

NZAP's 2004 Policy Statement on Therapy to Change a Person's Sexual Orientation ("Reparative Therapy" or "Reorientation Therapy")

Guideline one from the American Psychological Association "Guidelines for Psychotherapy with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients" provides an essential starting point for any policy about psychotherapy for homosexuals: "Psychologists understand that homosexuality and bisexuality are not indicative of mental illness."

A clear statement is made in the American Psychiatric Association Fact Sheet on "Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Issues" (1997):

There is no published scientific evidence supporting the efficacy of "reparative therapy" as a treatment to change one's sexual orientation, nor is it included in the APA's Task Force Report, Treatments of Psychiatric Disorders. More importantly, altering sexual orientation is not an appropriate goal of psychiatric treatment. Some may seek conversion to heterosexuality because of the difficulties that they encounter as a member of a stigmatized group. Clinical experience indicates that those who have integrated their sexual orientation into a positive sense of self function at a healthier psychological level than those who have not. "Gay affirmative psychotherapy" may be helpful in the coming out process, fostering a positive psychological development and overcoming the effects of stigmatization. A position statement adopted by the Board in December 1998 said: The American Psychiatric Association opposes any psychiatric treatment, such as "reparative" or "conversion" therapy, which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder, or based upon a prior assumption that the patient should change his/ her homosexual orientation.

Furthermore, the APA position statement mentioned above states:

The potential risks of reparative therapy are great; including 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 is not presented, nor are alternative approaches to dealing with the effects of societal stigmatization discussed.

NZAP is concerned that reorientation therapies may be an expression of homophobia; that is, the irrational fear and prejudice against homosexual persons.

Several major professional organisations, 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 NZAP has already stated in the Code of Ethics: "Psychotherapists shall be sensitive to diversity and shall not discriminate on the grounds of ... sexual orientation" (Paragraph 1.2). We now state that the NZAP opposes any therapy based upon the assumption that homosexuality

per se is a mental disorder or based upon the a priori assumption that the patient should change his or her homosexual orientation.

(Thanks to the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association for parts of this statement)