



# QUACKS

*'Conversion Therapists,' the Anti-LGBT Right,  
and the Demonization of Homosexuality*



# QUACKS

*'Conversion Therapists,' the Anti-LGBT Right,  
and the Demonization of Homosexuality*

MAY 2016

THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER is a nonprofit organization that combats hate, intolerance and discrimination through education and litigation. Its Intelligence Project, which prepared this report and also produces the semi-annual investigative magazine *Intelligence Report*, tracks the activities of hate groups, extremist antigovernment activity, and the anti-LGBT movement. Its Teaching Tolerance project helps foster respect and understanding in the classroom. Its litigation arm files lawsuits against hate groups and extremist groups that attack the LGBT community.

#### **MEDIA AND GENERAL INQUIRIES**

**Mark Potok, Heidi Beirich or David Dinielli**

Southern Poverty Law Center  
400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, Ala.  
(334) 956-8200

[splcenter.org](http://splcenter.org)

This report was prepared by the staff of the Intelligence Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The SPLC is supported entirely by private donations. No government funds are involved.

© Southern Poverty Law Center. All rights reserved.

## *About the Report*

This report was written by Mark Potok, with contributions from Evelyn Schlatter, who interviewed Alan Chambers.

It was designed by Scott Phillips and Russell Estes.

## *Special Recognition*

Great thanks are due to the attorneys whose remarkable and pioneering work in the 2015 JONAH trial informs this report.

They include David Dinielli, Sam Wolfe and Scott McCoy of the Southern Poverty Law Center; James Bromley, Lina Bensman and Tom Kessler of Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP of New York, NY.; and Allyn Lite and Bruce Greenberg of Lite DePalma Greenberg LLC of Newark, N.J.

The team was led by Dinielli and Bromley.

Thanks also are owed to the important work of Wayne Besen, an activist whose Truth Wins Out organization has been at the forefront of the battle against conversion therapy.



# *Table of Contents*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	4
QUACKS: Conversion Therapists in America .....	6
THE EXPERTS: JONAH's 'Scientific' Testimony .....	15
THE PLAINTIFFS: Portraits of Three Survivors.....	25
CONVERSION THERAPY: A Timeline .....	29
CONVERSION THERAPY: The Groups .....	38
CONVERSION THERAPY: An Interview .....	45

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Will standing in a circle of naked men deep in the woods turn gay men straight? Is disrobing in front of a mirror alone with your therapist and then touching “your masculinity” a cure for homosexuality? Does beating a pillow representing your mother really help develop “healthy” relationships with other men?

This is a report about junk science and some of the people who propagate it. It is not about silly, perhaps amusing theories about ESP or life on the moon or even purported miracle cures for cancer. The “science” examined here actively harms people, leading with grim regularity to suicide, depression and an array of self-destructive behaviors. It demeans, defames and defrauds human beings, typically at their most vulnerable moments. And, as if that weren’t enough, it regularly lays the blame for the alleged malady of homosexuality at the feet of gay people’s parents, despite the fact that they are wholly innocent.

The men and women who people this industry — known as “conversion,” “reparative” or “ex-gay” therapists — are like modern-day phrenologists, the “experts” beloved by the Nazis who thought they could identify inferior human beings by measuring their subjects’ skulls. They employ theories that have been thoroughly debunked by virtually all relevant medical associations. They cite bizarre studies that were shot down decades ago as key documents. They use techniques that were described in court by one expert as “worse than snake oil.” They are quacks.

Many of them are doubtless sincere. Some describe their own struggles with “unwanted same-sex attractions.” But sincere or not, the promotion of conversion therapy has a cynical side. If being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender is

merely a chosen behavior, one that can be “fixed” with the right mental health treatment, then criticizing LGBT people for their sexual choices is akin to simply criticizing bad behavior. Unlike attacking someone for their skin color, reparative therapists can condemn the gay “lifestyle” and still claim that they are not LGBT-hating bigots.

The real science is perfectly clear. A consensus of the vast majority of psychiatrists, psychologists and other counselors and their professional organizations agree that homosexuality is a normal variation of human sexuality. Likewise, they condemn reparative therapy and other attempts to change sexual orientation.

This report is built around revelations that emerged from a lawsuit that was tried in New Jersey last year. Represented by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and other attorneys, several gay plaintiffs sued Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing, or JONAH (formerly Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality), under a state consumer fraud law.

The case did not go well for JONAH. The judge in the case barred almost all testimony from the six experts proffered by the defendants, saying that “the theory that homosexuality is a disorder is not novel but — like the notion that the earth is flat and the sun revolves around it — instead is outdated and refuted.” In the end, the plaintiffs won a hands-down victory and JONAH went out of business. But

in depositions and the trial itself, the creepy world of reparative therapy was laid bare.

Nude group exercises and one-on-one therapy, re-enactments of past sexual abuse, group cuddling, and counseling blaming parents were normal. Bizarre practices included using anti-LGBT slurs, basketballs and even a pair of oranges representing testicles. Plaintiffs were told that living as gay men would reduce their lifespans, subject them to terrible diseases, and ensure miserable lives.

The practice of reparative therapy, which one expert estimates has been administered to one in three LGBT youths in recent years, is unconscionable, particularly when it is forced on young people by parents who are often trying to do what they think is best for their children. A number of experts have shown clearly that such therapy is unethical and utterly counterproductive.

Based on this study, the SPLC recommends several steps:

- At a minimum, states and localities should outlaw the provision of conversion therapy to

minors. Already, four states and two cities have passed such laws. Many more are considering similar action.

- Congress should pass the Therapeutic Fraud Prevention Act introduced last year by U.S. Rep. Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) A companion bill was filed in the Senate this April by U.S. Sens. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.). The legislation would classify conversion therapy as a fraudulent practice under the Federal Trade Commission Act, making it illegal to advertise or sell.
- Professional associations licensing psychiatrists, psychologists and other counselors should sanction members who engage in it.
- Insurers, both private and public, should refuse to reimburse claims made by reparative therapists.

If these things are not done, if the quacks who make up the reparative therapy business are not stopped, lives will continue to be ruined. ▲

# QUACKS

## *Conversion Therapists in America*

James E. Phelan was utterly convinced. After all, he had himself overcome “unwanted same-sex attractions,” and since then had worked for years as a conversion therapist, counseling men who wanted to become heterosexual. He’d been on the scientific advisory board of the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality. And, earlier in 2014, Phelan had written a book touting the therapy’s alleged successes.

But now he was on the spot. A lawyer for the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), which earlier had filed a lawsuit against a conversion therapy group for consumer fraud, was deposing him about his new book, *Successful Outcomes of Sexual Orientation Change Efforts: An Annotated Bibliography*.

“You report in your book on a drug called metrazol,” attorney Sam Wolfe said. “That’s also been reported in your book as having some value for people who want to convert to heterosexual.”

“Okay,” Phelan agreed.

“Are you aware that the FDA [Food & Drug Administration] revoked approval for that drug in 1982?”

“No.”

“Are you aware that that drug causes seizures?”

“No.”

That’s not all. Metrazol, a drug that was used in the 1930s and 1940s to treat various mental health disorders, produces explosive convulsions — so explosive that in one large study 42% of patients undergoing the procedure suffered spinal fractures. Ultimately, the FDA found that the acutely painful treatments, lasting from two to four months, were barbaric and banned them.

Phelan didn’t know any of that, even though his book was written 32 years after the FDA action. His book also listed another 35 sources favoring

“aversion therapy” — such “treatments” as the administration of electric shock or noxious chemicals in conjunction with images of gay sex — that he testified “do work.” He even said the only scientific study that could convince him conversion therapy was harmful would be one where “a majority of the people commit suicide.”

Phelan was one of six defense “experts” offered by Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing, or JONAH (the acronym formerly stood for Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality), in the case that was finally tried in a New Jersey courtroom last year. Two were excluded because their testimony would have been irrelevant to the issues being tried. But James Phelan, Joseph Berger, Christopher Doyle and Joseph Nicolosi — all key figures in the conversion therapy movement — wrote lengthy reports to the judge outlining their purported expertise.

Superior Court Judge Peter F. Bariso Jr. barred them all.\*

Finding that the men’s assertions were all based on the claim that homosexuality is a mental disorder even though the “overwhelming weight of scientific authority” concludes otherwise, Bariso ruled that “the theory that homosexuality is a disorder is not novel but — like the notion that the earth is flat and the sun revolves around it — instead is outdated and refuted.”

