

What is Reparative Therapy?

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It is neither! The term "reparative therapy" seems to be a catchall phrase for therapy intended to heal or prevent homosexuality. Its roots stem back to the work of a British theologian and self-proclaimed psychologist, Elizabeth Moberly. Moberly wrote a couple of books in the early 1980's that the early "ex-gay" movement found very intriguing. By far the most readable but not the easiest book was titled ***Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic***. Her "research" involved no subjects! She simply did an extensive literature review of the outdated works of Irving Bieber, Lawrence Hatterer, and Sigmund Freud and came up with a relatively minor reinterpretation of their findings.

Moberly, a proponent of psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories, moved away from Freud's emphasis on the "domineering mother" and focused on the effect of the "passive" or "distant" father. Moberly determined, by her reinterpretation, that the homosexual men in the studies were suffering from what she termed "defensive detachment" and "same sex ambivalence". The theory presumes that the young boy, for any of a variety of reasons, did not bond with his father in a meaningful way. Thus, the term "reparative" came into play. It is interesting to note that there is almost no attention paid to lesbianism or bisexuality in the literature put out by proponents of "reparative therapy".

Moberly saw homosexuality as a "reparative drive" to meet the heretofore-unmet needs of the child for love and bonding and thus "identification" with males. The theory continues to assume that the male child "defensively detaches" from relationships with boys out of self-protection, not wanting to experience another rejection. An attitude of false superiority develops and the homosexual male portrays himself as "better than" the boys. The assumption is the boy, in actuality, is feeling estranged and left out or left behind. At puberty, when the hormones start raging, the adolescent mistakenly identifies this longing for love and acceptance and sexualizes it.

It is assumed by reparative therapy proponents that a longing to find self-acceptance and self-identification as a "real man" fuels the perceived "promiscuity" of gay men. Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse, in her now out of print book, ***Homosexuality: A Symbolic Confusion*** went as far as to liken this "drive" to cannibalism. Cannibals, it is reported, eat only people they admire, hoping to take in the good traits of the deceased. The inference is that gay males are trying to "eat" or "consume" the perceived masculinity in their sexual partners. Thus, reparative therapy proponents attempt to help gay men find same sex love and bonding without eroticizing it. The theory, unsubstantiated, is that as the unmet love needs are met in "legitimate" ways, heterosexuality will emerge.

I liked Elizabeth Moberly. I was instrumental in bringing her over to the US to do conferences in Minneapolis and Seattle. She stayed with my wife and me. I learned that my good-natured teasing helped this shy, reserved woman to open up and allow her vulnerability and humanness to emerge. Very much an academic, she read her presentations word for word during an entire weekend long conference. She sounded intellectual and made quite a convincing case for "reparative therapy". When asked how many clients she had treated, she admitted she had seen none. When asked about her "research" she honestly reported she had done no new research. Elizabeth was a philosopher more than a psychologist. Her challenge at the

time was for "ex-gay" ministries to take her unsupported theory and implement it. And implement it we did!

Ex-gay leaders across the country flocked to hear her message. To us, it was new and refreshing; it took the emphasis off "sinful choices" and gave us some sort of explanation for how we came to be homosexual. Additionally, it seemed to offer a new ray of hope. To its credit, it took the emphasis off repression and sublimation and actually encouraged gay men to attempt to meet their "legitimate" needs for same sex love but always in "non-erotic" ways.

So-called professionals like Joseph Nicolosi and Charles Socoriades picked up the ball and ran with it. They started NARTH, the National Association for Recovery and Treatment of Homosexuality. They are prolific writers who have self published many official sounding "research" papers on recovery from homosexuality. What they have failed to substantiate is any reliable data to support the theory. Everything remains anecdotal, based on the self-report of people like me, who had everything to lose and nothing to gain by admitting they have not been "cured".

There are no studies in peer reviewed scientific journals that support the use of reparative therapies or attempts of any kind to cure homosexuality.

Many reasonable people ask, "What's the big deal, if it makes some people feel better and they believe in it?" This is a fair question. In fact, for many years after I left the "ex-gay" movement, I held a "live and let live" philosophy about it. In my own experience, most of the people who started trying to "go straight" ended up coming out and accepting themselves in the long run. The people I met were, for the most part, genuine, caring, and not heavy handed with guilt and shame. Many evangelical Christians, take a giant step in admitting they have homosexual feelings and seeking "help". To come out and risk the loss of love and respect from their entire system of support is, for many, beyond comprehension. Yet doing so appears to provide a middle ground where gay Christians can meet each other. As they genuinely "seek the truth", they eventually find the "ex-gay" movement to be a stepping stone to full self acceptance as evidenced by the huge number of "ex-ex-gays" we are seeing come forward.

I have decided to speak out forcefully about the "ex-gay" movement because there is a new and much more dangerous threat on the horizon. Huge organizations with hundreds of millions of dollars to spend have slowly started to "adopt" the "ex-gay" cause. James Dobson's ***Focus on the Family***, ***The Family Research Council*** and D. James Kennedy's ***Coral Ridge Ministries*** are the most visible. Homosexuality has been a "hot button" for many on the religious and political right since the founding of Jerry Falwell's now defunct Moral Majority in the 1980's. What has changed however, is that old tactics for pressing that button no longer work.

