

FACULTY OPINIONS From Grove City College

"Thanks E.R., For Showing Us Sexual Orientation Can Change"

by Warren Throckmorton, PhD.

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Can gays become straight? Can straights become gay? Most mental health professionals would say no and those affiliated with the struggle for gay rights find the idea that sexual orientation is changeable repugnant. The recent Supreme Court decision repealing the Texas sodomy law came very close to declaring gays and lesbians a class of persons distinct from straights. However, not everyone is convinced.

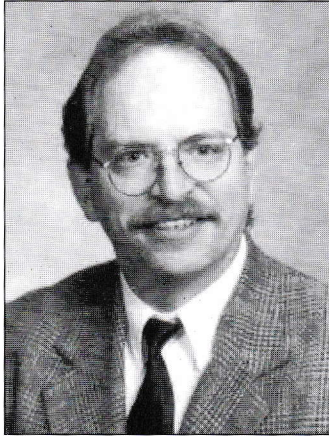
There are a substantial and growing number of individuals who say they've changed sexual orientation. Rarely, however are the lives of ex-gays described in the media. Most media portrayals of sexual orientation reinforce the conventional wisdom that gays and straights are different breeds of leopard, unable to change spots.

And so, surprisingly, those who believe gays can change have been getting some unrecognized support from an unlikely prime time media source. If you watch NBC, Thursday night at 10:00 p.m. EST, you have been watching the slow but clear transformation of *E.R.*'s Dr. Kerry Weaver, played by Laura Innes, from straight to gay.

Straight to gay? No I didn't get that backwards.

While once portrayed as clearly heterosexual, Dr. Weaver now is out as a lesbian. How does this support the potential that gays can change? Well, if sexual orientation is unchangeable, then the whole premise of this character during the last couple of seasons is ludicrous. And if straights can become gay then certainly the shift can occur the other way around.

Let's review. Veteran *ER* watchers will recall the episode when Kerry passionately greeted an African gentleman in the emergency room during the holiday episode, 'A Miracle Happens Here.' "Mlungisi," as Kerry called him, was enough of an old flame that she cancelled her plans to work the Christmas shift to spend time with him. When asked later about the visitor, Dr. Weaver replied wistfully, 'I had a farm in Africa...' parroting Meryl Streep's famous line in the movie *Out of Africa*.



Warren Throckmorton, Ph.D.

In season four, Kerry was romantically linked to character Ellis West. Although Dr. Weaver is one of the most mysterious characters on the show, she revealed in the seventh season that she had been married previously and apparently briefly to another doctor. And when first approached by lesbian psychiatrist Kim Legaspi about what seemed to Legaspi as sexual sparks flying, Kerry apologized for the confusion, saying she was straight.

Perhaps wanting to ignite a few cultural sparks, the writers of *ER* decided, in that seventh season, that Dr. Weaver would indeed finally fall in love with Dr. Legaspi, and a torrid affair ensued. This relationship ended, however, when Kerry decided she wanted a relationship "and not a lifestyle."

Somewhere in this transition, *E.R.*'s creators accurately depicted the ambivalence felt by many people experiencing sexual identity reconstruction. The issue for many real life changers is not so much declaring a political position but rather struggling with real human feelings that are often quite confusing and, yes, changeable. However, the gaying of Dr. Weaver did not stop there. She eventually met her current girlfriend, Sandy Lopez, and went from being out mainly to herself, to being out at work in a very short period. Lopez, an activist figure, socializes Dr. Weaver into the right way to be a lesbian: out and proud.

There you have it. *E.R.*'s writers have transformed Kerry Weaver from a woman who once sought opposite-sex partners to a fully out lesbian in a committed same-sex relationship. So the next time experts tell you sexual orientation is inborn and unchangeable, you just tell them to tune in on Thursday nights at 10:00 p.m. to watch ex-straight, Dr. Kerry Weaver.

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