



FACT SHEET

The Medical and Scientific Perspective on Sexual Orientation Change Efforts

"Reparative" therapy is based on the concept that homosexuality can (and should be) cured. However, for nearly 40 years, the scientific and medical communities -- as a result of numerous studies -- have affirmed that homosexuality is not a mental illness and does not need a "cure." In fact, a substantial amount of research supports that attempts to do so can be harmful to the individual. Please Note: MPIPP also has an additional information on this topic that contains statements of most major professional associations at www.mpipp.org.

Supporting research

In a meta-analysis of 83 studies conducted by the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation (APA, 2009), the task force generally found the least rigorous studies generally attribute more positive outcomes of "reparative" therapy than do studies that meet peer-reviewed standards of scientific rigor.

The American Psychiatric Association said in the Background to its Position Statement, "Psychotherapeutic modalities to convert or 'repair' homosexuality are based on developmental theories whose scientific validity is questionable. Furthermore, anecdotal reports of "cures" are counterbalanced by anecdotal claims of psychological harm. In the last four decades, "reparative" therapists have not produced any rigorous scientific research to substantiate their claims of cure." (ApA, 2000)

Selection of treatment modality

The American Psychological Association's Task Force noted, ". . . efforts to change sexual orientation are unlikely to be successful and involve some risk of harm, contrary to the claims of sexual orientation change effort practitioners and advocates and that it is difficult to determine who may be successful or harmed as a result of this therapy." (APA, 2009, p.85)

The American Psychiatric Association also said in its supporting materials for its 2000 Position Statement: "The 'reparative' therapy literature uses theories that make it difficult to formulate scientific selection criteria for their treatment modality." (ApA, 2000)

Continued stigmatization

According to the American Psychiatric Association, the "literature not only ignores the impact of social stigma in motivating efforts to cure homosexuality, it is a literature that actively stigmatizes homosexuality as well. 'Reparative' therapy literature also tends to overstate the treatment's accomplishments while neglecting any potential risks to patients." (ApA, 2000 Background Statement)

Potential for harm

Of particular importance from a mental health perspective is that subjective reports of "cures" are often met by just as many claims of psychological harm.

One study (Shido & Schroeder, 2002) of 202 reorientation therapy participants showed that many were severely harmed by the effort to change and experienced increased self-loathing, depression, and suicidal feelings. Furthermore, almost all of these participants eventually accepted a lesbian or gay identity after their sincere efforts to become heterosexual collapsed.

The US Surgeon General concurs

In 2001 the U.S. Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior (2001) said "there is no valid scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be changed." The report went on to say, "Sexual orientation is usually determined by adolescence, if not earlier (Bell et al, 1981), and there is no valid scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be changed (Haldeman, 1994; APA, 2000). Although the research is limited, transgendered persons are reported to experience similar problems. In their extreme form, these negative attitudes lead to antigay violence. Averaged over two dozen studies, 80 percent of gay men and lesbians had experienced verbal or physical harassment on the basis of their orientation, 45 percent had been threatened with violence, and 17 percent had experienced a physical attack (Berrill, 1992)."

Works Cited

Please note that many of these references also have extensive research citations:

American Psychological Association, **Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation - Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force, 2009.**

<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf>

An online summary of the above 130-page report is also available at:

<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/sexual-orientation.aspx>

American Psychiatric Association, **Therapies Focused on Attempts to Change Sexual Orientation, (Reparative or Conversion Therapies), Position Statement, 2000.**

<http://www.psych.org/Departments/EDU/Library/APAOfficialDocumentsandRelated/PositionStatements/200001.aspx>; **NOTE:** This also includes the Background on the Position Statement.

Shidlo, A. & Schroeder, M. (2002). **Changing Sexual Orientation: A consumers' report.**

Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 33(3): 249-259.

<http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=buy.optionToBuy&id=2002-01066-003&CFID=6524171&CFTOKEN=55794154>

U.S. Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior (2001), p.6. <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/sexualhealth/call.pdf>