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## APA resolution on "reparative therapy" delivers blow to ex-gays

by Kim Mills  
Special to Q-Notes

CHICAGO—On August 14, the American Psychological Association (APA) passed a resolution that represents a setback to proponents of so-called "reparative" or "conversion" therapy that aims to turn a patient's homosexual orientation into a heterosexual one.

"These therapies amount to nothing more than psychological terrorism and are usually performed by practitioners who harbor intense bias against gay people," said David M. Smith, Human Rights Campaign's senior strategist. "These practitioners usually are affiliated with extremist religious groups that promote the illusion that sexual orientation can be changed to further their political aims."

The resolution, which passed overwhelmingly at the APA convention in Chicago, asserted that there is no sound scientific evidence on the efficacy of these therapies. Some clinicians have compared these techniques to efforts to make left-handed people right-handed; they may learn to use their right hands, but they still are innately left-handed.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force was not pleased by the resolution. The agency's director expressed disappointment that the APA stopped short of calling for an end to conversion therapies. In a letter to the APA, Executive Director Kerry Lobel noted that "anything short of full condemnation for this repugnant practice leaves the door open for reparative therapy's further escalation."

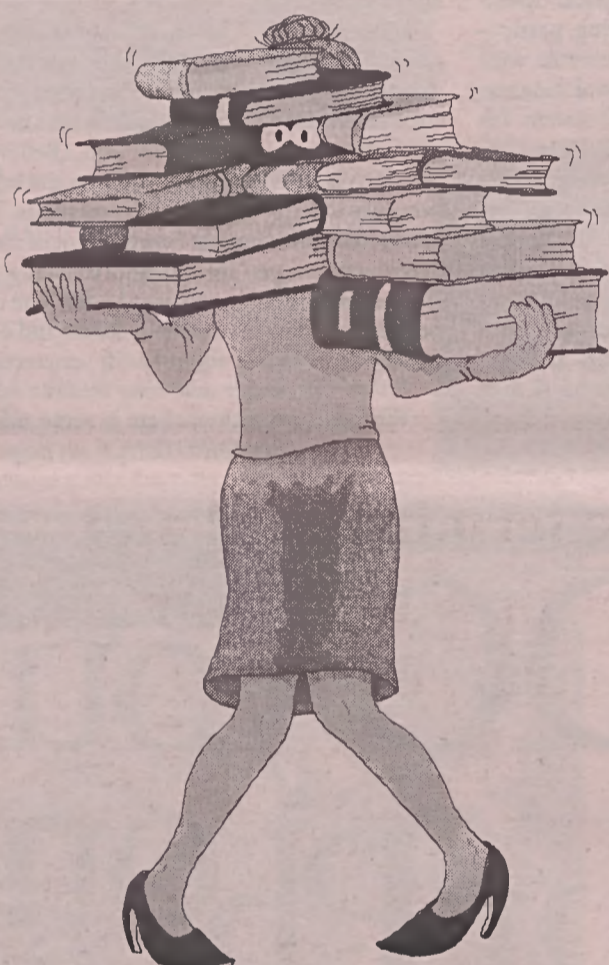
"The real victims of those misguided therapies are clients attempting to bear the weight of homophobia in society and within their own families," she argued. "As they seek counseling, they should experience self-validation and support for living a healthy and full life regardless of their sexual orientation. While some adults may give their consent to conversion therapy, many are coerced into doing so. The most vulnerable are young people at the mercy of confused parents or adult guardians seeking to erase their own shame or guilt about their child's sexual orientation. Allowing conversion treatments to remain a viable option assures that many will endure potentially costly, painful and traumatic procedures that could increase rather than relieve suffering."

Supporters of reparative therapy demanded that the APA make a statement on these "treatments" because they have been under intensive debate within the profession and in the larger society.

The resolution did strongly reaffirm that homosexuality is not a mental illness and that psychologists must not "participate in or condone discriminatory practices with sexual minority clients."

In addition, the APA resolution called on psychologists to "respect the rights of individuals, including sexual minority clients, to privacy, confidentiality, self-determination and autonomy." And it directed psychologists to obtain appropriate informed consent to therapy when working with sexual minority clients, including minors.

But even this statement has not quieted proponents of reparative therapy. They view the statement as political. ▼



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