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Yet Another Attempt To Discredit The Spitzer Study Fails

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Another attempt to discredit the Spitzer study and to demean Dr. Robert Spitzer personally, has failed.

Straight from the "academy," the new book titled *Ex-gay Research: Analyzing the Spitzer Study and Its Relationship to Science, Religion, Politics, and Culture* was edited by Jack Drescher and Kenneth Zucker (2006, Harrington Park Press, an Imprint of Haworth Press, Inc.).

Drescher's Second Attempt Yields "Lead"

Drescher failed in his first attempt to dismiss Spitzer's research in *The Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy* (JGLP). An activist whose criticisms of the Spitzer research seems limited to political diatribes, Drescher's introductory chapter is titled, "Gold or Lead?"

One can only conclude that Drescher's second attempt yields lead.

An Extra Measure Of Activism Masqueraded As Science

This volume is really not new but rather the original Spitzer study accompanied by commentaries from *The Archives of Sexual Behavior* along with the activist commentaries from the JGLP. Both publications have been critiqued in articles on the NARTH web site.

However, the re-emergence of both publications in one book merits attention.

Apparently, the editors determined that this extra measure of activism would be more convincing if packaged in one volume.

The articles from activists, instead of thoughtful scholarly responses, actually add credibility to the Spitzer research. For example, the Cathy Renna and Scott Lund's political treatise (both are former consultants to the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) borders on the ridiculous. They blame the media for catering to conservative zealots and for misrepresenting science. Such rhetoric eliminates itself from any thoughtful discussion and elevates, rather than discredits, the Spitzer research.

Renna And Lund Blame The Media?

Renna and Lund note that the media "marginalizes legitimate scientific insights and promotes simplistic, misrepresentative interpretations of complex issues." One wonders if Renna and Lund might be referring to the media's unrelenting claim that there is gay gene

or that a biological basis for homosexuality somehow accounts for finger length differences in lesbians or differential olfactory responses in gay men.

To their credit, Renna and Lund do acknowledge that "The historic and ongoing engagement between those who fight for and against cultural and legal equality for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals--combined with the opposition's insistence that any evidence that sexual orientation is mutable or 'choice' negates the validity of legal safeguards for gays and lesbians--suggests that the media's responsibility to cover related issues in a fair, accurate and comprehensive manner is of vital importance."

Most scientists would agree, particularly with the need for comprehensive and accurate representation of scientific findings. No one is benefited when science is misrepresented or misused to support political agendas.

However, what Renna and Lund seem to miss is that the science of homosexuality is different from the politics of homosexuality. The former only progresses by asking questions, not by avoiding questions whose answers might not fit a political agenda. The politics of homosexuality addresses the rights of gays and lesbians and what society is willing to give. However, even the support of these rights does not require allegiance to the false belief that homosexuality is invariably fixed in all people. It is not.

Besen's Rant Is A Death Knell To The Editors' Intended Message

Perhaps the most distracting detour from this "thoughtful analysis of the Spitzer study" is the Wayne Besen rant. Besen, a former spokesman for the Human Rights Campaign, characterizes Dr. Spitzer as an "over-the-hill stage horse galloping towards the limelight or a court jester hoodwinked by a scheming religious right."

I don't recall anyone calling Dr. Spitzer a "young, inexperienced stage horse galloping toward the limelight or a court jester hoodwinked by a scheming liberal left" when he led the charge to remove homosexuality from the diagnostic manual in 1973.

There is some merit to the adage that when you attack the messenger instead of the message that you weaken the counter message. In this volume, Besen's contribution is a death knell to whatever message the editors intended to convey.

Scholarly Responses Support Spitzer, Redeems Book's Value

The real scholarly responses to the Spitzer study in this publication came from three academics: Dr. Byrd, Dr. Yarhouse and Dr. Hershberger. Each of these scholars, all of whom have immaculate academic credentials, offers thoughtful responses to the Spitzer study. Each makes a different but important contribution in their analyses of this significant study.

Dr. Byrd's Response

From Dr. Byrd: "The Spitzer study essentially reopens the debate over whether homosexuality is mutable. ...Indeed Spitzer provides evidence that some gay men and lesbians are not only able to change self-identity, but are able to modify core features of sexual orientation, including fantasies. ...Spitzer's sample size was larger than those of most prior studies. He carefully considered the components of the homosexual experience and was considerably more detailed in his assessment than were other studies. ...Virtually any bias in the interview coding was eliminated by the near perfect interrater scores."

