

# BACKGROUND

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## The Regnerus Study: Social Science on New Family Structures Met with Intolerance

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### Abstract

*Despite claims that “no differences” exist between children whose parents had a same-sex relationship and children who were raised by their married biological parents, previous research cannot support such an assertion. Using a large, nationally representative dataset, a new study by sociologist Mark Regnerus finds that children whose parents had a same-sex relationship experienced more negative adult outcomes compared with children from intact biological families. The study has sparked a remarkably hostile and unscientific backlash—a backlash presumably motivated by the paper’s implications for the same-sex marriage debate. This backlash is regrettable because it undermines the health of public discourse on a subject of enormous significance—the institution of marriage—and challenges the integrity of social science inquiry in general.*

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/bg2736>

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In 2005, the American Psychological Association (APA) declared: “Not a single study has found children of lesbian or homosexual parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents.”<sup>1</sup> This sweeping “no difference” claim has been cited by proponents of same-sex marriage to support redefining marriage.<sup>2</sup>

However, the implications of the APA’s conclusion are actually much more limited due to the kind of research upon which it is based.<sup>3</sup> Often forced to work with small and unrepresentative samples, social scientists have been unable to determine how average children with same-sex parents compare with average children raised by their married biological parents. Such generalizable conclusions based on samples representing the whole population are the kind of information that citizens should expect from social science that is used to support a significant policy proposal, but the previous literature cannot provide this information.

A June 2012 study in *Social Science Research* by University of Texas sociologist Mark Regnerus helps to shed some light on the issue.<sup>4</sup> Using a nationally representative

### KEY POINTS

- Political advocates have used the sweeping claim of “no difference” between children of same-sex parents and their peers in married biological families to advocate for redefining marriage, but the research behind this claim does not support such generalizable conclusions.
- A June 2012 study by sociologist Mark Regnerus, which used a nationally representative random sample called the New Family Structures Study, found that a number of negative outcomes are associated with having a parent who is or has been in a same-sex relationship compared with having two married biological parents.
- Rather than treat the substance of Regnerus’s study, many opponents have leveled exaggerated denunciations and made baseless accusations of political bias and impropriety.
- Both sides of the debate should welcome the Regnerus study as a careful, data-driven contribution that enhances the debate about an issue of such magnitude as the future of marriage.

random sample called the New Family Structures Study (NFSS), it finds that a number of negative outcomes are associated with having a parent who was in a same-sex relationship compared with having two married biological parents.

The Regnerus study improves on prior methods and represents an important contribution to research on family structures.<sup>5</sup> Three critical reviews of the study published in the same edition of *Social Science Research* hail it as such.<sup>6</sup>

Elsewhere, however, the study has sparked a remarkably hostile and unscientific backlash—a backlash presumably motivated by the paper’s findings that undercut the “no differences” claim. The backlash is regrettable because it both undermines the health of public discourse related to a subject of enormous significance—the institution of marriage—and challenges the integrity of social science inquiry in general.<sup>7</sup>

The New Family Structures Study shows that prior research is

inadequate to support any assertion that it makes no difference whether a child was raised by same-sex parents. The results suggest both that there is a lot more to learn about how changing family forms can affect children and that social science evidence offers an insufficient basis for redefining marriage.

### The Existing Literature

In social science research, failure to find evidence of a hypothesized effect does not automatically mean that the effect does not exist. The quality of the research involved, especially regarding the size and representativeness of datasets, helps social scientists to determine whether the hypothesized effects are truly nonexistent or merely undetectable with the statistical tools at their disposal.

Much of the past research on outcomes for children in same-sex versus heterosexual households lacks the ability to confidently rule out the possibility of differences when comparing

averages among the broader population. In particular, the main challenge to research on the children of parents in same-sex relationships has been simply finding enough of them to analyze in the first place. Most existing datasets with detailed demographic data do not contain enough children of parents in same-sex relationships to conduct an informative analysis. For example, the widely used Add Health dataset contains only about 50 such children, despite a core sample of 12,105 adolescents.<sup>8</sup>

Researchers have generally compensated by creating “convenience” samples—sets of respondents that are easily obtainable by the researcher but do not necessarily reflect the average characteristics of the population in question. For example, one technique for creating a convenience sample of parents in same-sex relationships is to advertise in homosexual-themed newspapers and magazines. Researchers then ask the people who answer the advertisement to recommend others

