



Photo by Astrid Riecken/The Washington Times

Medrick Smith, an ex-homosexual, demonstrates Sunday against the American Psychological Association.

Backers of therapy for gays assail APA

By Julia Duin
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Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays are taking on the American Psychiatric Association this week in claiming the APA may force out therapists who try to help homosexual clients become heterosexuals.

"As we speak, the APA is moving toward criminalizing the practice of reparative therapy," said Robert Knight of the Family Research Council, referring to the counseling approach designed to help homosexuals forsake that lifestyle.

APA President Rodrigo Munoz has called reparative therapy "destructive." Its sister organization, the American Psychological Association, has likewise condemned reparative therapy.

Sunday, about 25 of the activists — who use the acronym PFOX — picketed some of the 15,500 therapists attending the American Psychiatric Association's annual meeting at the Washington Convention Center. They carried signs with messages like "APA: Repent of your unholy criticism" and "'Born gay' is a lie, APA, and you know it."

The object of their ire was a position statement unanimously

adopted five months ago by the APA board of trustees.

That statement says reparative therapy potentially causes "depression, anxiety and self-destructive behavior" among its clients. Such therapy, it suggests, is discriminatory because the therapist may be aligning himself or herself "with societal prejudices against homosexuality."

"The APA would presume to tell America what is and is not normal," said Peter LaBarbera, director of Americans for Truth About Homosexuality. "Americans are slowly waking up to the fact that the APA emperor has no clothes."

He and other speakers at a press conference yesterday said APA's position could damage the 900 therapists who belong to the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, a California group that works with the ex-gay movement.

That movement encompasses four ex-gay organizations around the country that claim to have counseled 20,000 homosexuals. A 1997 NARTH survey said that homosexuals are converted to heterosexuality through counseling about one-third of the time.

To date, no therapists have been forced to leave the APA over the

issue, and the APA has no authority to remove professional credentials, spokeswoman Melissa Katz said. Only state licensing boards can do that. Even revoking a therapist's APA membership is a cumbersome process, involving a complaint process and an ethics board review, she said.

"It's not like anyone is looking to take punitive action," she said of reparative therapists.

However, rebuking reparative therapy is a death knell for the technique, PFOX members said. That's because therapists cannot receive remuneration from health insurers if it is not recognized as a legitimate therapy by the professional associations.

"There is a group of lobbyists within the ranks of both APAs and they are ... trying to vilify therapists who have been helping homosexuals change for decades," said PFOX director Anthony Falzarano. "Now that homosexuality has been removed [as a mental disorder], it's very hard for a therapist practicing reparative therapy to ... bill the insurance companies. Anyone helping homosexuals these days has to bill it as helping someone with anxiety or depression."