

When Activism Masquerades as Science: Potential Consequences of Recent APA Resolutions

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"There is a gay activist group that's very strong and very vocal and recognized by the American Psychiatric Association...there's nobody to give the other viewpoint...There may be a few people...but they don't talk" (Spitzer, 2004).

In a press release issued this past summer at its annual conference, the American Psychological Association officially endorsed gay marriage and adoption, and condemned laws in the areas of marriage and adoption that fail to treat homosexuality the same as heterosexuality.

The resolution stated, in part,

"... be it resolved that the APA believes that it is unfair and discriminatory to deny same-sex couples legal access to civil marriage and to all its attendant benefits, rights, and privileges."

With this action—under the politically correct mantra of tolerance, diversity and civil rights—the leaders of one of America's most formidable mental health associations have taken one additional step toward disguising prejudices as clinical understandings. This step has in raised new questions about the APA's credibility as a scientific organization.

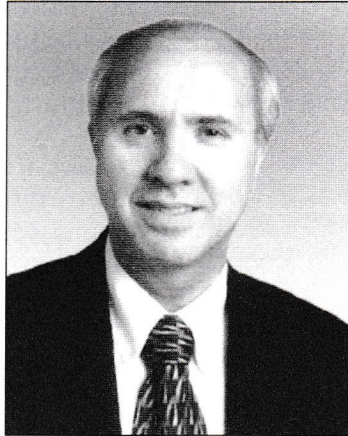
Activists' Interpretation of the Research

Although the resolutions on gay marriage and on parenting by gay partners were announced at the APA annual meeting this summer, a discussion of these important resolutions was completely absent from the September issue of the APA's *Monitor on Psychology*, and was followed by only the briefest of notes in the October *Monitor*. In the October issue, APA's Rhea Farberman noted that there is no research that suggests that "same-sex couples should be denied marriage rights" and she concludes that a "review of the literature calls for joint and second-parent adoption rights for gay parents" (2004, p.24)

APA insists that the resolutions are based on the recommendations of "researchers who study same-sex families and relationships" (Farberman, 2004, p. 24).

Yet, consider those individuals who were appointed to the committee: Armand Cerbone, who was inducted into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame in 2003 and was recognized for the distinguished service to the gay movement by the Society of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues;

Beverly Green, editor of *Psychological Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Issues*, Kristen Hancock, who developed "Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Clients"; Lawrence A. Kurdek, Editorial Board of *Contemporary Perspectives on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Psychology*; and Candace A. McCullough — whose partner, Sharon Duchesneau, was artificially inseminated from a deaf sperm donor to make it highly likely that their children would also be born deaf, because of their belief that deafness is not a medical problem, but a cultural identity (McElroy, 2002).



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The committee members were hardly an unbiased group!

What's more alarming is that nowhere did the authors of the resolutions cite the incompleteness of the data they studied, or mention the body of research that points clearly to the shortcomings of the studies.

For example, Lerner and Nagai (2000b), in their comprehensive review of the data on same-sex parenting, concluded:

"The claim has been made that homosexual parents raise children as effectively as married biological parents. A detailed analysis of the methodologies of the 49 studies, which are put forward to support this claim, shows that they suffer from severe methodological flaws. In addition to their methodological flaws, none of the studies deals adequately with the problem of affirming the null hypothesis, of adequate sample size, and of spurious non-correlation" (p. 1).

Baumrind (1995) agrees, saying:

"Research findings to date are not definitive, however, because most of the studies are based on small samples of convenience, retrospective data, or self-report instruments subject to social desirability biases. Also few, if any, of the studies have explored theoretically relevant hypotheses concerning adolescent outcomes, or used intensive observational and interview methods most likely to reveal possible problems such as identity diffusion or parent-child enmeshment" (p. 134).

The APA Committee supported their resolution on homosexual parenting by citing the research of Golombok,

Spencer and Rutter as well as Golombok and Tasker. Nowhere did they acknowledge the methodological flaws or the unreported differences. For example, Williams (2000), in his re-analysis of the data of Golombok, Spencer, and Rutter (1983) and the Golombok and Tasker (1996) research found a significant number of children to either have considered engaging in a homosexual relationship, or already engaged in a homosexual relationship.

There were also significant, but left unreported, differences in self-esteem between children of homosexual and heterosexual parents, as well as significant but unreported differences in social and emotional difficulties experienced by children of homosexual parents.

Even the meta-analysis by Stacy and Biblarz (2001) was given only cursory attention. This meta-analysis repudiated over 20 years of research which had been said to show that there were no differences between children raised by homosexual and heterosexual parents. In fact, differences do exist according to Stacy and Biblarz, who found that lesbian mothers had a feminizing effect on their sons and a masculinizing effect on their daughters. They report:

“...the adolescent and young adult girls raised by lesbian mothers appear to have been more sexually adventurous and less chaste...in other words, once again, children (especially girls) raised by lesbians appear to depart from traditional gender-based norms, while children raised by heterosexual mothers appear to conform to them” (p. 171).

