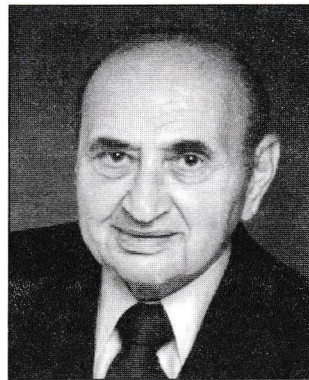


Work of Bieber, Socarides and its Relevance in the Debate on the Paraphilias

By Linda Ames Nicolosi

In 1987, a paper was published by psychoanalyst Irving Bieber, entitled "On Arriving at the American Psychiatric Association Decision on Homosexuality." That paper casts an illuminating light on a debate taking place today: the recent discussion at the American Psychiatric Association Conference about whether or not the paraphilias should still be considered mental illnesses.

Irving Bieber was one of the key participants in the historical debate which culminated in the 1973 decision to remove homosexuality from the psychiatric manual.



Irving Bieber, M.D.

The Revised Standard for Mental Illness

In that paper, Bieber describes psychiatry's shift to an "adaptational" perspective of normality. At the time he wrote his paper, the diagnostic manual was in the process of severing itself from established clinical theory, Bieber notes, particularly psychoanalytic theories of unconscious motivation. The new DSM criteria for mental illness required instead that substantial "distress, disability and disadvantage" be characteristic of a particular psychological condition for the condition to be considered disordered.

On first consideration, Bieber argues, the new criteria sound plausible. However, he observes, we see its startling consequences when we apply it to a condition such as pedophilia. If a pedophile is happy and otherwise well-functioning, then would he be "normal"? No, Dr. Bieber argues, because psychopathology can be ego-syntonic and therefore not cause distress. Furthermore, he noted, social effectiveness—that is, the ability to maintain positive social

relations and perform work effectively—may coexist with severe psychopathology.

Social-Values Shift Affects Understanding of Psychopathology

In his 1987 paper, Dr. Bieber described the deletion of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic and statistical manual as "climax of a sociopolitical struggle involving what were deemed to be the rights of homosexuals."

Many observers have noted that our cultural shift toward moral relativism has caused Americans to dislike making evaluative distinctions. There is a reluctance to promote any vision of what it means to be fully human, or to claim to know anything about the nature of a healthy sexuality, the best family forms for raising children or even the nature of good character. Legal scholar Robert Bork believes that this reluctance to make distinctions may be an inevitable consequence of a democratic political philosophy carried to the extreme, while simultaneously coming untethered from its moral roots. When our democracy began to lose its grounding in self-restraint and responsibility-----that is, the foundational values of its Judeo-Christian cultural heritage ---then a new political philosophy began to emerge which placed freedom and self-expression, *not a search for some concept of the truth about human nature*, at the top of its values hierarchy.

Defining Homosexuality

Bieber freely admitted to the difficulty of putting homosexuality in an appropriate category: Is it a developmental

arrest, or an illness? Is it a constitutional disorder, a genetic misprint, a habit? Through his longterm research on the subject, he concludes that homosexuality is not a normal sexual adaptation.

In support of this conclusion, describes in detail the well-known research study he conducted in 1962, involving a 500-item questionnaire and 106 male homosexuals, with a comparison group of 100 male heterosexuals.

Mothers. In that study, Bieber found a close-binding, intimate mother who tended to interfere with her son's assertiveness, and who tended to dislocate his relationship with the father, siblings, and peers. However, he also observed that homosexuality can develop without the close-binding-intimate, mother-son bond.

Fathers. But the most significant finding of the Bieber study was that of the detached father. "The father-son relationship was almost the diametrical opposite of that between mother and son. The paternal portrait was one of a father who was either detached or covertly or overtly hostile," he reported. While there was some variance in the mother-son relationship, Dr. Bieber reported,

"The father-son relationship, however, revealed uniformly an absence of loving, warm, constructive paternal attitudes and behavior. In my long experience, I have not found a single case where, in the developing years, a father had a kind, affectionate, and constructive relationship with the son who becomes homosexual. This has been an unvarying finding. It is my view, ... that if a father has a kind, affectionate, and constructive relationship with his son, he will not produce a homosexual son, no matter what the mother is like."

