

Researching Against the Cultural Tide: An Interview with Walter R. Schumm and D. Paul Sullins

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There are many challenges to doing research in a controversial and contentious arena, particularly when one is finding and interpreting results that may go against the tide of “conventional wisdom,” not to mention the policy interests of powerful mental health organizations, advocacy groups, and government agencies. The study of sexual orientation and gender certainly constitutes a supreme example of where such challenges are to be found. Yet there are a few researchers who have had the courage and statistical acumen to enter into this fray. In this article, I interview two preeminent researchers who have sometimes challenged the “scientific consensus” of the field in this arena. Walter R. Schumm, Ph.D., Emeritus Professor of Applied Family Science in the Kansas State University Department of Applied Human Sciences, has conducted research on gender identity, sexual identity, sexual attraction, and same-sex relationships and parenting since 1999. D. Paul Sullins, Ph.D., is with the Leo Initiative for Social Research, Catholic University, and the Ruth Institute, Lake Charles, LA. In this interview, Drs. Schumm and Sullins reflect on how they became researchers, changes they have seen in the field over the years, challenges and hopeful signs within this area of research, and some suggestions for others who may be thinking about doing controversial research.

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Rosik: Since I do not believe it is possible to understand a scholar’s work without knowing something about his or her personal history, I’m hoping you would

not mind sharing a little of your background with the journal audience (e.g., family, religious, cultural upbringing).

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Schumm: When I was in second grade, my professor predicted I'd become a college professor. But a year or two later, I told my father I might want to get a Ph.D. in psychology, to which he responded that any fool could get a Ph.D. in that area. So, I focused on another interest, astronomy for a time, eventually majoring in physics at William and Mary. Meanwhile, my brother, twenty years older than myself, had earned a Ph.D. in chemical engineering, was an officer in the Army Reserve, and was married with four children, so that became my copycat path.

So, I ended up similarly, both with Ph.D.'s, both retired colonels in the Army Reserve, and myself with seven children. In college, advanced calculus was about as far as I could go successfully in math, so I tried out social science courses and did very well without nearly as much work as physics required. In physics if I tried a new idea, it was discouraged, even ridiculed in class by some of my professors, but in social science, the professors generally welcomed new approaches.

For my senior project, I replicated some work being done in my brother's corporate labs, but my professors doubted it would work until they saw it work with their own eyes. Then it took them only five minutes to come up with an explanation. In one of my anthropology classes, I did a project that showed how incest rules were associated with creation narratives in terms of how many humans were created at the beginning of time, at the same time.

My father was born the son of a New York architect, but his parents divorced when he was about five or six, and so poor that one Christmas he cried because he was so happy to get even a bar of soap as a present. He dropped out of high school as a junior to take admission tests for the U.S. Naval Academy, and he got in, nonetheless, graduating in 1927 and fighting in 18 battles in the Pacific in

World War II on the *U.S.S. San Diego*. Later he was captain of the *U.S.S. Okanagan* and the *U.S.S. Salem*. After that he taught high school math at St. Stephen's Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Virginia, from which I graduated in 1968.

I was baptized and confirmed in the Episcopal Church when I was about twelve. A friend in high school introduced me to Young Life and that's when I learned about having more of a personal relationship with God.

Sullins: I was raised Southern Baptist, became an Episcopal priest, and have now become a Catholic priest. This journey has shaped my life and my research. I have continually examined my beliefs and sought deeper and clearer understanding of what was presented to me as true.

The constant in this journey has been an evangelical personal relationship with Christ, which I first discovered as a Baptist and has not changed much through all the religious changes. I sometimes describe myself as a completed Baptist. For those interested, my journey into the Catholic Church was the subject of an episode of the Catholic TV program "The Journey Home" (online at <https://chnetwork.org/journey-home/dr-paul-patti-sullins-former-episcopalians-journey-home-program/>).

I also wrote a book on former Episcopalian now Catholic priests, most of whom are married: *Keeping the Vow: The Untold Story of Married Catholic Priests* (Oxford, 2015), available at <https://www.amazon.com/Keeping-Vow-Married-Catholic-Priests/dp/0199860041>.

