



Marriage of Same-Sex Couples – 2006 Position Statement Canadian Psychological Association

In 2003, the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) issued its response to public debate about the effect of marriage of same-sex couples on children. CPA's review of the psychological research led us to conclude that the children of same-sex parents do not differ from the children of heterosexual parents in terms of their psychosocial development, their gender development and their gender identity. In 2005, the CPA voiced its support to the House of Commons of Bill C-38, legislation legalizing marriage of same-sex couples.

The current federal government has committed to asking Parliament to re-examine the legalization of marriage of same-sex couples. In response to this intention, many individuals and groups, both in favour and against marriage of same-sex couples, have brought their opinions and positions to the public. Because public opinion continues to involve concern about the rights and needs of children, CPA has reviewed recent research and re-affirms its 2003 position and 2005 support of marriages of same-sex couples and their families.

According to Herek's extensive review of the literature in 2006, the research on which opponents to marriage of same-sex couples rely, look at the functioning of children in intact families with heterosexual parents compared to those children raised by a single parent following divorce or death of a spouse. They do not include studies that compare the functioning of children raised by heterosexual couples with the functioning of children raised by same-sex couples. In this group of studies, any differences observed are more accurately attributable to the effects of death or divorce, and/or to the effects of living with a single parent, rather than to parents' sexual orientation. These studies do not tell us that the children of same-sex parents in an intact relationship fair worse than the children of opposite-sex parents in an intact relationship.

Although the research relied on by supporters of marriage of same-sex couples is not without its methodological flaws (as can be made the case for almost any area of scientific inquiry), it is based on comparisons of children with same-sex and opposite-sex parents. Herek points out that this group of studies is more relevant to the marriage debate and the findings of this group of studies are very consistent. A review of the psychological research into the well-being of children raised by same-sex and opposite-sex parents continues to indicate that there are no reliable differences in their mental health or social adjustment and that lesbian mothers and gay fathers are not less fit as parents than are their heterosexual counterparts.

The opposition to marriage of same-sex couples, on the grounds that it fails to consider the needs or rights of children, does not consider the most relevant body of psychological research into this topic or draws inaccurate conclusions from it. Further, opposition to marriage of same-sex couples often incorrectly pre-supposes that, by preventing marriage of same-sex couples, no children will be born or raised within families where parents are of the same sex. Such an argument ignores the reality that children are, and will continue to be, born to and raised by parents who are married,

those who are unmarried, those who are cohabitating, and those who are single – most of whom will be heterosexual, some of whom will be gay, and some of whom will be lesbian. Further, the literature (including the literature on which opponents to marriage of same-sex couples appear to rely) indicates that parents' financial, psychological and physical well-being is enhanced by marriage and that children benefit from being raised by two parents within a legally-recognized union. As the CPA stated in 2003, the stressors encountered by gay and lesbian parents and their children are more likely the result of the way in which society treats them than because of any deficiencies in fitness to parent.

The CPA recognizes and appreciates that persons and institutions are entitled to their opinions and positions on this issue. However, CPA is concerned that some are mis-interpreting the findings of psychological research to support their positions, when their positions are more accurately based on other systems of belief or values.

CPA continues to assert its 2003 position that the psychological literature into the psychosocial adjustment and functioning of children fails to demonstrate any significant differences between children raised within families with heterosexual parents and those raised within families with gay and lesbian parents. CPA further asserts that children stand to benefit from the well-being that results when their parents' relationship is recognized and supported by society's institutions.

Herek, G.M. (2006). Legal recognition of same-sex relationships in the United States: A social science perspective. *American Psychologist*, 61, 607-621.