

NARTH BULLETIN

On November 12 and 13, NARTH held its annual conference in Salt Lake City, and this year there were no protesters to mar the event. The meeting was hosted by Evergreen International, a support group for men and women transitioning out of homosexuality. Approximately eighty individuals attended, most of whom were psychotherapists.

On the first morning, Charles Socarides, M.D. and Joseph Nicolosi, Ph.D. described the complementary concepts of "reparative" versus "reconstructive" therapy. Both agreed that new techniques must be developed in order to shorten the therapeutic process. Reparative therapy takes about two years, while reconstructive (psychoanalytic) therapy commonly takes much longer. Dr. Nicolosi described a new therapeutic area he considers very important—"grief work," which investigates the deep, sometimes agonizing wounds inflicted when the child grew up in a narcissistic family relationship that required the surrender of his or her authentic identity as male or female.

Next, Jeffrey Robinson, Ph.D. presented a particularly lively and engrossing discussion on the meaning of change for the homosexual client.

During lunch, Utah Psychological Association past president Brent Scharman, Ph.D. spoke about his new awareness that effective treatment is available.

Dr. Scharman said he had once thought homosexuality to be biologically rooted and immutable, but through information provided by

Lively Speakers, No Protesters at NARTH'S 1999 Conference

NARTH Scientific Advisory Board member A. Dean Byrd, Ph.D., he has come to see an important new perspective of the issue.

Another luncheon speaker was Rabbi Sam Rosenberg, L.C.S.W., who told NARTH members about the new--and first of its kind--group he has formed to support Jewish men and women transitioning out of homosexuality (*see page 8, this issue*).

Psychoanalyst Loretta Loeb, M.D., related a harrowing experience answering ethics charges by a state mental-health association. Dr. Loeb had made a public statement which implied that homosexuality was a treatable condition. (After a lawyer successfully defended her right to express this opinion, the association agreed to drop the charges.) During the luncheon, Dr. Loeb also received the 1999 Sigmund Freud award.

In the afternoon the audience heard from Richard Cohen, M.A., and Dan Gray, L.C.S.W., who described techniques they use in their practices. Dan Gray is Clinical Director of a Sexual Trauma and Discovery Program; David Matheson is in private practice and co-author of a book for homosexual strugglers; and Richard Cohen is an author and psychotherapist who lectures across

the country on homosexuality.

Then Dr. Lynn Wardle, a prominent Brigham Young University law professor, delivered a compelling discussion of legal debates regarding same-sex marriage and reparative therapy, and described gay-activist attempts to prohibit sexual-reorientation treatment.

"As one of the few legal experts who has been closely following these legal developments," said NARTH's Joseph Nicolosi, "Dr. Wardle brilliantly dissected the arguments that seek to prohibit reparative therapy and allow same-sex marriage. NARTH members must publish papers to advocate reparative therapy, he said, because such publications are taken very seriously by the courts---a fact well known by gay activists, but neglected by those of us on the other side, who know such therapy is effective and valuable."

Unless therapists from NARTH's perspective speak up to object to restrictions on the client's right to choose, Dr. Wardle emphasized, they could eventually lose the right to conduct such therapy.

On the second day of the conference, a group of ex-gay men and ex-lesbians offered sometimes emotionally wrenching testimony of childhood pain and alienation. Some of the women reported families made chaotic by alcoholism, and others described mothers and fathers who did not affirm their daughters' authentic feminine identities--either through emotional neglect, or the requirement that they fashion their

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feminine identities in a way that reflected their mothers' narcissistic needs. For one woman, this meant the expectation that she express no opinions and develop no autonomous identity. In adulthood, she still held onto an intense and primal need for feminine nurturance, and therefore felt powerfully drawn to women, even though the relationships were emotionally dependent and destructive.

Another woman said she felt her mother's expectation to surrender her emotional and spontaneous self to take on a stylized form of femininity which was her mother's false construct for her. She rejected this false construct as "not me," but along with it, also rejected the feminine nature which would have been natural to her—one rooted in earthiness, emotionality and spontaneity. After many years in the lesbian community, she came to see that "something in my soul was lost"—that she carried a deep "feminine wound." She is now married and a mother.

All the women said that when they made the decision to come out of lesbianism, they finally experienced themselves as beginning to live genuinely.

The men offered similarly emotional testimonies, typically describing the lifelong alienation from their fathers and male peers, followed by driven, addictive lifestyles of promiscuity and unhappiness. As Richard Cohen said, "The gay lifestyle is anything but gay."

Ex-gay presenter Mike Haley of Focus on the Family described his seventeen years in a gay lifestyle, followed by a profound change which allowed him to leave the lifestyle and marry. He said that for men who have spent many years in gay relationships, change should bring a deep-seated shift in self perception, a leap in self-insight, and same-sex emotional needs will be more fully met -- but there may always be some sexual responsiveness from those earlier years which cannot be simply "erased."

Psychotherapist Richard Cohen, M.A. offered moving personal testimony describing his childhood enmeshment with his mother, alienation from his father and male peers, and the trauma of molestation by an uncle, which sent him the message, "If you want affection from males, you must have sex with them." After some years in a gay lifestyle, he eventually discovered that "The man I was looking for was not 'out there'—he was me."

In a discussion of his therapeutic concepts and techniques, Mr. Cohen provided a fast-paced, easy-to-understand discussion supplemented with audio-visual aids and psychodrama in a format which he currently offers at training workshops around the country.

Many of the conference attendees agreed that this year's meeting was NARTH's best to date, as it featured speakers whose lively, sometimes off-the-cuff presentations captured audience attention and permitted a high level of audience interaction. ■