The book, based on interviews with over 100 married convert Catholic priests, doesn't tell my personal story exactly, but gives a composite picture of the personal and intellectual journey such a man takes. My journey fit the typical pattern.

How is this journey related to my research? Here's a hint: The book describes men like me as "truth converts." The single most common, striking characteristic of the convert Catholic priests is that they (and I) were willing, even happy, to suffer the loss of income, position, prestige, and reputation in order to live authentically in accord with the truth, as they (and I) had come to understand it. We were true Protestants, willing to risk all for the truth of Christ and the scripture; only this commitment, ironically, brought us back to the Catholic faith.

What led you to become a researcher and particularly one willing to study controversial topics that even conservative social scientists nearly always shy away from?

Schumm: My brother had done research on how propellers move water and found that a third of what we thought we knew was actually incorrect. That helped develop a skeptical attitude toward accepted wisdom or conventional scholarship. My physics professors could not comprehend how my senior project could work until they believed in it after they saw it.

When I was a master's student at Kansas State, my major professor had done work on sexual standards and had "found" that people with lower levels of intelligence were more likely to have traditional or double standards. I challenged that theory and later got my version published. My physics background probably helped me be less worried about what others might think; I had risked flunking out of college and going to Vietnam and risking death by running with a senior project that no one thought would work and satisfy my graduation requirements. If that wouldn't get me to compromise, what else would? My personality type is INTJ, which is basically a researcher personality type, so that helped. My experience has been that often you learn

the most from the most difficult questions. So I look forward to hard challenges.

Sullins: As my previous answer suggests, this is in large measure an outgrowth of my spiritual life and journey. I'm actually not reliably conservative economically or politically. (Full disclosure: I am a lifelong Democrat, of the stripe often called "Reagan Democrats"; though in recent years I have voted almost exclusively for Republicans. We still have some strong pro-life anti-corruption local Democrat politicians in Maryland.) I am a committed Catholic Christian, which in the current state of cultural discourse makes me a default conservative on most social issues, and emphatically so on the issues of the body—sex, sexuality, gender, abortion—and by extension religious freedom. Jesus was no zealot, but he was not shy to dispute the Pharisees over conflictual issues (paying tax, working on the Sabbath, associating with sinners) that clouded people's access to God's kingdom and grace. I am honored to do the same in a much smaller and more limited degree.

I sometimes remember (probably inaccurately) an image from the writings of Alan Paton, the South African novelist, of a man who had been brutally beaten while helping oppressed blacks during apartheid. When asked why he chose to do this, he told of a dream in which he had died and stood before God, and God asked to see the scars from his life's suffering. He replied that he had no scars to show. And God said, "No scars! Was there nothing in your life worth being scarred for?" Paton's character said to his questioner, "I could not face that question. Like our Lord, I do not want to reach heaven unscarred." I feel the same way. The purpose of my life is not merely to make it to death comfortably.

You have been conducting research for a long time. Have you seen changes over the years in the environment within which social science research is conducted? If so, could you describe the most important of these changes?

Schumm: When I started in social science, if you could overturn some accepted wisdom, you were like a hero and publishing journal articles, especially with your graduate students, was the gold standard for academic success. As time went on and university budgets got tighter, getting grants eventually overtook publishing as the key to getting promotions and university awards. At first rocking the boat was respected, but later it was probably seen as a threat to the financials and therefore discouraged. At first, professors were able to stir up controversy in class to get discussion going, but as time went on, that became dangerous, because one student complaint could get one into much trouble.

In later years, I was criticizing journal articles in a graduate class, but one student took it personal, and in the end I received a letter of reprimand over it. Another time, I showed in a class how some medical researchers had engaged in scientific misconduct, and two students dropped the class immediately because their fathers were physicians and they could not accept the idea that any doctor would do that.