1. Charlotte Patterson, “Lesbian & Gay Parenting,” American Psychological Association, p. 15, <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/parenting-full.pdf> (accessed August 24, 2012).
2. For example, Judge Vaughn Walker ruled that “[t]he research supporting this conclusion is accepted beyond serious debate in the field of developmental psychology.” *Perry v. Brown*, 671 F.3d 1052 (9th Cir. 2012).
3. In addition to being misleading in terms of the quality of data supporting it, the statement itself is not accurate. See Loren Marks, “Same-Sex Parenting and Children’s Outcomes: A Closer Examination of the American Psychological Association’s Brief on Lesbian and Gay Parenting,” *Social Science Research*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (July 2012), pp. 735–751, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X12000580> (accessed August 24, 2012).
4. Mark Regnerus, “How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study,” *Social Science Research*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (June 2012), pp. 752–770, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X12000610> (accessed August 24, 2012).
5. See Christine C. Kim, “Impact of Same-Sex Parenting on Children: Evaluating the Research,” Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 3643, June 19, 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/06/impact-of-same-sex-parenting-on-children-evaluating-the-research>.
6. Paul R. Amato, “The Well-Being of Children with Gay and Lesbian Parents,” *Social Science Research*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (July 2012), pp. 771–774, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X12000749> (accessed August 24, 2012); David J. Eggebeen, “What Can We Learn from Studies of Children Raised by Gay or Lesbian Parents?” *Social Science Research*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (July 2012), pp. 775–778, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X12000750> (accessed August 24, 2012); and Cynthia Osborne, “Further Comments on the Papers by Marks and Regnerus,” *Social Science Research*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (July 2012), pp. 779–783, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X12000774> (accessed August 24, 2012).
7. “The very integrity of the social-science research process is threatened by the public smearing and vigilante media attacks we have seen in this case,” writes Christian Smith, a widely respected sociologist at Notre Dame. Christian Smith, “An Academic Auto-da-Fé,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 23, 2012, <http://chronicle.com/article/An-Academic-Auto-da-F-/133107/> (accessed August 14, 2012).
8. Jennifer L. Wainwright, Stephen T. Russell, and Charlotte J. Patterson, “Psychosocial Adjustment, School Outcomes, and Romantic Relationships of Adolescents with Same-Sex Parents,” *Child Development*, Vol. 75, No. 6 (November/December 2004), pp. 1886–1898, [http://dime159.dizinc.com/-uv1258/blog/Matrimonio/archivos/wainwright\\_2004.pdf](http://dime159.dizinc.com/-uv1258/blog/Matrimonio/archivos/wainwright_2004.pdf) (accessed August 22, 2012).

who might be willing to participate. The next set of respondents is asked for more leads, and so on, creating a “snowball” sample that the researcher can then use.<sup>9</sup>

It is not difficult to see how convenience samples of this kind can be unrepresentative of same-sex parents in general. People who are having poor experiences as parents may be less likely than contented parents to volunteer for a survey. Selection through snowball techniques also tends to produce samples that are relatively homogeneous, with prior same-sex parent studies often dominated by upper-class urban whites.<sup>10</sup>

Obtaining an unbiased sample is a crucial aspect of social science research in general. Regardless of the subject matter at hand or the population being examined, large and representative samples are essential for drawing strong conclusions about a particular group.

In a literature review published in the same issue of *Social Science Research* as the Regnerus study, family studies professor Loren Marks detailed several other problems in the dataset construction in studies of children whose parents had same-sex relationships. These problems include small sample sizes, lack of comparison groups, and narrow sets of outcome measures.<sup>11</sup> All of these objections are applications of

standard research principles—not arcane technical points.

It is important to note, just as Regnerus does, that researchers producing these past studies were usually open about the limitations of their methodologies, and their work is still interesting and informative in certain ways. But it cannot tell us how the average children of same-sex parents compare in terms of stability and outcomes with the average children of married biological parents.