Conversion therapy, also known as “reparative” or “ex-gay” therapy, is on the ropes. Virtually all relevant U.S. medical associations — plus, just this March, the world’s largest professional association of psychiatrists — have condemned it. In the last

---

\* The judge made a narrow exception for Berger, who was allowed to testify only that it was unusual that Unger’s therapist’s notes did not make more mention of JONAH.



four years, four states and two cities have outlawed its use with minors. One after another, both secular and religious ex-gay groups have been embarrassed by gay sex scandals involving their founders or top officers. And the civil suit against JONAH – which produced hair-raising testimony about nude counseling sessions, group cuddling exercises, bizarre re-enactments and other “therapy” – exposed the creepy world of the conversion therapy industry and the quacks who run it.

### **‘Curing’ Homosexuality**

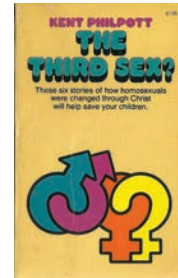
Although some ancient societies, like the Greeks and many American Indian tribes, accepted homosexuality as normal, gay men and women through the ages have been subjected to a litany of horrors, from castration to burning at the stake to the “anal pear,” which ripped apart a man’s insides (a “vaginal pear” was used for women judged deviant). But starting in the late 19th century, as medicine and faith in the scientific method blossomed, there were many who sought to “cure” any number of sexual practices seen as “deviant,” chief among them homosexuality.

The results were not enlightening.

A German baron claimed to cure scores of gay men through hypnosis. An American neurologist proposed riding bicycles for the same purpose, while a doctor suggested the use of cocaine solutions and strychnine shots for lesbians. A Viennese endocrinologist transplanted a testicle from a straight man to a gay man and claimed a complete conversion. Swiss experts reported that castration was effective.

An American neurologist perfected the “icepick” lobotomy to expunge homosexuality and other conditions, killing as many as 100 people in the process. Convulsive therapies, ranging from the use of drugs

The Rev. Kent Philpott’s *The Third Sex?*, published in 1975, told the stories of six gay people who had supposedly been “saved through Christ.” Four years later, four of the book’s subjects wrote the publisher to say that those claims were “100% false.”



like metrazol and insulin to electric shock, began to spread. A Danish endocrinologist experimented on gay concentration camp prisoners at Buchenwald. A British psychologist injected gay patients with nausea-inducing drugs while playing recordings of men having sex. Even Masters and Johnson, the pioneering sexologists who were the first to show that homosexuality is common, claimed that gay people could be converted.

But it was Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, whose ideas about homosexuality, developed in the first decades of the 20th century, formed the basis of what most conversion therapists today believe. Although Freud did not demonize gay people and doubted that sexual orientation could be changed, he did see homosexuality in both men and women as a form of arrested psychosexual development.

In the hands of later conversion therapists, Freud’s ideas about the “triadic family” were developed to theorize that gay men were the product of families with an overbearing, dominant mother, a distant and weak father, and a sensitive child. The boy was said to thus fail to mature into a close relationship with his father, and ultimately to seek to replace that relationship by having sex with other men. A closely related theory blames early childhood trauma like sexual molestation.

Today, the consensus of the vast majority of psychologists, psychiatrists and other counselors is that that model is entirely false. Alan Chambers, who

headed up the ex-gay giant Exodus International until its shutdown in 2013, said as much when he apologized for the pain caused by Exodus and, specifically, its promotion of “reparative theories about sexual orientation that stigmatized parents.”

### **The Contemporary Movement**

The year 1973 was epic both for LGBT people and for the about-to-be-born reparative therapy movement.

On the one hand, the American Psychiatric Association, which had listed homosexuality as a “sociopathic personality disturbance” since 1952, declassified it as a mental illness, removing it from its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The move came as the nascent gay rights movement, birthed by the 1969 Stonewall Riots, struggled in the face of widespread bigotry and burgeoning attacks from a rapidly expanding fundamentalist religious right.

On the other hand, the year saw the creation of Love in Action, the nation’s first contemporary reparative therapy ministry. Two years later, one of its founders, the Rev. Kent Philpott, wrote a book detailing how six gay people had been “saved through Christ.” *The Third Sex?* spawned a whole litany of other books, tapes and ministries that claimed to be able to use religion to turn gay people straight.

In many ways, the time was ripe for the reparative therapy movement. LGBT people were more in the public eye, and the religious right was looking for ways to remain engaged with an increasingly tolerant society. Rather than simply demonize gay people, reparative therapists latched on to the idea that gay people could change — that homosexuality was a sin like many others but did not have to be a permanent affliction. Indeed, some religious reparative therapists, a large percentage of whom had struggled with their own same-sex attractions, sincerely wanted to help.

But there was a more cynical reason as well. If being gay, lesbian or transgender was a “choice,” as most of the religious and secular right contended, then criticizing the LGBT community would be akin to simply criticizing bad behavior. It was, in other words, fundamentally different than skin color, over which people have no control. The tac-

tic was seen as a firewall against being attacked as gay-hating bigots. While reparative therapists might condemn the gay “lifestyle,” they could still claim to be simply trying to help people clean up their unhealthy and unhappy lives.

At the same time, with the rise of many types of religious fundamentalism, growing numbers of young men and women felt painful conflicts between their own urges and the prohibitions of their faiths. As a result, there was an enormous market of Christians, Jews, Mormons and others who faced condemnation by their co-religionists if they acted on their attractions to members of their own sex.

For a time, therefore, the movement expanded rapidly.

In 1976, what would grow into the largest religiously based reparative therapy group in the country was started in California. The group, which later came to be known as Exodus International, was an interdenominational Christian coalition that connected ex-gay ministries with potential clients. The nonprofit operation claimed that “30-50%” success rates in conversion therapy were “not unusual.”

Others followed. The same year, Homosexuals Anonymous, funded in part by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was founded by two men in Texas. In 1980, Courage International was organized as an official apostolate of the Catholic Church. In 1989, Evergreen International began serving members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The next year, ex-gay counselor Richard Cohen started the International Healing Foundation, one of the first to rely on Freudian ideas about the triadic family. (Cohen blamed his own early homosexuality on being molested by a male adult at a young age and on his parents.)

Countless other ex-gay therapists, counselors and life coaches, along with a large number of smaller groups, also began to pop up around the country. They increasingly relied on pseudo-science rather than religion to back their claims.

That tendency reached its peak with the 1992 creation of the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) by Charles Socarides, Joseph Nicolosi and Benjamin Kaufman. The founders said they were starting NARTH



KEVIN MCLOONEY/GAMMA LIAISON/GETTY IMAGES (ANNE, JOHN, AND CHILD); FACEBOOK (ANNE PAULK); COURTESY PHOTO (JOHN PAULK); NEWSWEEK (COVER)

because, they believed, the American Psychiatric Association's declassifying of homosexuality was mere political correctness and precluded an honest discussion of the topic. Based in Nicolosi's Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic in California, NARTH claimed to base its work on scientific facts.

In 1998, the drive to portray homosexuality as changeable culminated in a \$600,000 newspaper ad campaign, entitled "Truth in Love," that was funded by 15 religious-right groups — "the Normandy landing of the culture war," according to a Family Research Council official. The poster children of this campaign were John and Anne Paulk, who said they were formerly gay but now happily married. A photo of the couple ran on the cover of *Newsweek* under the headline "Gay for Life?"

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force reacted with alarm the next month, publishing a report entitled "Calculated Compassion." It described the ad campaign as "re-framing its attack on homosexuality in kinder, gentler terms," and warned that the ex-gay industry was undermining the battle for LGBT rights by suggesting that homosexuality is a choice, not an unchangeable condition like skin color.



**THEN AND NOW:** In 1998, John and Anne Paulk were the faces of a major religious-right campaign to promote conversion therapy. Two years later, John was photographed in a gay bar and lost his position as the chairman of the board of Exodus International. Fifteen years after that, he divorced Anne and said that he did not believe that sexual orientation change was possible.



Michael Bussee (far left and above) and Gary Cooper were among the five founders of Exodus International in 1979. Three years later, the men fell in love, left the organization, divorced their wives and became a couple.

But by then, the ex-gay movement already was in trouble.

### Things Fall Apart

The idea that gay people could convert to heterosexuality began to unravel within a few short years of the first ex-gay groups' formation. Over the course of the next four decades, that claim received a battering of biblical proportions.

Just a few years after Love in Action became the first reparative therapy group in America, a prominent member, John Evans, quit the group in disgust after a close friend, Jack McIntyre, reportedly committed suicide over his inability to become heterosexual. And in 1979, four years after group founder Kent Philpott published his book recounting six "successful" conversions, Evans and three of the others whose stories were featured wrote the publisher of Philpott's *The Third Sex?* to say that his claims that the four had become heterosexual were "100% false."

