Reviewer's report

Title: The response of mental health professionals to clients seeking help about their sexual orientation

Version: 2 Date: 1 December 2008

Reviewer: anthony R d'augelli

Reviewer's report:

1. MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS: a) There is no discussion of the possibility of a self-selection process influencing the findings. The response rate to the study was quite good, but it is possible that professionals who conduct or recommend reparative therapy would choose not to response to such as study as this. Therefore, it should be noted that these figures may underestimate the prevalence of the practices described. b) the use of "homosexual" needs to be reviewed. This should only be used to describe sexual behavior, so when "feelings" etc. are under discussion, it would be best to use "same-sex sexual feelings or attractions." If the questions were asked in a certain way, of course that cannot be changed. On p. 10, for instance, there is a heading "Services to modify a homosexual orientation." This should be "lesbian, gay, or bisexual" sexual orientation. c) I am concerned about the lack of reference to the considerable literature in the US about this topic. In particular, the study published by Robert Spitzer purporting to show that reparative therapy can be effective (published in the Archives of Sexual Behavior in 2003) was followed by an entire issue of the journal devoted to commentaries (in 2004). This was an enormously controversial study and should be referenced, even though it did not occur in the UK. d) The very last sentence suggests that therapists, if allowing their "inherent attitudes" to influence their behavior, are likely to discriminate against LGB clients. There is no evidence of this in the report and it is an exaggeration. e) there are more recent papers on the topic than those cited by the authors. A more thorough literature review, especially of recent papers, is very important. The last cited paper was published in 2007; most of the others are considerably older. f) Provide complete citation for Platzer (journal?) and Stevens (volume?).

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS: a) the "thematic content analysis" mentioned on p. 7 is not described at all, so the reader does not know how this qualitative analysis was conducted. It should be described in detail so that the reader can determine how rigorous it was. In particular, was any effort spent on assuring reliability among those people doing this analysis? b) More examples in clients' own words would be exceedingly useful. I would suggest having several to illustrate each point. If possible, it would be important to note the age and sex of the therapist. It may be interesting in this regard to be sure to include verbatim comments from therapists who are among the oldest and among the youngest in the sample. c) I would like to have more discussion of several findings, such as the finding that more males are subject to reparative therapy.DISCRETIONARY
REVISIONS: The title is not entirely accurate. The study was not just about clients seeking "help about" their sexual orientation; it was about seeking professional assistance to change their sexual orientation. Please consider a different title.

Statistical analyses are acceptable.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.