
Dr. Spitzer Clarifies His Position

NARTH has recently been pleased to cooperate with Robert Spitzer, M.D., the renowned Columbia University psychiatric researcher, by sending him names of individuals who claim to have made a change in sexual orientation, and also by offering a list of suggested panelists for his consideration for an upcoming Psychiatric Association debate.

It is important to note, however, that Dr. Spitzer is an independent researcher without ties either to gay activism, or ties to NARTH—and that he will conduct his research as a non-allied professional. He is seeking to be fair and open to the claims of both sides in the debate, and to avoid advocacy in either direction—not an easy balancing act when one studies homosexuality.

We applaud Dr. Spitzer's attempt to provide a middle ground on an issue where opposing sides rarely dialogue with each other. While NARTH and Dr. Spitzer disagree on many issues, nevertheless we recognize the need for an independent individual to reopen the dialogue.

A recent letter to NARTH members stated: "Dr. Spitzer was a key player in the original 1973 decision to normalize homosexuality. He was moved to rethink this issue when a group of former homosexuals picketed the 1998 Psychiatric Association meeting." Dr. Spitzer has asked us to make the following clarifications of his position:

Talking to former homosexuals at the 1999 (not 1998) American Psychiatric Association meeting resulted in his

new interest in studying the effectiveness of sexual reorientation therapies - but it did not lead him to "rethink" his involvement in the 1973 decision to remove homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental disorders. He is still is of the opinion that the A. P.A. made the right decision.

Furthermore, during the debate surrounding that decision, Dr. Spitzer specifically wrote that it would be incorrect to equate the removal of homosexuality from a list of mental disorders with a judgment that homosexuality was normal or represented optimal functioning.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, he says, the NARTH letter was inaccurate when it referred to the "1973 decision to *normalize* homosexuality."

In other words, although the term "normalize" is used by NARTH and others in common parlance, Dr. Spitzer correctly notes that the removal of homosexuality was not, in fact, an act of "normalization" by the American Psychiatric Association. The A.P.A.'s decision merely removed homosexuality from its list of disorders.

Reference

(1) Spitzer, R. L., "A Proposal About Homosexuality and the APA Nomenclature: Homosexuality as an Irregular Form of Sexual Behavior, and Sexual Orientation Disturbance as a Psychiatric Disorder: A Symposium. Should Homosexuality Be in the APA Nomenclature? *Am J Psychiatry* 1973; 130:1207-1216.