

NARTH BULLETIN

Vol. 16, No. 1

National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH)

Summer 2008

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APA's New Pamphlet on Homosexuality De-emphasizes the Biological Argument, Supports a Client's Right to Self-Determination

The APA has now begun to acknowledge what most scientists have long known: that a bio-psycho-social model of causation best fits the data.

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In 1998, the American Psychological Association (APA) published a brochure titled "Answers to Your Questions about Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality."

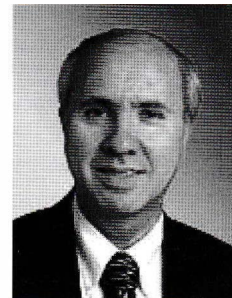
This document was ostensibly published to provide definitive answers about homosexuality. However, few of the assertions made in the brochure could find any basis in psychological science. Clearly a document anchored more in activism than in empiricism, the brochure was simply a demonstration of how far APA had strayed from science, and how much it had capitulated to activism.

The newest APA brochure, which appears to be an update of the older one, is titled, "Answers to Your Questions for a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation & Homosexuality."

Though both brochures have strong activist overtones (both were created with "editorial assistance from the APA Committee on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns"), the newer document is more reflective of science and more consistent with the ethicality of psychological care.

Consider the following statement from the first document:

"There is considerable recent evidence to suggest that biology, including genetic or inborn hormonal factors, play a significant role in a person's sexuality."



NARTH President
A. Dean Byrd

That statement was omitted from the current document and replaced with the following:

"There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined

the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles..."

Although there is no mention of the research that influenced this new position statement, it is clear that efforts to "prove" that homosexuality is simply a biological *fait accompli* have failed. The activist researchers themselves have reluctantly reached that conclusion. There is no gay gene. There is no simple biological pathway to homosexuality. Byne and Parsons, and Friedman and Downey, were correct: a bio-psycho-social model best fits the data.

On the question of whether or not therapy can change sexual orientation, the former document offered a resounding "no." However, the current document is much

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more nuanced and contains the following statement: "To date, there has been no scientifically adequate research to show that therapy (sometimes called reparative or conversion therapy) is safe or effective."

Of course, no mention is made of the Spitzer research, the Karten research, or the recent longitudinal research conducted by Jones and Yarhouse -- all of which support the conclusion that some people can and do change.

Of the Spitzer research, psychologist Dr. Scott Hershberger (who is a philosophical essentialist on questions of sexual orientation) conducted a Guttman analysis of the study sample, and declared:

"The orderly, law-like pattern of changes in homosexual behavior, homosexual self-identification, and homosexual attraction and fantasy observed in Spitzer's study is strong evidence that reparative therapy can assist individuals in changing their homosexual orientation to a heterosexual one."

The Spitzer study found no evidence of harm. Neither did the Karten study, nor the Jones and Yarhouse study.

Furthermore, one might ask, does the APA plan to conduct studies on the effectiveness of other therapies in use? Many are entirely without validation, yet practitioners regularly receive Continuing Education credits for teaching these same therapies through APA-approved courses. Perhaps it is time for APA to hold all therapies and all therapists to the standard which they advocate for reorientation therapy.

The Right To Self-Determination Is Finally Recognized

In APA's new document, there is a greater emphasis on ethicality. The pamphlet includes this key statement:

"Mental health organizations call on their members to respect a person's [client's] right to self-determination."

Certainly, client self-determination is one of the cornerstones of any form of psychological care. And any attempt to ban psychological care for those unhappy with their homosexual attractions would be a direct violation of enormous magnitude of APA's own Code of Ethics -- one

which neither the federal/state governments nor the American public would respond to favorably. Imagine a media headline, "APA Declares That Homosexuals Are Not Competent To Determine Whether Or Not They Can Seek Psychological Care to Change" or "APA Bans Choice of Psychological Care for Homosexuals."

Additions to the new APA brochure also include sections on adolescents, homosexual marriage and adoption by homosexual couples.

Interestingly enough, the section on adolescents contains fairly good information regarding the differences between homosexual attractions, homosexual orientation and homosexual identity (though the terms are not used). There is an admission of the sexual fluidity of adolescence, with different ultimate outcomes for different sexually confused adolescents.

The section on marriage is simply an advocacy statement suggesting that marriage might enhance the stability of homosexual couples.

The discussion on parenting by homosexual couples was noteworthy for its internal contradictions. There is an admission that there is a dearth of scientific data on children raised by same-sex couples, but the authors conclude that there are "few differences." How can the dearth of scientific studies allow anyone to offer such a conclusion?

Finally and most intriguing are the recommended resources for further reading. The former brochure referred readers to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force; to Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, and to Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), all activist groups.

The current brochure refers readers to the American Psychological Association, Mental Health America, and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

A significant portion of the new brochure was devoted to the role that prejudice and discrimination plays in the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. This theme seemed pervasive throughout the document. Homosexual relationships are viewed as no different from heterosexual relationships. There is no acknowledgement of the substantial

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THE NARTH BULLETIN

Editor: Mike Hatfield

The *NARTH Bulletin* is published three times yearly by the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality, a non-profit educational association. For information contact NARTH, 1-888-364-4744.



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"Victory on the Bow of a Ship"