspiration. It seems to me that Regnerus was working in that mode by questioning the orthodox idea, not always supported by strong data, that there are no differences in outcomes in different kinds of families. If he has done a bad job doing that, he should be attacked in the strongest scientific ways possible, rather than impugned by people with ideological agendas who then seek to destroy him with the politics of personal destruction.

And in no case should a kind of ex post fact review of the review process be done by someone who clearly has his own ideological agenda. What is the likely effect of this kind of thing on the overall willingness of all social scientists to explore the most provocative issues of the day? No one will be safe, it seems and the complex dialectic that is the font of knowledge will be impeded, as it always is, by blinkering ideology.

2 people liked this. Like



**Per Smith** 5 minutes ago

"Also, I find it irregular to link the findings to the source of the money, since it is clear that they had no direct influence on the methodology, or the findings of the study."

The conflicts of interests mentioned in this audit not merely (or most importantly) about those links. They are about reviewers with personal and professional ties to Regnerus and most importantly, professional ties to the family survey that produced these results. In my mind, that admittedly sits between two very wet ears, such a conflict of interest should automatically disqualify a reviewer. Why didn't it? What does this say about the review process? Can we leave the politics behind for one second to discuss the extremely disconcerting FACTS about the review process? Cheers.

Like



**Scott Rose** 4 minutes ago

Quick! Name ten influential and widely accepted and respected sociological studies that make as glaringly inappropriate a comparison between their test groups and their control groups as the Regnerus study exhibits.

Like



**jay\_livingston** 31 minutes ago

Many of the accusations here are about bias. Were the reviewers biased? Was Sherkat biased? Wright says he assumed that reviewers, and presumably Sherkat, would "check their ideological guns." The reviewers and Sherkat would probably deny being biased. So these accusations are attributing motives to people who would deny them. That's always a tricky business. In effect, you're accusing people either of lying or of being influenced by strong unconscious motivations. In either case, you have no evidence. What you do have is the study and the criticisms of it and the criticisms of the criticisms. [Sherkat's assertion that "the marketing-research data were inappropriate" has been challenged by other sociologists, even those who think the study was really bad. (There's a long methodological discussion at [Scatterplot](#). For the posts on the data, search for "KN.")]

Much of the furor is not about the paper but about the response of people outside the research-review-publication process. Can you blame a paper and its author and reviewers for the political uses that others make of it? If you think a paper is valid research, should you refuse to publish it because of what others might do with it?

1 person liked this. Like



**Scott Rose** 6 minutes ago

The allegations are not about "bias." The allegations involve persons paid with money from Regnerus's funders to "consult" on and approve the inappropriate and inadequate study design, which consultants then approved the publication of the study featuring their inappropriate and inadequate study design for publication. Less the topic of the study, the bare-bones facts of the improper relationships involved in the study design approval, and the subsequent approval of the study for publication, mark the publication of the invalid study as inappropriate and unacceptable.

Like



**Homer Thiel** 22 minutes ago

Regnerus' study was funded by groups linked to the leading anti-same-sex marriage group, the National Organization for Marriage. The day after it was published it was cited in court briefings filed by anti-gay groups in a DOMA case (how did that happen, hmmm?). Mark Regnerus is not some unbiased researcher. He decided to promote a particular view, received funding from groups who wanted this view promoted, and amazingly enough, managed to collect data that supported his view exactly. Coincidence or fate?

3 people liked this.

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**Scott Rose** 14 minutes ago

At this link, you may read allegations of scientific and scholarly misconduct against Regnerus, presented to University of Texas at Austin officials.  
<http://tinyurl.com/chuakw8>

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