

"The Negative Effects of Reparative Therapy"

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Notes from the presentation by John Sweet

John Sweet presented a movie produced by the Association of Gay and Lesbian Psychiatrists. The movie examined the harm done by "reparative" or "conversion" therapy. The title of the movie was "Abomination: Homosexuality and the Ex-gay Movement."

The movie examined the strategies used by the ex-gay movement, their success rate and finally the negative effects of reparative or conversion therapy.

Reparative or Conversion Therapy includes the following strategies:

1. Faith healing
2. Electric shock - as many as 40 sessions of electric shock treatments that leave burn marks.
3. Peer counseling
4. Praying
5. Camps - where pressure is exerted to change one's behavior; men are taught not to cross their legs when they sit down, men and women are taught how to talk, what words to use and how to dress.
6. Hypnosis

Position of the American Psychiatric Association

1. 1973 - removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and opposed all public and private discrimination against homosexuals in such areas as employment, housing, public accommodations and licensing.
2. 1998 - opposed any psychiatric treatment, such as "reparative" or "conversion" therapy, that is based on the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or is based on the a priori assumption that the patient should change his or her homosexual orientation.

Controversial Research

1. Researcher - Dr. Spitzer at Columbia University
2. Purpose of research - examine both benefits and potential harm of sexual conversion therapy
3. Sample - members of the Exodus (the Ex-Gay movement)
4. Interviews - phone interview to see if members of the Ex-Gay movement had benefited from this therapy
5. Findings from the 202 people interviewed
 - o 87% said that the therapy was unsuccessful

- 13% said that it was helpful (Of the 26 individuals that said it was helpful)
 - 1/3 said that they were "still struggling with their sexual orientation."
 - 1/3 said that they were "single and celibate."
 - 1/3 said that they were now "heterosexual." (It is interesting to note that this group who claim to be heterosexual are now employed by the Ex-Gay movement.)

Success Rate Among Ex-Gay Movement Leaders

1. The first ex-gay minister (1973) now says that conversion therapy doesn't work.
2. Mike Bussee and Gary Cooper, the founders of the ex-gay movement, fell in love with each other, divorced their wives, abandoned the ex-gay movement and formed a relationship with each other.
3. John Paulk, the poster boy for Exodus, was identified drinking and flirting at Mr. P's, a Washington, D.C. gay bar, on September 19, 2000. Because of this incident, he was removed from the International Board of Directors of Exodus.
4. Richard Cohen, who has been called the leading practitioner of conversion therapy, uses the strategy of cuddling his patients, an approach rejected even by NARTH, the conservative advisory committee on conversion therapy.
5. In summary, the leaders of the Ex-Gay movement and conversion therapy appear to raise doubts about the credibility of conversion therapy.

Harmful Effects of Conversion Therapy

1. **Suicide Attempts** - There have been numerous attempts at suicide in the aftermath of this therapy.
2. **Failed marriages and harm to children** - Gays and lesbians forced into dating the opposite sex, marriage and then children cause serious psychological harm to their spouses and their children when their marriages fail.
3. **Sexual dysfunction, addictive behavior and depression** - When gays and lesbians can't change, faith-based ministries demand celibacy. Suppression of sexual desire usually increases sexual "acting out" or high risk behavior - anonymous sex, binge drinking or use of drugs. These behaviors create strong feelings of guilt, a sense of failure and self blame. This can create a downward spiral leading to depression, loss of friends and social support.

The Central Characters in the Movie told four painful stories of their struggles with their sexual orientation

1. **Mother whose daughter committed suicide**
 - The mother was a member of a church which condemned gays and advocated conversion therapy.
 - Following her minister's advice, she put an enormous amount of pressure on her daughter to reject "her lesbian lifestyle."
 - This rejection from her own mother eventually led the daughter to commit suicide.
 - Her daughter's suicide caused the mother to reevaluate her church's teachings.
2. **Lesbian raised in a conservative religious environment where she internalized her church's homophobic teachings.**
 - She embraced conversion therapy when she was a young woman.
 - She said it took her 20 years to overcome this indoctrination and finally achieve a healthy self acceptance.
3. **Gay man who underwent conversion therapy at a young age**
 - He described how the conversion therapists tried to teach him how to dress, talk, walk, etc.
 - He said following these prescriptions created an enormous internal battle and sapped him of his energy.
 - He had to abandon his church and conversion therapy in order to lead a healthy and spiritual life.
4. **Gay man who underwent conversion therapy when he was middle aged**
 - He said that conversion therapy taught him to hate who he was.
 - In rejecting conversion therapy, he was able to love what he was not - a closeted and unhappy individual.

The Advice of Experts

1. **477,000 mental health professions state that being gay or lesbian is not a problem and that conversion therapy is generally harmful to those individuals forced by their family or social pressure into this therapy.**
2. **Professional therapists and interviews of LGBT individuals shows that what LGBT individuals want from their parents is for them to say "I love you and it's O.K. that you are gay." This strategy is the most effective and direct path to mental health for LGBT individuals.**