Research became an instrument of politics and confirming one's own biases so that if you dared to disagree it was taken as an insult personally. One time I had challenged some research on same-sex parenting, and a lesbian scholar yelled at me in a public meeting that I was an idiot who didn't know anything about research. When I asked an older colleague about it, he said that my research might mean that she would lose her children and like a good mama bear she was fighting against that threat.

Later I was banned from ever attending my professional organization's annual conferences because in 2018 I had offended someone over something; I didn't even get so much as a hearing about it, just a letter (or two) stating the banishment. To this day, I don't know what I actually said or did that triggered someone else. Since I've been critical of LGBT research and have done some research on Islam, there are many ways my research could have upset someone.

Sullins: The major change, described by many, is the loss of a common arena of discourse where very different perspectives can be respectfully debated. When I was in college (early 1970s) a popular show called "Crossfire" featured conservatives debating liberals on a range of policy and moral questions. They went at it hammer and tong, no holds barred but without personal attacks. Today such a show could not be aired; the conservative position would be labelled hate speech and censored from YouTube and other media channels. I know this personally: Several popular blog interviews that I have given about homosexual parenting or the link between homosexual priests and child sex abuse have been defunded or disappeared.

The social sciences and academia generally are hardly immune from such bias; if anything, it is even stronger for being cast in high-minded intellectual categories. In psychology the root bias is not against conservatism as such but against any form of naturalism or even rationalism, that is, the idea that there is order, purpose, and reason in nature and especially human nature. It is not Burke and Locke they hate so much as Aristotle and Aquinas.

Rejecting the non-rational element of embodiment, modern intellectuals seek to find identity in the abstract "self" that theoretically underlies all human conditionings (race, class, gender . . .). Any element that appears to limit the pursuit of

this myth, for example by affirming human finiteness or real limits to human potential, becomes problematic, with the result that human life has increasingly become the object of technological control, even when such control manifestly does not work. Such technology—even as it fails—is claimed to be necessary for human right and dignity. In fact, however, such technology only furthers degenerate, illusory, or even horrifically destructive goals. Attempting to become superhuman, it becomes subhuman. This is an old story, in fact the original story of rebellion. As a culture, we have said, “I will be like the Most High God,” with the result that we have lost both knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves.

In the social sciences, in university faculties and journal reviews and editorials, this hubris has advanced in many places to the point of rejecting the scientific method and even reason itself. Propositional argument—if A is true, then B must be true—is rejected as defectively male, white, Western (or choose another qualifier). Even the canons of the scientific method, which are rooted in the West’s Christian heritage, are derided as religious and therefore defective. This isn’t true everywhere, but the tendency is widespread in Western academic culture. If it continues, we can expect to see the West concede scientific dominance to the global East (Asia) and South (Africa and Latin America), a process which has already begun.

Do you see much of a future for publishing conservative perspectives on topics related to sexual orientation or gender?

Schumm: There are so many journals, I see a future in it but not in mainstream, politically correct journals, unless you know precisely how to navigate their hurdles. Right now, people are losing some of their means of communication for making negative

comments on transgenderism. If this gets to where you could lose email access, it could do real damage to the careers of conservative professors or researchers. On the other hand, it is a “target rich” environment because politically correct articles are often scantily reviewed by peers who don’t want to look politically incorrect by being too critical. Thus, major errors often get by peer review and into print, just like plums waiting to be plucked as low hanging fruit.

Sullins: Yes, but decreasingly in traditional publications. The system of anonymous peer review, like faculty review for faculty appointments, enables those with anti-conservative bias to effectively censor opposing points of view. But this only true, even today, in Anglophone Western countries, e.g. USA, England, and Australia. French and Spanish language journals, even those of liberal Scandinavia, have little systematic bias against opposing views in social science publications, and almost none at all in hard science journals. Italian social science journals, many of which also publish in English, actually favor what in America are considered conservative perspectives.

Globalization is rapidly draining the oxygen from USA-led anti-conservative publication bias. Top journals are increasingly open source and Eastern. The back office of almost every journal today is run by contractors in India or Indonesia, where there is much more appreciation for conservative wisdom. The editorial offices, editors and committees are also becoming more populated by scholars from traditional social and intellectual cultures. While one may be stonewalled from publishing in most prestigious Western publications, the possibilities for publishing in alternative, non-Western journals of high quality and growing reputation today are many and are growing.

