

Film Critiques Orthodox Jewish View of Sexuality

A new documentary film, "Trembling Before God," relates the real-life stories of Jews from Orthodox backgrounds dealing with their homosexuality.

After the Jerusalem Film Festival this past fall, Sandi DuBowski's film quickly became the subject of a massive international promotional campaign.

But a reviewer writing in *The Jerusalem Post* explains the film's omissions. That reviewer, Adam Jessel, explains what "Trembling Before God" left out:

No one would deny the film's power. DuBowski captures the pain and loneliness of his subjects in a series of intense, heart-wrenching interviews. Those interviewed desperately miss the lifestyle, community and family closeness of the traditional Orthodox world.

Had DuBowski sought only to sensitize us to the torment of those torn between their religious beliefs and their same-sex attractions, he would have performed a valuable service.

But DuBowski does more than that. "Trembling Before God" is a polemic arguing that the Orthodox community should not just be more accepting of people with homosexual attractions, but that it should also be more accepting of homosexual behavior.

The film assumes that same-sex attraction is irreversible, and therefore cannot be morally proscribed.

DuBowski conveys the impression that those with same-sex attractions are uniformly rejected by a cold, unsympathetic Orthodox society...While it is true that the Torah and halacha unequivocally prohibit homosexual acts, there are a growing number of Orthodox rabbis, educators and therapists who offer encouragement and support to struggling homosexuals. Anyone who doubts this should read "Letter to a Homosexual Ba'al Teshuva," published in *Jewish Action* by a prominent rosh yeshiva and distributed widely on the Internet.

DuBowski denigrates the possibility that people can change

the nature of their sexual attractions. The therapies mentioned in the film range from the draconian to the ridiculous - electric shock treatments, libido-controlling drugs, snapping oneself with a rubber band, and eating figs. Ignored are all the conventional tools of psychotherapy.

Many individuals have benefited greatly from such therapy. In a paper presented at this year's annual convention of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), Columbia University professor Robert Spitzer presented a study of 200 men and women who have experienced a significant shift from homosexual to heterosexual attraction and have sustained that shift for more than five years. At the time of the study, three-quarters of the men and half the women were married.

Spitzer's conclusion: "Contrary to conventional wisdom, some highly motivated individuals, using a variety of change efforts, can make substantial change in multiple indicators of sexual orientation." Lest Spitzer be suspected of being a homophobe, it was he who spearheaded the 1973 removal of homosexuality from the APA's list of psychiatric disorders.

Spitzer's message, however, was not one DuBowski was interested in presenting. Jewish support groups that help people deal with and overcome homosexuality, such as JONAH (Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality), are not even mentioned in the film, and are conspicuously absent from the resources listed in the film's credits and at the film's promotional web site.

"The film was done completely out of a love of Judaism," DuBowski told an interviewer. "Let the film open hearts. There's no ideology being served that you have to follow."

But if so, why did he not show us those who seek to overcome their same-sex attractions—those who have grown disillusioned with homosexual relationships, those who wish to marry and have children, those who are already married and wish to eliminate the interference of same-sex attractions? What about those who simply feel that sexual desire is not a license to ignore a Divine imperative? The voices of these strugglers appear to have been censored out.

DuBowski claims that he was unable to find any who have overcome their same-sex attractions, or who are striving to do so, who were willing to be interviewed. Yet I attended the movie with one such person, now married. He told me that DuBowski interviewed him, but that the interview was cut from the final product.

Another man, Sam, who describes himself as a recovering homosexual, explained, "I spoke with DuBowski on the phone when he was making the film, and he told me he doesn't believe in change. He didn't seem interested in meeting any Jews who were in the process of change, either."

Where are the stories of all those who don't view acting on their homosexual attractions as an option? Are their strug-

gles not heroic and inspiring? A film including **their stories** should be shown **together** with DuBowski's. **Much of that** footage may, in fact, **have already been shot. It's lying on** DuBowski's cutting room floor.

(Source: "THINK AGAIN: Half the Story on Homosexuality," by Adam Jessel, *The Jerusalem Post*, September 7, 2001)