

APA, Science and the Defense of Marriage Act

by Ray W. Johnson, Ph.D.
Founder, Psychologists for a Free APA

Science can never settle the issue, "Is gay marriage good for society?" because it cannot tell us, "What IS the good society?" But scientific evidence does indeed contribute to the discussion of these philosophical questions. Therefore, it is imperative that the evidence be properly gathered and accurately interpreted.

The following is a summary of an article by the same name published in Psychological Reports 81,1007-1016,1997. Reprints of the original article are available free of charge from:

**Psychologists for a Free A.P.A.
1807 North Elm Street, #321
Denton, Texas 76201**

In 1997 the Congress of the United States passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). This act defined, for federal purposes, marriage as being between a man and a woman. It also permitted each state to refuse to recognize marriage which had been contracted in other states between same-sex partners. The American Psychological Association opposed this bill. The APA public policy office described it as "anti-gay."

What is the Definition of "Homosexual"?

The American Psychological Association has repeatedly declared that its political actions are based on and directed by science. A fundamental requirement for an adequate science to attempt to influence public policy is a universal standard operationalized definition of the object of study. There is no such definition for any sexual orientation. In other words, with no standard operationalized definition there is no generalizable research. Therefore, there is no adequate science of homosexuality upon which to base decisions of public policy. So, there is no science to support APA's position on DOMA or its positions on homosexuality.

If the APA position on DOMA was based upon science it would be reasonable to expect APA to present scientific evidence that endorsement of its position would improve society and marriage or that, at least, society would not be damaged by supporting same-sex marriage. In its position paper, APA Public Policy Office Legislative Overview of the defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), there was no discussion of the function that marriage serves in society. There was no discussion of why government might have an interest in any marriage. There was no discussion of the possible impact of legalizing homosexual marriage on other social institutions.

APA attempted to answer the question "What is Sexual Orientation?" by presenting a melange of possible defini-

tions, all of which were woefully inadequate for scientific purposes. None of the definitions specified the standard operations necessary to determine if any person would fit into the sexual orientation categories, "*generally* [emphasis added] classified as heterosexual, or homosexual..."

How Does Homosexuality Develop?

The Overview also posed a question regarding what factors contribute to the development of sexual orientation. In the absence of an adequate definition for sexual orientation, an adequate scientific answer is not possible for this question. Nonetheless, the Overview said that adult homosexual orientation is predictable by early childhood. It declared that "By the time boys and girls reach adolescence, their sexual preference is likely to be already determined..." It emphasized research which purports to show biological causes in homosexual development. It dismissed social-development influences thusly: "Developmental precursors for adult homosexual orientation...have not been consistently identified *for the population as a whole.*" [Emphasis added]

In doing so, APA followed the political strategy for gaining public sympathy for pro-gay issues advocated in the October 1996 *APA Monitor*. It recommended emphasizing the biological as opposed to the learning possibilities in the development of homosexuality. The importance of this strategy lies in the implication of APA's statement "The scientific literature thus strongly indicates that sexual orientation is far from being a voluntary choice." The combination of emphasis on genetics and biology, the dismissal of social influences, and the absence of choice implies that homosexuality is biologically determined and therefore cannot be influenced by developmental experience.

APA's reason for dismissing research showing differences in "homosexuals" and "heterosexuals" in developmental experience as possible precursors of homosexuality is significant. The research was dismissed because the precursors "...have not been consistently identified *for the population as whole.*" [emphasis added] Since there is no standard operationalized definition for homosexuality, there is no possibility of defining a population. Furthermore, the same demand for a representative sample of the population was not made for research which APA approves.

Since no science can resolve the moral concerns which many have about this matter, they were not discussed in the full-length version of this paper. Other issues from the APA Overview were addressed, and in all of them the lack of an adequate science upon which to base public and professional policy was discussed. Most particularly, it was stressed that there is no science of homosexuality which *would justify the radical definition of marriage*, an institution fundamental to our society.

This paper concludes: (a) that since there was no adequate science to justify APA's opposition to DOMA, it was an example of APA's devotion to divisive political positions; and (b) that advocacy of this sort degrades psychological science and tends to strangle scientific discourse and debate. ■