Former Alliance President A. Dean Byrd used to attend the American Psychological Association conference's town hall meetings and ask the officials, "Is there a place in the APA for someone like me?" He would usually get affirmative responses, though I sometimes wondered if that "place" was generally limited to paying the annual dues. What has been your experience with the professional mental health associations and is there hope for a substantive inclusion of clinicians and scholars such as those aligned with the Alliance or even the Alliance point of view?

Schumm: I am sure professional organizations will take your money and allow you to be involved in "safe" research presentations. The challenge comes when a person thinks they are an oppressed person and you are the oppressor. Almost anything you say can be interpreted in a hostile way, through what researchers call "negative sentiment override." Once it's interpreted that way, the person may "feel" unsafe and alert the organization about this hostile person who is making them not want to attend future meetings and the only remedy is to ban that person for life from coming back and reoffending them. Those who have continued to attend my professional organization tell me they dare say nothing critical of research by any potentially oppressed/minority group person lest they be targeted for removal from the conferences or even the organization.

Sullins: I'm sorry to report that my experience in this regard has been consistently negative. My academic specialty as a sociologist was sociology of religion, so each year I would attend the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and/or the Association for the Sociology of Religion as well as the American Sociological Association annual meetings.

These meetings were friendly until I began publishing articles that challenged prevailing liberal orthodoxy. As I wrote first on abortion, then the Catholic priesthood (opposing women priests and yes, married priests; to understand this irony, read my book!), and then gay parenting and "not born that way," my relationships, even my ability to present my views, deteriorated rapidly. Collaborations disappeared. At the 2003 meeting, the president of ASR, a Catholic religious scholar with whom I had had many friendly conversations on research topics, pointedly and publicly refused to shake my hand or speak to me. In 2007 gay scholar/advocates continually interrupted my ASA presentations (encouraged by the session moderator) so that I was effectively unable to continue. A more serious problem with these associations, for me, was that they rarely addressed questions that were of interest or value to me. I could find no one interested in discussing, say, Aquinas' view of sexual morality or the social benefits of marriage or prayer. The negatives of being shunned were not balanced by any positive reasons to attend, so I stopped attending these meetings.

On the other hand, I have had valuable and positive experience with newer, alternative conservative-orientated scholarly associations, similar to the Association for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity. I call such groups in the Catholic context "reconstructionist" because they are restoring what was, in Catholic settings, a vibrant ecology of faithful orthodox scholarly groups that flourished in the mid-20th century. The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, Society of Catholic Social Scientists, University Faculty for Life, and similar organizations offered a positive setting in which I could discuss and dispute important questions, build fruitful scholarly relationships, and contribute a little to advancing this strand of intellectual life. I found in the SCSS especially an outstanding

forum for engaging scholars of all types on issues at the intersection of faith and scientific knowledge. I have served on their Board for over 15 years and am currently blessed to serve as Chaplain of this association. But all such groups, like the ATCSI, are extremely valuable for intellectual culture today, even though they are usually small and certainly not very powerful, because they create a space to hear and consider ideas that can be uttered almost nowhere else. In the middle of an intellectual culture of death, they are a spark of life.

From my reading of relevant surveys, about half of the American population has doubts about the trustworthiness of social science research. What do you foresee as the future for the social sciences? Is there any hope for a return to a valuing (in actual practice) of diverse perspectives on areas of study relevant to contested social policies?

Schumm: This is a hard issue. For example, we have published an article where we showed that 90% of 72 reviews of the literature believed “X” to be true, except that “X” isn’t true. Some liberal scholars who dared to suggest that “X” might be true, were severely criticized, even twenty years ago, for putting forth harmful information that would hurt minorities. One scholar has argued that nearly all initial research will turn out to be incorrect. That’s because most initial research is biased by small and nonrandom samples, as well as other methodological problems. It can take decades for research to reach a valid consensus; meanwhile, incorrect research will be used, as the best available, to promote public policy changes. Once policy is made into law, even if the research corrects itself over time, the laws will take much longer to change. This situation can put a premium on cranking out a lot of premature, low quality, largely

incorrect research as long as it supports the policy objectives. If there is social pressure to avoid normal criticism of such research, proponents will argue that no one has challenged it, so it must be valid. Some scholars have felt that the social sciences will become similar to the humanities rather than to science.

