

Psychologists are told to tell gays they don't need fixing

Association restricts conversions

By Julia Duin
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The American Psychological Association yesterday passed a resolution mandating psychologists to tell gay patients that homosexuality is normal and restrict therapies aimed at converting them into heterosexuals.

At issue is so-called conversion or reparative therapy spearheaded by the 900-member National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality in Encino, Calif., as well as many churches that counsel or teach clients to forsake homosexuality.

The APA has long opposed such practices and two years ago tried

unsuccessfully to pass a resolution calling reparative therapy unethical.

Yesterday's resolution, which is not legally binding, stopped short of doing that but set standards for the APA's 151,000 members that could be added weight in any lawsuit brought against an APA member found to practice reparative therapy.

"This is a violation of a patient's right to therapy, as well as a way to block psychologists and therapists desiring to help patients who desire to change," said New York psychoanalyst and NARTH president Dr. Charles Socarides.

"We obviously applaud it," said David Smith, spokesman for the

Human Rights Campaign, a homosexual lobby in the District, "because there's nothing wrong with being gay or lesbian, so there's nothing to change."

If homosexuality is a genetic trait as many homosexual advocates say, it's much harder — if not impossible — to change.

"This type of therapy is psychological terrorism and people performing it are biased against gay people," Mr. Smith said. "You can teach a left-handed person to use their right hand, but they are innately left-handed."

But if homosexuality is a case of

physical or psychological abuse during childhood, as NARTH says, then change is more likely, according to advocates of reparative therapy, some of whom were once homosexuals.

"If I am convinced that homosexuality is a sin or wrong for my life, I need to go for help," said Bob Davies, president of the ex-gay ministry Exodus International in Kenmore, Wash., and a former homosexual. "People who want their behavior changed on pornography are free to go to psychologists today. Why should homosexuality be treated differently?"

The APA resolution says psychologists must not discriminate against homosexuals and dredge up false statements about the scientific basis of homosexuality. Both sides of the argument charged each other with using pseudoscience; with one side condemning findings on a purported "gay gene" and the other criticizing surveys on significant rates of homosexuals who forsake their orientation.

Dr. Socarides said the APA ignored a 1992 study by Dr. Houston MacIntosh of the Washington Psychoanalytic Institute showing that of 1,215 homosexual patients surveyed, 23 percent of them were able to change their orientation

and 84 percent "showed vast improvement."

"It's false when they say there is no sound evidence that such therapy doesn't work," Dr. Socarides said. "They've skewed the facts and given out a pro-gay program in trying to gain acceptance for homosexuality in this country."

The APA has taken the position that reparative therapy assumes homosexuality is a mental illness; a position the APA took a stand against in 1975. That year, it passed a resolution supporting a 1973 decision by the American Psychiatric Association removing homosexuality from its list of mental and emotional disorders.