

BOX TURTLE BULLETIN

This article can be found at: <http://www.boxturtlebulletin.com/tag/robert-spitzer?nomobile>

Posts for May, 2012

Robert Spitzer in NY Times, NPR

Jim Burroway
May 21st, 2012

Last Saturday, the *New York Times* published an important cover story by Benedict Carey which, more or less, covers *the same ground* **Gabriel Arana** covered in April is his interview with Robert Spitzer, whose 2001 ex-gay study purported to show that some people can change their sexual orientation with a great deal of effort. During that interview, Spitzer acknowledged that critics of his study were “largely correct.” Spitzer then decided to retract his study and issue an *apology* to the gay community and also “to any gay person who wasted time and energy undergoing some form of reparative therapy because they believed that I had proven that reparative therapy works with some ‘highly motivated’ individuals.”

Carey’s piece with the *New York Times* doesn’t cover much new territory, although there was one revelation surprised me: “The paper did not go through the usual peer-review process, in which unnamed experts critique a manuscript before publication.” I did not know that. Of course, what I did know what that when the paper appeared in 2003 in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, editor Kenneth Zucker took the highly unusual step of publishing 26 “peer commentaries,” from all sides of the debate. Many professionals either denounced or criticized the study’s methodology and conclusions, while others (mostly ex-gay therapists and supporters like A. Dean Byrd, Joseph Nicolosi, Mark Yarhouse) hailed it as “giv(ing) a voice to the disenfranchised within a minority group.”

But what is important in the Times story is the fact that Arana’s article at *The American Prospect* has caught the attention of the wider mainstream media. Today, Spitzer appeared on NPR’s *Talk of the Nation*, followed by Arana and Carey to discuss the study, its retractions, Spitzer’s apology, and the legacy of ex-gay therapy.

Researcher Apologizes for Flawed Ex-Gay Study

Jim Burroway
April 25th, 2012

Robert Spitzer, who recently *retracted* his landmark 2001 study claiming to “prove” that people who underwent ex-gay therapy could change their sexual orientation, issued an apology to the gay community. He also acknowledged that his study suffered from what he called a “fatal flaw”: “The simple fact is that there was no way to determine if the subject’s accounts of change were valid.”

Those statements were included in a letter to Dr. Kenneth Zucker, the editor of the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* which published the study in 2003. (An earlier version of the study had been presented before a

LATEST POSTS

The Daily Agenda for Tuesday, May 22

Robert Spitzer in NY Times, NPR

Dharun Ravi Sentenced to 30 Days in Jail

The Daily Agenda for Monday, May 21

Kiev Pride Canceled, Two Beaten

The Daily Agenda for Sunday, May 20

NAACP Board Approves Statement Supporting Marriage Equality

What Makes Cameron Tick? (Cont'd)

FEATURED REPORTS

What Are Little Boys Made Of?

In this original BTB Investigation, we unveil the tragic story of Kirk Murphy, a four-year-old boy who was treated for “cross-gender disturbance” in 1970 by a young grad student by the name of George Rekers. This story is a stark reminder that there are severe and damaging consequences when therapists try to ensure that boys will be boys.

Slouching Towards Kampala: Uganda’s Deadly Embrace of Hate

When we first reported on three American anti-gay activists traveling to Kampala for a three-day conference, we had no idea that it would be the first report of a long string of events leading to a proposal to institute the death penalty for LGBT people. But that is exactly what happened. In this report, we review our collection of more than 450 posts to tell the story of one nation’s embrace of hatred toward gay people. This report will be updated continuously as events continue to unfold. Check here for the latest updates.

meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in 2001. It was press accounts of that 2001 presentation which garnered nationwide attention.) In the letter obtained by Truth Wins Out and posted on their web site today, Spitzer wrote:

I believe I owe the gay community an apology for my study making unproven claims of the efficacy of reparative therapy. I also apologize to any gay person who wasted time and energy undergoing some form of reparative therapy because they believed that I had proven that reparative therapy works with some “highly motivated” individuals.

Rachel Maddow Covers the Retracted Ex-Gay Study and the Movement It Bolstered

Jim Burroway
April 19th, 2012

Last night, Rachel Maddow did a two-part segment on the ex-gay movement prompted by **Gabriel Arana's article** in *The American Prospect* last week. In the first segment, Rachel provides a history of the mental health community's stance on homosexuality along with background information on Robert Spitzer's role in removing homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental disorders. She also covered Spitzer's controversial paper presented at a 2001 meeting of the APA (it was later published in 2003 in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*) which claimed to show that efforts to change sexual orientation could be successful. That paper, which made national headlines, was a boon to both the ex-gay and anti-gay industry for the next decade. Last week, Robert Spitzer **retracted that paper** in an interview with Gabriel Arana.