### The Regnerus Study

To improve on prior methodologies seeking to compare children’s outcomes across household types, Mark Regnerus led an ideologically diverse team of researchers from multiple universities who advised on the design of the New Family Structures Study (NFSS). The NFSS features a sample of 2,998 adults between the ages of 18 and 39, with information from respondents about both their childhood experiences and their current circumstances as adults. The sample contains 175 respondents who reported that their mothers were in a same-sex relationship at some point during their childhood and 73 whose fathers were in such a relationship during their childhood.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike much of the past research on the topic, these respondents are

derived from a random population-level sample that is much more likely to reflect the average experience of children with a parent who had a same-sex relationship. Both Regnerus and his critics would like to have a larger number of such children to study, but the NFSS sample size does provide considerably more statistical power in detecting differences compared with most of the past research.<sup>13</sup> Regnerus examined 40 different outcomes—many more than any previous study—and controlled for a variety of family circumstances.

Results of the Regnerus study reveal that having a parent who is or has been in a same-sex relationship is generally associated with more negative adult outcomes, especially when compared with adult children from intact biological families. For example, adults whose mother or father had a same-sex relationship have lower educational attainment than adults who grew up with their two married biological parents. They are also more likely to receive welfare, experience depression, smoke, and be arrested. These differences remain after controlling for a variety of other childhood circumstances, such as race, family income, and state of residence.

On 24 of the 40 outcomes after controls, Regnerus found

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9. For example, see Helen Barrett and Fiona Tasker, “Growing Up with a Gay Parent: Views of 101 Gay Fathers on Their Sons’ and Daughters’ Experiences,” *Educational and Child Psychology*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2001), pp. 62–77, <http://decip.bps.org.uk/decip/educational-and-child-psychology/back-issues.cfm> (accessed August 24, 2012).
  10. Gary J. Gates, “Family Formation and Raising Children Among Same-Sex Couples,” *Family Focus*, Winter 2011, National Council on Family Relations, <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gates-Badgett-NCFR-LGBT-Families-December-2011.pdf> (accessed August 22, 2012).
  11. Marks, “Same-Sex Parenting and Children’s Outcomes.” For a summary of and comment on the Marks paper, see Kim, “Impact of Same-Sex Parenting on Children: Evaluating the Research.”
  12. Of the 175 respondents that reported having a mother in a same-sex relationship, 12 reported that their father had also been in a same-sex relationship. To bolster the size of the gay father sample relative to the lesbian mother sample, Regnerus included these 12 cases among the 73 respondents with fathers in a same-sex relationship. In later work, he included the 12 cases in the lesbian mother sample.
  13. Given that the NFSS initially screened over 15,000 individuals nationwide, one can see how challenging it is to create a sufficient sample when analyzing such a small population.

statistically significant differences (meaning highly unlikely to have been due to random chance) between children whose mothers had same-sex relationships and children who grew up in intact biological families. Children whose fathers had a same-sex relationship were significantly different from children in intact families on 19 measured outcomes after controls.

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**RESULTS OF THE REGNERUS STUDY REVEAL THAT HAVING A PARENT WHO IS OR HAS BEEN IN A SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIP IS GENERALLY ASSOCIATED WITH MORE NEGATIVE ADULT OUTCOMES, ESPECIALLY WHEN COMPARED WITH ADULT CHILDREN FROM INTACT BIOLOGICAL FAMILIES.**

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**What the Study Does and Does Not Say**

As Regnerus makes clear, these results establish an *association* among family structures, parental relationships, and adult outcomes—not causation. The study does not by itself establish that having a parent in a same-sex relationship is a root cause of the differences in outcomes that Regnerus observed. However, it does suggest that such a causal mechanism is plausible and cannot be ruled out. The claim of no measured disadvantage for children with parents who have same-sex relationships cannot be justified by the existing research.

Despite what some media reports might suggest, Regnerus's study draws no conclusions about how

marriage should be defined. The report focuses on the data, not their implications for the political and legal debate. However, his study is significant because its findings discredit a popular argument *for* same-sex marriage: that it makes no difference whether children are raised by parents who had a same-sex relationship or by a married mother and father, an argument that the existing data cannot support.

Hopefully, future research that builds on the Regnerus study will use even larger samples with more control variables. Longitudinal study designs, meaning those that follow the same children over time, could be especially illuminating. Also interesting would be an exploration of whether outcomes for children with parents in same-sex relationships vary based on the birth cohort of the subjects (1972–1993), given that the adults profiled in the NFSS grew up at a time when such relationships were less publicly visible.

