

An attempted whitewash of the APA's publication of falsified results for GID prevalence

An Investigative Report by Lynn Conway

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Introduction:

In August 2008, the APA 'Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance' published numerical values for the prevalence of "gender identity disorder" that were known to be false at the time. In September 2008, I wrote to the President of the APA and alerted him about this situation. Clinton Anderson, Ph.D., then responded to my letter on behalf of the APA's President.

Unfortunately, Dr. Anderson failed to acknowledge the Task Force's publication of false results, and instead attempted to whitewash the situation. This report discusses the events leading up to Dr. Anderson's letter, and then discusses the attempted whitewashing of the Task Force's errors.

Initial alert to the APA about the false results:

On September 5, 2008, I notified the President of the American Psychological Association that false results for the prevalence of GID had been published in the *Report of the APA's Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance* [1]. A copy of that letter is attached [2].

In their report, the Task Force had pronounced the prevalence of GID to be 1:11,900 (MtF) and 1:30,400 (FtM), using numbers that were based on counts of sex reassignments at a Dutch gender clinic during the 1980's [3].

The Task Force misrepresented those sex reassignment counts as being counts of gender dysphoric people, thus making gender dysphoria seem far less prevalent than it really is. Anyone who takes the time to read the original paper by Bakker, et al [3] can easily confirm this for themselves. I've attached and linked to a copy of that two-page paper, so that you can do this too.

In doing this, the Task Force disregarded a report by Olyslager and Conway [4] (a report that the Task Force was well aware of) that had exposed that error. The Task Force also failed to mention other errors in Bakker, et al that caused its results to be too small by a further factor of four, as also exposed in [4]. They then failed to mention recent studies revealing the prevalence of GID to be on the order of 1:1000 to 1:500 or more – values far higher than those they published.

These mistakes, failures and oversights led the Task Force to underreport the prevalence of GID by a factor of at least 10 to 20. The failure of the Task Force to correct these errors, even after having been alerted to them, led to the subsequent publication of false results by the APA – as discussed in my September 5th letter to the President of the APA [2] and an associated investigative report [5].

APA response attempts to whitewash the falsified results:

On September 25, 2008, Clinton Anderson, Ph.D., Director of the LGBT Concern's Office, responded to my letter on behalf of the President of the APA. A scan of his letter is attached [6].

Unfortunately, Dr. Anderson's response attempted a whitewash of the Task Force's falsification of GID prevalence. In the following sections, I quote and discuss passages in Dr. Anderson's letter passages that reveal his glossing over of the faults and errors in the Task Force's work.

First, consider the following paragraph:

“The Task Force tried to convey the fact that gender dysphoria is a spectrum, that the prevalence data that have been reported in the peer reviewed literature largely assess only one pole of that spectrum, and thus we have little evidence to report about the rest of that spectrum.” – Clinton Anderson [6]

That paragraph appears aimed at obfuscation (i.e., obscuring people's understanding and leaving them baffled) perhaps hoping that confused readers will accept SRS as “one pole of the ‘transgender’ spectrum” and forget the error of equating counts of SRS with counts of GID.

It also suggests that only peer-reviewed literature is acceptable evidence in scientific reasoning, and then uses that as an excuse to sidestep the error alert. However, as you know, peer review is often lax in niche fields such as sexology. Errors creep into peer-reviewed papers in such fields (as happened in Bakker, et al [3]). Researchers must remain vigilant and receptive to error-alerts from all sources in order to detect and correct such errors. To do otherwise is unprofessional.

Unfortunately, during the past decade sexologists have widely cited the numbers in Bakker [3] as being GID prevalence, under the mistaken assumption that is what those numbers meant. That erroneous interpretation of Bakker, et al, gradually became unquestioned dogma in sexology, and the APA Task Force repeated that dogma in a kind ‘group-think’ response. Apparently neither they nor their colleagues have ever read Bakker, et al, not even after receiving the error alert. Otherwise they would have recognized their mistake.

Now consider this paragraph:

“It was the Task Force’s aim to report the current state of knowledge of prevalence, not to promote some particular perspective on that question. They chose to cite in the body of the report only those studies that have been published in peer-reviewed journals, but decided to note your study in a footnote as a way to acknowledge that a minority opinion exists, even though your paper has not yet been published.” – Clinton Anderson [6]

That statement raises the question of exactly which peer reviewed papers are ‘relevant’ to a particular scientific debate and which are not.