That same year, two of the five founders of Exodus International, Michael Bussee and Gary Cooper, quit that group to become a couple. They later divorced their wives and, in 1982, joined in a civil commitment ceremony. Years later, after Cooper's death, Bussee apologized for his role in the movement, admitting that "I never saw one of our members or other Exodus leaders or other Exodus members become heterosexual," and adding that it had harmed many people.

In 1986, Colin Cook, the former Seventh-day Adventist minister who had co-founded Homosexuals Anonymous a decade earlier,

resigned after a sociology professor studying his claims interviewed 14 of Cook's former clients. Every one said their sexual orientation had not changed, and 12 said they had had sexual contact with Cook during "treatment." As a result, the Seventh-day Adventist church pulled its funding, the group moved to Houston, and Cook's co-founder took over.

After the religious right's expensive 1998 ad campaign brought the reparative therapy movement to national attention, things went from bad to worse. It started the same year, with the horrific murder of gay student Matthew Shepard in Wyoming. The much-publicized killing illustrated the violence that LGBT people faced.

Then, in 1999, Russ Goringe, one of the first board members of the Mormon reparative therapy group Evergreen International, found himself hiking in the mountains with his wife and four children. In despair over his continuing same-sex attractions, he says he was about to commit suicide by leaping off a rope bridge when one of his daughters saw and stopped him. In the aftermath, he reevaluated his beliefs, divorced his wife and, with his children's support, married a man.

The next year, John Paulk, who had been the ex-gay poster boy for the 1998 ad campaign, was removed from his position as Exodus board chairman after LGBT activist Wayne Besen photographed him in a Washington, D.C., gay bar. Although Paulk initially dissembled about his reasons for being there, some 15 years later, in 2013, he would divorce his wife and say, "I do not believe

COURTESY OF MICHAEL BUSSEE (COUPLED); LINKEDIN (BUSSEE)

## “I never saw one of our members or other Exodus leaders or other Exodus members become heterosexual.”

that reparative therapy changes sexual orientation; in fact, it does great harm to many people.”

Paulk’s fellow ad campaign star, Michael Johnston, soon ran into trouble of his own. Johnston, who had been featured in 1998 TV ads touting reparative therapy and was the founder of “National Coming Out of Homosexuality Day,” was accused in 2003 of infecting men he met via the Internet with HIV. The American Family Association, which had partly funded the ad campaign, acknowledged that Johnston, who was featured in its “It’s Not Gay” video, had had a “moral fall.” Nevertheless, the group, after initially stopping, soon resumed distributing its video.

In 2007, the industry hit a new low with the conviction of Chris Austin, a reparative therapist from Texas who had addressed both Evergreen International and NARTH, for sexually assaulting a male client. He was sentenced to 10 years.

The next embarrassment was the third for Love in Action. John Smid — another ostensibly ex-gay man who had married a woman, joined that group and finally become its executive director — quit in 2008. He divorced his wife of 19 years shortly afterward and, in 2010, apologized for his role in the reparative therapy movement. “I offer my most sincere and heartfelt apology to the men, women and especially children and teens who felt unlovable, unworthy, shamed or thrown away by God or the church,” he said. In 2014, Smid married his male partner.

In 2010, NARTH officer and scientific advisory board member George Rekers was exposed for traveling abroad with a male prostitute. He denied

sexual contact with the man, saying he was merely helping to carry luggage, but the man told a wholly different story. Rekers resigned from NARTH’s board a week later.

The reparative therapy movement was also seriously damaged as professional organization after professional organization followed the lead of the American Psychiatric Association in declassifying homosexuality as a disorder. Over the years, the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Counseling Association, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, the American Medical Association, the American School Counselor Association, the American School Health Association and the American Psychoanalytic Association all issued similar statements. Each one also condemned the practice of conversion therapy.

Then, in 2012, Robert Spitzer, the psychologist who had led the 1973 effort to declassify homosexuality as a disorder, retracted a 2003 study that had concluded that some highly motivated people could change their sexual orientation. The study, which was published in a peer-reviewed journal, had been used repeatedly by ex-gay groups to validate their own beliefs. However, most of Spitzer’s subjects had been referred by ex-gay groups and, as he later explained, that meant that at best he could only conclude that his study reported what those people claimed.

But the most dramatic blow to hit reparative therapy came in 2013, when Exodus International President Alan Chambers, who had grown

increasingly critical of the movement, led his board to close down what was the largest religiously based conversion therapy group in the country. Chambers profusely apologized for the “pain and hurt” Exodus had caused and criticized reparative theory. His words sent shock waves through the entire American conversion therapy industry.

Still, it was late in the game for at least two generations of LGBT people, particularly youths. According to 2012 court testimony by Dr. Caitlin Ryan, an expert who works with the Family Acceptance Project, as many as one in three American LGBT youths had by then been subjected to conversion therapy.

Many of those people have reported being harmed as a result. And the evidence is not merely anecdotal. The Columbia University Law School

“I do not believe that reparative therapy changes sexual orientation; in fact, it does great harm to many people.”

recently reviewed the 13 peer-reviewed studies that did primary research on conversion therapy over the prior 30 years. Twelve of them “concluded that [conversion therapy] is ineffective and/or harmful, finding links to depression, suicidality, anxiety, social isolation and decreased capacity for intimacy.” The practice, it concluded, “can be extremely harmful.”

And then came JONAH.

### Here Comes the Judge

In November 2012, the Southern Poverty Law Center filed a lawsuit against JONAH, founder Arthur Goldberg, affiliated counselor Alan Downing, and Alan Downing Life Coaching LLC. Although the suit would not go to trial until 2015, the 2014 depositions of JONAH’s would-be experts already foreshadowed problems in the courtroom. The men seemed to have only the loosest grip on the scientific facts. One was described by the judge as a plagiarizer. At the same time, the judge, in addition to barring all of their testimony on conversion

therapy, pointed out that “the JONAH experts’ reports are riddled with methodological errors that also render their opinions inadmissible” and slammed their “refusal to consider studies” that didn’t support their views.

Some of what came out in those depositions was astonishing. One of the purported experts had cited a study by a “therapist” who turned out, unbeknownst to him, to be a massage therapist. Another’s articles had been published in a “journal” that charges authors \$35 a page. Most cited studies that dated back to the 1960s and before and had long been discredited; one of them was a 1947 article on extrasensory perception. One man denied news reports that he had claimed success rates of 75-90%. Another described how clients needed to insist on taking female dates to the restaurant *they*

chose to assert their masculine authority — or risk finding themselves attracted to a waiter. The practice of a New Guinea tribe that encourages young boys to consume as much semen from older men

as possible was cited with approval as an exercise in building heterosexuality.

In the courtroom, it got worse.

The original plaintiffs in the case were four former JONAH clients and two of their mothers — Michael Ferguson, Benjamin Unger, Sheldon Bruck, Chaim Levin, Jo Bruck and Bella Levin. (Sheldon Bruck was later dismissed as a plaintiff because his mother paid for his therapy.) They did not seek damages for pain and suffering, but only what they had paid for their therapy, along with the cost of therapy for one of them to undo the psychological damage wrought by JONAH.

The court heard how JONAH founder Arthur Goldberg encouraged potential clients with claims, such as one recounted by Bella Levin, that “he would be able to fix Chaim, that he wouldn’t be gay any more.” (JONAH asserted about a third of its clients became heterosexual, a third advanced in that direction, and a third saw no change.) And it came out that Goldberg, who had allowed himself to be addressed as “doctor” and

“rabbi” although he was neither, was a convicted con man. In 1989, he was sentenced to 18 months in federal prison in a \$2 billion municipal bond scheme. The prosecutor said Goldberg, who was later disbarred, was a man who “habitually took advantage of people” and “did not hesitate to lie or cheat or cover up.”

### Into the Fire

The stories the plaintiffs told were shocking.

During a closed-door session with Alan Downing, a JONAH-affiliated counselor, Chaim Levin, standing in front of a mirror, was told to say one negative thing about himself, then remove an article of clothing, repeating the process until he was naked. Then Downing told him to touch his penis and then his buttocks.

Benjamin Unger and Michael Ferguson were asked to do the same thing, but both demurred after initially starting to follow Downing’s instructions. But Downing was insistent, saying that “the principle of surrender” was important to the therapeutic process, Ferguson testified. “He kept rephrasing it in different ways,” he said, “but about half dozen different ways he tried to get my pants off.”

At one point, in line with the theory that bad parenting was what made children gay, Unger was handed a tennis racket and a pillow that represented his mother. “I was told to lift the racket over my head and start beating the pillow while yelling ‘mom’ the entire time. And I did that literally,” he recounted. “I had a huge gash and my hands were actually bleeding from hitting it so much.”

Clients were strongly encouraged to attend \$650, 48-hour retreats in the woods that were often staffed by JONAH principals like Downing and Arthur Goldberg. There, they had their cell phones and similar devices taken away and then were subjected to a series of bizarre exercises, re-enactments and more.

