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Considering Another Side: Ex Gay Therapy

Audience Analysis

Primarily, my paper will be read by Christians and Psychologists alike, who disagree with the idea of ex gay or aversion therapies. These two groups will consist of “liberal” Christians and psychologists who agree with the American Psychological Association’s declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness. My secondary audience will include anyone else interested in LGBT studies and who disagrees with ex gay therapy as well. Levels of expertise include people who are currently in college or who have graduated. This paper is for people who know enough about Christian values or about psychology to find meaning in the points made throughout the paper. Overall, it is for a generally knowledgeable and learned audience.

Of course my audience has bias since they completely disagree with the fact that homosexuality is wrong thus they definitely disagree with ex gay therapy. These biases come from the fact that more liberal Christians may argue that we should love and accept all of God’s children. The psychologists will feel that the APA’s word is complete truth. Because of my audience and their biases, I am taking a very professional, direct, and formal tone to show that I am not biased but simply looking at fact.

Exigence is created through the statistics that I use in the introduction showing that Americans attitudes toward homosexuality are in fact moving in the wrong direction. The stats show that America is becoming too tolerant. The evidence that I use to persuade consists of more statistics, conclusions from psychological experiments, definitions, and true stories. My evidence is also backed by the stasis of conjecture, value, jurisdiction, and even some call to action at the end. Logos is developed with the statistics and results from psychological experiments. Pathos if developed with my introduction that speaks to the attitudes of American citizens and through the true stories that I discuss. Ethos is established because my thorough research of the topic. I also establish ethos by using refutation in the paper.

I Pledge on my honor that I have not given or received and unauthorized assistance on this assignment.
Homosexuality is becoming increasingly acceptable in American society. As more and more people identify themselves as homosexuals, the more it becomes seemingly natural to a nation of people who were once opposed to it for various religious or biological reasons. An article on the trends in American attitudes toward gay people noted that as of 1996, a majority of Americans knew someone who was gay. In 2004, 32% of Americans said that they believed people were born homosexual. This statistic is in comparison to the study done just twenty years earlier in which only 16% said they believed people were born gay. But does this growing exposure and thus tolerance of homosexuality make it acceptable or right? This is the question being asked by Christians, by politicians, by psychoanalysts, and by the world; is homosexuality right and what should be done about it? Should homosexuality be deemed correct simply because people are caving to the popular idea? Should it merely be accepted as natural? No, being gay was wrong twenty years ago and it is still wrong. In fact, homosexuality is unnatural according to psychoanalysts and is even iniquitous according to Christianity, because of this; it should be eradicated through ex gay therapies.

Ex gay aversion therapies came about as a result of the American Psychological Association’s classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder. Homosexuality was listed as a mental illness in APA’s first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) published in 1952. It was listed as a sociopathic personality disturbance categorized as “sexual deviation”. Listing homosexuality as a mental illness also led to efforts by the APA to treat the disorder. However, in 1973, after much lobbying from gay rights activists over the listing of homosexuality in the DSM, the APA declassified homosexuality as a disorder and abruptly ended the treatment of homosexuality altogether (Burdige). This declassification is what sparked Christians and some psychoanalysts to maintain and act on the belief that homosexuality was in
fact an illness that still needed to be cured. As a result, ex gay organizations were formed to continue treating and converting homosexuals into heterosexuals. These ex-gay programs were established and run by Evangelical, Presbyterian, Southern Baptist, Roman Catholic, and Mormon Christians. These groups formed aversive therapy programs such as “Exodus international”, “Focus on the Family”, and “Love Won Out” (Lewellen). Psychoanalysts who got in on the movement to continue converting homosexuals included Charles Socarides and Joseph Nicolosi, both of whom fused psychoanalysis with religious doctrines in order to treat gays. They also became the co-founders of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality or NARTH (Lewellen). NARTH is a scientific agency that works with Christian groups and to prove that homosexuality is deviant and should be cured through ex gay therapies.

There are several aspects and techniques involved in ex gay therapy that lead to the extermination of homosexuality. Ex gay therapies that are performed in Christian organizations like “Exodus” can consist of many different treatments including religious support groups, extensive prayer, religious mentoring, and exorcism (Christianson). Ex gay therapies performed by psychoanalysts include electric shock, orgasmic reconditioning, hypnosis, medication, distracting patients from homosexual desire with heterosexual activities, and “name it and claim it” which consists of patients labeling themselves as heterosexuals or ex gays even before they are cured (Christianson). An example of another aversion therapy method is when homosexual patients are presented with attractive pictures of the same sex and then administered painful stimuli at the same time so that homosexual arousal is associated with discomfort and thus patients revert to natural sexual desires (Chenier). Therapy can also consist of patients reconstructing their childhoods in order to recall any particularly traumatic experiences that may have caused sexual deviance (Lewellen). Ex Gay therapy is ideally administered over a certain
number of years before it is said to be successful. According to ex gay therapists, success is
defined as when homosexual men or women convert to heterosexuality or simply remain
celibate. Any of these practices can help patients to experience a cure.