Dr. Yarhouse's Response

From Dr. Yarhouse. Of the Spitzer study, Dr. Yarhouse notes "it has given a voice to the disenfranchised within a minority group...the Spitzer study supports the view that some people experience a change in sexual orientation."

Dr. Yarhouse cites supportive research from Shidlo and Schroeder who had to change the name of their study when they discovered the possibility of successful change in some of their subjects (The Schidlo and Schroeder study was originally title, "Homophobic Therapies: Documenting the Damage." The title was later changed to "Changing Sexual Orientation: Does Counseling Work?" because they found that some people reported benefits to reorientation therapy including a change of sexual orientation.

Yarhouse notes that whatever methodological limitations might be found in the Spitzer study--such as self-report--are similar to those limitations found in lesbian, gay, and bisexual research as well. Even the Schidlo and Schroeder study is subject to the same methodological criticisms leveled at the Spitzer study.

Finally, Yarhouse concludes that the key to understanding the Spitzer study is to understand what Dr. Spitzer intended, which was to study whether anyone had ever experienced a change of sexual orientation. Ironically, Spitzer's study was not so different from that of Evelyn Hooker who asked the question as to whether or not homosexuals are manifestly disturbed. Hooker did not prove that all homosexuals are healthy, just as Spitzer did not prove that all homosexuals can change their sexual orientation.

But Spitzer's study did answer the question, "Is it ever possible for a person with a homosexual orientation to report change in the direction of a heterosexual orientation?"

And the answer to that question is, "Yes."

Dr. Hershberger's Response

Dr. Scott Hershberger's contribution was perhaps the most unique among the three scholarly responses. His chapter is titled "Guttman Scalability Confirms the Effectiveness of Reparative Therapy."

Dr. Hershberger's contribution is unique because he is an essentialist, a distinguished

scholar and statistician who has voiced his belief that homosexuality is biologically determined.

Apparently Dr. Hershberger questioned the legitimacy of the subjects' responses in the Spitzer study and decided to subject the Spitzer study to a Guttman scalability analysis to answer his question. The Guttman test is a scalagram which is used to determine where or not reported changes occur in a cumulative, orderly fashion.

Subsequent to the Guttman analysis, Hershberger concluded, "The orderly, law-like pattern of changes in homosexual sexual behavior, homosexual self-identification, and homosexual attraction and fantasy observed in Spitzer's study is strong evidence that reparative therapy can assist individuals in changing their homosexual orientation to a heterosexual orientation. Now it is up to those skeptical of reparative therapy to provide strong evidence to support their position. In my opinion, they have yet to do so."

Activists Try Silence Research That Does Not Support The Gay Agenda

So why all the discussion?

Robert Spitzer simply challenged the assumption that every desire for change in sexual orientation is always the results of social pressure and could never be the product of a rational self-directed goal.

Specifically, the Spitzer study tested the hypothesis that some individuals whose orientation is predominantly homosexual can become predominantly heterosexual following some form of reparative therapy.

And to his surprise, the answer was "yes."

According to Spitzer, many of the participants "...made substantial changes in sexual arousal, and fantasy--not merely behavior." Even subjects who made less substantial changes believed therapy to be extremely beneficial.

Spitzer's research does not lend support to the gay agenda, an agenda whose foundation is based on innate-immutable theory of homosexuality. The Spitzer study essentially re-opens the debate on the malleability of homosexuality. With the re-opening of the debate in the academy comes the permission to conduct research.

And the recent Karten dissertation sponsored by Fordham University is an example of such research. The Karten study takes the Spitzer research a step further to determine what factors make a difference in the transition from homosexual to heterosexual orientation.

It now appears that other studies will follow.

Science Supports The Malleability Of Homosexuality

The current volume on ex-gay research, without the political commentary, adds to the growing body of studies which point toward the fluidity of non-heterosexual expressions of human sexuality. From the recent research by Diamond, Schechter and others, one can only conclude that sexual orientation is far from fixed in those individuals who are not exclusively heterosexual.