Falwell, Swaggert, and others of their ilk used to send out letters filled with ridiculous statements about homosexuals as "pedophiles" and "predators". They played on people's ignorance and fear. Using a parent's love and instinct to protect, they stirred up massive fear and repulsion by presenting false and distorted pictures of gay life in America. Out of this fear sprang millions of dollars in revenue for the religious and political right. However, thanks to the courage millions of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered individuals who have come out of the closet, these ridiculous stereotypes have been shattered. Now, statements like "God hates fags" are more likely to engender support and compassion for the GLBT community,

even from those on the far right. Too many people are now acquainted with their gay neighbors, workmates and family members to accept the "perverts" and "predators" lies.

A new "kinder and gentler" money making campaign of hate and intolerance is being launched. Using the unsubstantiated claims of the "ex-gays", megalithic organizations are trying to deny basic human rights protection to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. They are attempting to accomplish this by presenting homosexuality as a chosen lifestyle, one that "many" are choosing to leave. By reducing sexual orientation to a "choice", they are trying to build a case against gay rights, domestic partnership benefits and hate crimes legislation. Their twisted logic assumes that if people want to be "normal" and "fit it" they can. If they "choose" to run wild and deviate, they should not be afforded "special privileges". After all, smokers and drinkers are not afforded any special privileges, they have to accept responsibility for their choices and pay the piper if it does not work out. Why should it be any different for gays?

The "ex-gay" message was originally intended for Christians within the church. Now with big money backers, advocates are taking these "claims" of healing and change out into the world and in a big way. They have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars buying full page adds in major newspapers across the country. They have produced television commercials. In 2001, James Dobson started a road show. His "Love Won Out" conference is touring the country. From major city to major city, hundreds upon hundreds of people are drawn in to hear about ways to "respond to misinformation in the public school system, change public opinion and much more". Once again, he is capitalizing on the concerns of parents for youth at risk. Dobson's seminar is cleverly crafted using high quality handouts, great PowerPoint presentations, emotionally stirring testimonies and piles of official looking "studies" by authors with MD and Ph.D. behind their names.

The time for thinking that the ex-gay movement is benign is long past. Huge political wars being launched.

John Paulk and his ex-lesbian wife Ann, former poster children for the movement, loved the media hype and attention. They were featured on the cover of Newsweek magazine. They presented themselves as evidence that gays and lesbians can be cured. While in Chicago protesting the American Psychological Association's refusal to debate the merits of reparative therapy, they had their 4-year-old son carrying a sign that read, "I love my ex-gay parents". Paulk had no credentials to support his title of "homosexuality and gender specialist" for Focus on the Family's public policy division. He was deemed a "specialist" simply because he claimed to be healed.

In 2001, John Paulk was removed from his position as president of Exodus International. He later left Focus on the Family in shame after being photographed in a Washington D.C. gay bar. Tragically, it is common for ex-gay leaders to be used for media hype. They are later abandoned and silenced when they admit their claims of healing were bogus. This does not appear to cause the ex-gay political machine much concern. There are always new "ex-gays" in the pipeline waiting to jump into the spotlight to claim their *15 minutes of fame*.

It is the goal of the new "ex-gay movement" to influence public opinion, to spread their misinformation throughout the school system and to raise just enough doubt to sway legislators away from supporting equal rights, domestic

partnership and hate crimes legislation. I know I am repeating myself but I want to drive the point home. This is a serious situation. Unless school board members, administrators and lawmakers are equipped with accurate information presented scientifically, they are very likely to be taken in by the pseudo science of reparative therapy. It is my hope that each person reading this article will make five copies and get them into the hands of policy makers.

Reparative therapy will appear to make sense and sound reasonable to people who do not challenge the initial assumption that homosexuality is a disease or a complex.

Failure to challenge that assumption is the crux of the matter. If we were to start with a premise that heterosexuality is maladaptive, we could build elaborate theories that support our faulty presuppositions. How difficult would it be to make a case for a heterosexual pathology based on a theory that presupposes heterosexual men had insufficient bonding with their mothers? The adolescent dating and lifelong attraction to women would be a pathologic symbol of the male's lifelong quest to get back to his mother's breast and receive the nurturing and love he never received. It seems so obviously ridiculous; however, if centuries of ignorance and prejudice had embedded the notion that a male's attraction to a female was sick or immoral, we would probably latch onto the theory. It is easier to look for ways to support what we have always believed than to challenge ourselves and face the possibility that we may have been wrong.

It is not easy to admit that in the name of tradition or morality, we may have caused irreparable damage to generations of people. People went to incredible lengths to rid the world of witches in Salem, Massachusetts. How many wars, how many crusades and holocausts have there been in the name of truth? A simple look at history reminds us what a deadly combination religion mixed with unchallenged ideology can be.

It is critical to bring the debate about the place of reparative therapy in our schools back to the initial presuppositions. Why do we assume that sexual diversity is pathological? Why would we entertain inviting prejudice and bigotry to the table? Every major scientific association has gone on record warning of the potential dangers of reparative therapy. Why do we feel compelled to give it "equal time"? Neo-Nazi's are not invited in to share their "science" of white male supremacy in biology classes.

It is time to step up to the plate not only with compelling scientific data but also with a resounding "NO" to the continued acceptance and tolerance of homophobia. It can no longer be okay to hear "fag jokes" at the local comedy club. It can no longer be acceptable for children to use the phrase "you're so gay" in the halls and playgrounds of our schools.

Diversity is a vital and wonderful reality in creation. America's Founders established that all human beings are created equal and have inalienable rights to the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. We must not be willing to let the "powers that be" debate the merits of our existence by tolerating the proliferation of a political agenda disguised as science. We must become the voice. We must set a new standard. We must STEP UP!

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