



Family Policy Brief

Unwanted Same-Sex Attraction Can be Successfully Treated

In a dramatic reversal of a former position, American Psychological Association (APA) President, Gerald Koocher, declared in 2006 that the “APA has no conflict with psychologists who help those distressed by unwanted homosexual attraction.”

This was a stunning reversal, especially in light of the fact that Koocher coauthored a graduate level text book in 1998 that states that “such therapies are unethical and professionally irresponsible, as well as based on inadequate and questionable science.”

To further appreciate the significance of this reversal, it is important to understand that several decades ago, at an APA convention in San Francisco, gay rights activists disrupted presentations and pressured the APA to give them the chance to present their position that homosexuality is normal. The pressure continued until 1973 when the APA Board of Trustees removed homosexuality from their list of mental disorders, mainly under the direction of Dr. Robert L. Spitzer, a Professor of Psychiatry at Columbia University.

This action was taken not because there had been a scientific study proving that homosexuality was not a disorder, but due to political pressure within the APA, and because Dr. Spitzer believed at the time that homosexuality was a fixed orientation that could not be changed. However, Dr. Spitzer subsequently received numerous phone calls from former homosexuals claiming that they had recovered from their unwanted same-sex attraction, so he decided to investigate the matter further.

Spitzer conducted more than 200 telephone interviews with people struggling with unwanted same-sex attraction and found that approximately 66 percent of the men and 44 percent of the women interviewed had achieved, over the course of many years, a level of “good heterosexual functioning.” He concluded: “Some highly motivated people can change from gay to straight.”

When Spitzer publicized his results, he essentially committed professional suicide. The American Psychiatric Association refused to endorse his research findings, not on scientific grounds, but because his findings were politically incorrect. His findings were attacked by professionals and organizations including The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD).

However, due to pressure from members of the APA, especially those members also belonging to the National Association for Research and Treatment of Homosexuality (NARTH), that have successfully treated homosexuals for unwanted same-sex attraction, APA president Koocher was eventually compelled to reverse his position.

This certain shift back to recognizing unwanted same-sex attraction as a condition that can be successfully treated will benefit many individuals by making proven therapeutic techniques for

helping those trapped with unwanted same-sex attraction more widely available. However, this shift also has important policy implications for the U.S. and other countries as well. Research and polling results show that people who believe that homosexuality is innate and unchangeable are more likely to support “rights” for homosexuals such as being allowed to legally marry. On the other hand, people who understand that it is a behavioral disorder that can be successfully treated in many instances, or that it is simply a chosen sexual lifestyle, are less likely to support laws and policies that promote homosexuality or that give special rights to homosexuals.

Clearly the growth in the number of individuals who are being successfully treated for unwanted same-sex attraction undermines the very foundation of the homosexual “rights” agenda. For purely political purposes, homosexual activists actively promote and perpetuate the myth that same-sex attraction is fixed, inevitable and unchangeable, and therefore efforts to treat homosexuals will increasingly come under attack. It is essential for pro-family supporters to make sure that public policy is made on the basis of the facts as often as possible. The reversal by the APA on this issue will go far toward helping achieve that goal.

1. Ethics in Psychology: Professional Standards and Cases, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), by Gerald Koocher & Patricia Keith-Spiegel.