

Position Statement on Psychiatric Treatment and Sexual Orientation

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 1998
Approved by the Assembly, November 1998

"Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees... These are... position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects..." – *APA Operations Manual*.

The Board of Trustees of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1973 after reviewing evidence that it was not a mental disorder. In 1987 ego-dystonic homosexuality was not included in the revised third edition of DSM (DSM-III-R) after a similar review.

APA does not currently have a formal position statement on treatments that attempt to change a person's sexual orientation, also known as "reparative therapy" or "conversion therapy." In 1997 APA produced a fact sheet on homosexual and bisexual issues, which states that "there is no published scientific evidence supporting the efficacy of "reparative therapy" as a treatment to change one's sexual orientation."

The potential risks of "reparative therapy" are great and include depression, anxiety, and self-destructive behavior, since therapist alignment with societal prejudices against homosexuality may reinforce self-hatred already experienced by the patient. Many patients who have undergone "reparative therapy" relate that they were inaccurately told that homosexuals are lonely, unhappy individuals who never achieve acceptance or satisfaction. The possibility

that the person might achieve happiness and satisfying interpersonal relationships as a gay man or lesbian are not presented, nor are alternative approaches to dealing with the effects of societal stigmatization discussed. APA recognizes that in the course of ongoing psychiatric treatment, there may be appropriate clinical indications for attempting to change sexual behaviors.

Several major professional organizations, including the American Psychological Association, the National Association of Social Workers, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, have made statements against "reparative therapy" because of concerns for the harm caused to patients. The American Psychiatric Association has already taken clear stands against discrimination, prejudice, and unethical treatment on a variety of issues, including discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Therefore, APA opposes any psychiatric treatment, such as "reparative" or "conversion" therapy, that is based on the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or is based on the a priori assumption that the patient should change his or her homosexual orientation.

An initial version of this position statement was proposed in September 1998 by the Committee on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues of the Council on National Affairs. It was revised and approved by the APA Assembly in November 1998. The revised version was approved by the Board of Trustees in December 1998. The committee members as of September 1998 were Lowell D. Tong, M.D. (chairperson), Leslie G. Goransson, M.D., Mark H. Townsend, M.D., Diana C. Miller, M.D., Cheryl Ann Clark, M.D., Kenneth Ashley, M.D. (consultant); corresponding members: Stuart M. Sotsky, M.D., Howard C. Rubin, M.D., Daniel W. Hicks, M.D., Ronald L. Cowan, M.D.; Robert J. Mitchell, M.D. (Assembly liaison), Karine Igartua, M.D. (APA/Glaxo Wellcome Fellow), Steven Lee, M.D. (APA/Bristol-Myers Squibb Fellow), and Petros Levounis, M.D. (APA/Center for mental Health Services Fellow).