Sullins: I don’t foresee a revival of truth in the social sciences anytime soon, but there is always hope. Hope (with faith and love) is one of the three virtues a Christian can never relinquish, and history attests to recoveries from intellectual deserts more sparse than our own age. But I see our task today as one of carrying on a culture of truth and discourse in restricted, limited communities of discourse that will not prevail in social policy anytime soon; may even be outlawed and suppressed; but will preserve this culture or civilization until a day when it may thrive once again. For this reason it is important that we speak out even when it seems that we will have no effect, in the spirit of bearing witness to an eschatological truth, until such time as (who knows?) God may take up our faltering witness and from it make a new world.

Dr. Sullins, you have conducted a very important reanalysis (Sullins, 2021) of a study by Blosnich et al. (2020) that purported to find exposure to SOCE associated with greater suicidality. Could you tell our readers something about this study and what you found in your reanalysis?

Sullins: I found that Blosnich et al.’s conclusion neglected to examine whether the suicidality occurred before or after SOCE participation. They reported suicidal thoughts or attempts made before any SOCE exposure, for example, as being “due to SOCE.” After correcting for this error, I found that there was no association between SOCE and post-

SOCE suicidality. In fact, after an initial expression of suicidality, persons who subsequently had undergone SOCE were less likely to persist in suicidal behavior than those who had not undergone SOCE. I should note that this study is still undergoing peer review, which could find errors in my analysis that undermine the findings, so please don't put too much weight on these results just yet.

What do you think the implications of your findings are for the body of this SOCE-causes-harm literature?

Sullins: If confirmed, these findings reverse the false narrative that undergoing SOCE increases suicide risk. On these results, “banning” SOCE would increase suicide risk, by removing from sexual minorities an effective resource to reduce suicidality. The findings would also challenge the whole minority stress hypothesis, which holds that the psychological struggles of sexual minorities are due wholly or largely to social stigma. Ilan Meyer (source of the minority stress theory) was a co-author of Blosnich's study, and virtually all evidence for minority stress features similar global, uncontrolled lifetime associations.

How does someone best position himself or herself to become a researcher?

Schumm: The most important thing is to be a creative thinker, to be willing to think where others have never gone or at least don't want to go at the moment. Second, you probably need to become very good at doing statistics and management of larger data sets, as well as good at collecting your own data. We are probably talking about taking 30 or more graduate credits in research methods and statistics. But I am biased since I had about 55 such credits in graduate school, if my memory isn't failing me. But you also

need to know how to dig through the research literature and set up your ideas for testing.

You also need to learn how to write well technically—and ideally, for ordinary audiences as well. On a more positive note, I think that anyone who can honestly look at any question from multiple angles is often way ahead of other scholars, who may limit themselves to only one way of looking at the world, maybe even only one scholarly theory (e.g., sexual minority theory). You should be willing to consider how your own biases might be helping you overlook important concepts or ideas or distort their meaning. It helps to be willing to ask ordinary persons about their views rather than assuming they must be like this or that.

Sullins: “Best position”? Earn a graduate degree, preferably a Ph.D., in a social science field with a specialty heavy in quantitative statistics; forego academic teaching positions; apprentice in an active conservative research agency for 3 to 5 years; grow the skin of an elephant; and become independently wealthy. I am half kidding about the last two, but only half. If being doxed by the SPLC [Southern Poverty Law Center] or HRC [Human Rights Campaign] is going to hurt your job prospects, or being shunned or publicly disparaged is going to hurt your feelings, you are not cut out for this work.

