

APS Position Statement on Psychological Practices that attempt to change Sexual Orientation

Approaches to mental health practice variously referred to as 'reparative', 'conversion' or 'ex-gay' are based on the belief that homosexuality is a disorder, and that it can be 'cured'. No professional health organisation in Australia supports these approaches, for the following reasons:

- 1) There is no clinical evidence demonstrating that approaches that claim to change a person's sexual orientation are effective.
- 2) There is, however, a considerable body of evidence documenting the negative effects of stigma associated with homosexuality, including higher rates of depression.
- 3) There is also clinical evidence that reparative, conversion and ex-gay approaches can compound the challenges already faced by some lesbians and gay men. For example, the 'failure' of such approaches can further contribute to negative mental health outcomes.

As a professional organisation committed to evidence-based practice, the Australian Psychological Society strongly opposes any form of mental health practice that treats homosexuality as a disorder, or seeks to change a person's sexual orientation. Any psychologist attempting to do so is likely to be in breach of the APS Code of Ethics.

Instead, in response to an individual client who may be struggling with their homosexuality, the Australian Psychological Society recommends psychological approaches that attempt to:

- challenge negative stereotypes
- develop affirming social supports
- promote self-acceptance; and
- increase mental health literacy.

Such responses are in line with the APS *Code of Ethics* and *Ethical Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Clients*.

References

Australian Psychological Society. (2007). *Code of ethics*. Melbourne: APS.

Australian Psychological Society. (2010). *Ethical Guidelines for psychological practice with lesbian, gay and bisexual clients*. Melbourne: APS.

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