

Shocked by therapies: psychologists reject sexual reorientation

August 6 2009, by Virginia Montet

US psychologists are slamming therapies treating homosexuality as an illness, and warning mental health workers against promising patients their sexual orientations might be changed.

The 150,000-member American Psychological Association said in a report, released at its convention in Toronto, that [mental health](#) professionals "should avoid telling clients that they can change their [sexual orientation](#) through therapy or other treatments."

The convention was looking at reports including one on the efficacy of so-called "reparative therapy," or sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE). It reviewed the results of 83 studies carried out between 1960 and 2007 on the controversial concept, which appeals particularly to some religious conservative patients uncomfortable with their homosexuality.

"Contrary to claims of sexual orientation change advocates and practitioners, there is insufficient evidence to support the use of psychological interventions to change sexual orientation," cautioned Judith Glassgold, who spearheaded the work.

Over the years, aversion therapies with "behavior therapists ... (included) a variety of aversion treatments, such as inducing nausea, vomiting or [paralysis](#); providing electric shocks, or having the individual snap an elastic band around the wrist when the individual became aroused to same-sex erotic images or thoughts," the report noted.

Other examples of aversive behavioral treatments included shame aversion, in which the patient is publicly humiliated in an attempt to stamp out the behavior, and systematic desensitization, a method used to overcome phobias and [anxiety disorders](#).

"Scientifically rigorous older studies in this area found that sexual orientation was unlikely to change due to efforts designed for this purpose. Contrary to the claims of SOCE practitioners and advocates, recent research studies do not provide evidence of sexual orientation change as the research methods are inadequate to determine the effectiveness of these interventions," the APA statement said.

The therapies were described as inhumane as early as the 1970s -- but they have not gone away.

And their side effects could include suicidal ideation, depression, impotence, relationship dysfunction, and high school dropout rates, the APA said.

"From our survey of recent publications and research, most SOCE currently seem directed to those holding conservative religious and political beliefs," the APA concluded.

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