Same-Sex Peers. Dr. Bieber's study in fact found a continuity of poor relationships with males, beginning with the father, older brothers, and same-sex peers in childhood. He concludes,

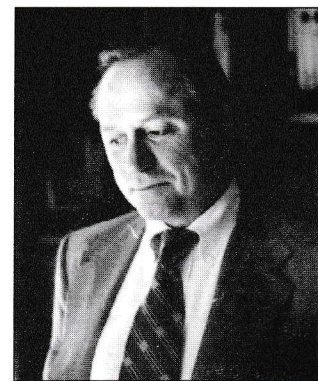
"The consistent history of unremitting fear of and hostility to other males throughout childhood has led me to conclude that male homosexuality is basically an adaptation to a disorder of a man's relationship with other men."

Of the 106 homosexuals who started psychoanalytic therapy, 29 changed to exclusively heterosexuality, which represented 27 percent of Bieber's total sample.

Socarides Adds to the Critique of the "Adaptational" View of Mental Illness

Charles Socarides also argued against the "adaptational" definition for mental illness in a review he wrote several years ago describing Robert Stoller's book, *Pain And*

Passion: A Psychoanalyst Explores The World Of S&M.



Charles Socarides, M.D.

In his book, Stoller acknowledged the psychodynamic causes of sadomasochism, and then described practices, utensils, and bodily parts used in sadomasochistic performances. He offered a six-page listing of the various methods used to inflict pain and humiliation on willing victims, including the different hanging techniques used to achieve orgasmic ecstasy.

"Sadomasochism Not Abnormal"?

But then, Stoller claimed that sadomasochism was simply a matter of personal sexual taste—no more psychologically abnormal than "dislike of zucchini." He asserted that only our "deep prejudices" about what we think of as "sexual perversion" lead us to label it abnormal.

Socarides responded that Stoller had failed to propose an adequate understanding of pathology; for we must take into account the unconscious processes that drive a behavior. Otherwise, he explains, we not only "render chaotic" our understanding of unconscious psychodynamics, but we grossly distort the interrelationship between anatomy and psychosexual identity.

The New Psychiatric Diagnostic Criteria, Bieber Agrees, Are Inadequate

In arguing for the normality of homosexuality in 1973, the Psychiatric Association pointed to the excellent occupational performance and good social adjustment of many homosexuals as evidence of the normalcy of homosexuality. (Note: the same arguments were recently made in the May 2003 symposium at the American Psychiatric Association conference by those in favor of normalizing pedophilia and the other paraphilias; see our cover story).

But good performance at work and seemingly normal social adjustment does not, Dr. Bieber countered, exclude the presence of psychopathology. Psychopathology is not, he notes, invariably accompanied by adjustment problems; therefore, those criteria are inadequate to identify a psychological disorder.

When the A.P.A. was considering normalizing homosexuality, a task force was set up to study the condition, but the members chosen, Bieber says, included not a single psychiatrist who held the view that homosexuality was not a normal adaptation. To reinforce their demands, gay activists held demonstrations at scientific meetings, which increased the pressure on the Psychiatric Association.

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Should Gender Identity Disorder Be Normalized?

Will preventive therapy for homosexuality be prohibited, Dr. Bieber asked in 1987, when homosexuality is normalized? His musings may have been prescient, for at its most recent meeting, the American Psychiatric Association considered the possible removal of childhood gender-identity disorder from the diagnostic manual. Gay activists have long argued that childhood gender nonconformity is a healthy precursor to adult homosexuality.

Bieber vs. Spitzer, 1973— But Spitzer Modifies Views in 2003

Back in 1973, during the APA debate about homosexuality, Robert Spitzer responded to Bieber that the paraphilias should perhaps also be removed from the *DSM-II* — and that

if the sadists and fetishists were to organize as did the gay activists, they, too, might find their conditions normalized.

Yet, ironically, thirty years later in 2003, Spitzer changed his mind. It was Dr. Spitzer who argued for the retention of those conditions in the DSM at the 2003 A.P.A. meeting.

References:

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