For starters, there were “healthy touch” sessions in which Ferguson and others were told to cuddle other men for long periods of time. Ostensibly an exercise to develop nonsexual relationships with men, it involved positions like “the bicycle,” in which one man sat backed up into the lap of a man hugging him from behind. Ferguson described the exercise as both “predatory” and “very homoerotic.”



**John Smid married a woman, joined Love in Action, and eventually became the ex-gay group’s executive director. But then he quit the group, divorced his wife, apologized for his role in promoting conversion therapy, and, in 2014, married his male partner.**

In a related exercise, clients were told to stand naked in a circle of other naked men, including Downing and other counselors. They were told not to worry if they developed erections, because “what comes up must come down.” This exercise was described as a way for clients to learn to relate to other men in “healthy” ways.

In yet another exercise, Levin was asked to participate in the re-enactment of a childhood trauma of sexual abuse by an older cousin. He was told to give lines to others representing his abuser and his childhood self. “[I]t was mostly the person representing my cousin who was speaking and he just started saying over and over again, ‘If you don’t give me a blow job, I’m not going to love you any more.’ And it just kind of was being repeated and repeated and more and more until people on the sidelines started kind of chiming in.” He added: “I didn’t want to relive it ... but once again, I was told ... that this is part of the work that you have to do.”

Unger testified that Downing seemed obsessed in their individual therapy sessions, asking repeatedly what male body parts interested him the most and to whom they belonged. Another time, he was blindfolded while other participants bounced basketballs nearby and hurled anti-gay epithets at him. He recounted how Downing told him to go to ritual Jewish baths in order to see men naked.

Summarizing some of the plaintiff’s testimony, Judge Bariso described one particularly strange

exercise that “required participants to hold hands to create a human chain, with one individual standing behind the chain clutching two oranges representing testicles. Participants took turns standing on the other side of the human chain while being taunted with homophobic slurs. Many purportedly expressed anger and struggled to break through the human chain to seize the two oranges.”

### **The Denouement**

On June 24, 2015, the jury in Judge Bariso’s courtroom unanimously found JONAH had committed consumer fraud and engaged in unconscionable commercial practices under New Jersey law by selling services that it claimed could change clients from gay to straight. In December, as part of a settlement, JONAH agreed to close its doors and its principals promised to cease all related commerce and to resign any leadership posts in ex-gay groups. The plaintiffs were awarded \$72,400, and JONAH agreed to pay some of their legal fees.

It was hardly a surprise, given the dramatic testimony of the plaintiffs, the defendants, and some of the genuine experts who were allowed to testify.

One of those experts was Lee Beckstead, a psychologist with expertise on sexual orientation change efforts and a member of the American Psychological Association task force that examined them. Beckstead testified that “healthy touch” is “a form of sexual abuse.” He said that nudity in

one-on-one counseling sessions is “unconscionable.” He stated that the exercises involving anti-gay slurs were “sadistic.”

“This is not legitimate therapy,” Beckstead said. “It’s outdated ... it’s confusing, it’s misleading. It’s even reckless. And it’s harmful.”

“It’s worse than snake oil.”

In the aftermath of the JONAH trial and all that preceded it, conversion therapy is under siege. A large number of states are considering bans on providing it to minors. The president has denounced it. A bill now pending in Congress would make it illegal to advertise or sell. Americans who provide it are going to Israel to set up their practices in a less hostile environment. Horror stories like those told by the JONAH plaintiffs have been featured in countless media accounts.

James Bromley, an attorney with Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton who assisted in the case, put it like this in concluding remarks to the JONAH jury: “Too many years out of an office here in Jersey City, less than two miles from this courthouse, Goldberg, [JONAH co-founder Elaine] Berk and Downing have been operating with scalpels on the minds of young gay men from around the world. They’ve been operating without licenses. They’ve been operating without training. And they have been operating without science to back up any of their crackpot theories. They lied and that is wrong.” ▲



## THE EXPERTS

# JONAH's 'Scientific' Testimony

The defense in last year's civil lawsuit against Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing, or JONAH (the acronym formerly stood for Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality), offered six men it claimed were "expert" witnesses. The six — Joseph Berger, Christopher Doyle, Joseph Nicolosi, James Phelan, John Diggs and Rabbi Avrohom Stulberger — were presented as people who could, based on evidence generally accepted by the scientific community, explain and defend the practices of JONAH. As such, they were each required to submit an expert report in advance of trial explaining their opinions, and also had to submit to depositions taken by the plaintiffs' lawyers, who worked hard to discredit them. The plaintiffs' attorneys later argued to the judge that the experts should be excluded largely because their testimony was based on the assertion that homosexuality is a disorder, despite the fact that no authoritative medical organization agrees. In the cases of Diggs and Stulberger, New Jersey Superior Court Judge Peter F. Bariso Jr. excluded their testimony because Diggs' assertion that homosexual behavior involves health risks and Stulberger's expertise on Orthodox Judaism's view of homosexuality were irrelevant to the issues at trial. Bariso also excluded the much more important testimony of the other four men, who are longtime proponents of reparative therapy and well known in their field (with a narrow exception allowing one of them to testify that it was unusual that one of the plaintiff's therapist's notes did not make more mention of JONAH). Bariso ruled that "the universal acceptance" of the "scientific conclusion" that homosexuality is not a

disorder "requires that any expert opinion to the contrary be barred," along with any opinion based on that claim. As Judge Bariso concluded, "[T]he theory that homosexuality is a disorder is not novel but — like the notion that the earth is flat and the sun revolves around it — instead is outdated and refuted." He also asserted that one of the proffered experts had plagiarized others' work for his expert report to the court. What follows are excerpts from depositions taken from Berger, Doyle, Nicolosi and Phelan by plaintiffs' lawyers in late 2014, in advance of trial.

### DR. JOSEPH BERGER

*Dr. Joseph Berger is a Jewish psychiatrist and psychotherapist who has long been part of the conversion therapy movement, although he is married to a woman and says he has never experienced same-sex attractions (SSA) himself. Trained in the United States, Berger practices from offices in Ontario, Canada, where he has treated men with SSA and in which country, in 2006, he addressed a parliamentary committee in order to urge it not to afford "special rights" to transgender people. (If such people claim that they are, for instance, a "woman trapped in a man's body," Berger described them as a clinically "psychotic." If they say they merely feel that way, but recognize that they are not one sex trapped in another's body, then they are simply unhappy, Berger testified, and "[t]he proper treatment of emotional*



unhappiness is not surgery,” a reference to gender reassignment surgery.) Berger wrote a 1994 article in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, entitled “The Psychotherapeutic Treatment of Male Homosexuality,” that, he claimed, “confirms that such patients can indeed be understood and treated successfully,” with many of them becoming “comfortably and fulfillingly heterosexual.” Berger has been closely aligned with the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), guest editing a NARTH bulletin some years ago, giving a presentation to a NARTH conference in 2013 on “When the Persecuted Become the Prosecutors,” accepting NARTH patient referrals, and joining NARTH’s scientific advisory committee. He also has performed many independent evaluations of disability benefits claimants for the Canadian government and others, and written a book on that topic. Berger said he was motivated to testify by “the false allegations made by the plaintiffs.”

### **Is homosexuality a disorder?**

Is it a disorder? The official diagnostic nomenclature decided that it would exclude it in terms of being considered a disorder. I’m not going up and fighting against them, so it doesn’t — it doesn’t, any more, enter sort of that realm of our terminology. ... What I consider it to be, in terms of generalizing, that it is a failure to reach full psychosexual development. And I define full psychosexual development as the ability to relate intimately in a long-term relationship with somebody of the opposite sex.

### **Do you think transgender children should be ridiculed by their peers?**

... No, I don’t think transgender children should be ridiculed by their peers.

### **When you wrote on the NARTH website that transgender children should be ridiculed by their peers —**

No, I didn’t. You’re getting a distortion from Mr. [Wayne] Besen [an activist who forcefully opposes conversion therapy and who publicized Berger’s 2006 Internet comment about transgender children]. That is a distortion. I didn’t write that, I never said that, and I never thought it. It is a distortion.

**So you did not write the words [advocating letting children who want to go to school wearing clothing associated with the opposite sex to do so]: “On the contrary, don’t interfere, and let the other children ridicule the child who has lost that clear boundary between play acting at home and the reality needs of the outside world. Maybe in this way, the child will re-establish that necessary boundary.” ... Dr. Berger, did you or did you not write those words?**

I’m not aware of writing those words. I am aware of participating in a discussion, a hypothetical discussion, that I think has been distorted by Mr. Wayne Besen, and publicized around. So that even people who have no idea of the original context have misquoted, misread and distorted it, so I don’t know.