The second segment features an interview with Gabe himself, in which he talks about his interview with Spitzer in which Spitzer recanted his 2001 paper.

David Benkof: Behind the Mask

At first glance, David Benkof appears to be a young gay man who believes that same-sex marriage will damage the institution of marriage, that there are better options for gay couples than marriage, that the community should join him in prioritizing other more pressing issues, and that the marriage discussion is harming the efforts of gay couples in red states to get recognition for their unions. He also claims that he's a gay columnist, that he speaks for an influential collection of gay thinkers, and that he is part of the gay and lesbian community and that he shares our goals and dreams. But none of that is true.

“Repeat After Me”: The Reparative Therapy Echo Chamber

The April 2008 edition of the pay-to-publish vanity journal *Psychological Reports* featured a new report from NARTH. Written by NARTH president A. Dean Byrd, past president Joseph Nicolosi, and Richard W. Potts, the report carries the unwieldy but self-descriptive title, “Clients perceptions of how reorientation therapy and self-help can promote changes in sexual orientation.” While the title describes what the authors meant to show — how clients describe the benefits of reparative therapy — the report itself actually illustrates something very different: the ex-gay movement's remarkable ability to instill an almost robot-like parroting of ex-gay rhetoric among their clients.

Testing the Premise: Is MRSA The New Gay Plague?

The *Toronto Star* said that a new study “discover[ed] a new strain” of a super-bug “hitting gay men.” Headlines in Britain screamed, “Flesh-eating bug strikes San Francisco's gay community,” and anti-gay extremists across America spread the alarm that gays were introducing another plague into “the general population.” But there was a small problem with all of this: **None of it is true!**

Paul Cameron's World

In 2005, the Southern Poverty Law Center wrote that “[Paul] Cameron's ‘science’ echoes Nazi Germany.” What the SPLC didn't know was Cameron doesn't just “echo” Nazi Germany. He quoted extensively from one of the Final Solution's architects. This puts his fascination with quarantines, mandatory tattoos, and extermination being a “plausible idea” in a whole new and deeply disturbing light.

From the Inside: Focus on the Family's “Love Won Out”

Researcher Robert Spitzer Retracts Landmark Ex-Gay Study

Jim Burroway
April 11th, 2012

When I wrote about Gabriel Arana's piece in *The American Prospect* about his experiences in ex-gay therapy under Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, I wanted to emphasize his personal story. It was both poignant and harrowing, and I think that ex-gay voices are too often unheard whenever we talk about the movement.

But there is another aspect of that story which, in the larger scheme of things, is quite significant. In 1973, Dr. Robert Spitzer, who was the chief editor of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association (the manual which decided what was a mental disorder), had led the effort to remove homosexuality from the APA's official list of mental illnesses. In 2001, Spitzer presented a paper to a meeting of the APA which, based on 200 interviews, concluded that ex-gay therapy worked for those who worked hard at it. (That paper was subsequently published in the prestigious *Archives of Sexual Behavior* in 2003.) It was a huge boost to the ex-gay movement, with headlines from the Associated Press and the *Wall Street Journal*.

For his article in *The American Prospect*, Gabe visited Spitzer at his home in Princeton:

Spitzer was drawn to the topic of ex-gay therapy because it was controversial—"I was always attracted to controversy"—but was troubled by how the study was received. He did not want to suggest that gay people should pursue ex-gay therapy. His goal was to determine whether the counterfactual—the claim that no one had ever changed his or her sexual orientation through therapy—was true.

I asked about the criticisms leveled at him. "In retrospect, I have to admit I think the critiques are largely correct," he said. "The findings can be considered evidence for what those who have undergone ex-gay therapy say about it, but nothing more." He said he spoke with the editor of the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* about writing a retraction, but the editor declined. (Repeated attempts to contact the journal went unanswered.)

Spitzer said that he was proud of having been instrumental in removing homosexuality from the list of mental disorders. Now 80 and retired, he was afraid that the 2001 study would tarnish his legacy and perhaps hurt others. He said that failed attempts to rid oneself of homosexual attractions "can be quite harmful." He has, though, no doubts about the 1973 fight over the classification of homosexuality.