In this case, the Task Force based their GID prevalence claims on one peer-reviewed paper [3], and failed to mention peer reviewed papers that conflicted with those claims.

For example, they failed to cite a 1988 paper about the major study by W.F. Tsoi on “The prevalence of transsexualism in Singapore” [7], which reported a far higher prevalence of SRS. They also failed to cite recent reports by S. Winter on the demographics of transgender women in Thailand [8, 9], which revealed a far higher prevalence of gender transition.

They further dismissed the 2007 report by Olyslager and Conway [4] that had exposed the errors in Bakker, et al, under the ruse that it hadn’t been published yet in a peer-reviewed journal.

Referring in a footnote to that report as being a “minority view”, they failed to acknowledge that it had exposed errors that undermined the Task Force’s own results. They further maligned Olyslager’s and Conway’s work by saying “transgender activists tend to endorse the study”, hinting to colleagues that Olyslager’s and Conway’s work was somehow suspect as “activism”.

In a most telling oversight, the Task Force also failed to cite a peer reviewed paper by Olyslager and Conway that contained a condensation of their key results, including exposure of the errors in Bakker, et al – a paper that had been published prior to the Task Force’s report [10]:

Olyslager, F. and L. Conway, "Transseksualiteit komt vaker voor dan u denkt. Een nieuwe kijk op de prevalentie van transseksualiteit in Nederland en België," (Transsexualism is more common than you think. A new look at the prevalence of transsexualism in the Netherlands and Belgium), *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies*, Vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 39-51, July 7, 2008.

The Task Force was either oblivious to the fact that Olyslager and Conway had published a paper regarding GID prevalence in a journal outside those they usually read (*Archives of Sexual Behaviour, International Journal of Transgenderism*), or else they deliberately failed to cite a peer reviewed paper that conflicted with their own results.

Finally, consider the following paragraph:

“Although we welcome your scientific criticism of the report, we greatly regret the tone of your letter. To accuse the Task Force of “falsification” seems highly unfair and needlessly inflammatory.” – Clinton Anderson [6]

We reflect on this ad hominem in the next section, following a summary of what the APA Task Force did and didn't do.

Summary and Findings:

The Task Force failed to consider and respond to error alerts. They evidently failed to read the paper in question, thus failing to check for the errors themselves. Unaware they were not reporting what their primary reference had actually measured, they published long-held assumptions about what that old paper said, while failing to mention peer-reviewed papers that conflicted with those assumptions.

Unfortunately, Dr. Anderson did not acknowledge the Task Force's publication of the false results, and attempted to whitewash the situation instead. He then 'attacked the messenger' who raised the error alert – using the argumentum ad hominem above – perhaps hoping to discredit the error alert.

In doing so, Dr. Anderson continued the APA's practice of ignoring and dismissing external criticisms from transgender people, as had been earlier exposed by Kelley Winters, Ph.D. in a GIDReform Report entitled “Blinded Me With Science: The Burden of Proof” [11]:

Negative stereotypes about transition outcomes are also refuted by the magnitude of post-transition and post-operative populations that have integrated into society so completely that they are undetectable to the psychiatric research establishment. At the 2007 WPATH conference, Professors Femke Olyslager and Lynn Conway [4] presented evidence of mathematical flaws in earlier studies, suggesting that vastly more people have transitioned with corrective surgeries than figures cited in the DSM. Although their conclusions were independently corroborated in a health benefit cost analysis by Dr. Mary Ann Horton [12*], mental health policy makers in both APA organizations have ignored these challenges to longstanding belief about the prevalence of transsexualism. A 2008 report from the American Psychological Association Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance rejected Olyslager and Conway's work in a footnote, without bothering to examine the math or even list a citation to their paper. Just as disappointing, the APA (psychological) invoked a guilt-by-association tactic to discredit Olyslager and Conway by claiming that their analysis was endorsed by “transgender activists.” [1*]*

Suppressing dissent by labeling critics of derogatory psychiatric policies as transgender or transsexual “activists” is an unfortunate trend in recent literature. – Kelley Winters, Ph. D. [11]

* References renumbered to those listed at the end of this report.

On reflection, one is struck by the tone of certainty in the Task Force's pronouncement that the prevalence of GID equals 1:11,900 (MtF) and 1:30,400 (FtM), and to three significant digits at that.