I hold an occasional meeting of aspiring and current conservative quantitative researchers, called the “Pro-life Quants,” where we talk about both general and specific issues relating to entering a research career devoted to important controversial social questions related to the natural law. I provide a meal, one or two people present on a current project they're doing, then it opens to questions and general discussion. Lately it has become hybrid, with folk dialing or Zooming in from afar. I have also sponsored “Meet and Greet” sessions at the SCSS for

the past few years, where conservative graduates newly on the job market can interact with representatives of schools looking to hire same. This is mostly for aspiring faculty, not researchers per se, although researchers have also participated; and I hear that faculty even sometimes do research. Participants in these things trend mostly Catholic and younger, but persons of any age, state in life and religious or non-religious preference are welcome to take part. If anyone is interested, just send me that in an email (sullins@cua.edu) and I will put you on the list for the next one.

What advice and guidance would you offer to someone who is interested in researching and publishing studies that may be viewed as “non-affirming” or otherwise run against the conventional wisdom of the age?

Schumm: I’d suggest you have a second career option readily available. For me, it was being in the Reserves, where full-time positions or several-month temporary positions were often available for the asking. But you need to have a heart for truth that is greater than the fear of man or of losing your job. It reminds me of a story where a speaker asked a group of highly religious persons if they were willing to die for Jesus. All said, “Yes!” Then the speaker asked how willing they would be to be embarrassed for Jesus? Not so many hands went up for that idea. Academic humiliation is far more likely than physical harm, so one should be prepared for it.

Sullins: My previous answer already speaks to this question. The first thing I always say to someone who inquires about this is that engaging in such research is an academic career killer. This overstates somewhat, but only somewhat. What I really want to see is how timorous the inquirer is. Most of them

don’t get back to me after this. If they do, then we can continue the conversation.

Besides this journal, are there any other journals that are sympathetic or at least would consider publishing research that might challenge the “conventional wisdom” regarding sexual orientation, change efforts, and gender?

Schumm: I was editor of *Marriage & Family Review* for eleven years, and under my tenure we welcomed a diversity of ideas and research. *Linacre Quarterly* seems willing to consider conservative ideas, but the editor seems very concerned with not appearing to be hostile towards minorities (your tone must not be deemed too offensive as you present the truth or facts). It’s hard to say in general because editorial policies last as long as the editors last. One journal presented some conservative research and the editor was not long for his job there. Perhaps his tenure was up soon anyway. There are many open access journals now that probably need your financial support badly enough they will be more open to diverse opinions. Market forces may be driving greater diversity for open access journals.

Sullins: Yes, and, as I mentioned above, the number of them is growing, but they are not likely to be US-based or the most prestigious journals. As you know, we just had a SOCE-affirming study published in *F1000Research*, a new open source journal that shows some bias but was still willing to publish it. The *Linacre Quarterly*, the journal of the Catholic Medical Association, is a highly respected medical journal founded in the 1920s that has published many studies that contravene conventional wisdom (although they declined to publish the SOCE study, so there’s a limit). *Issues in Law and Medicine*, the journal of a pro-life research institute, is a core PubMed journal that welcomes studies

from a conservative perspective, particularly ones pertinent to current judicial disputes. Its list of referees reads like a roster of top conservative scholars.

The family of “Sage Open” journals advertise that they do not reject articles based on point of view, only methodological merit, and I have found that to be often though not always the case. The family of “MDPI” journals, with editorial offices in Switzerland and Bulgaria, have published many studies of sexuality from a conservative or traditional perspective, in particular the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* which, despite the clunky name, is a well-respected journal also automatically indexed in PubMed. The journal *Frontiers in Psychology*, also a PubMed journal based in Switzerland, is also open to, even looking for, sexuality studies from a conservative perspective. These journals require top notch statistical competency, however; qualitative studies or essays will not make the grade.

Many journals today ask the author to recommend possible reviewers. I suggest you give them the name of several conservative scholars who are not likely to be biased against your findings. The journals don’t promise to use your suggestions, but they often use at least one of them; and if you get one positive review and one negative one the editor will often seek out a third, objective reviewer to settle the discrepancy, thus increasing your chances of acceptance.

