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# Politics, Childhood Sexual Abuse, and Science Abuse

Editor

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**Abstract.** This article explores the latest political developments concerning the scientific analysis of childhood sexual abuse.

According to The Chronicle of Higher Education, the editor of the flagship journal of the American Psychological Association (APA), *American Psychologist* (AP), has reneged on an agreement to publish an article that was critical of APA and of several members of the United States (US) Congress. The article that was to be published in AP alleged that APA--reactive to Congressional concerns and those of some religious and politically conservative interest groups--used non-scientific criteria in deciding to apologize for publishing an article about childhood sexual abuse in another APA journal, *Psychological Bulletin* (PB). The PB article--while not addressing the moral, ethical, or legal goodness of childhood sexual activity--did support the conclusion that not all instances of sex between adults and children caused psychological harm to children.

A facile take on the above is that the author of the article that was to be published in AP may rightly be describing violations of aspects of the scientific method. And given that the PB article appears to have passed muster as to basic issues of reliability and validity in its meta-evaluation of childhood sexual abuse studies, APA should have stood fast against political attacks. This is because APA, as a scientific organization, cannot broach non-scientific concerns and, indeed, should perceive such concerns as extraneous and irrelevant. In fact, the political attackers of the PB article inevitably provide yet another example of the same reactionary forces of ignorance that were faced by the Seekers of Light such as Socrates, Copernicus, and Darwin. This might be even more the case given that the author of the article to be published in AP has made substantive, controversial observations in areas as diverse as the validity of the Rorschach, dolphin-assisted therapy, anxiety sensitivity, and eye- movement desensitization.

Would that matters were so simple. First, the very conceptions of rationality and logic--that are intrinsic to the scientific method--are imbued with values bearing on morals, ethics, the law, and beliefs on what makes sense. This is why honorable advocates of different policy opinions characterize political space. Second, choices of what merits study are inevitably based on morals, ethics, the law, and beliefs on what makes sense. Third, the very enterprise of science can be characterized by the same four parameters described above because that enterprise uses resources that could be otherwise be applied elsewhere and is, therefore, political in nature. Fourth, scientific conclusions also can be characterized by the same four parameters. As can be seen, there is no scientific vacuum that seals off the real world.

Thus, before generating outrage and becoming "shocked, shocked" that APA could actually look beyond science, consider that science is not and cannot be beyond the political sphere. In the calculus of rightness and wrongness among APA, the authors of the AP and PB articles, the US Congress, self-interest groups, and others, all concerned parties may jointly be abusing science in a Nietzschean will to power through which the welfare of children is merely a vehicle. (See Courtois, C.A. (2000). Our professional responsibility in response to gender politics. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 9, 107-112; Herbert, J.D., Lilienfeld, S.O., Lohr, J.M., Montgomery, R.W., O'Donohue, W.T., Rosen, G.M., & Tolin, D.F. (2000). Science and pseudoscience in the development of eye movement desensitization and

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