

Strategies in Promoting the Right to Treatment: Why the A.P.A.'s Stance Cannot Prevail

by Dale O'Leary

We live in an age when the majority of people hold to a "rights"-based philosophy which refuses to acknowledge any intrinsic human nature, and denies that there are any limitations imposed by that nature.

As a result, people react negatively to words like tradition, truth, and natural order. But they do support the idea of "rights."

Therefore, we, too, need to make our argument within the same framework---speaking less of what is healthy, normal, natural, and so on, and more of a person's "right" to choose therapy---even when we believe there is much more to the issue than a simple matter of the "right" to follow a chosen destiny.

Of course, gay activists also have an idea of what is healthy, natural and normal---from a gay perspective---which is why they so vigorously oppose reorientation therapy. But they have managed to present their perspective as a matter of "rights," and ours as being one of imposing limitations---that is, we are "against rights."

So we, too, must argue our case within that framework of rights. People have the "right" to know that therapy is available, and the "right" to choose a therapy which is respectful of their religious and moral convictions.

Why is Sex-Change Surgery Approved, But Not Reorientation Therapy?

We can also point to this irony: the same professional organizations which oppose the individual's right to grow into his heterosexual potential (because the person is "really" homosexual and can't change) contradictorily support *sex-change surgery* (they say such a man is "really" female and *can* change). When a man feels like he is a woman trapped in a man's body, mental-health professionals validate his effort to mutilate his genitals in order to make them match his inner feelings.

Even though genital mutilation and hormone therapy often do not succeed in alleviating the client's gender confusion--and can never change the fact that every cell in the man's mutilated body remains indelibly marked as male--the men-

tal-health profession does not protest this surgical attempt at transition.

So if the transgender man says he really feels like a woman, the profession will help him change. But if a client is convinced, in his core being, that he is really heterosexual and not gay in spite of his same-sex attractions, why can he not have help to follow his destiny?

Why Should Therapy Be Available?

Homosexual men and women may choose reorientation therapy for a variety of reasons. They may belong to a religion that regards same sex activity as a sin. They may have found a homosexual lifestyle unfulfilling, unstable and sexually addictive. They may wish to marry and have children. Given that a high proportion of men who have sex with men, according to epidemiologists, will be come infected with HIV or another potentially fatal disease such as hepatitis or anal cancer, they may very likely wish to protect their health.

Why shouldn't they be informed about the various forms of therapy available, and the potential for success? For one reason: because gay activists know that information about therapeutic success will undercut their public claim that a homosexual orientation is inborn and unchangeable.

Gay activists who oppose therapy say that their ultimate goal is the destruction of "heterosexism," defined as social attitudes which favor the sexual union of men and women. In pursuit of a non-heterosexist, non-gender-polarized world, they are sacrificing the rights of individuals who want release from homosexuality.

Who is in the forefront of an anti-therapy movement? A vocal group of gay activists who have great influence in the professional organizations, in particular the American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association. These takeovers were effected by subtle threat, demonstrations, intimidation, the shouting down of opponents, and the misuse of research.

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In his book *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis*, Ronald Bayer provides a clear account of the politics behind the decision to remove homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. Bayer's book is a must-read for those who are involved in this issue.

Bayer, it should be noted, *supports* the normalization of homosexuality. But his book is important because he reveals on what basis homosexuality was normalized. He wrote:

"The result was not a conclusion based on an approximation of the scientific truth as dictated by reason, but was instead an action demanded by the ideological temper of the times."

In making our public argument, we must stress that homosexually attracted men and women have every right to live a gay lifestyle. But we, in turn, have a duty to protect those

who want therapy.

Secular Therapy Must Also Remain Available

If the time comes when therapy to change a person's pattern of sexual attraction is only available from religious support groups, then men and women who are not religious will be denied the help they seek. Therefore, the right to secular therapy for same-sex attraction must also be defended.

The public needs to be reminded that the American Psychological Association is not values-neutral. In fact, its values may be very far from those of most of the American public. The Psychological Association, for example, was recently censured by Congress for publishing an article which offered some support for pedophilia; and Kinsey, one of the A.P.A.'s most-quoted researchers, protected pedophiles while conducting his research.

NARTH Therapists: Stay Connected on the Internet!

An e-mail discussion group is now available to NARTH members. At this time, the list is available only to NARTH's full members with clinical credentials, who are on our referral list.

The listserv has two primary functions:

- 1) to serve as a resource and means of informal consultation for clinicians doing reparative therapy with individuals experiencing same-sex attraction, and**
- 2) to serve as a forum for general questions and thoughts among the membership.**

To subscribe, please send an e-mail to MembersL-request@narth.com Type your name in the body of the e-mail so we can confirm your eligibility. You will receive a welcome message to indicate that you have been added to the list.

THE NARTH BULLETIN

Editor: LINDA AMES NICOLOSI

The NARTH Bulletin is published three times yearly by the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, a non-profit educational association.



"Victory on the Bow of a Ship"