**Engaging the Substance of the Study: Are Negative Outcomes Due Simply to Unstable Families?**

One criticism leveled at the Regnerus study is that it does not limit its comparison to stable families headed by committed same-sex couples. Instead, Regnerus categorizes respondents based on their reports of having a parent who had a same-sex relationship—a much broader category that includes some parents who at one time were in heterosexual relationships. This has led some observers to argue that the Regnerus study is really capturing

the impact of unstable family structures rather than the impact of having a parent in a same-sex relationship *per se*.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of this objection has been overstated for several reasons. First, in a follow-up study, Regnerus separated respondents who lived with their mother and her same-sex partner from respondents who never lived with their mother's same-sex partner. Compared with respondents from intact biological families, respondents who lived with their mother and her same-sex partner reported significantly different outcomes on 19 of the 40 measures after controls.<sup>15</sup>

Second, in addition to the primary comparison group of respondents who were raised in intact biological families, the original study examined several other family forms. Although the differences were not nearly as great as compared with intact biological families, respondents whose parent had a same-sex relationship also generally fared worse than respondents with divorced or single parents.

For example, compared with children whose mothers had a same-sex relationship, both children with single parents and children with step-parents were less likely to receive welfare when growing up, more likely to be employed as adults, less likely to be depressed, and less likely to be arrested.

Importantly, the original study reports only the raw comparisons—not controlled for other family circumstances—when the control group is not the intact biological family. Investigating how children with

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14. William Saletan was one of the first to make this point. William Saletan, "Back in the Gay," *Slate*, June 11, 2012, [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/human\\_nature/2012/06/new\\_family\\_structures\\_study\\_is\\_gay\\_parenthood\\_bad\\_or\\_is\\_gay\\_marriage\\_good\\_.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/human_nature/2012/06/new_family_structures_study_is_gay_parenthood_bad_or_is_gay_marriage_good_.html) (accessed August 24, 2012).

15. Mark Regnerus, "Parental Same-Sex Relationships, Family Instability, and Subsequent Life Outcomes for Adult Children: Answering Critics of the New Family Structures Study with Additional Analyses," *Social Science Research*, Vol. 41, No. 6 (November 2012), pp. 1367-1377.

parents in same-sex relationships compare with other family forms is an important avenue for further research, and the initial data suggest that differences may exist.

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**EVEN IF NOTHING ABOUT SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR SAME-SEX GENDER DYNAMICS AFFECTS THE QUALITY OF PARENTING, OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH SAME-SEX HOUSEHOLDS WILL LIKELY EXHIBIT THE SAME ELEVATED RISK FACTORS (RELATIVE TO BIOLOGICAL PARENTS) AS NONBIOLOGICAL HETEROSEXUAL FAMILY STRUCTURES.**

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A third reason the Regnerus study is not merely capturing the effects of family structure is that same-sex parenting involves greater risk of instability relative to biological families insofar as one parent is biologically related to the child and one parent is not. Even if nothing about sexual orientation or same-sex gender dynamics affects the quality of parenting, outcomes associated with such same-sex step-families are likely to entail the same challenges

and instability associated with heterosexual step-families.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, emerging data indicate high divorce rates among same-sex couples. In Scandinavia, same-sex civil unions—essentially marriages in everything but name—have been legal for about two decades. After controlling for age, region, country of birth, education, and duration of the partnership, male couples in Sweden were 35 percent more likely to divorce than heterosexual couples, and lesbian partners were over 200 percent more likely to divorce.<sup>17</sup> Whether the couples have children makes little difference in the relative rates.

The reasons for these higher rates of divorce are unclear. They could be due to same-sex gender dynamics, different social expectations for same-sex versus opposite-sex unions, or perhaps omitted control variables. In any case, researchers should continue to study the higher divorce rates closely to evaluate the effects of same-sex parenting.

Interestingly, Regnerus has said that he would gladly have included an analysis of children raised in stable two-parent same-sex homes, but there were not enough in his

data. In fact, he found only two such households after screening over 15,000 participants.<sup>18</sup> This fact alone suggests that stability in same-sex parenting is a legitimate concern, although it should be emphasized—as Regnerus emphasizes—that same-sex parenting is probably more common now than it was during the childhoods of those studied in the NFSS (born between 1972 and 1993).