Of particular concern was the APA Committee’s reliance on the research of Charlotte Patterson, whose studies were questioned and subsequently excluded from a Florida Court. The Court concluded:

“Dr. Patterson’s impartiality also came into question when prior to trial, she refused to turn over to her own attorneys copies of documentation utilized by her in studies. This court ordered her to do so (both sides having stipulated to the Order), yet she unilaterally refused despite the continued efforts on the part of her attorneys to have her do so. Both sides stipulated that Dr. Patterson’s conduct was a clear violation of this Court’s order.

“Dr. Patterson testified as to her own lesbian status and the Respondent maintained that her research was possibly tainted by her alleged use of friends as subjects for her research.” (1997, June Amer, *Petitioner v. Floyd P. Johnson*, p. 11).

Potential Consequences for State Psychological Associations

Dr. Alan Hopewell, President of the Texas Psychological Association (TPA), noted:

“ ... as far as I know, the Texas Psychological Association was not consulted regarding this [same-sex marriage] resolution. The research data on issues such as this are far from conclusive, and there certainly is not consensus in the professional community upon which we currently can make such sweeping recommendations for social change with confidence.

“The often-heard assertion that all sexual orientation is invariably genetically driven is far from proven. I am also concerned with the politicization of mental health issues such as these....We, as a scientific and professional organization, should be very hesitant, therefore, to use any diagnosis or research findings for the purpose of manipulation of political goals....

“A consensus such as this is not reached by the imposition of the desires of the few upon others by means of judicial fiat or committee proclamation” (Ohlschlager, 2004, p.3; Hopewell, 2004).”

Dr. Hopewell added, “The committee’s assertion that the psychological literature demonstrates that this behavior is both non-problematic and acceptable is far from consensus in the scientific community, and grave concerns have been raised by many fully qualified scientists whose voices have not been allowed to be represented” (Hopewell, 2004).

Dr. Hopewell further noted the potentially damaging impact of these resolutions on current legislative action affecting psychologists in Texas. “In addition,” he said, “we are entering our sunset year for our license, and I see this as a potentially very damaging issue as our license is at stake” (Ohlschlager, 2004, p. 4).

“One such risk to Texas psychologists,” he noted, “is that the local legislature might vote for a tightly state-regulated board of psychology, because the APA resolution pushing for gay marriage might give Texas legislature the idea that psychologists are a fringe group who endorse homosexual marriage” (Hopewell, 2004). Dr. Hopewell indicated that he has already been contacted by a Texas legislator regarding the APA resolutions (Hopewell, 2004).

“We have also introduced bills twice for prescriptive authority,” Dr. Hopewell said, “and I see this issue damaging progress with that bill, as happened in Louisiana a few years back. I am in a quandary as how to respond to this as the leader of the organization” (Ohlschlager, 2004, p. 4).

Science, Not Activism, Must Guide Resolutions and Policy

Scientists are not immune from the political and cultural debates, but they must assure that any official declarations, resolutions or policies are anchored to the most extensive scientific research available. Kitcher (1985, p. 3) noted that

"when scientific claims bear on matters of social policy, the standards of evidence and of self-criticism must be extremely high." APA must mandate that all statements or resolutions endorsed are subject to review and intense scrutiny, and that a balanced discussion is facilitated among all professionals and members.

Williams has noted that —

"Social scientific research can provide useful information and evidence in support of important public policies, but it must be of the highest quality in its design, instrumentation, and conceptual rigor.

"At the same time, such empirical research can never provide ultimate justification for decisions and policies that are essentially moral and reflect our deepest values.

"In the final analysis, the justification must derive from our vision of the highest and most noble things of which we as cultures and individuals are capable. If this vision is worthy, we ought not be timid about confronting the issues and seeking support for the vision in the research area" (p. 355).

No scientific organization can provide any resolution or policy statement based on scientific research that is tainted, flawed and inconclusive without breaching the trust of the general public. For APA to retain its credibility as a scientific organization, science must be separated from activism.

Dr. Robert Perloff, former President of the American Psychological Association, criticized APA for pandering to special interests groups: "The APA is too politically correct...and too obeisant to special interests" (Murray, 2001, p. 20).

Indeed, the evidence is clear that in the case of the APA resolutions on homosexual marriage and parenting, APA has indeed catered to as small but vocal special-interest group and has allowed activism to masquerade as science.

If the resolutions are allowed to stand, scientific groups such as NARTH must make a concerted effort to surface the issues to state legislatures in order to preserve psychology as a science. Otherwise, Dr. Hopewell's fears may indeed become reality. ■

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