What research or other professional activities with which you have been involved have generated the most “push back” from those who disagreed with you? How did you handle this?

Schumm: Publishing my book on same-sex parenting seemed to generate the most push back. The same week the book came out, the university fire marshal showed up to inspect

my office and found that I had stacks of papers more than two inches deep and books lying flat on my bookcase shelves (so did Einstein, by the way). Once I got those things cleaned up, then I was told that instead of having six/six file cabinets and bookcases in my office, I could only have one/two. I got it done but what a mess! It eventually led to my moving my office to my home, even before COVID made other professors have to do that. I handled it by going into a phased retirement for two years so I could stay long enough until my wife was eligible for Medicare.

When I was banished from my organization’s annual conferences, I spiritualized it by reminding myself that being shamed and ostracized was part of Jesus’s life as well, even though He was perfect, unlike myself totally. When other faculty members who had served their universities for 40 years were recognized by the governor of Kansas in a web video, my name was not among them, even though I was put forth on the list initially with forty or more years of service. When the university held a Zoom retirement ceremony, my audio was lost and the moderator said it would take too long to fix, so I could not hear the provost’s short blurb on my past service, which was just as well since he only discussed my military service rather than my teaching or research at the university. As the program ended, my audio returned without any intervention on my part. But again, it points to the futility of expecting rewards this side of heaven. Then again, it helps me appreciate the award granted by the Alliance several years ago.

Sullins: The most adverse reactions I have gotten has been for my work on same-sex parenting, which has shown emotional problems to be much higher among children with same-sex parents, especially if those same-sex parents are married. Almost all the

opposition has been related to political uses of my findings, not the substance of the studies themselves. In 2015 my study “Emotional Problems among Children with Same-Sex Parents: Difference by Definition” was critiqued, along with a study by Mark Regnerus, by the APA and ASA briefs in Obergefell. Mark and I (aided by Loren Marks) defended our work in our own brief, written under the auspices of the American College of Pediatricians.

In June 2016 I published an article in the journal *Depression and Research Treatment* titled “Invisible Victims: Delayed Onset Depression among Adults with Same-Sex Parents.” The study showed, using high quality longitudinal data, that a significant percentage of children raised by same-sex parents who appeared unaffected during childhood and adolescence manifested depressive symptoms by their late 20s. A gay activist scholar wrote a negative commentary on it full of falsehoods, which the journal published along with my rebuttal. There matters sat for over a year; the article was viewed about 200 times, with about 25 downloads.

Then in August 2017, during the run-up to the Australian gay marriage referendum, a shadowy far right group put up a salacious poster in Melbourne citing one finding in the paper: all forms child abuse in same-sex parent families was 93%. This is not as extreme as it sounds, as it includes even minor verbal abuse; among all families the same measure was 69%. I had reported it in a table, since it was a significant finding, with only a brief mention in the narrative. The hostile critique by the gay activist never mentioned it.

But this single politically sensitive use of my study set off a firestorm. Gay scholars around the world, and all the Australian media, fulminated against my hateful stigmatization of gay parents. Editorials denounced me for writing and the journal for

publishing such hate speech. No matter that the finding was accurate and that I upon publication I had purchased the copyright from the journal. The journal launched an investigation into the article’s reviews and approval, scrutinized every model and claim in it, and finding nothing amiss published an “Expression of Concern,” an action just short of retraction which usually describes the questionable practices that should lead scholars to question an article but in this case affirms that no questionable practices were found.

The final chapter in this story is laughable. A friendly attorney urged me to sue the journal for defamation. (It is incorporated in England, where the bar for such suits is apparently lower than in the United States.) But he eventually decided we had no case. Why? In order to sue one has to show damages. And when we checked, we found that after the EOC and denunciation, worldwide readership of the article had skyrocketed. In the three weeks after the fracas the article was viewed and downloaded five times more than it had been in the year before. Since then the pace has hardly diminished. Today, not quite four years later, the article which was almost ignored in its first year has been viewed over 85,000 times with over 4200 downloads and a dozen citations. Versions of it have been reproduced and posted on 21 family friendly organization’s websites. By denouncing this study, the gay activists and the journal ensured that it would be read and considered by tens of thousands more people than would have been the case otherwise!

