

Conversion Therapy II

9.1 History Part II Conversion therapy (also known as **reparative therapy**) is a range of treatments that aim to change sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. Such treatments have been criticized for being pseudo-scientific. Conversion therapy has been a source of controversy in the United States and other countries. The American Psychiatric Association has condemned "psychiatric treatment, such as reparative or conversion therapy which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon the a priori assumption that the patient should change his/her sexual homosexual orientation." It states that, "Ethical practitioners refrain from attempts to change individuals' sexual orientation." It also states that political and moral debates over the integration of gays and lesbians into the mainstream of American society have obscured scientific data about changing sexual orientation "by calling into question the motives and even the character of individuals on both sides of the issue."

The homosexuality as sickness theory started to come under criticism in the 1950s. Evelyn Hooker in 1957 published "The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual", which found that "homosexuals were not inherently abnormal and that there was no difference between homosexual and heterosexual men in terms of pathology." This paper subsequently became influential. Irving Bieber and his colleagues in 1962 published *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study of Male Homosexuals*, which concluded that "although this change may be more easily accomplished by some than by others, in our judgment a heterosexual shift is a possibility for all homosexuals who are strongly motivated to change."^[44] The same year, Albert Ellis published *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*, which claimed that "fixed homosexuals in our society are almost invariably neurotic or psychotic:... therefore, no so-called *normal* group of homosexuals is to be found anywhere." Ellis published his main work on homosexuality, *Homosexuality: Its Causes and Cure*, in 1965.

Charles W. Socarides, M.D.

Charles Socarides's first book, *The Overt Homosexual*, was published in 1968. Socarides regarded homosexuality as an illness arising from a conflict between the id and the ego usually arising from an early age in "a female-dominated environment wherein the father was absent, weak, detached or sadistic". He credited the earlier work of Irving Bieber with clarifying progress in therapeutic knowledge and effectiveness.

There was a riot in 1969 at the Stonewall Bar in New York after a police raid. The Stonewall riot acquired symbolic significance for the gay rights movement and came to be seen as the opening of a new phase in the struggle for gay liberation. Following these events, conversion therapy came under increasing attack. Activism against conversion therapy increasingly focused on the DSM's designation of homosexuality as a psychopathology.

Lawrence Hatterer in 1970 published *Changing Homosexuality in the Male*, which advocated a therapy based on simplified psychoanalytic ideas and behavior modification techniques.

In 1973, after years of criticism from gay activists and bitter dispute among psychiatrists, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality as a mental disorder from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. Supporters of the change used evidence from researchers such as Alfred Kinsey and Evelyn Hooker. Psychiatrist Robert Spitzer, a member of the APA's Committee on Nomenclature, played an important role in the events that lead to this decision. Critics argued that it was a result of pressure from gay activists, and demanded a referendum among voting members of the Association. The referendum was held in 1974 and the APA's decision was upheld by a 58% majority.

Books promoting new forms of conversion therapy were published in the 1980s. Robert Kronmeyer in 1980 published *Overcoming Homosexuality*,^[48] while research psychologist Elizabeth Moberly in 1983 published *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*.

The APA removed ego-dystonic homosexuality from the DSM-III-R in 1987 and opposes the diagnosis of either homosexuality or ego-dystonic homosexuality as any type of disorder.

Joseph Nicolosi began playing an important role in the development of conversion therapy in the early 1990s, publishing his first book *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality* in 1991. In 1992, Joseph Nicolosi, Charles Socarides, and Benjamin Kaufman founded the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), a mental health organization that opposes the mainstream medical view of homosexuality and aims to "make effective psychological therapy available to all homosexual men and women who seek change." Former American Psychological Association President Dr. Nicholas Cummings was the Keynote Speaker at the 2011 NARTH Conference and said that

he had a "high regard" for NARTH and considered it an honor to be invited to speak at NARTH's scientific gathering.