### **Critics Avoiding the Substance of the Study**

Scientific research should be evaluated strictly on its methodological merits, not on the political implications of the results. Regrettably, much commentary on the Regnerus study has failed to meet this basic standard. Rather than treat the substance of Regnerus's study, many opponents have used exaggerated denunciations ("junk science") and made baseless accusations of political bias and scholarly impropriety.

Beyond labeling the study "dangerous propaganda" and "appalling and irresponsible,"<sup>19</sup> opponents have sought to discredit the author himself. An assistant editor at *The New Republic* called Regnerus a "retrograde researcher" and suggested that

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16. 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, <http://www.childtrends.org/files/marriagerb602.pdf> (accessed September 2, 2012). According to Child Trends, a highly respected nonpartisan research organization, "[I]t is not simply the presence of two parents, as some have assumed, but the presence of two biological parents that seems to support children's development." *Ibid.*, p. 2 (emphasis added).
  17. Gunnar Andersson et al., "The Demographics of Same-Sex Marriages in Norway and Sweden," *Demography*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (February 2006), pp. 79–98.
  18. Mark Regnerus, "Part 2: More Info About the Study on Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships," *Patheos*, June 11, 2012, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/blackwhiteandgray/2012/06/part-2-more-info-about-the-study-on-adult-children-of-parents-who-have-same-sex-relationships/> (accessed August 24, 2012).
  19. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation called the study "a flawed, misleading, and scientifically unsound paper that seeks to disparage lesbian and gay parents." Evan Wolfson, president of Freedom to Marry, called it "pseudoscientific misinformation." A writer for *The American Prospect* called it "junk science" and "dangerous propaganda." Press release, "Flawed Paper Claims to Overturn 30 Years of Credible Research That Shows Gay and Lesbian Parents Are Good Parents," Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, June 11, 2012, <http://www.glaad.org/releases/flawed-paper-claims-overturn-30-years-credible-research-shows-gay-and-lesbian-parents> (accessed August 24, 2012), and E. J. Graff, "What Hurts Children More: Having Lesbian and Gay Parents, or Junk Science About Their Parents?" *The American Prospect*, June 13, 2012, <http://prospect.org/article/what-hurts-children-more-having-lesbian-and-gay-parents-or-junk-science-about-their-parents> (accessed August 24, 2012).

this study should “mark the beginning of the end of Mark Regnerus’s credibility with respectable news outlets.”<sup>20</sup> These responses are a case study in how *not* to engage in constructive social science discourse.

To charge that the study is junk science disregards obvious facts about its publication. *Social Science Research* asked three experts to comment on the Regnerus study in the same issue of the journal.<sup>21</sup> The experts counseled caution and noted some of the same interpretive limitations described above, but all three praised the study as an important contribution.

The facts are also at odds with the allegation of political bias. Regnerus took pains to assemble an ideologically diverse group of researchers to help in planning his study and supervising the data collection. No evidence indicates that any of the sources of his funding, which came in part from conservative organizations, played any role in the development or analysis of the NFSS.<sup>22</sup>

These facts about the NFSS design contrast with the allegations of a blogger-activist who claimed that the study was “designed so as to be guaranteed to make gay people look

bad, through means plainly fraudulent and defamatory.”<sup>23</sup> The blogger lodged an official complaint with the University of Texas, which triggered an automatic “scientific misconduct” inquiry into Regnerus’s work. On August 29, the university issued a press release exonerating Regnerus and closing the inquiry.<sup>24</sup>

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**THE EXAGGERATED AND EXTREME REACTIONS TO THE PAPER, PARTICULARLY THOSE THAT CALL FOR EXILING MARK REGNERUS FROM POLITE SOCIETY, FALL FAR BELOW THE EXPECTATIONS OF SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE, NOT TO MENTION THE STANDARDS OF CIVIL DEBATE IN GENERAL.**

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Regrettably, the denunciations and personal attacks were not focused solely on Mark Regnerus and his study. *Social Science Research* and its editor were subjected to similar attacks. A joint letter to the editor signed by numerous academics alleged that the journal did not apply its usual level of scrutiny to the paper, but the letter provided no evidence for this claim.<sup>25</sup> The letter

also criticized the choice of reviewers, acknowledging that they are “certainly well respected scholars” but complaining that they have never “published work that considers LGBT family or parenting issues.” Left unstated was what such a researcher would understand about the Regnerus study’s methodology that three well-respected family scholars would not.