"Had there been no Bob Spitzer, homosexuality would still have eventually been removed from the list of psychiatric disorders," he said. "But it wouldn't have happened in 1973."

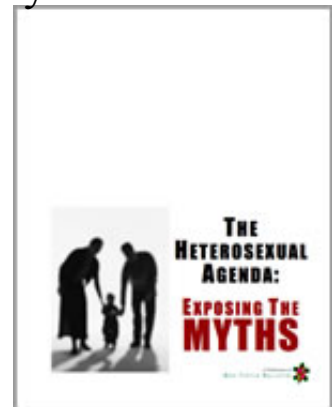
On February 10, I attended an all-day "Love Won Out" ex-gay conference in Phoenix, put on by Focus on the Family and Exodus International. In this series of reports, I talk about what I learned there: the people who go to these conferences, the things that they hear, and what this all means for them, their families and for the rest of us.

Prologue: Why I Went To "Love Won Out"
Part 1: What's Love Got To Do With It?
Part 2: Parents Struggle With "No Exceptions"
Part 3: A Whole New Dialect
Part 4: It Depends On How The Meaning of the Word "Change" Changes
Part 5: A Candid Explanation For "Change"

The Heterosexual Agenda: Exposing The Myths

At last, the truth can now be told.

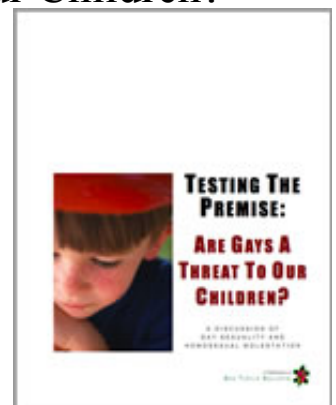
Using the same research methods employed by most anti-gay political pressure groups, we examine the statistics and the case studies that dispel many of the myths about heterosexuality. Download your copy today!



And don't miss our companion report, *How To Write An Anti-Gay Tract In Fifteen Easy Steps*.

Testing The Premise: Are Gays A Threat To Our Children?

Anti-gay activists often charge that gay men and women pose a threat to children. In this report, we explore the supposed connection between homosexuality and child sexual abuse, the conclusions reached by the most knowledgeable professionals in the field, and how anti-gay activists continue to ignore their findings. This has tremendous consequences, not just for gay men and women, but more importantly for the safety of all our children.



Spitzer was growing tired and asked how many more questions I had. Nothing, I responded, unless you have something to add. He did. Would I print a retraction of his 2001 study, “so I don’t have to worry about it anymore”?

In 2007, Spitzer spoke out against the ex-gay movement *for misrepresenting the results of his study*. At that time, he told the *New York Times* that he thought that if change occurs in ex-gay therapy, it was very rare. “Is it 1 percent, 2 percent? I don’t think it’s 10 percent.”

Dr. Robert Spitzer Speaks Out Against Abuses of His Study

Jim Burroway

February 15th, 2007

When Dr. Robert Spitzer’s study of 200 gay men and women who reported a change in their sexual orientation appeared in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* in 2003, anti-gay lobbyist seized on it as proof that homosexuality was, at its core, a choice that could be changed. But as Dr. Spitzer has said repeatedly, any appears to be exceptionally rare. Just last Monday *The New York Times* quoted him as saying:

“Although I suspect change occurs, I suspect it’s very rare,” he said. “Is it 1 percent, 2 percent? I don’t think it’s 10 percent.”

Dr. Spitzer consistently warned that his study should not be used as a part of political efforts to denying gays and lesbians, a warning which Focus on the Family, NARTH and Exodus have ignored with abandon. Now Truth Wins Out has released a video in which Dr. Spitzer registers his disappointment in no uncertain terms:

... of course, they [Focus on the Family] were delighted with that study. What they fail to mention — and it’s not, I guess, a big surprise — is that in the discussion I noted that it was so hard for me to find 200 subjects to participate in the study that I have to conclude that, although change is possible and does occur, it’s probably quite rare. And of course, they don’t want to mention that.”

(Out of) Focus on the Family

Straight From The Source: What the “Dutch Study” Really Says About Gay Couples

Anti-gay activists often cite the “Dutch Study” to claim that gay unions last only about 1½ years and that the these men have an average of eight additional partners per year outside of their steady relationship. In this report, we will take you step by step into the study to see whether the claims are true.

