Psychiatry and the ‘treatment’ of homosexuality: When prejudice masquerades as science

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This presentation contains clips from the documentaries:

For the Bible Tells Me So;
The Celluloid Closet;
Anyone and Everyone;
and, especially:
This American Life’s “81 Words”
The presenter is deeply appreciative.
While same gendered relationships have existed since the beginning of time, the term ‘homosexual’ was coined in the 19th century.
‘a hermaphrodisim of the soul.’

“The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.”

Michael Foucault (1976)
Such discussions reflected an attempt to replace criminal punishment or condemning religious explanations, with a modern, compassionate, scientific perspective.
Initially, many homosexuals welcomed these efforts.

While ultimately, this legitimized efforts to try and change them, they felt it was better to be sick than a criminal or a sinner.
Individuals with this diagnosis were “ill primarily in terms of society and of conformity with the prevailing cultural milieu.”
Henry Gerber, Founder
Society for Human Rights
First Known US Homosexual Organization
In the 1950s and 1960s, arrests for homosexual offenses were often followed by mental health treatment services delivered by the criminal justice systems in many countries around the world.
1899-1962 Edmund Bergler, M.D. psychiatrist/psychoanalyst

- Author of 25 books, 273 articles
- Considered the most important theorist of homosexuality in the 1950’s
1956 Edmund Bergler, “I have no bias against homosexuality … [but] homosexuals are essentially disagreeable people … [displaying] a mixture of superciliousness, false aggression, and whimpering … subservient when confronted with a stronger person, merciless when in power, unscrupulous about trampling on a weaker person.” (Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life?) 1956
The world is not divided into sheeps and goats. Not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes.

Alfred Kinsey - American Biologist
Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, 1948
Dr. Evelyn Hooker  (1907-1996)

Private sexual behavior between adult men was decriminalized in Britain in 1967, (2003 in the U.S.; *Lawrence vs. Texas*)

Treatments to change homosexuals into heterosexuals peaked in the ’60s and early ‘70s.
The British Medical Journal (2004) reported on the experience of 29 gay men and 2 lesbians of that era and the practitioners who treated them. Ages ranged from 13 to 40 years, most were in their late 20’s.
1960’s to 1970’s, one in 1980

Most common ‘treatments,’ in the BMJ study:

■ Behavioral aversion therapy with electric shocks

■ Nausea induced by apomorphine as the aversive stimulus
One clinical psychologist who at the time was doing his internship:

“Well I didn't have much choice. That was a clinical placement. I was [the consultant's] first student. Basically the first year I was there, more or less all I ever did was shove electricity down homosexual patients.”
One psychiatrist noted:

“From the data I looked at, it undoubtedly inhibited their sexual behavior, and there was loads of evidence of that. They were psychologically castrated if you like....”
1935 Freud: I gather from your letter that your son is a homosexual. … Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; … Many highly respectable individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest men among them (Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc).
.... By asking me if I can help, you mean, I suppose, if I can ... make normal heterosexuality take its place. What analysis can do for your son runs in a different line. If he is unhappy, neurotic, torn by conflicts, inhibited in his social life, analysis may bring him harmony, peace of mind, full efficiency, whether he remains a homosexual or gets changed.
Reverend Dr. Mel White –
Founder of “Soulforce”
Author of Stranger at the Gate
(1994)
1967 CBS Reports

“The Homosexuals”
1967 CBS Reports

“The Homosexuals”

Poll:

2/3 of Americans look upon homosexuals with disgust, discomfort or fear, one out of ten says hatred

The majority of Americans favor legal punishment even for homosexual acts committed in private between consenting adults
“The average homosexual, if there be such, is promiscuous. He is not interested in nor capable of a lasting relationship ... His sex life – his ‘love life’ consists of chance encounters.”
1996 “Well, I said it. That is – God help us – what our understanding was of the homosexual lifestyle … because nobody was out of the closet and because that’s what we heard from doctors – that’s what Socarides told us, it was a matter of shame.”
‘Ex-Gay’ Ministry Founders Come Out
Ten Years Later, Lovers Denounce ‘Conversions’

by CHF O’Neill

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Bill Schall, a former director of Exodus, said, “I counseled hundreds of people who tried to change their sexual orientation and some of them found success. If you got them away from the Christian Realms and asked them, ‘Honestly, are you sure that you are no longer homosexual and you are now intrinsically corrected?’... I’ve never said, ‘Yes, I am actually now heterosexual.’