Of course these therapy techniques are necessary in the first place because of the fact that
homosexuality is deemed inappropriate by both science and Christianity alike. Christians believe
that homosexuality is a dangerous lifestyle and that sex is only natural among heterosexual
couples. Some conservative Christians consider it a disorder, a demon possession, and a sin that
should be exorcized and healed. Barry Levy, a licensed social worker and Christian counselor
insists that, "[homosexuality] is not consistent with the manufacturer’s desire. It is not what the
body is for…it is a mental disorder, a certifiable neurosis" (Benjamin 30). Homosexuality, in this
case, is a complex, a mere obsession that goes against the intentions of the creator of mankind
and most Christians agree with this. In fact, in the Bible, Leviticus 18:20, "You shall not lie with
a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." If a man is to lie with or have relations
with another man as he does with a woman, it is in fact detested by God. Clearly, homosexuality
is unnatural and against His created order, which is for men to be with women as mates (Slick).
Homosexuality is believed to be wrong to those who value God’s will and purpose for
humankind. That purpose does not include homosexuality. As a result, Christian ministries are
looking to cure people without showing bigotry or bias so that sufferers might let go of this
worldly impurity. They welcome gay patients with open arms, ready to help. Psychoanalysts
share similar beliefs; for example prominent psychoanalyst Irving Bieber insists that based on
his 1962 study of the subject, homosexuality is both unnatural and fixable (Burdige). Dr. Joseph
Nicolosi, president of NARTH says that homosexuality is caused by “a distant…critical father
[or] an over involved intrusive…mother” (Benjamin 28). Males who find their fathers to be cold
often look for consolation and affection in other males, and females with imperious mothers replace the lack of motherly love with lesbian relationships. Both these instances show homosexuality can, in some instances, be the result of a family dysfunction; a problem that can be fixed. Another American psychoanalyst, Sandor Rado, believes that heterosexuality is the biological norm (Chenier). Even psychotherapists, who deal with the more scientific spectrum of the issue, are in agreement that the natural order of humankind is most desirable, and homosexuality goes against the natural order for reasons that can be overcome through therapy. Even for those who are not interested in Christian beliefs, it is clear that science, a governing force in the world, also shows homosexuality to be wrong. Both sides, the therapist and Christians are working together, helping people lead healthier lifestyles, not plagued by this illness and healed from its causes.

Some Psychologists will probably dispute that claim by saying that the APA should have jurisdiction over whether homosexuality is right or wrong because they are a more legitimate and reliable organization of licensed psychologists. In actuality though, psychoanalysts and Christians should have the jurisdiction and authority in saying that homosexuality is wrong as opposed to the APA who now claims that homosexuality is acceptable. Skeptics might also argue that NARTH is not reputable and was formed out of rebellion by some psychoanalysts and Christians. It is true that NARTH was formed out of deviance from the norm; however, the formation of NARTH was necessary considering the APA only tolerated homosexuality because of social and political pressures to do so. In fact, when homosexuality was still listed as a sexual deviation in the DMS, the APA had done extensive research to prove that it was in fact an illness. They were even performing reparative and aversive therapies on patients at the time. It was only after much protesting from gays that the APA removed homosexuality from the DMS.
Coincidentally, the civil rights movement, the gay rights movement, and the women's right movements were going on at the same time that the APA declassified homosexuality at their 1973 convention (Christianson). At a time when the world was beginning to fight harder for all forms of civil rights, the APA suddenly changed their classification of homosexuality. They wanted to be seen as one of the many organizations that upheld civil rights and fought discrimination as did all of the other copy cat organizations which declassified homosexuality as an illness at the same exact time as the APA. These included the National Association of Social Workers, the American Counselors Association, and The American Medical Association etc. Everyone was looking to be a civil rights activist and hero instead of looking at homosexuality for what it really is, as a curable problem. In truth, the APA and organizations like it caved in to political and social pressure from gay activists and interest groups (Benjamin). Thus, they do not have the credibility or the authority to determine whether or not homosexuality is right or wrong. The APA lost that credibility when they denounced the sound research they had done to prove homosexuality an illness. However, psychoanalysts and Christians have not succumbed to the social and political pressures. They continue to uphold the fact that homosexuality is deviant and their rebelliousness comes from wanting to remind the world of that fact. Homosexuality is wrong according to both psychoanalyst and Christian groups, and they have the power to say so since their views are consistent and based on the original findings of an earlier and more, strong willed APA.

