

My Experience on the Roseanne Show

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Recently, I was called by the Roseanne Show to speak about reparative therapy. I am by no means a "big name" in this field, but I was excited at the prospect of speaking on behalf of a rarely-heard position. Nonetheless, I knew that this would not be a dispassionate scientific discussion. Indeed, I expected that this show could degenerate into a circus.

I was wrong. It wasn't a circus. It was a zoo. Stage left was occupied by the gay-activist side. On stage right sat Anthony Falzarano (ex-gay Christian speaker) and myself. The audience was similarly divided.

The show began with Anthony Falzarano telling his story. He said he had been walking down the street when the Almighty intruded on his thoughts; he believes he was warned by God to leave the gay life or die of AIDS. The gay audience members berated Anthony for having said this, implying that he is a self-hating homophobe. A gay man in the audience told him that he felt like Anthony was "raping his mind."

If you asked people who know me if I am shy or verbally inhibited they'd deny this—after they finished laughing. I am neither—in spades! Nonetheless, opportunities to speak on the Roseanne show were few and far between. I had decided ahead of time to subdue my typical "aggressive" style. But the pace was pretty hectic and it was almost impossible to break in and be heard. At one point, during a commercial break, I said to Roseanne, "It's not enough to be articulate; to be heard here, one must be rude." She smiled at me (she has lovely teeth) and said, "Jump right in!"

It seemed to me that if I "jumped right in" I'd be seen as rude and hostile—the very essence of the "homophobic" image the gay activists were so eager to malign me with. But if I didn't jump in, then I forfeited the chance to be heard.

Roseanne finally asked me to define reparative therapy. I told her it was difficult to translate all that psychoanalytic mumbo-jumbo into a few pat phrases, but I'd try. I thought for a moment and said, "Reparative therapy seeks to help the gay man feel more like a man on the inside, so that he will not have to take in a man from the outside."

Now here's the really interesting thing. To the best of my recollection, the gay members of the audience and the panel were silent after I said this. On some deep level, I think, they knew what I had said was true—so much so that they became silent. In confirmation, the ex-gay members of the audience and panel jumped in to say that his fit their own experience exactly.

At some point during the show, Anthony used the term "gay lifestyle." This led to an instant uproar on the part of the gay audience members. They yelled, "Define gay lifestyle; define straight lifestyle!" In retrospect, I wish I had said that one of the predominant characteristics of a gay lifestyle is extraordinary promiscuity. I'm sure that if I had said this it would have led to another argument and more cries of homophobia.

But here's the ironic thing. After the show, I was sitting in the Green Room at a table enjoying a well-prepared lunch. Two gay men from the audience approached me and asked if they could join me. I invited them to sit with me, and shortly afterwards, Anthony Falzarano joined us. A pleasant and amicable conversation ensued.

During the conversation, Anthony mentioned that he had lived in Boston during a specific time period. One of the gay men added that he had also lived in Boston during that time. The other gay man said, "Oh, then you must have slept together," and laughed. The first gay man added with a smile, "Yes, then we must have had sex." Anthony looked puzzled.

Not fifteen minutes earlier I had refrained from mentioning the promiscuity so common to gay life, and here was implicit (albeit anecdotal) confirmation. I couldn't possibly imagine saying the same thing to a woman I'd just met under similar circumstances. Even if I thought it, I wouldn't say it. And certainly—even during my most immature, sexually acting out years—I was never so promiscuous that I lost track of who my sexual partners were. And certainly, my wife certainly would never have said, nor even thought of saying such a thing about her single years.

And in fact they were making a joke about something they knew to be true about themselves. But they were joking about something that is not funny. It certainly is not funny that promiscuity is a major risk factor in the high rate of serious and fatal diseases from which gay men suffer. And it's not funny that gay promiscuity is an implicit sign of the inherently unfulfilling nature of homosexuality.

I saw this same cynical humor displayed by one of the same gay men some moments later. We had gotten to talking about the higher rate of molestation in the childhood histories of gay men, as compared to heterosexuals. He replied that he never had been molested—then added whimsically that he "felt deprived."

At a different point in the conversation, this same man told me that it would be impossible for a gay man to have any-

thing but a shame-based motive for entering into reparative therapy. In other words, he was saying that it isn't possible that there could exist *any valid motives* for a homosexual man to want to change.

This position, which I think is the position of the larger gay-rights movement, is alarming because it shows contempt for others' stated convictions and motives. We hear it many times in the form of "His claim of heterosexuality is a self-deluding sham—he'll soon be back with us in the gay community," and "Reparative therapy should be made illegal, because those therapists are just taking advantage of the homophobia of self-hating people." Such an attitude implies contempt for the sincerely-held convictions of others, and is the breeding ground for a totalitarian control of the psychological profession.

If I step back and think about what I witnessed, I can see that this self-contempt and cynical sense of humor are really a defense against pain. Thinking about this helps me put things in perspective. I so often feel angry about the dishonesty, political spinning, and outright McCarthyism which gay activists infuse into this debate that, I confess, I lose sight of the people and of the cost in human suffering and life. Only people who are suffering make jokes about doing things which degrade them, do not fulfill them, and can even kill them.

This needs to be our focus. We are not the bedroom police; we are motivated to help people. The term "gay lifestyle" is, I believe, the ultimate misnomer. From what I have seen, it is neither gay, nor is it life.