The FRC’s Briefs Are Showing

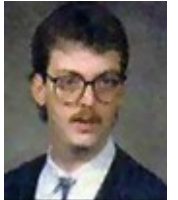
Tony Perkins’ Family Research Council submitted an Amicus Brief to the Maryland Court of Appeals as that court prepared to consider the issue of gay marriage. We examine just one small section of that brief to reveal the junk science and fraudulent claims of the Family “Research” Council.

Review: *The Gay Report*

When Karla Jay and Allan Young published *The Gay Report* in 1979, it quickly a favorite source of statistics for many anti-gay extremists. But before you accepts these statistic at face value, you should examine the inner workings of this survey very carefully. What you learn might surprise you.

Daniel Fetty Doesn’t Count

The FBI’s annual Hate Crime Statistics aren’t as complete as they ought to be, and their report for 2004 was no exception. In fact, their most recent report has quite a few glaring holes. Holes big enough for Daniel Fetty to fall through.



This video comes out at a time when we noticed PFOX (Parents and Friends of Ex-gays and Gays) revamping their website and pulling one of **Dr. Spitzer's statements out of context**, this time in an embedded video that rudely plays automatically as soon as the page is loaded. Maybe this is the Focus on the Family video that Dr. Spitzer mentions and is so unhappy with.

PFOX Distorts Dr. Spitzer On Their New Website

Jim Burroway

February 14th, 2007

This is pretty outrageous. Teach The Facts noticed that the website for PFOX (Parents and Families of Ex-Gays and Gays) has gotten quite a makeover. (It's also a severely jumbled mess if you try to view it using Firefox or Safari) And in the process, they placed a video of Dr. Robert Spitzer front and center of the web page.

(For those of you at work, please note that the video loads and plays automatically, and depending on your browser you may have difficulty disabling it. The sound may be loud, and may be annoying or distracting for people working nearby. This is a huge no-no among professional web designers, who would never do this sort of thing out of simple courtesy to their visitors. But then PFOX has never been known for courteous behavior.)

In that video clip, Dr. Spitzer is heard to say:

The DSM stands for Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, it's a publication of the American Psychiatric Association, and it's kind of the Bible of psychiatry. I came up with a definition in 1973 that made it possible to argue that homosexuality was not a mental disorder. I mean, the gay activists have taken the viewpoint that from a political/strategic point of view they do better if they can convince society at large that once you're homosexual you can never change. Now, I can appreciate that that helps them politically, and I'm sympathetic towards their political goals, but I think it's just not true.

Dr. Spitzer has been at the center of the ex-gay controversy ever since he presented preliminary findings in 2000 of 200 ex-gays who reported some change in their sexual orientation. He revealed that it took him some sixteen months of repeated searching to find the two-hundred participants for the study, and even then, nearly a fifth of those participants were in leadership positions of ex-gay ministries and many more made public pronouncements about their "transformation" at church functions. The process of determining the degree of change for these participants consisted of a single telephone interview.

While he concluded that it was possible for some very highly-motivated people to undergo some sort of change in sexual orientation, the study's many weaknesses prompted the *Archives of Sexual Behavior* to take the very unusual step of publishing some twenty-five peer review commentaries when they published the study in 2003. Most of those commentaries were highly critical of the study's methodology and conclusions.

PFOX has a lot of nerve cherry-picking that single quote from Dr. Spitzer. What they don't reveal is that as recently as this past Monday *The New York Times* reported:

But after enduring an avalanche of criticism from peers who said he had given too much credence to the accounts of his subjects, many of whom were leaders of ex-gay ministries, Dr. Spitzer now says many advocates of sexual reorientation have misrepresented his views.

“Although I suspect change occurs, I suspect it’s very rare,” he said. “Is it 1 percent, 2 percent? I don’t think it’s 10 percent.”

Dr. Spitzer has previously condemned misappropriations of his study by anti-gay lobbyists and activists in their efforts to limit civil liberties for gays and lesbians. It’s impossible to imagine that Dr. Spitzer would lend his endorsement to an organization like PFOX, which is among the more notorious for its unethical practices.

You may remember that PFOX was embarrassed last July when then-Board President Richard Cohen demonstrated his **highly unorthodox conversion therapy techniques on national television**. Cohen, who had been permanently expelled from the American Counseling Association two years earlier, finally left the organization, although it’s unclear whether he resigned or was forced out.