Schall was one of the founders of Exodus, which is based in Los Angeles, California. In the mid-1980s, Exodus was a driving force behind the “ex-gay” movement, which sought to change the sexual orientation of homosexuals through therapy.

Frank Schaefer, the new director of Exodus, now looks back at his years in the movement, describing its impact on his life. He said the group did “psychological damage.”

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After a brief time, Schaefer, now a 10-year-old boy, who was then going his senior’s degree in counseling, found himself in the Fasthouse by the church leaders who asked him to help train lesbian volunteers to convert homosexuals into loving the gay or lesbian lifestyle for heterosexuality and to promote the movement.

Instead, he realized he was not alone.

With another church volunteer, Schaefer soon began to counsel, and a 21-year-old teenager, who was then going his senior’s degree in counseling, found himself in the Fasthouse by the church leaders who asked him to help train lesbian volunteers to convert homosexuals into loving the gay or lesbian lifestyle for heterosexuality and to promote the movement.

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This category is for individuals whose sexual interests are directed primarily toward objects other than people of the opposite sex, toward sexual acts not usually associated with coitus, or toward coitus performed under bizarre circumstances as in necrophilia, pedophilia, sexual sadism and fetishism. Even though many find their practices distasteful, they remain unable to substitute normal sexual behavior for them. This diagnosis is not appropriate for individuals who perform deviant sexual acts because normal sexual objects are not available to them.
- 302.0 Homosexuality
- 302.1 Fetishism
- 302.2 Pedophilia
- 302.3 Transvestism
- 302.4 Exhibitionism
- 302.5 Voyeurism
- 302.6 Sadism
- 302.7 Masochism
- 302.8 Other sexual deviation
- 302.9 unspecified sexual deviation
Homophobia

The term homophobia was coined in 1967 an irrationally negative attitude toward homosexual people.

1) religious fundamentalism
2) heterosexism
Homo-ignorance – many heterosexuals lack simple knowledge about homosexuality.
1969

Stonewall Uprising
In the late 60's and early 70's, political activism grew stronger. In 1969, the Stonewall Uprising occurred.
1970

The Gay Liberation Front vs. the Behavioral Modification Conference in Los Angeles
Irving Bieber, M.D.

Gay Liberation Front
1968 Charles Socarides
The Overt Homosexual
New York: Grune and Stratton
“I am reminded of a colleague who reiterated ‘all my homosexual patients are quite sick’ - to which I finally replied ‘so are all my heterosexual patients.’

Ernest van den Haag, psychotherapist
1972 John Fryar, MD
(Dr. Anonymous)
1972

RONALD GOLD

ROBERT SPITZER, MD
The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the DSM.
“Never before in history had so many people been cured in so little time.”
1980

A new diagnosis was added to the DSM III – ‘Ego Dystonic Homosexuality’ (Removed in 1987)
1992

Homosexuality removed from ICD-10 (international classification of diseases, 10th revision).
The American Psychiatric Association opposes any psychiatric treatment, such as "reparative" or conversion therapy. Many others have joined in including:

- The American Psychoanalytic Association
- the American Academy of Pediatrics
- the American Medical Association
- the American Psychological Association
- The American Counseling Association,
- National Association of Social Workers.
Reparative Therapy- We recognize the legitimacy and efficacy of counseling, which offers reparative therapy and treatment for those patients seeking healing and wholeness from their homosexual lifestyle.
What is “normal” sexuality?

What is the role (procreation, pleasure, etc.) of sexuality in human experience?

Does science, religion or medicine have the answer? Do clergy? Do psychotherapists?
Preparing for and Proceeding Into the 21st Century

“...the historical cultural conceptual change from seeing gayness as a sin to seeing it as a crime to seeing it as an illness to seeing it as a difference is a huge change (L. Hartmann, 2007)
OVERLAP BETWEEN MORALITY AND ILLNESS

What we view as “mental health” is ‘value soaked’ and bears a ‘strong cultural stamp’ (Barbara Wooten)
Unconsciously, there is no impermeable line between the idea that there is something different about you and something wrong with you; nor is there a line between psychologically wrong and morally wrong.

(Shaffer, 2002)
That’s right …..

We need to be loved.

Thank you very much.