

## "Dr. Laura" Interviews Psychiatric Association's Robert Spitzer

Excerpt of Dr. Laura Schlessinger's Radio Show, January 21, 2000. (Published courtesy of the Dr. Laura Show—not for reproduction—partial transcript of the original.)

*"I'm convinced from people I have interviewed, that for many of them, they have made substantial changes toward becoming heterosexual...I think that's news."*

*"I came to this study skeptical. I now claim that these changes can be sustained."*

*"I agree that a homosexual who is not able to be aroused heterosexually...I think, implicitly, there is something not working."*

—Robert Spitzer, M.D.

A major network news magazine program [ABC 20/20] is going to break a story in about two weeks, but I'm breaking it here today.

I'm going to read [something] to you, from the *Washington Times*, July 5, 1994, by psychiatrist Charles Socarides, and it leads right up to the point of the breaking news. He wrote:

"A significant portion of society today is of the belief that homosexuality is a normal form of sexual behavior, different from but equal to that of heterosexuality. Many religious leaders, public officials, educators, social and mental health agencies, including those at the highest level of government, Departments of Psychiatric, Psychology, and Mental Health Clinics, have been taken in," he writes, "by a widespread sexual egalitarianism, and by accusations of being undemocratic or prejudiced if they do not accept certain assertions thrust upon them, as if deprived of all intellectual capacity to judge and reason. This revolutionary change in our sexual mores and customs has been ushered in by a single act of considerable consequence—the removal of homosexuality from the category of aberrancy by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973."

He writes, "This act was naively perceived by many psychiatrists as the simple elimination of a scientific diagnosis in order to correct injustices. In reality though, it created injustices for the homosexual and his family...and prevented the homosexual from seeking and receiving help."

That is Dr. Charles Socarides, psychiatrist of immeasurable note, at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. It leads me up



Dr. Laura Schlessinger

to a conversation I had this morning with a gentleman, and if you are anywhere near involved in the history and the study of homosexuality, and therapy therein, and the declassification of it as a disorder, you will know the name Dr. Robert Spitzer.

I had an hour's discussion with him this morning because he has changed his position on reparative...but he calls it reorientation, therapy.

I want to just read you some... let me tell you, I didn't get through college and graduate school not being able to write fast, and fortunately Dr. Spitzer, a learned and patient man, speaks very slowly, so between his slow cadence and my faster-than-the-speed-of-light handwriting, I think I have just about a quote.

He said, "I was at the center of the 1973 decision and essentially that decision had to do, not with the treatment of homosexuals, but whether homosexuality was a mental disorder," which the issue of disorder is a naivete that we argued about. He said,

*"In the 1973 decision—I happened to look at what I wrote back then, and one of the things that we said there, was that by saying homosexuality was not a mental disorder, we were not saying that it was necessarily a normal variant."*

Side bar [from Dr. Laura]: I believe, and it has been said to me by a number of experts in this area, both psychiatrists and psychologists, that they see this man as basically an incredibly empathetic, sympathetic man. In 1973 evidently Dr. Spitzer was confronted by gay activists, complaining about the prejudices in society against them, and how hurtful that was. After talking to this guy for an hour, I can tell you he is a warm soul. I think he believed that having a vote and normalizing and just changing the classification would somehow minimize social discrimination. In other words, from a lot of people's opinions and from mine, and the research I have done, he had a big heart. He didn't like that there were taunts and unkind words and thoughts, so the thinking is, well, "Gee, if we just take it off [the diagnostic manual] here, that will all stop."

Sadly, the picture is bigger than that. Evidently about a year ago, ex-gays were picketing an American Psychiatric Association meeting, because as you know, the psycholo-

*continued on next page*

gists and psychiatrists, the gay activists therein, have been pressuring to make sure there shall be no therapy for homosexuals who wish to change, calling it unethical. Well, I'm going to read you what has happened to him [Dr. Spitzer] in the last quarter of a century. He said,

"At this time I am involved in a study where we look at people who feel they have benefited from some kind of reorientation therapy, and at least **I'm convinced from people I have interviewed, that for many of them they have made substantial changes toward becoming heterosexual...I think that's news.**"

Some of these individuals, he said...and he's interviewed so far, 26 women and 20 men...many of them have seen mental-health professionals, psychiatrists, psychologists, marital family therapy. Some of them have been in ex-gay ministries, support groups. There's no single therapy that's been studied.