### **What is your explanation for homosexual behavior in animals?**

... People claim that. I don’t, in a sense — in a sense, I don’t understand their claims, because I don’t really relate animals to human beings. There are some aspects of animal behavior that we can observe that can be helpful in terms of our understandings, and other things not. I wouldn’t necessarily interpret such things as so-called homosexual behavior in animals as being analogous in any way to us as humans.

### **Why not?**

Because I don’t. I don’t think it relates to us as humans. I think we’re different.

**And then what follows [in a 2002 study of harm reported by people undergoing conversion therapy, *Changing Sexual Orientation: A Consumers’ Report*, by Ariel Shidlo and Michael Schroeder, published in *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*] is, essentially, a list of various harms that participants in the study reported. Does that not trouble you?**

... This is not harm, per se. This is people’s feelings of unhappiness and distress. That’s not necessarily harm, per se. ... One of them goes as far as to say that she wanted to die, yes. Another one says, “I think it harmed me.” ... But to me, it’s not necessarily — it’s not necessarily objective harm... . Harm is somebody comes along and breaks your arm, if somebody comes along and hits you in the head

and you're concussed and have the possibilities of internal brain hemorrhage — that's harm.

**... At the bottom of this column, it says: "We found that 11 participants had reported suicide attempts since the end of conversion therapy. Of these, only three had attempted prior to conversion therapy. Of the 11 participants, three had attempted during conversion therapy." That doesn't trouble you either?**

... You want to extract from this one or two statements by some people, yes, undoubtedly there were people who say they were harmed. But that doesn't necessarily mean to say that that is objective harm. That's a very subjective thing.

**What is your understanding of what gay affirmative therapy is?**

My understanding ... is trying to make people who identify themselves as homosexual, comfortable with who they are as a homosexual. And the problem, from my perspective, is, especially if it's dealing with younger people in the teens, for example, that really, they may be confused. They're not necessarily homosexual, per se, they're identifying with it for certain reasons, such as to draw attention; to be the different one in the class; to be cool, or whatever.

**CHRISTOPHER DOYLE, MA, LCPC**

*Describing himself as a psychotherapist, licensed clinical counselor and "prominent clinician in this field," Christopher Doyle is a longtime member of the ex-gay movement who says that to his "astonishment," he shifted his own sexual orientation to heterosexual at the age of 23 without the use of conversion therapy. Doyle has an undergraduate degree in political science and history from a Christian college in Pennsylvania and a master's in counseling from Liberty University, the conservative Christian college started by Jerry Falwell. He also says he has years of training from ex-gay advocates including the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality, the conversion therapy group that he has been a part of since 2008. Today, he is*



*the executive director of the Institute for Healthy Families (IHF, formerly known as the International Healing Foundation), another ex-gay group whose board includes Arthur Goldberg — who was one of the defendants in the lawsuit heard last year against JONAH — and also runs his own Northern Virginia Christian Counseling agency out of his home. Doyle said last year that he had treated some 150 clients in the prior five years and was active in lobbying for ex-gay causes, both for IHF and for two similar nonprofits, Voice of the Voiceless and Equality and Justice for All.*

**Do you think homosexuality is a disease or disorder?**

I believe it's a maladaptive condition.

**What does a maladaptive condition mean?**

I believe that in most ... development of individuals, I believe that development that typically occurs is bonding with the same sex, and that leads to one experiencing primarily heterosexual feelings. ... So I think that because of the lack of bonding and attachment with the same sex, I think that the — it's a maladaptive condition, meaning that the normal development does not occur.

**I'm trying to figure out, you know, why it is that you think you can rely on that information [a claim by a certain counselor that he and his staff treated 18,000 cases of same-sex attraction] in your report when you don't know anything about it.**

Well, I've relied on a lot of research studies in my report [expert report to the court] that I don't necessarily know all the specific methodological functions and how they did that. ... I mean, there are hundreds of citations —

**So how do you know that ... Dr. Cummings' numbers are valid?**

I don't.

**You don't?**

No.

**But you think you can rely on it even though you have no idea about the validity?**

Well, I don't think Dr. Cummings is lying. ... If Cummings said he [personally] treated ... over 2,000 individuals who are homosexual and hundreds changed, if he was really lying or trying to make a point, wouldn't he say that more than a few hundred changed?

---

**You wrote this report?**

I did. It's all my work.

**And you wrote it by yourself?**

I did.

---

**[H]ow did you come to these various citations?**

Well, some of them I researched myself. Some of them I got in other documents that I reviewed that were already — that I've already reviewed these studies and made conclusions.

**Uh-huh. So did you read each one of these additional sources?**

In its entirety?

**Yeah.**

No.

**Did you read every one of these in some partial form?**

Yes.

---

**So these citations are things you went back and independently reviewed?**

Some of them I have. Some of them I relied on reviews of other people.

**Would that be Whitehead [a 2014 book by Neil and Briar Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It! Homosexuality and the Scientific Evidence*]?**

Including Whitehead.

**... Right. But would it surprise you to know that each one of these studies listed [in Doyle's report] are directly listed in Whitehead's bibliography?**

I don't know if that's to be the truth. ... I don't know. There may be overlap.

**... What's not included in Whitehead's analysis? ... Because to me it looks like there is perfect overlap between Whitehead and what's listed here [in Doyle's report], and, in fact, in the same order as Whitehead's chapter. ... [D]id you go and you look at these studies again, or did you just look at Whitehead and pull from Whitehead?**

I did for some Whitehead and some of them I looked at myself.

**Which ones?**

I don't recall all the ones I looked at myself. I reviewed hundreds of studies for this.

---

**And in particular, it appears to me that you did draw this from [James] Phelan [who wrote the 2014 book, *Successful Outcomes of Sexual Orientation Change Efforts: An Annotated***

***Bibliography*] — word for word from Phelan. The first sentence you say, "According to Phelan 2009," and then you have the sentence "homosexual men," then it goes [on]. And that's directly from — just cut and pasted from Phelan. Correct?**

Yeah. I said that I drew a lot of this from Phelan's review.

**Right. And the citation then — the long citational cite just is also just cut and pasted from Phelan?**

Yes.

**... Basically, what you have in your report tracks directly Phelan?**

From this section, yes. ... I looked at a couple of them, but I relied more exclusively on Phelan's reporting for this, yes.

**... So you didn't add anything independently based on your expertise to anything that Phelan said in this section of the report?**

No, I didn't. I didn't think it was necessary to reinvent the wheel.

**... Well, in the examples we showed before you didn't summarize. You took exactly what Phelan said and plugged it into your report, didn't you?**

Not exactly, no.

**You didn't? So let's look at Bailey. Okay? So this is Section 3, if you look on page 79. Now compare to page 79 of Phelan. It says, "Bailey's 1999 conclusions about Herrell."**

Right. This, I did — this, I did — yes, I did copy it.

---

**In the middle of the next paragraph, there's a sentence [in your report] that starts: "Psychoanalysis has been widely documented in the scientific literature to help clients and patients resolve homosexual attractions and increase opposite sex attractions." And then you have this big string cite.**

That's right.

**All of those citations are from Phelan's *Annotated Bibliography*. Correct?**

That's right.

**And, in fact, you just went through Phelan's book, and in the section on psychoanalysis, copied every cite but put them in reverse chronological order.**

Right. I did.

---

**[W]hat is this Powell work? ...**

The Powell article is a — it's a manuscript. It's a review of literature on — I believe on catharsis.

**Is it published?**

I don't — I don't know if it's published. ...

**Where did you find it?**

In my research on — in my research on the Internet.

**...You think that it's okay to just rely on an unpublished document you found on the Internet?**

In some instances, yes.

**... So ... the contents of this paragraph are also just pulled from the unpublished Powell piece. Right?**

Yeah. Yep. That seems to be the — it seems to be what I did.

**What is sociometry? Or sociometry?**

I am not familiar with the definition of that word, actually.

**Yet you use it in your report?**

Yes.

**You then have a sentence right after that we were looking at on page 21 from Aaron 2006. Who is that?**

... I believe Aaron is a therapist.

**... You don't know?**

I believe — I believe it's a therapist.

**Do you know ... she's a massage therapist? Is that the kind of therapist you were thinking about?**

... So you're saying Aaron is a massage therapist?

**Yep.**

I didn't know that.

**Then you go down in your report and say — when you say, "According to Zur and Nordmarken," and you don't use quotes, everything after that is [word for word] from Zur and Nordmarken. Is that how you operate?**

Typically, yes.

**You think that there's a scientific basis that nudity [in therapy] can help resolve sexual orientation issues?**

I think it can help resolve underlying issues that cause same-sex attractions, yes.