Perhaps this reveals the power of the media, which so widely reported those numbers during the past decade. In any event, that erroneous interpretation of Bakker has become unchallengeable dogma in sexology, and the Task Force simply repeated those numbers without question, and without any doubt.

We realize that any admission that the APA had published false GID prevalence numbers would be a great embarrassment for all involved. Thus it is not surprising to see the APA engaging in denial and dismissing error alerts that to them appear to be from "transsexual activists".

However, all scientists have a professional duty to respond to error alerts and admit mistakes in published data, calculations or analyses. To do otherwise only leads to further falsifications and denials – and only delays the inevitable exposure of the errors.

Alerting the President of the APA about the attempted whitewash:

On December 31, 2008, I wrote to the APA's President again [13] to alert him to Dr. Anderson's attempt to whitewash the falsification of the GID prevalence results. This investigative report was included as an attachment to that letter.

References:

[1] APA Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance. (2008). *Report of the Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, August 17, 2008.

<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbctransgender/2008TaskForceReport.pdf>

[2] Lynn Conway, "Open letter to the President of the APA re Falsification of GID prevalence results by the APA Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance", *LynnConway.com*, September 5, 2008.* Mirrored on:

<http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Prevalence/APA/APA%20Letter%209-05-08.html>

[3] A. Bakker, P.J.M. van Kesteren, L.J.G. Gooren, and P.D. Bezemer, "The prevalence of transsexualism in the Netherlands," *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, vol.87, pp.237-238, 1993.*

Mirrored on: <http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Prevalence/Reports/REFs/bakker1993.pdf>

[4] F. Olyslager, F. and L. Conway, "On the Calculation of the Prevalence of Transsexualism", presented at the WPATH 20th International Symposium, Chicago, Illinois, September 6, 2007. (Submitted for publication in the *International Journal of Transgenderism*).

<http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Prevalence/Reports/Prevalence%20of%20Transsexualism.pdf>

[5] Lynn Conway, "Falsification of GID prevalence results by the APA Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance", *LynnConway.com*, August 27, 2008.*

http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Prevalence/APA/Falsification_of_GID_prevalence_results_by_the_APA_Task_Force.html

[6] Clinton Anderson, Ph.D., Letter to Lynn Conway on behalf of Alan E. Kazdin, Ph.D., President, American Psychological Association, September 25, 2008.* Mirrored on:

http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Prevalence/APA/APA_Response_to_Conway_by_Anderson_9-25-08.pdf

- [7] W.F. Tsoi, "The prevalence of transsexualism in Singapore," *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, vol. 78, pp.501-504, 1988. Mirrored on:
<http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Prevalence/Reports/REFs/tsoi1988.pdf>
- [8] S. Winter, "Counting Kathoey", *Transgender Asia Papers*, August 27, 2002.
http://web.hku.hk/~sjwinter/TransgenderASIA/paper_counting_kathoey.htm
- [9] S. Winter, Thai Transgenders in Focus: Demographics, Transitions and Identities, *International Journal of Transgenderism*, vol. 9, No. 1, pp.15-27, 2006.
- [10] Olyslager, F. and L. Conway, "Transseksualiteit komt vaker voor dan u denkt. Een nieuwe kijk op de prevalentie van transseksualiteit in Nederland en België," (Transsexualism is more common than you think. A new look at the prevalence of transsexualism in the Netherlands and Belgium), *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies*, Vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 39-51, July 7, 2008. Mirrored on:
http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Prevalence/TvG_Paper/Transsexualism_is_more_common_than_you_think.pdf
- [11] Kelley Winters, Ph.D. "Blinded Me With Science: The Burden of Proof", GID Reform Advocates, October 21, 2008.
<http://gidreform.wordpress.com/2008/10/21/blinded-me-with-science-the-burden-of-proof/>
- [12] Mary Ann Horton, "The Cost of Transgender Health Benefits," Out and Equal Convention, Denver CO, 2006.
<http://www.tgender.net/taw/thbcost.html>
- [13] Lynn Conway, "Cover-letter regarding 'An attempted whitewash of the APA's publication of falsified results for GID prevalence'", December 31, 2008.
http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TS/Prevalence/APA/Cover_letter_re_attempted_whitewash_of_APA_falsification_of_prevalence_results.html

* These items were attached to the December 31, 2008 cover-letter to the President of the APA.