PFOX is now headed by Regina Griggs, who I saw at last Saturday’s Love Won Out conference in Phoenix at the PFOX booth. Love Won Out was jointly presented by Focus on the Family and Exodus. This brings to mind the following questions: Does Focus on the Family endorse PFOX’s blatant misappropriation of Dr. Spitzer’s image, voice, and good name to create a fraudulent endorsement of PFOX’s methods and message? And will Exodus, of which PFOX is a member ministry, condemn PFOX and strip that organization of its annual certification for carrying out such fraudulent representations?

Ex-Gay Watch Analyzes The Spitzer Study

Jim Burroway

February 5th, 2007

At the 2001 Annual Convention of the American Psychiatric Association, Dr. Robert Spitzer presented the preliminary results of a study that he had been working. For the previous year and a half, he looked for and found two hundred “ex-gays” to interview to determine whether they had actually changed. Based wholly on their self-reports in telephone interviews, he concluded that some of them had.

The issue of “change” (I only put it in quotes because there hasn’t been a consistent definition of exactly what supposedly changes) is extremely complex and contentious. It’s one that I will be dedicating considerable energy in exploring in the near future. It is impossible to discuss the many claims that ex-gay leaders make concerning change without understanding what the Spitzer study did and did not say.

My friends and compatriots at Ex-Gay Watch have put together an excellent video that makes a very good primer on the Spitzer Study. Contributing author and ex-ex-gay Daniel Gonzales delves into how the study was done, what its weaknesses and limitations are, and how Dr. Spitzer has denounced the way the study has been misused by those who seek to limit or roll back civil liberties for gays and lesbians. It’s worth a watch.

The False Witness of Focus on the Family

Jim Burroway

June 20th, 2006

Wayne Besen, founder of Truth Wins Out, has been closely following some recent statements coming from Melissa Fryrear of Focus on the Family, who has misrepresented research twice in as many days.

Yesterday, Wayne reported on Melissa Fryrear’s claims that a recent Canadian study on youth suicide links “pro-gay advocates” with a higher number of suicide attempts by gay and lesbian youths. In her press release, she says:

“Regrettably, they think they have to embrace homosexuality because pro-gay advocates told them that they were born gay,” she said. “And that is absolutely not true.”

Unfortunately for Ms. Fryrear, Wayne asked the researcher, Dr. Elizabeth Saewyc about Ms. Fryrear’s statement, and this is what he learned:

When contacted about Focus on the Family's claims, Saewyc, the study's principal investigator, said she was "disturbed" by what "seems to be an attempt to make their opinions more credible by linking them to scientific research — even though the research doesn't support those beliefs." She said Focus on the Family draws conclusions well beyond the study results by claiming that lesbians are suicidal because they are "embracing homosexuality," as well as other inaccuracies in their article.

"Population surveys cannot determine cause and effect," Saewyc explained, "they can only suggest possible links. Even so, other researchers have not found these sorts of links, and neither have we."

The Canadian Press has since picked up the story. When they asked Dr. Saewyc for a comment, she responded:

"The research has been hijacked for somebody's political purposes or ideological purposes and that's worrisome."

In fact, said Saewyc, American studies have noted that gay teenagers are at the highest risk of suicide before they come out of the closet. After that, they do quite well unless they're harassed.

"If they're trying to kill themselves because they're embracing homosexuality, one would logically conclude they should all be suicidal," said Saewyc.

The Canadian Press then asked Ms. Fryrear to respond, and that's when she chose to misrepresent psychological research for a second time:

Some clinical studies, including one by Dr. Robert Spitzer, have linked contemplating suicide to unwanted attractions to the same sex, she said.

Now, I've read Dr. Spitzer's study, and can assure you it says no such thing. But for good measure, Wayne asked Dr. Spitzer directly, who responded:

"Unfortunately Focus on the Family has once again reported findings of my study out of context to support their fight against gay rights," said Dr. Robert Spitzer, a professor of psychiatry at Columbia University. ...

"Although a third of the subjects in my study reported having had serious thoughts of suicide related to their homosexuality, not one of them blamed the gay rights movement's advocating a 'born-gay' theory of homosexuality as the cause of their suicidal thinking," said Spitzer.

Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family often seeks the moral high ground when exploring issues concerning the family and the broader culture. Unfortunately, his "Gender Issues Analyst" needs to brush up on the ethics of misquoting legitimate scientific research. Otherwise, it's just another ***False Witness*** in the service of bigotry.