Position Statement on Use of Stigma as a Political Tactic

Approved by the Board of Trustees, June 1990
Approved by the Assembly, May 1990
Reaffirmed, 2007

"Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and
Board of Trustees...These are...position statements that define
APA official policy on specific subjects..." – APA Operations
Manual.

In several instances in recent years, the fact that a political
candidate has consulted a psychiatrist at some time has
been exploited by the candidate’s opposition to undermine
public confidence in the candidate. This political tactic is,
to a significant extent, based on lack of knowledge and
understanding, a lack that has stigmatized people with
mental and emotional disorders for ages.

Mental and emotional disorders occur with wide
variety in degree of impairment and in duration, much as
physical illnesses do. Thus, in the complicated process of
assessing fitness for public office, psychiatric illness or
consultation or treatment should be evaluated realistically,
in the same way other medical illnesses or treatments are.
We consider it particularly unreasonable to hold a history
of consultation or treatment against anyone.

The American Psychiatric Association a) holds that a
history of mental illness, or consultation or treatment for
mental illness or mental distress, does not disqualify
qualified people from any political office and b) deplores
political tactics that discredit candidates by exploiting
misguided prejudices about psychiatric illness and
emotional distress.