As promised by the psychoanalysts and Christian institutions, the effects of gay therapies have been proven; the therapies have allowed many homosexuals to become cured. According to ex gay therapists, being cured counts as either becoming asexual or heterosexual. One Alan Medinger of Baltimore Maryland attests that he lost all homosexual desires in 1974 after one
night of “cathartic prayer” in an ex gay ministry (Baxter). Today, Medinger is married with children. Tom Cole, now the director of Reconciliation in the Exodus ministry of Detroit reports being cured of homosexuality at age twenty-six. He was turned on to ex gay ministries by a friend. Today Cole is married to an ex-lesbian woman named Donna, whom he met at a bible study/prayer session (Benjamin). Alan Chambers, Exodus president, says that although a “struggle free life is not what I have found” from attending ex gay therapy, his homosexual desires have changed and he looks forward to the after-life when “God will fulfill his promise of healing to completion” (Benjamin 31). The effects of ex gay ministries are clear from these testimonials of individuals who were living unnatural and even sinful lives. They turned to ex gay as an opportunity to be healed and they found improvement, if not complete success. The effects of ex gay ministries were so powerful and fulfilling that people like, Cole, and Chambers, decided to work for the ministries in order to affect change in other people.

In addition to testimonies, psychoanalysts have done research to show that ex gay therapy does in fact produce helpful results. The Institute of Psychiatry and The Maudsley Hospital did a pilot study of 10 ex gay therapy patients in 1968 showing that 70% of patients showed changes in sexual attitude after being treated with electric aversion therapy (Bancroft). This study is not recent; however, it does serve as a comparison for the more recent studies, which actually display improvement in these sorts of numbers. One more recent study was done by psychiatrist Robert Spitzer. Spitzer performed a study to measure the effect of reparative therapy on 143 alleged ex gays and 57 alleged ex lesbians who had either gone through ex gay counseling or a ministry. This very controversial study, often referred to as The Spitzer Study, was published in the Archives of Sexual Behavior in 2003. Spitzer performed interviews with his subjects to measure their behaviors before and after ex gay therapy. The results show that 48% of
participants had been successfully converted to heterosexuals. In addition, 66% of males and 44% of females had good heterosexual functioning and were finding emotional and sexual satisfaction with a partner of the opposite sex; rarely or never thinking about someone of the same sex (Lewellen). Ex gay therapy is effective and the proof is in both the true stories of those who have been through it as well as in the famous Spitzer Study that shows significant statistics of success.

Many who oppose ex gay therapy or are in agreement with homosexuality might challenge the Spitzer Study as valid evidence for the effectiveness of ex gay therapy. Arguments against it may be that the Spitzer study could be flawed because it was not conducted longitudinally; participants were not interviewed continually over a span of time. Another argument is that Spitzer’s Study is the only evidence showing the success of ex gay therapy, so it cannot be trusted (Lewellen). Both arguments are understandable but they also fail to take into account two important things. One is that ex gay researchers are in the minority up against gay rights activists and APA supporters, thus they have limited money, resources, and support to perform ex-gay research. It is inevitable for Spitzer to have a somewhat flawed experiment. Secondly, Spitzer’s study is not the only study showing the success of ex-gay therapy. There are other studies including the previously mentioned study done by the The Institute of Psychiatry in 1968. Also, the testimonies of people who were cured through ex- gay therapies serve as unparalleled evidence for the effectiveness of aversion therapy. Spitzer’s study is reliable, in spite of how it may draw positive attention to ex gay therapy in a way that many might object to.

Homosexuality is deviant and goes against the laws of nature, thus homosexuals should seek out ex gay therapy in order to be cured of unnatural desires. In order to do so, individuals need to first accept the truth, which is that homosexuality is abnormal because it goes against the
laws of nature. This is agreed upon in the areas of science and religion, both of which serve as
governing forces in American society. Ex gay therapy is a viable alternative to a life of aberrant
desires. Ex gay therapy is essential to restoring the natural order of humankind, so that people no
longer yield to the popular idea that homosexuality is acceptable. Instead, people should work to
keep other members of the human race from being affected by this illness. In order to accomplish
this, individuals need to take action by sending their confused homosexual teens to ex gay
ministries so that they can get cured before this illness sets in too deep. Individuals should also
allot money, time, and even more research to the efforts and services of ex gay therapies. Action
is what is going to inform the world about this issue and save those caught in the trap of
homosexual desires. With this, hopefully someday the percentage of people who approve of
homosexuality will decrease, as they will be enlightened about the true issue at hand and strive
harder to promote treatment.
Works Cited