21st century

United States Surgeon General David Satcher in 2001 issued a report stating that "there is no valid scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be changed". The same year, a study by Robert Spitzer concluded that some highly motivated individuals whose orientation is predominantly homosexual can become predominantly heterosexual with some form of reparative therapy. Spitzer based his findings on structured interviews with 200 self-selected individuals (143 males, 57 females). He told *The Washington Post* that the study "shows some people can change from gay to straight, and we ought to acknowledge that." Spitzer's study caused controversy and attracted media attention. Spitzer recanted his study in 2012, and apologized to the gay community for making unproven claims of the efficacy of reparative therapy, calling it his only professional regret.

The American Psychoanalytic Association (APsaA) spoke against NARTH in 2004, stating "that organization does not adhere to our policy of nondiscrimination and ... their activities are demeaning to our members who are gay and lesbian."^[60] NARTH believes that it is discriminatory and unethical to ignore the needs and goals of people who do not wish to be gay.^[61] In 2006, Focus on the Family and several other organizations announced that they would protest the American Psychological Association's convention in New Orleans. Mike Haley, the director of gender issues for Focus on the Family, commented that, "The APA's views on issues such as the immutability of homosexuality have caused real harm to real people and patients." The same year, a survey of members of the American Psychological Association rated reparative therapy as "certainly discredited", though the authors warn that the results should be interpreted carefully as an initial step, not a final word.

The American Psychological Association in 2007 convened a task force to evaluate its policies regarding reparative therapy. Ex-gay organizations expressed concerns about the lack of representation of pro-reparative-therapy perspectives on the task force, while alleging that anti-reparative-therapy perspectives were amply represented.

In 2008, the organizers of an APA panel on the relationship between religion and homosexuality canceled the event after gay activists objected that "conversion

therapists and their supporters on the religious right use these appearances as a public relations event to try and legitimize what they do."

In 2009, American Psychological Association stated that it "encourages mental health professionals to avoid misrepresenting the efficacy of sexual orientation change efforts by promoting or promising change in sexual orientation when providing assistance to individuals distressed by their own or others' sexual orientation and concludes that the benefits reported by participants in sexual orientation change efforts can be gained through approaches that do not attempt to change sexual orientation".

9.2 Theories and techniques

Behavioral modification

Douglas Haldeman writes in "Sexual Orientation Conversion Therapy for Gay Men and Lesbians: A Scientific Examination" that early behavioral forms of conversion therapy mainly employed aversive conditioning techniques, involving electric shock and nausea-inducing drugs during presentation of same-sex erotic images. Cessation of the aversive stimuli was typically accompanied by the presentation of opposite-sex erotic images, with the objective of strengthening heterosexual feelings. Haldeman discusses the work of M. P. Feldman, who in "Aversion therapy for sexual deviation: a critical review", published in 1966, claimed a 58% cure rate. Haldeman is skeptical that such stressful methods permit feelings of sexual responsiveness, and notes that Feldman defined success as suppression of homosexuality and increased capacity for heterosexual behavior.

Haldeman also discusses the covert sensitization method, which involves instructing patients to imagine vomiting or receiving electric shocks, writing that only single case studies have been conducted, and that their results cannot be generalized. He writes that behavioral conditioning studies tend to decrease homosexual feelings, but do not increase heterosexual feelings, citing Rangaswami's "Difficulties in arousing and increasing heterosexual responsiveness in a homosexual: A case report", published in 1982, as typical in this respect.^[69]

Haldeman concludes that such methods applied to anyone except gay people would be called torture, writing, "Individuals undergoing such treatments do not emerge heterosexually inclined; rather they become shamed, conflicted, and fearful about their homosexual feelings."^[70]

Haldeman writes in "Gay Rights, Patient Rights: The Implications of Sexual Orientation Conversion Therapy" that aversive treatments sometimes involved the application of electric shock to the hands and/or genitals, or nausea-inducing drugs, administered simultaneously with the presentation of homoerotic stimuli, while less cruel methods included masturbatory reconditioning, visualization, and social skills training. All of these methods were based on the idea that homosexuality is a learned behavior that can be reconditioned.^[10]