**You have a lot of stuff in your report about [Edward] Bindrim, and you have a citation to Bindrim. ... And my question is, how did you rely on that piece of work in forming your opinions in this case?**

I don't recall.

**... Do you think you read it?**

I don't know. It's possible.

**... The title of the article — well, first of all, the journal is the *Journal of Parapsychology*. Did you rely on anything from the *Journal of Parapsychology*?**

This article, apparently.

**...So the title of this article from 1947 is "A New Displacement Effect in ESP." ... Did you know Bindrim was a believer in extrasensory perception?**

... It was my intention to report that there was a scientific basis to the use of nudity, and I did find that in Bindrim's work as well as in some others.

**Are you familiar with a NARTH board member, Gerald [J.M.] van den Aardweg?**

I've heard of his book [*The Battle for Normality: Self-Therapy for Homosexual Persons*, published in 1997]. I've never met the man personally.

**In fact, you cite to him in your bibliography several times, don't you?**

Uh-huh.

**... Van den Aardweg said there's a correlation between homosexuality and muscle weakness. Do you subscribe to that view?**

No, I don't know of any evidence that suggests that.

**JOSEPH NICOLOSI, PH.D.**

*Joseph Nicolosi is a licensed California psychologist, the founder and clinical director of the Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic, one of the three original founders of the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), and the best known living conversion therapy advocate in the country. Nicolosi, a Catholic who at one point did work for the Los Angeles Archdiocese, was a very early advocate of secular ex-gay therapy, writing his first book on the subject, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*, a year before becoming one of three founders of NARTH (along with Benjamin Kaufman and the late Charles Socarides) in 1992. In the years that followed, Nicolosi produced three similar titles: *Healing Homosexuality: Case Stories of Reparative Therapy* (1993), *A Parent's Guide to Preventing**



Homosexuality (2002, with his wife, Linda Ames Nicolosi), and Shame and Attachment Loss: The Practical Work of Reparative Therapy (2009). Nicolosi is still closely aligned with NARTH, having served as its president for several years, regularly attended its conferences, and currently serving on both the group's board of directors and its overseeing board of trustees. In addition, NARTH's official headquarters was for years at Nicolosi's Aquinas Clinic, which is located in Encino, Calif., and was started in 1980. (NARTH has since moved to Salt Lake City, Utah.) In 2012, Nicolosi was a plaintiff in a lawsuit filed against the state of California that challenged the constitutionality of a new law banning the use of conversion therapy with minors; the suit failed, meaning the law went into effect and Nicolosi had to stop treating minors for same-sex attraction at his clinic.

**And I think a number of your articles have been published in the journal of Psychological Reports?**

Yes.

**... Is it affiliated with any kind of research institute or an academic institute?**

Not that I know of.

**Were you required to make payments per page in order to have any of these articles that appeared in Psychological Reports published?**

No.

**Are you aware that this is a practice that the journal utilizes [as reflected on its website, which says authors are charged \$35 a page]?**

I'm not aware of that practice at all.

**Turn to page 6 of your bibliography [attached to Nicolosi's expert report to the court], please. There's an entry that lists author Rekers, G. I take it that's George Rekers?**

Yes.

**And who is he?**

Rekers did research on GID, gender identity disturbed children.

**He formerly was affiliated with NARTH, correct?**

Correct.

**What was his position?**

He was a NARTH member. I think he joined the board for a brief time, yes.

**And he left NARTH at some point, correct?**

That's right.

**What were the circumstances?**

There was some kind of controversy about the fact that he was traveling with some person and there might have been some, I don't know, compromise in their physical contact.

**Well, in fact, he was photographed traveling with a gentleman he had located via rentboy.com [a male escort service], correct?**

That's not my understanding.

**What is your understanding?**

George Rekers said to me that he was walking on the beach where he lives and he ran into a man. And they were talking about travel and George said to this man that he has to do traveling but that he can't lift his luggage. And this man said, "Well, I know of a young guy who would be willing to do that for you, to accompany you, if you could pay for his airfare." And George met this young man through the man he met on the beach. This is what George Rekers said to me.

**Do you believe him?**

I know George and I believe him, yes.

**Dr. Nicolosi, you told me you also served [the Archdiocese of Los Angeles] as a psychological consultant for cases of possession.**

Yes.

**What did that consist of?**

Well, luckily for me it was only one case, and this woman was sent to my clinic because she saw demons. And it was kind of spooky. You know, I mean, you have someone sitting there and she says, "Oh, well, I see demons." She's like an old lady, you know, she had a little rouge, so she looked like Rosemary — what was it?

**Rosemary's baby?**

Something really creepy. So I said, "Do you see any around you now?" And she says, "No." I was relieved. Anyway, I saw that as a psychological problem and it could be explained psychologically, so it didn't give grounds for exorcism.

**In any event, though, you believe there is at least a valid debate about the validity of your belief with respect to heterosexuality being the norm?**

Absolutely.

**And that view is not generally accepted?**

I wouldn't say that.

**Why not?**

... Again, we go back to the question ... who are we asking the question to? ... Because many psychologists will tell me, “I privately agree with you but I won’t say it publicly.”

**Can you name one for me?**

No, I wouldn’t name because I would disclose a number of rather prominent psychologists and psychiatrists. ... [T]hat would be a violation of confidentiality.

**Confidentiality because they were your patients at the time?**

No, because they’re, they said it to me in private and I would not want to disclose their names.

**What is the basis for your opinion that traditional psychology envisions humankind as part of a universal heterosexual natural order?**

Well, again, human anatomy. The male and female fit together in a very compatible way.

**So, if you could again tell me what pre-gender and post-gender mean?**

Okay. So the gender identified phase is from 1½ to 3 years old, where the child, where the boy — we’ll talk about the boy — has disidentified with the mother and bonded with the father. If the trauma ... happened before the gender identity phase, gender identity period, then that is the pre-gender type. That’s the more effeminate type of male. Because he never internalized masculinity, he maintained his identification with his mother. The post-gender type is the one who successfully went through the gender identity phase, disidentified with the mother, bonded with the father, but then afterwards experienced trauma regarding his masculinity. And that can happen in the form of a mean father, he was [nevertheless] good enough to make the transition, a cruel brother, a crazy-making mother, sexual abuse, severe bullying for whatever reason.

**Tell me what it looks like when a man is being assertive to a woman [as Nicolosi recommends that same-sex attracted men act as part of their therapy]?**

... He’s on a date, my client is on a date, and he’s walking down the street, and he has in mind this nice little Italian restaurant that he’s going to take

her to. And she says, “Oh, let’s go to that Chinese restaurant there.” If he stays in his assertion, he’s going to say, “You know what, I’m really looking forward to this Italian restaurant. I’d like to go there tonight.” But what he does instead was he acquiesces, he gives in. “Okay, we’ll go to where you want to go.” So, already he’s disconnected. He’s resenting her, he’s disconnected from her. She has no idea, she’s chatting away, but he’s already disconnected. And then he finds the waiter attractive and he doesn’t know why. That’s an example.

**Do you recall agreeing to the statement [in a questionnaire on the Catholic Therapists website] that homosexual acts are acts of great depravity?**

I don’t remember answering that question.

**... Do you recall whether you agreed that, quote, “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered”?**

I don’t remember answering that, but I would say yes.

**... Do you agree with the statement that “yoga is at odds with Christian faith and, therefore, is to be rejected”?**

... No, I don’t.

**... If in fact you previously did agree that yoga is at odds with Christian faith and, therefore, is to be rejected, are you telling me now that that would have been an error on your part to agree to that statement?**

Correct.

**The Washington Times also apparently talked to you in 1993. Do you recall that?**

The story of my life you have there. ...

**In any event, that story reported that you said 90% of your patients who stick with the program for about two years are able to abandon homosexuality permanently.**

Oh, no. Terrible.

**You don’t think you would have said that?**

No, of course not.

**... Do you remember going to a conference in London in 2009?**

Yes.

**Did you ever say at that conference that 75% of your clients were completely cured?**

No. Of course not. Completely cured, no.

---

**I have similar questions with respect to the use of nudity [in conversion therapy or life coaching]. ... Are you aware of any such common observations [by therapists using nudity in group therapy] that have been shared with respect to the use of nudity in helping clients overcome SSA?**

I can only respond from my own experience, where clients who have had those experiences [at weekend retreats] have had very positive experiences. Where for the first time they experience no attraction being around naked guys and they thought they would be aroused. And sometimes there's an initial arousal, but then it goes down and they just feel really connected in a brotherly way with men that they would normally find attractive but there's no attraction.

