

## Spitzer Study Stirs Further Debate Over Reorientation Therapy

*Some gay activists claim that the Spitzer study will cause harm.  
Censorship efforts were made by some, prior to publication, within the academic community.*

By Roy Waller

The *London Times* joined the now-international controversy that followed in the wake of publication of Dr. Robert Spitzer's study.

That study, published in the October 2003 issue of the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, surveyed 200 people who said they had made a significant change in sexual orientation. The study's findings supported the contention that homosexuality is not necessarily "who a person is," but is instead a psychological condition that can be modified.

The data collected by Spitzer, who is a psychiatrist on the staff at Columbia University, showed that of the sample studied, 78% of men and 95% of the men reported changes in their sexual self-identification, ranging from a result of "predominantly heterosexual" to "exclusively heterosexual."

Dr. Spitzer—who was instrumental in the removal of homosexuality from the official list of mental disorders in 1973—admitted that he knew his study would be greeted with strong reactions from both camps in the homosexuality debate. Gay activists, he said, would see his findings as threatening, while those who see homosexuality as outside of the sexual norm would be delighted. According to the piece appearing in the October 3, 2003 edition of the *London Times*, his predication proved accurate.

Among those adding their voices to the debate in the

*London Times* were Lawrence Hartmann, Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard University who, along with British gay activist Peter Tatchell, spoke strongly against reparative therapy. "The paper was...likely to cause harm," stated Hartmann, while Tatchell claimed that those people he knew in the gay community who had tried reparative therapy reported that it "failed to convert them to heterosexuality."

Dr. Spitzer himself has said that while complete change (the absence of any remaining attractions) appears to be rare, it is necessary to ensure the right of any individual to have such therapy at their disposal as an alternative to continuing in a homosexual lifestyle.

Addressing the controversy from the standpoint of academic freedom was psychologist Kenneth Zucker, editor of *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. In the *Times* article, Zucker said that he was disappointed that those colleagues who disagreed with reparative therapy had attempted to censor publication of Spitzer's opposing point of view. Such academic journals, he stressed, are in fact the proper places for open discussion of controversial issues, not censorship.

NARTH member A. Dean Byrd of the University of Utah School of Medicine also emphasized the need for open debate as well as equal rights for all concerned. "A commitment to the basic civil rights of gays and lesbians," Byrd noted, "does not require a belief in the false notion that homosexuality is fixed in all people." ■

***Important Date: November 12-14, 2004***

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