(Free preprint copies of all papers mentioned are available at <https://ssrn.com/author=2097328> . The study “Invisible Victims” is online at https://www.hindawi.com/journals/drt/2016/2410392/?fbclid=IwAR3G1xCoSLMZCsUbC56IwQCLhWCo0uOtyc1fOGZsYzf_nu4YNIHOaUpKbkY)

What is the most humorous experience you have had in doing research?

Schumm: There is humor in finding things to be different than you expected, which should happen often with genuine research (otherwise, why bother?). The most consistently humorous thing was that people would come by my cluttered office and ask me for a certain journal article and I usually could find it somewhere in my stacks of papers. I used to kid people that my office was like therapy; it just had to make you feel better about your own clutter problems. I still have the same issues—now they are in my own home, much to my wife’s frustration. Once I am fully retired, I have about 40 projects to wind down, so the plan is to reduce the materials as each project is completed. One time a couple dozen family scholars were asked to prepare autobiographies which were published as a book. What was funny was that some of the book’s critics said the authors did nothing but talk about their own careers in a prideful way. Well, what were they supposed to do? Talk about someone else’s career or how terrible their own career had been? They did what they were told to do—but that wasn’t acceptable to these critics!

Sullins: In 2010 I submitted a presentation “Homosexual Identity: The Case Against Innateness” to the convention of the Eastern Sociological Society in Boston. I presented a list of “ordinary” reasons, like temporary prison homosexuality and the defection rate from homosexual identification from age 18 to age 40, to question the narrative that homosexuality is innate. The organizers put me in a session “Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Sexuality,” which had only one other presenter. After I made my presentation the other presenter came up and introduced herself as Widow Centauri: Sociologist, Sex

Educator, Dominatrix, Stand-Up Comic. She identified as nonbinary, insisting on the pronoun “xe”, and of course as lesbian. Sort of. In a rambling stream-of-consciousness narrative she reported that she frequently changed her sexuality and sexual identity, like a suit of clothes, depending on how she felt, who she was with and other random factors. I could not have made up a better illustration of the non-innateness of homosexual identity if I had tried. When asked what she had thought of my presentation, she said, “I couldn’t agree more with Dr. Sullins. All our sexual identities are a social construction and nothing more.” I wasn’t totally sure I wanted this endorsement from such a creature, but it was definitely a hoot. She was hilarious. Widow and I got together later in the day and had a wonderful, strange, nonlinear conversation. We actually got along pretty well. She poked fun at my normality and conventional religiousness, as she saw it, and I poked fun at her deviance and transgressiveness. Nothing mean or judgmental, just a meeting of minds coming from two radically different universes and laughing at the difference. She has since finished her degree and, for reasons that mystify her, has had trouble landing an academic position.

Any other final thoughts you would want to convey to Alliance partners?

Schumm: If you have the character traits of humility, willingness to be proven wrong, a strong desire for the truth, an eagerness to learn more, an acceptance of doing hard work, an ability to think creatively, you are so far ahead of any scholar who lacks such traits. If you allow the Holy Spirit to build such traits into yourself, even if you may be lacking them as natural talents, you are so much better off in the long run. Frequently, I would run into seemingly intractable problems, and I had no recourse but to ask

God, “Where do I go from here? What am I missing? What ideas don’t I get? Help!” And I found God to be very faithful in giving me keen insights into things far beyond what I could have figured out on my own.

Sullins: I think of Hebrews 11, which recounts the trials of prophets and people of faith throughout history, but in the middle of talking about them being tormented and deserted inserts these words (verse 38): of whom the world was not worthy. As a final thought, I want to say to your partners, if it is not too presumptuous: do not be afraid or discouraged. When darkness prevails, even a small light is powerful. You may be small and disregarded, harassed and despised, but you are far more important than you know in God’s plan and way. Don’t give up! Keep shining.

References

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