

## On the APA's Same-Sex Marriage Resolution

By Warren Throckmorton, Ph.D.

*All on the APA's working committee knew the outcome they supported before they started "working."  
The committee should have been called the "Same-Sex Marriage & Parenting Advocacy Committee."*

Recently the leadership of the American Psychological Association approved resolutions supporting same sex marriage and parenting. In the days since the announcement, many in and out of the association have asked why the APA leadership felt the need to get involved in this contentious issue. Good question.

The APA news release announcing the policy move stated that the leadership wanted to provide "policy recommendations for APA that would guide psychologists in the current public debate over civil marriage for same-sex couples."

Psychologists need guidance? That's laughable.

Guiding psychologists is like herding cats. Children need guidance. Cattle need guidance. Psychologists are not in their offices thinking, "You know, I am so grateful that I know what to think about gay marriage now." I am not buying that at all. While serving as president of the American Mental Health Counselors Association, I observed that many mental health professionals are not content just to give *advice* in the consulting room. Many are closeted public policy wonks. In other words, the APA leadership wants to guide *you*. Should you trust their judgment?

Many people might assume that the APA membership would vote on such important issues before the leadership would go public with a policy statement. *Not so*. No polling was done of the 150,000 members. Six committee members recommended the resolution to the 160 members of the Council of Representatives, and by a show of hands, the matter was done. So when APA president Diane Halpern said to the *USA Today* newspaper that the APA was "going out on a limb" to support same-sex marriage and parenting, a more accurate statement would be that the APA leadership had crawled out there without taking into account where the members stood.

Such research on attitudes of psychologists toward these issues has been conducted, but it was ignored. For instance in a 1999 *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* article, psychologists were asked in a survey to choose between hypothetical gay and straight couples as a preferred adoption setting. Most psychologists favored the straight couple, particularly for the adoption of a female child.

Another assumption that the public might make is that the psychologists studying such matters would be impartial or at least that several points of view would be represented

on a committee. Not so in this case.

The individuals who were members of the Working Group appointed by the APA were all aligned with gay political objectives before they were named to the job. There was no diversity of view or research perspective on this committee. Let that sink in a minute. *All* on the committee knew the outcome they supported before they started "working." The committee should have been called the Same-Sex Marriage & Parenting Advocacy Committee.

A third thing many people would assume is that the process of developing policy on complex and controversial issues would require lengthy deliberation. Not so in this case.

The working group was only convened in February of 2004. They had less than six months on task. The short time on the matter may explain why some pretty important studies were omitted from consideration. For instance, the paper supporting same-sex marriage did not mention Stanley Kurtz's work, on the impact of same-sex domestic partnerships in Europe. The paper supporting same-sex parenting also did not mention a 1996 Children Australia study that compared children of straight married, straight cohabiting, and gay cohabiting couples on measures of school performance and social adjustment. The report by Sotirios Sarantakos found that "in the majority of cases, the most successful are children of married couples, followed by children of cohabiting (straight) couples and finally by children of (cohabiting) homosexual couples."

Even if the APA committee disagreed with the study's findings, they should have considered them. They did not. Space does not permit the examination of other studies unconsidered by the APA committee. This is not the way to develop professional consensus. A professional association that truly wanted to achieve a scientific consensus would have incorporated a much more diverse working group and taken much more time to consider research from all the social sciences.

Better yet, if the APA is really interested in guidance, I have a suggestion. To help the public and fellow professionals really understand the nature of professional consensus on any policy issue, let the membership be polled. Report the results along with whatever committee position is taken, even if there is disagreement.

Let the cats meow, even if they don't do it in unison. ■

**The APA committee  
lacked diversity and never  
sought a consensus from  
its membership.**