He said,

"I think almost all of them have made some change, and some very substantial, and many changes that have been sustained over many years. I think the issue is, these are all people who very firmly believe in this therapy and want other people to know it's successful, and that's why they are participating in the study."

He defended his study a little bit later by saying,

"One of the things that's unique about this study, is that I think it's the first time that people other than the people who go to therapy, are involved in the assessment. I came to this study skeptical. **I now claim that these changes can be sustained.**"

Now he has organized a debate on sexual reorientation therapy that's going to take place at the next American Psychiatric meeting in Chicago. I asked him who was going to debate the so-called "pro-reparative therapy" side. He said "A Dr. Warren Throckmorton, counselor, and Gerald Zuriff, a psychologist." He said he'd be the moderator and he will not say his own views at the time, but everybody, of course, as of this moment knows them.

I asked if Throckmorton and Zuriff have conducted in this kind of therapy. He said, "Throckmorton has himself, but Zuriff is talking about ethical issues." I said, "What are the ethical issues?" He said, "Well the ethical issue is that many gay activists feel that many people have been harmed by this kind of therapy." He said, "I'm quite sure that many people have been harmed, and left therapy feeling disappointed in themselves and full of self-hate."

I came back at him with the following: "Raise your hands out there, how many of you have gone to a medical doctor for some ache or pain or problem, and have not gotten helped? How many of you have gone to six doctors and not gotten diagnosed properly?"

Let's talk to Montel. What was it, 20 years before he was diagnosed [accurately, with MS]? There is something *new* about the fact that you can go in for a medical or psychiatric or psychological or marital therapy and it not work? That is a specious argument that holds no weight. There is no therapy without at least a 50 percent failure rate if not more, period. That is just the truth.

We argued that, and he said, "I agree with you." He says, "What's interesting is that we've had this controversy about reparative therapy for, how many years now? At least 30. No one on this side..." — now listen to this damning statement, and remember this guy doesn't want to declassify [homosexuality as a disorder] ...He's saying on the one hand that it is not a disorder, on the other hand people who want to become straight should get therapy. I asked him how you treat people who are not disordered, and it got a little odd after that, I must tell you.

He said, "No one on the side of those who are skeptical has taken the time to try to interview these people and see what changes are present. That's what's unique about my study. All the critics," he says...and he was a skeptic!... "have not been honest and taken the time to do the research, because it's just politics."

That from the man who is at the center, with respect to...we went back and forth for a long time, and to be honest, he really didn't want to discuss homosexuality as a disorder...he finally, at the end, I think I wore the poor man down...very nice man, I've got to tell you...very nice, very intelligent, very sincere. He said,

"I agree that a homosexual who is not able to be aroused heterosexually—well I think, implicitly, **there is something not working.**"

The question is, what is the extent of the harm of that? The judgment that he has, is that it's not a harm sufficient to label all homosexuality as a disorder.

I said, "Sir, with all due respect, what the heck does that mean?" And I think what it means is that he as in so many decent people have responded so passionately and pathetically, hearts rendering about social injustice against gays and lesbians, that he's willing to be unscientific. But at least not in the form of reparative therapy, and I told him that I gave him a lot of points for intellectual honesty, and for compassion to help people who are in pain and who want to change. That's where his heart is always at, with the pain.

But when our compassion gets in the way of science, I think we end up doing more harm than good, as you can see what's come. Now he has to fight a battle to try to help homosexuals who wish to change, and he is going to be viciously attacked by the very people who hailed him as a hero in 1973.

That takes guts! ■