Ex-gay ministry

Some sources describe ex-gay ministries as a form of conversion therapy, while others state that ex-gay organizations and conversion therapy are distinct methods of attempting to convert gay people to heterosexuality. Ex-gay ministries have also been called transformational ministries. Some state that they do not conduct clinical treatment of any kind. Exodus International once believed reparative therapy could be a beneficial tool, but ceased activities in June 2013, issuing a statement which repudiated its aims and apologized for the harm their pursuit has caused to LGBT people. Evergreen International has stated that it is unlikely therapy can erase all homosexual feelings, and does not advocate any particular form of therapy. In January 2014 Evergreen International announced it would be subsumed into North Star which does not emphasize changing sexual orientation.

Psychoanalysis

Douglas Haldeman writes that psychoanalytic treatment of homosexuality is exemplified by the work of Irving Bieber and his colleagues in *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study of Male Homosexuals*. They advocated long-term therapy aimed at resolving the unconscious childhood conflicts that they considered responsible for homosexuality. Haldeman notes that Bieber's methodology has been criticized because it relied upon a clinical sample, the description of the outcomes was based upon subjective therapist impression, and follow-up data were poorly presented. Bieber reported a 27% success rate from long-term therapy, but only 18% of the patients in whom Bieber considered the treatment successful had been exclusively homosexual to begin with, while 50% had been bisexual. In Haldeman's view, this makes even Bieber's unimpressive claims of success misleading.

Haldeman discusses other psychoanalytic studies of attempts to change homosexuality. Curran and Parr's "Homosexuality: An analysis of 100 male cases", published in 1957, reported no significant increase in heterosexual behavior.

Mayerson and Lief's "Psychotherapy of homosexuals: A follow-up study of nineteen cases", published in 1965, reported that half of its 19 subjects were exclusively heterosexual in behavior four and a half years after treatment, but its outcomes were based on patient self-report and had no external validation. In Haldeman's view, those participants in the study who reported change were bisexual at the outset, and its authors wrongly interpreted capacity for heterosexual sex as change of sexual orientation.

Reparative therapy

Reparative therapy has been used as a synonym for conversion therapy generally, but Jack Drescher has argued that strictly speaking it refers to a specific kind of therapy associated with Elizabeth Moberly and Joseph Nicolosi.^[79] Joseph Nicolosi's *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*, published in 1991, introduced *reparative therapy* as a term for psychotherapeutic attempts to convert gay people to heterosexuality.

Douglas C. Haldeman writes that Nicolosi promotes psychoanalytic theories suggesting that homosexuality is a form of arrested psychosexual development, resulting from "an incomplete bond and resultant identification with the same-sex parent, which is then symbolically repaired in psychotherapy". Nicolosi's intervention plans involve conditioning a man to a traditional masculine gender role. He should "(1) participate in sports activities, (2) avoid activities considered of interest to homosexuals, such [as] art museums, opera, symphonies, (3) avoid women unless it is for romantic contact, (4) increase time spent with heterosexual men in order to learn to mimic heterosexual male ways of walking, talking, and interacting with other heterosexual men, (5) Attend church and join a men's church group, (6) attend reparative therapy group to discuss progress, or slips back into homosexuality, (7) become more assertive with women through flirting and dating, (8) begin heterosexual dating, (9) engage in heterosexual intercourse, (10) enter into heterosexual marriage, and (11) father children".

Most mental health professionals consider reparative therapy discredited, but it is still practiced by some.

Psychoanalysts critical of Nicolosi's theories have offered gay-affirmative approaches as an alternative to reparative therapy. Exodus International regarded reparative therapy as a useful tool to eliminate "unwanted same-sex attraction" but ceased activities in June 2013 and issued a statement repudiating its aims and apologizing for the harm the organization had caused to LGBT people.