

## Following the Lead of Psychologists, Counselors Pass Anti-Conversion Therapy Resolution

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In March, the American Counseling Association (ACA) joined the American Psychological Association (APA) in discouraging the practice of sexual-reorientation therapy.

The 50,000-member ACA, based in Alexandria, Virginia, passed a resolution strikingly similar to the APA's resolution of August 1997.

The recent ACA resolution, passed in Indianapolis at its annual convention, was first proposed by the association's Human Rights Committee, and the motion to accept was made by the representative of the Association for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Issues in Counseling (AGLBIC), a division of ACA.

Titled, "On Appropriate Counseling Responses to Sexual Orientation," the original version of the resolution would have placed the ACA in clear opposition to conversion therapy. As proposed, the original resolution read: "Be it further resolved that the American Counseling Association opposes the use of so-called 'conversion or reparative' therapies in counseling individuals having a same-gender sexual orientation; opposes portrayals of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth as mentally ill due to their sexual orientation; and supports the dissemination of accurate information about sexual orientation, mental health, and appropriate interventions in order to counteract bias that is based in ignorance or unfounded beliefs about same-gender sexual orientation."

However as a result of debate over the resolution, the association's governing council *deleted the phrase stating its opposition to sexual-reorientation therapy*. But the opposition was maintained if the conversion therapy portrays "gay, lesbian or bisexual youth as mentally ill," or a counselor spreads inaccurate information or has "unfounded beliefs" about sexual orientation.

### What Are the Implications of This Resolution?

As it stands, the resolution's impact is difficult to gauge. The resolution seems to discourage efforts to promote a shift from homosexual to heterosexual orientation, but comes short of clear opposition. If passed as originally proposed, the resolution *would have had* enormous impact on practice. Counselors would have been compelled to

tell clients who want to modify their sexual arousal patterns that such an objective is faulty. Counselors who believe homosexuality *can be modified* would be in danger of being charged with a violation of the ethics code.

Even licensed professional counselors (LPCs) outside of the membership of ACA would be at risk, since most states adopt ACA's code of ethics in their counselor licensing statutes. Most states automatically adopt subsequent revisions of that code, so counselors performing activities deemed unethical based on a reading of the code would practice under threat of ethical review by state-licensing authorities.

### Same-Sex Marriage Endorsed

The ACA action—along with a companion resolution supporting same-sex marriage—created immediate controversy at the association's convention. Opponents of the action hope to see the resolutions modified or rescinded at the association's next governing meeting in October, 1998.

### No Opportunity for Open Discussion

The association's president, Courtland Lee, devoted his editorial column to the issue in the association's May 1998 newsletter; he says he believes that the resolutions had sparked a healthy dialogue. In truth, however, there was very little real dialogue during the time the resolutions were being considered. Neither resolution—concerning either conversion therapy or same-sex marriage—had been specifically listed on the meeting agenda. Thus, opponents of the actions were not prepared to debate the issue. No method of gauging member sentiment on the issue was conducted, nor has the association convened a task force to study the issue. Furthermore, no research into the efficacy of conversion therapy was sought by the leadership.

This action is consistent with ACA's developing position as a key supporter of the gay-activist agenda. For instance, in October 1997, the governing council moved to donate funds raised from military exhibitors at its annual convention (around \$4,000) to a gay and lesbian legal defense fund which was actively fighting the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. This decision came at a time when the association had suspended its legislative grants program due to a state of financial deficit. ■



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