---

**So one of the ways you've written fathers can affirm the masculinity of their sons is to take showers with them, correct?**

That's one possibility, yes. ... Taking a shower with the boy so there can be this familiarity. Again, getting back to the nudity concept. The familiarity. I'm a boy, daddy is a boy, we have penises, mommy doesn't. ...

**Can you give me as complete a list as you can ... [of] advice that you recall giving to fathers to help the fathers affirm the masculinity of sons?**

Yeah. Make your son feel good about being a boy. "Being a boy is special. You, me and your brother, we're lucky, we're special, we're boys. And mommy and the sisters, too bad for them, they're not." A little sexist, but it's important. ... [L]ife is a gendered life. Male/female design is fundamental to society, to culture. So that's what we're doing, we're preparing the child for life.

---

**You've written about the Sambia tribe of New Guinea, for example? ... Tell me why you've written about them and their practices.**

... [T]he Sambia tribe ... [wi]ll take a bunch of boys from the tribe and with the older men go into the woods for three or four days and do all these kinds of activities. Activities that challenge the boy. Can you do this dangerous thing, can you do that dangerous thing? And when they survive it, it's like a, it's like a rite of passage. That happens to be male psychology.

**One of the things that happens is that the older men use sharp sticks to poke the boys' noses so they bleed profusely. Are you —**

Well, I never read that. That's an interesting — **And you know that there is sexual contact between the older men and the younger boys?**

Yes, there is. Yes, there is sexual contact, there is. And by the way, that's fine because it's the bonding, it's not the sexual behavior. That fits reparative therapy. It's not the sexual activity that's important, it's the emotional bonding.

**One of the things that people have written the older Sambians do with the younger is have the younger consume as much semen as they possibly can?**

True, true, true.

**... And the older men oftentimes engage in intercourse, anal intercourse, with the younger boys?**

That, I did not — I never heard of.

**But you knew that they do ask the boys to perform fellatio on the older?**

Yes, they do.

### **JAMES E. PHELAN, MSW, PH.D.**

*James Phelan describes himself as a "consultant, social worker, researcher and author."*

*He worked as a conversion therapy counselor from 1994 to 2001 and then again during 2005. For several years, he was on the scientific advisory board of the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality, long the premier secular promoter of ex-gay therapy, and he still acts as a consultant on matters related to "unwanted same-sex attractions" (SSA). A lifelong Baptist who claims that he once experienced SSA but does so no longer, Phelan is probably best known for his self-published 2014 book, Successful Outcomes of Sexual Orientation Change Efforts: An Annotated Bibliography, a compilation of pro-reparative therapy titles.*



**[Y]our book reports on the reported outcomes in the studies?**

Yes. Yes.



**It makes no assessment of the validity of those outcomes?**

No.

**You credit all anecdotal reports of success of conversion therapy from the literature you report — you reviewed?**

Yes.

**You don't credit anecdotal reports of harm of conversion therapy?**

No.

**Why not?**

It's — that's not what I was discussing. We are not looking at harm here, we are just looking at success. ... Because the focus of the book was on successful outcomes.

---

**[Studies of homosexuality] are equally valid if they are from decades ago, from the '50s and '60s?**

Sure. That was a great era.

**Why was it a great era?**

Lots of good things happened in those times. The civil rights movement happened in the '60s. I was born... .

---

**Would you be surprised if your literature review includes 35 sources that obviously favor aversion therapy [such as electroshock or noxious-smelling chemicals administered in association with images of gay sex]? ... You don't criticize those therapies in your book?**

I don't criticize them. I just list them as, you know, they did report successful outcomes. ... I don't think anybody said that, scientifically, they don't work. They do work. There is a place — there was a place in an era for those therapies.

---

**What empirical study would convince you that conversion therapy is harmful?**

I haven't found one that convinces me that it's harmful.

**What — what would be entailed in that study in order to convince you that it's harmful?**

That there is a majority of the people commit suicide.

**Anything short —**

Or there is anything operational in terms of, like, their functioning, if they left therapy and they

were, like, psychologically paralyzed, crippled, couldn't function.

---

**You report in your [2014] book on a drug called metrazol. That's also been reported in your book as having some value for people who want to convert to heterosexual.**

Okay.

**Are you aware that the FDA revoked approval for that drug in 1982?**

No.

**Are you aware that that drug causes seizures?**

No.

---

**On pages 93 through 97 [of Phelan's 2006 book, *Practical Exercises for Men in Recovery of Same-Sex Attraction (SSA)*], you offer a list of 326 activities clients can participate in when they feel homosexual urges. These activities include bowling, singing, watching the sky, reading maps, caring for house plants, going to a revival or a crusade, crying, seeing or smelling a flower, going to a drive-thru, bird watching, smiling at people, playing Frisbee, going to auctions. What — what do such activities have to do with a person wanting to become heterosexual?**

These are common behavioral strategies for ... someone who is saying, "Hey, listen, okay, I don't — I'm having a same-sex attraction, I don't want to have it, and I want to get away from that thought." ... They do this all the time in cognitive behavioral restructuring.

---

**In Exercise 27, you detail masturbation inventory. ... How are clients supposed to inventory their masturbation?**

Just by using these 10 items. ... [T]his is for clients who are disturbed by compulsive masturbation with SSA fantasies... .

---

**In Exercise 56, that's the exercise where clients write a goodbye letter to their same-sex attraction? ... Can someone find greater freedom from homosexuality by writing a letter saying goodbye to it?**

This is indicated for somebody that's — that's wanting to leave one or two or more elements of the same-sex attraction. ... So it's more of a closure exercise.

---

**In that message [an Oct. 16, 2006, email from Phelan], you go on record to say that homosexuality is a mental disorder?**

Yes.

**And developmental arrest?**

Uh-huh. Yes.

**And it can be healed with therapy?**

Yes. This was my discussion... .

---

**This [a June 15, 2011, email] appears to be a message from you with respect to [ex-gay psychologist and then-NARTH board member George] Rekers, who had recently been found as a person, I believe, associated with NARTH, who had been discovered with a rent boy [male prostitute] on vacation?**

Hmm.

**I would like to draw your attention to ... where you say, furthermore, if and only if a therapist gives a patient a gun and tells him to shoot himself — yes, literally — and no one in their right mind does that —**

Right.

**—then they would be liable for their death.**

Right. Nobody would do that. ▲

## THE PLAINTIFFS

# Portraits of Three Survivors

The plaintiffs in last year's civil suit against Jews Offering New Alternatives for Healing (JONAH) were young men who, mainly because of the religious beliefs of their families, were desperate to resist homosexuality. But, as each testified, the idea that they could be "cured" and converted to heterosexuality actually was a phantasm, and the treatment offered by JONAH and related organizations often turned out to be downright bizarre and sexually creepy. There were originally six plaintiffs — Michael Ferguson, Benjamin Unger, Chaim Levin and his mother, Bella Levin, and Sheldon Bruck and his mother, Jo Bruck. But because the plaintiffs were only seeking reimbursement for the money they actually spent because of JONAH, Sheldon Bruck was dismissed as a plaintiff as it was his mother who paid his therapy bills. What follows are portraits of the three remaining plaintiffs who underwent JONAH therapy, and accounts of what happened to them there.

### **BENJAMIN UNGER**

#### HIS MOTHER PAID THE PRICE

Ben Unger was coming into his own as a teenager, a shy kid emerging from his shell as he grew into an increasingly rambunctious and self-confident young man. By his third year at the all-boys Jewish religious high school he attended near his home in Brooklyn, N.Y., he felt he had joined the "in" group of his peers.

But Ben had a terrible secret.

He had grown up in an Orthodox Jewish community that rejected even the possibility of homosexuality; he was expected to soon begin dating girls on his way to an early marriage and children within that community; and he had been feeling increasingly attracted to boys ever since he was 11 or 12 years old. During a post-high school year in Israel at an all-boys yeshiva, it became unbearable.



Luckily, Ben Unger had his parents, whom he'd felt close to throughout his childhood. On a break from the school in Israel, he approached his mom.

"I went back home, and I was very, very confused," Ben testified during the lawsuit last year against JONAH. "So I told my mom. She was the — the first person I told. ... She was very loving, no judging. She actually recommended that I should talk to my father, after she gave me support, of course. She felt my father would be more ... well-equipped ... to handle this."

How did that go? Ben was asked in court. "It went great, considering ... the way we grew up," he testified. "I mean, he was extremely loving, very supportive, almost, I would say, as confused as I was as far as, like, what to do and how to deal with it. But he — he's a great dad, so he was — he was awesome."

Still, Ben's father was at a loss. At first, he recommended that his son seek advice from various rabbis, which Ben did upon his return to Israel. One told him — seriously — "that if I find a wife who cooks

really well, that will be good enough.” Another suggested a chemical imbalance might be to blame. A third prompted him to see a therapist, but the therapist basically said he had no idea how to proceed.

