



# North Carolina **PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION**

## **POSITION STATEMENT OPPOSING DEFENSE OF MARRIAGE AMENDMENT**

**Adopted by the NCA Board of Directors  
September 16, 2011**

The North Carolina Psychological Association (NCPA) opposes the Defense of Marriage amendment for the following reasons:

1. There is no empirical evidence that supports the denial of marriage rights to people in same-sex relationships.

A person's sexual orientation defines the universe of persons with whom he or she is likely to find the satisfying and fulfilling romantic and intimate relationships that, for many individuals, comprise an essential component of personal identity (D'Augelli, 2000; Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991; Herek, 2001, 2006; Peplau & Garnets, 2000);

Mental health professionals and researchers have long recognized that being homosexual poses no inherent obstacle to leading a happy, healthy, and productive life, and that the vast majority of gay and lesbian people function well in the full array of social institutions and interpersonal relationships. Such functioning includes the capacity to form healthy and mutually satisfying intimate relationships with another person of the same sex (American Psychiatric Association, 1974; American Psychological Association, 2007; Conger, 1975, National Association of Social Workers, 2003).

Married individuals generally receive social, economic, health, and psychological benefits from their marital status, including, but not limited to, numerous rights and benefits provided by private employers and by state and federal governments (Badgett, 2001; Brown, 2000; Chauncey 2005; Gove, Hughes, & Style, 1983; Gove, Style, & Hughes, 1990; Kiecolt-Glaser, 2001; Murray, 2000; Nock, 1995; Previti & Amato, 2003; Ross, Mirowsky, Goldsteen, 1990; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; White & Booth, 1991; Williams, 2003;

Many gay men and lesbians, like their heterosexual counterparts, desire to form stable, long-lasting, and committed intimate relationships and are successful in doing so (Gates, Badgett, & Ho, 2008; Herek, Norton, Allen, & Sims 2010; Kurdek, 1995, 1998; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Simmons & O'Connell, 2003).

Empirical research demonstrates that the psychological and social aspects of committed relationships between same-sex partners closely resemble those of heterosexual partnerships, and an emerging research literature suggests that legally recognized same-sex relationships may also be similar to heterosexual marriages in these psychological and social aspects (Balsam, Beauchaine, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2008; Kurdek, 2001, 2004, 2005; Mackey, Diemer, & O'Brian, 2000; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007).

Thus, the only reason for according same-sex relationships a different legal status than heterosexual relationships is ultimately the fact that the relationship is homosexual rather than heterosexual. This differentiation based on sexual orientation is an expression of prejudice and leads to stigma.

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2. There is empirical evidence that denial of marriage rights to people in same-sex relationships is damaging to their psychological health.

Individuals with a homosexual orientation are often subjected to minority stress, that is, additional stress beyond what is normally experienced by the heterosexual population, as a consequence of stigma, discrimination, and violence (Badgett, 2001; Berrill, 1992; Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 2000; Herek, 2009; Herek, Gillis, Cogan, 1999; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Meyer, 1995; 2003; Meyer, Schwartz, & Frost, 2008);

The experience of minority stress may create somewhat higher levels of illness or psychological distress in the sexual minority population, compared to the heterosexual population (Cochran, Sullivan, & Mays, 2003; Dohrenwend, 2000; Herek & Garnets, 2007; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Meyer, 1995; 2003);

Emerging evidence suggests that statewide campaigns to deny same-sex couples legal access to civil marriage are a significant source of stress to the lesbian and gay residents of those states and may have negative effects on their psychological well-being (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010; Rostosky et al., 2009; Russell, 2000);

Research suggests that this denial has pervasive negative effects not only on the members of same-sex couples who seek to be married, but on all homosexual persons, regardless of their relationship status or desire to marry (Badgett, 2009; Herek, 2006; Hull, 2006).

3. There is empirical evidence that opposing denial of marriage rights initiatives has beneficial psychological effects.

Policies supportive of lesbian and gay people's human rights may have positive effects on their psychological well-being (Blake, Ledsy, Lehman, Goodenow, Sawyer, Hack, 2001; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Hatzenbuehler, Keyes, Hasin, 2009).

4. Psychologists have colleagues and we have clients for whom this issue is relevant and important, and who appreciate representation. From a social justice perspective, significant benefits accrue to all of us when diverse families are legally and socially sanctioned.

Thus, it is resolved that, based on the available empirical evidence, the North Carolina Psychological Association is opposed to the May ballot initiative that would alter the North Carolina Constitution to make marriage between a man and a woman the only legal domestic union recognized in the state. This position will be communicated to NCPA members, and NCPA may be listed with other organizations opposing the amendment, such as Equality NC. NCPA may also seek to make coalitions with other mental health associations and agencies for the purpose of opposing the amendment.

(Adapted with permission from the California Psychological Association's "Excerpts from the Amicus Curiae Brief submitted to the California Supreme Court on *In re Marriage Cases*" and the American Psychological Association's Resolution on Marriage Equality)

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