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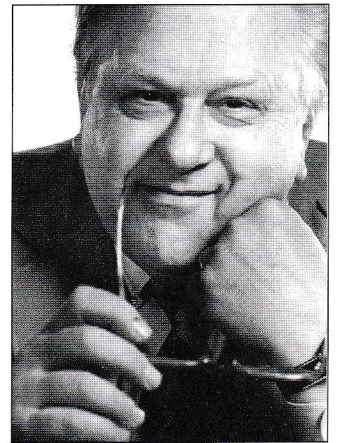
Former APA President Supports NARTH's Mission Statement, Assails APA's Intolerance of Differing Views

By A. Dean Byrd, Ph.D., MBA, MPH

Former President of the American Psychological Association Robert Perloff was the keynote speaker at the annual NARTH Conference, which was held in Washington, D.C. on November 12-14, 2004.

Dr. Perloff is the Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Business Administration and of Psychology at the Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business, University of Pittsburgh.

The former APA president's lecture — entitled "Free to Choose" — received a standing ovation from the conference participants. The gathering at the Washington's Wyndham Hotel comprised the largest attendance of any NARTH Conference.



Dr. Robert Perloff

The Importance of Client Self-Determination

Dr. Perloff began his lecture by emphasizing the importance of client self-determination, a cornerstone value of all of the mental health professions. He stated,

"I am here as the champion of one's right to choose...It is my fervent belief that freedom of choice should govern one's sexual orientation...If homosexuals choose to transform their sexuality into heterosexuality, that resolve and decision is theirs and theirs alone, and should not be tampered with by any special interest group — including the gay community..."

In support of the mission statement of NARTH, he concluded,

"The individual's right for self-determination of sexuality — or sexual autonomy — is, I am happy to see, inherent in NARTH's position statement: 'NARTH respects each client's dignity, autonomy, and free agency...every individual has the right to claim a gay identity, or to develop their heterosexual potential. The right to seek therapy to change one's sexual adaptation is considered self-evident and inalienable.' I subscribe fully to the aforementioned NARTH position statement."

Both Sides Supported

Noting that he was a Fellow of APA's Lesbian and Gay division, Dr. Perloff reiterated his support for gay and lesbian issues. However, he vigorously declared his opposition to the efforts of the gay community within APA to prevent psychotherapists from accepting clients

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who wished to develop their heterosexual potential. Dr. Perloff articulated the following reasons for his position:

1. "The individual has the right to choose whether he or she wishes to become straight. It is his or her choice, not that of an ideologically driven interest group.
2. "To discourage a psychotherapist from undertaking a client wishing to convert, for reasons I will explain, [is] anti-research, anti-scholarship, and antithetical toward the quest for truth.
3. "To deny a client the opportunity to engage in a psychotherapeutic experience is potentially harmful to the client, who may well have emotional problems and mental health roadblocks independent of that client's sexual orientation."

The Intellectual Irresponsibility of Dismissing Reorientation Therapy

Dr. Perloff noted the growing body of research that contradicts the popular notion that change of sexual orientation is not possible. He concluded, "The research on sexual conversion is, therefore, very much a work in progress, an open question, and efforts to declare that conversion is 'doomed to failure' and is 'futile' are irresponsible, reactionary and intellectually flawed."

When asked about the American Psychological Association's opinion of his presence at NARTH, Dr. Perloff indicated that he had recently received a warning phone call from a former member of APA's Board of Directors. This fellow psychologist told Dr. Perloff "that a

group of APA members were deeply concerned" that he had the "audacity and political incorrectness" to address NARTH (defined as a bunch of "bad guys").

Special-Interest Mafias

Dr. Perloff's response to the caller was, "If APA or any of its special-interest mafias seek to bring ethics charges against me, they will face litigation the likes of which they have never encountered before."

He commended NARTH for its position, which he views as representative of the clear majority of Americans because of the popular support for traditional marriage that was expressed in the recent national elections.

Dr. Perloff encouraged NARTH to increase its membership and to continue articulating its views. He stated that freedom of choice is "a powerful and unassailable right inherent in human behavior, especially in a democratic society such as ours, where freedom of expression is guaranteed by the United States Constitution." ■

A past president of the American Psychological Association, Dr. Perloff was also president of the American Psychological Foundation, the Eastern Psychological Association, the Evaluation Research Society, and several other regional and national associations. He is the author of over 400 publications, reviews, commentaries, and presentations at universities and professional conferences. In 2000, the American Psychological Foundation awarded him its Gold Medal for Lifetime Achievement in Psychology in the Public Interest.

More Comments by Dr. Robert Perloff, former APA President, at the 2004 NARTH Conference

"I am pleased to see an organization such as NARTH, that supports freedom to change."

"It is ironic that NARTH is such a small organization, considering the large percentage of the national population that apparently shares the same views."

"NARTH is a voice in the wilderness."

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"Victory on the Bow of a Ship"