

Who Says Developmental Theories Have Been Discredited?

Psychologist Responds to Newsweek Article

NARTH member Mitchell Harris wrote the following letter-to-the-editor of NEWSWEEK:

I wish to offer some comments on your article, "Can Gays 'Convert'?" (August 17, 1998). I am a clinical psychologist in private practice in Chino, California and a member of N.A.R.T.H.



Mitchell E. Harris, Ph.D.

You make a reference to Exodus International "touting...a discredited theory of childhood development." I have some questions here. To what theory specifically do you refer? By what means and by whom has it been discredited?

To my knowledge, **no theory of child development** relevant to homosexuality has been formally discredited. I can only assume that when you say it has been discredited, you mean that it has been eschewed by gay advocates and their allies in the mental-health professional associations *based solely on their personal beliefs*. This is not how we discredit theories in science.

You quote Gregory Herek as stating that "therapy to change sexual orientation...doesn't have any scientific basis." This is a half-truth at best. Practitioners of reparative therapy, and the faith-based groups such as Exodus International and Desert Stream Ministries, have had more than enough successes to justify a clinically based belief in both the theory and the efficacy of treatment.

Moreover, it is equally true that the belief that *homosexuality is not a disorder* rests upon no scientific basis whatsoever. This is a conveniently ignored fact. Homosexuality was removed from the list of psychiatric disorders at an American Psychiatric Association Annual Convention in response to extremely aggressive lobbying by gay activists. The psychiatrists couldn't handle the accusation of bigotry; their courage failed them. Their emotions overrode their intellects. A very famous psychiatrist rose in opposition to point out that voting is not a scientific method. In other words, science is not supposed to be informed by social movements.

You note that "last year the American Psychological Association officially declared reparative therapy to be scientifically ineffective and possibly harmful."

This is utter nonsense. The American Psychological Association cannot declare reparative therapy to be scien-

tifically ineffective. The American Psychological Association refuses to support scientific scrutiny of reparative therapy (and this because of its value-based adherence to a particular ideology). NARTH has tried to get APA to support scientific study, but APA won't budge. APA will

only create grants to study homophobia, which is basically a made-up term which attributes bigotry and/or psychopathology to those who have the temerity to share a different (i.e., traditional) value system.

As for reparative therapy being "possibly harmful," this is just an extrapolation based upon a premise which is not only unproven (i.e., that homosexuality is not a disorder), but which neither of the two APA's will explore. In law, this is referred to as an irrebuttable presumption.

You, also, note that "both Nicolosi and Exodus stress that the process isn't for everybody. People who are gay and happy won't find it useful." Let's put things in perspective. This same statement applies universally, across the board, to any and all conditions that might lead anyone to seek psychotherapy. Of course, happy people don't seek therapy. However, "happy people" can include include *all kinds of folks* with personality disorders, as well as alcoholics, pedophiles, rapists, etc. I do not seek to disparage homosexuals by this comparison, but only to point out that *the absence of pain* is never proof of well-being.

Finally, you refer to individuals who have gone through secular or spiritual "conversion" processes and relapsed. It should be remembered that relapses are universal across diagnostic categories. By itself, a relapse neither proves the ineffectiveness of a particular treatment, nor the misclassification of the behavior in question as a disorder.

The bottom line, in my opinion, is that the mental health field is predominantly populated by people with a liberal political/social orientation. Their position regarding homosexuality is as much a reflection of their personal (i.e., non-scientific) value system as is the position of some of the more conservative therapists who support reparative therapy.

When gay advocates say that homosexuality is "demonized" simply because of the personal values of some people, they are not being completely honest. Of course values are involved. The only questions that remain are:

- (1) **Whose values will dominate the public debate? and**
- (2) **Will we be honest enough to investigate our value-based decisions intellectually and empirically?**

Sincerely,

Mitchell E. Harris, Ph.D.