To dispel the controversy fanned by the joint letter and accusations in the press and blogosphere, the editor of *Social Science Research* requested an internal audit to review the publication process for Regnerus’s piece. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reviewed the audit and reported that it “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.”<sup>26</sup>

The exaggerated and extreme reactions to the paper, particularly those that call for exiling Mark Regnerus from polite society, fall far below the expectations of scientific discourse, not to mention the standards of civil debate in general. Rather than substantively engage the

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20. Molly Redden, “It’s Time for Mark Regnerus to Get Collectively Dumped,” *The New Republic*, June 12, 2012, <http://www.tnr.com/blog/plank/104019/its-time-mark-regnerus-get-collectively-dumped> (accessed September 17, 2012).
  21. Amato, “The Well-Being of Children with Gay and Lesbian Parents”; Eggebeen, “What Can We Learn from Studies of Children Raised by Gay or Lesbian Parents?”; and Osborne, “Further Comments on the Papers by Marks and Regnerus.”
  22. Regnerus, “How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships?” p. 755.
  23. Quoted in Peter Wood, “The Regnerus Affair at UT Austin,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Innovations blog, July 15, 2012, at <http://chronicle.com/blogs/innovations/the-regnerus-affair-at-ut-austin/33509> (accessed August 14, 2012).
  24. University of Texas at Austin, “University of Texas at Austin Completes Inquiry into Allegations of Scientific Misconduct,” August 29, 2012, [http://www.utexas.edu/news/2012/08/29/regnerus\\_scientific\\_misconduct\\_inquiry\\_completed/](http://www.utexas.edu/news/2012/08/29/regnerus_scientific_misconduct_inquiry_completed/) (accessed September 17, 2012).
  25. Scott Rose, “Bombshell Letter: 200+ PhDs and MDs Question Scholarly Merit of Regnerus Study,” The New Civil Rights Movement, <http://thenewcivilrightsmovement.com/bombshell-letter-scores-of-ph-d-s-ask-for-retraction-of-regnerus-study/legal-issues/2012/06/29/42413> (accessed June 29, 2012). The letter’s co-signers merely point out that the peer review process for the paper was unusually fast. Many different reasons unrelated to how carefully a submission is considered—including editorial priority, the complexity of the work in question, and the peer reviewers’ familiarity with the topic—could account for the fact that some papers are processed more quickly than others.
  26. Tom Bartlett, “Controversial Gay-Parenting Study Is Severely Flawed, Journal’s Audit Finds,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Percolator blog, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/percolator/controversial-gay-parenting-study-is-severely-flawed-journals-audit-finds/30255> (accessed August 2, 2012).

study, many critics have attempted to discredit legitimate research with baseless denunciations, unfounded insinuations of editorial impropriety, and personal attacks. Sober, fair-minded analysis is especially important when research has implication for an issue as politically charged as same-sex marriage.

### Conclusion

The APA's claim that no differences exist between children of same-sex parents and children with heterosexual parents has been used as an argument in favor of same-sex marriage. However, it is inappropriate to draw such a general policy conclusion from the studies on which the APA's claim was based—studies with small or unrepresentative samples that cannot be generalized to the population at large.

By contrast, a June 2012 study by Mark Regnerus helps to shed more light on the issue by using the New Family Structures Study, a nationally representative random sample. Regnerus's study found that adult children of parents who had a same-sex relationship report a number of negative outcomes compared with those who had two married biological parents. It also suggests that differences may exist between children whose parents had a same-sex relationship and those in non-intact heterosexual households.

These research findings have met fierce and frequently uncivil opposition, presumably because of their implications regarding the debate over the definition of marriage. In light of the Regnerus study, existing social science data do not support a popular argument *for* same-sex

marriage—the “no differences” claim. The subsequent slurs against the study and the *ad hominem* attacks on its author are wholly inappropriate in scientific discourse.

The new information provided by the Regnerus study should enhance—not preempt—debate about the important policy questions related to the institution of marriage. Both sides of the debate should welcome Regnerus's research as a careful, data-driven contribution to an issue of such magnitude as the future of marriage.

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