

## Sociopolitical Diversity in Psychology

*By refusing to acknowledge its own worldview bias, psychology avoids the challenge of having to engage in principled debate.*

By Christopher H. Rosik, Ph.D.

Link Care Center  
Fresno, California

A recent article in *The American Psychologist* (Redding, 2001) makes an overdue challenge to our discipline to include sociopolitical values in the "diversity" lineup. I appreciate the APA for publishing this piece, and I hope that it will be a stimulus to real efforts within the organization toward ideological inclusiveness.

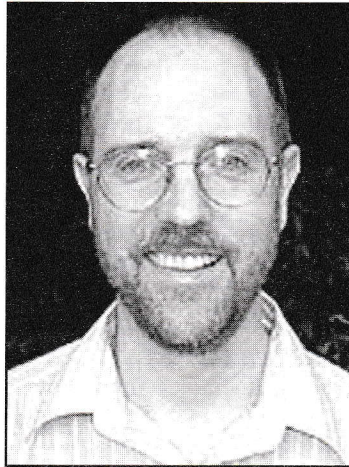
I would like to add a further example of the kind of concerns to which the *American Psychologist* article alludes. Next, I suggest an approach to addressing these issues that I believe may be even more fundamental to achieving a satisfying resolution.

A prominent example of sociopolitical values cutting short reasoned debate can be found in the popular term, "homophobia." Most of the research instruments used to measure the construct of homophobia include at least a few items that are overtly morally prescriptive, and many others than seem to pathologize a subject's responses that could, in many cases, actually be motivated from traditional moral convictions. The "Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale" (Herek, 1984), for example, includes items such as "Female homosexuality is a sin" and "Sex between two men is just plain wrong." A subject who checks off those statements is considered by the tester to be homophobic.

Similar items are found in other scales (Larsen, Reed, & Hoffman, 1980). Some tests assume all *morally derived* discomfort is *psychologically deviant* (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980). Of course, endorsement of these items in a manner consistent with a traditional moral code is scored as being "homophobic." These instruments are heavily imbedded in an "ideological surround" (O'Donohue & Caselles, 1993; Watson, Morris, Hood, Milliron, & Stutz, 1998), yet this fact remains largely unnoticed due in part to the lack of sociopolitical diversity in our association, particularly within the peer review process.

To illustrate by way of contrast, imagine that fur-industry executives decided to take a similar path toward seizing the high ground against members of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). They could construct a psychological test instrument to measure "fur-o-phobia." This test would label as "phobic" (and thus irrational) all moral disagreement with the use of animal fur in human

apparel. Experiencing any discomfort around people who produce, sell, or wear animal furs would be also scored as implying pathology.



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Should the test and its terminology end up gaining wide acceptance among psychologists, PETA sympathizers could be effectively marginalized without the annoying inconvenience of having to engage them in principled debate. The underlying moral, ethical, and philosophical implications of the fur industry's practices would not need to be scrutinized; all dissent could be reduced to a "psychological disorder."

If this comparison seems absurd to many, allow me to suggest that this is precisely *because our profession's lack of ideological diversity* has caused us to become dangerously unreflective about our worldview assumptions.

Redding (2001) advances several good suggestions for increasing sociopolitical diversity, including exploring conservative alternatives, expanding the domain of diversity, enriching the curriculum, and separating science from advocacy.

I also would see great value in more overt disclosure of sociopolitical commitments in our journal articles. We are all familiar with the practice in many medical journals where authors are required to openly state their interests and allegiances, usually understood in terms of financial underwriting. This statement is typically highlighted in regular print as part of the first page summary of the article. This practice could be adapted for our own journals.

In addition to disclosure of funding sources, a statement of interest might also include any division affiliations of the authors. Findings that did not support, but *contrasted* with the assumed advocacy commitments of the authors would carry special weight in the literature. I would like to see all of these cautionary measures implemented as a means of putting the authors' worldview and values in a clear and open context.

However, at the same time I am not sure these measures are sufficiently foundational to move us forward to a fuller understanding of the issues underlying our present diffi-

culty in achieving genuine sociopolitical diversity.

I am convinced that as doctors of *philosophy* in psychology, our scientific debates—especially concerning controversial social matters—need to be accompanied by forums in which the latent *philosophical* issues beneath our differences can be aired.

Unfortunately, little if anything positive has followed in the 25 years since Frank (1977) and Kimble (1984) exhorted psychologists to become better aware of the impact of differences in value orientations and belief systems. Would it not therefore be refreshing to see our journals have special issues wherein psychologists from divergent sociopolitical perspectives articulate their *a priori* assumptions?

Authors should be required to state their beliefs regarding such subjects as moral epistemology, the character of human nature, and what constitutes the good life. I believe that much of the lack of sociopolitical diversity in psychology traces back to a single-minded perspective on these kinds of issues.

Rather than surreptitiously advancing only one basic set of worldview commitments through demagoguery, advocacy, or scientific question-begging, I hope our association has the courage not only to promote real diversity, but also to encourage all of us to comprehend and be forthcoming about our own philosophical allegiances.

Only this type of undertaking can encourage pluralism at the deepest level of analysis. ■

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