Finally, Ben’s dad tripped across JONAH. “He said that this number is for Rabbi Arthur Goldberg, and you should give him a call,” Ben recalled.

Goldberg wasn’t a rabbi, but he did offer Ben hope. “He said that this is scientific. Said that there are statistics to prove it. He said that he had helped hundreds of people go from gay to straight,” Ben testified. “I said ... is it possible that I will turn straight? Like, is this possible? And he said, ‘Absolutely. Going from gay to straight is absolutely possible in a matter of two to four years.’”

What followed was, ultimately, a nightmare, although Ben sometimes felt high when he seemed to be making progress. He did one-on-one therapy with a JONAH counselor named Alan Downing for something like 38 weeks. He went regularly to group therapy, as Downing suggested, and to a weekend in the woods meant to accelerate his progress toward heterosexuality.

The sessions were remarkably bizarre. During several, Ben testified that Downing repeatedly asked him to describe what male body parts interested him sexually the most, and to whom they belonged. Ben engaged in an exercise where other participants yelled anti-gay slurs at him while bouncing basketballs nearby. He was told that “it was important that I see other men naked,” and encouraged to go to ritual Jewish baths in order to “stare at people’s penises.” In one closed-door session with Downing, Downing asked him to completely disrobe in front of a mirror — and Downing — to counter his “body shame.” Taken aback, he refused.

But the worst was what Ben was told about his mother. In line with other reparative therapists, Downing and Goldberg pushed the idea that he’d been too close to his mother, that she was a major part of the problem and had helped cause him to not bond in a healthy way with his father and other men. In one group therapy session, Ben was given a tennis racket and a pillow to represent his mother.

“I was told to lift the racket over my head and start beating the pillow while yelling ‘mom’ the entire time,” he said. “And I did that literally — I had over here, I had a huge gash and my hands were actually

bleeding from hitting it so much. ... [T]hat was probably the worst ... thing I did in the JONAH program...”

Urged to distance himself from his mother, Ben spoke less and less frequently to her, and not at all during one three-month spell. He moved out of his parents’ house to sharpen the separation. At one point, he remembers refusing to talk to her during a car ride as she desperately tried to start a conversation.

Today, after abandoning reparative therapy and undergoing months of other therapy meant to undo the damage he suffered, Ben Unger is close to his mother once again. But he will never forget what came between them.

“I feel horrible” about it now, he testified to the court. “My — we — my mother and I are right now as close as ever and I love her to death. And she’s — she’s been amazing. She’s an amazing mom. But I will always — I know that I will always regret the fact that for months, I didn’t talk to her. And when I did see her, it was just as painful as not ... because of the way I treated her.”

#### **MICHAEL FERGUSON**

##### THE HYPOCRISY OF EX-GAY THERAPY

For four long years, Michael Adam Ferguson, raised as a strict Mormon, struggled to overcome his homosexuality. He sought counseling at Brigham Young University while attending that Mormon institution. He joined evangelical Christian “pray away the gay” groups. He even tried a related 12-step program.

None of it worked. But Michael felt he had to keep on trying.

“Growing up, Mormonism shaped my identity,” he explained last year to a jury in New Jersey, where he and four other plaintiffs were suing JONAH.

“Mormonism is what gave me a vision for what I wanted out of life. Mormonism is what gave me a vision of getting married to a woman. It’s what gave me a sense of purpose entirely. ... [And] the Mormon position on homosexuality is that if you’re gay, that you either are celibate for the rest of your life, which means that you abstain from having sex, or that you marry a woman anyway.”



KARSTEN MORFANI

Then he learned about the Journey Into Manhood (JIM) weekends that were often staffed by JONAH principals like Arthur Goldberg and Alan Downing. A fellow Brigham Young student told him the retreats were highly effective.

Michael Ferguson's long, strange trip had begun.

Arriving at the JIM retreat, Michael knew no one at all among the 60 or so men gathered together. His cell phone was taken away. He had no access to a car or public transportation. He was "completely isolated," he says, and vulnerable.

One of the exercises there was called "healthy touch," where men held each other for long periods of time, often cuddling, in an effort to develop nonsexual relationships with other men. One such position was called "the bicycle."

"[T]here would be a leader who sat down on the ground, and they would open their legs," Michael testified. "And then one of the beginner journeyers would sit, like, backing up into the — into their lap. And then the leader would reach around and put their arms around their chest and hold on to them like that."

To Michael, these touches weren't "healthy" at all. On the contrary, he testified, these holding exercises, lasting some 30 minutes, were both "predatory" and "very homoerotic." He added: "Some of the men of service [leaders] said that, you know, it's okay — some of you are going to get boners [erections], but they said not to get too caught up on it because what comes up must come down."

Later, after starting "life coaching" with Downing, Michael listened as Downing blamed his mother and father for the parental "deficiencies" that supposedly caused his homosexuality, according to his testimony. But what was far more shocking to him was Downing's suggestion, during a private session, that he undress in front of a large mirror as part of a bid to "feel my masculinity." Once he had stripped down to the waist, Downing handed him a large stick that was meant to represent a spear and told him to shake it and pretend he was a "warrior."

Then he asked Michael to remove his pants.

"I said that I did not feel comfortable with that," Michael told the court. "He reminded me, you know, one of the principles that I was taught on Journey Into Manhood was the principle of sur-

render. He told me that if I was really serious about doing this work, I needed to be all in. ... He kept rephrasing it in different ways, but about half dozen different ways he tried to get my pants off." Later, upon learning that Downing was still attracted to men, Michael quit Downing's coaching.

And then there was a young man who had been a leader at the JIM retreat. The pair started corresponding and, while Michael was attending medical school in New York, they began to see each other. The man told Michael that they should shower together in Michael's dormitory, a "technique" he said "he had learned from Alan Downing." Ultimately, the two had an affair that lasted several months.

"I felt conflicted because I had been told multiple times that to overcome unwanted same sex attractions, you need to develop deep emotional relationships with other men," Michael said. But the two men, he said, "were clearly having sex. And so that seems to defeat the purpose of overcoming same sex attraction."

Michael said that he suffered an emotional crash after that, failing his finals that term and taking a leave of absence from medical school. Ultimately, though, he left Mormonism, accepted his sexuality, and married a man. Today, he is a person who lives without the sexual hypocrisy that seemed so rampant inside JONAH.

## CHAIM LEVIN

ABUSE TIMES TWO

When Chaim Levin was a little boy growing up in an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, N.Y., he was sexually abused by an older male cousin. That trauma, his mother testified recently, led to years of anguish and a difficult coming of age, despite what she described as his exceptional charisma.

It didn't help that as he entered his teenage years, Chaim began to realize that he was gay. After all, homosexuality was viewed by many of his neighbors as nonexistent among the Orthodox, something you see in San Francisco or on television but never in Crown Heights. And being outed



by fellow students at religious high schools he attended in Israel and France only made the situation worse.

So when a French rabbi suggested that he contact JONAH, a group that long claimed to be able “cure” homosexuality, Chaim was thrilled, as was his mother, Bella Levin. JONAH’s Arthur Goldberg, Bella testified last year, “told me ... that he would be able to fix Chaim, that he wouldn’t be gay any more, that he would be straight. ... I was ecstatic when I hung up the phone. ... I told my husband this is amazing. This — this guy is going to save Chaim.”

The abuse hadn’t ended for Chaim Levin.

In an initial phone call, Chaim testified, Goldberg “confirmed what I thought I knew, which was that I was gay because of what happened to me as a child,” but that “change is possible” and JONAH had “helped thousands of men overcome same sex attraction.” Then, just two weeks after his 18th birthday in 2007, Chaim was persuaded to attend a \$650 Journey Into Manhood retreat in the woods, staffed by Goldberg and JONAH counselor Alan Downing, among others.

There, after a bizarre session of “healthy touch” — men in small groups cuddling, most in the fetal position, supposedly to re-establish healthy relations with other men — Chaim was asked to participate in a personal “psychodrama.”

“They re-enacted a scene from my childhood where basically they told me to pick someone to represent my — my cousin, my abuser, and someone to represent the child version of me,” Chaim told the jury. “And they instructed me to give those people lines. ... [I]t was mostly the person representing my cousin who was speaking and he just started saying over and over again, ‘If you don’t give me a blow job, I’m not going to love you any more.’ And it just kind of was being repeated and more and more until people on the sidelines started kind of chiming in. They’re like, what are you going to do to stop this? Are you going to stop this? Are you going to let this abuse continue for the rest of your life?”

Then, Chaim recounted, Downing publicly confronted him. Where was your father? Was your father there to protect you from your cousin? Did he stop it?

“Now, you know, I’ve had issues with how my parents handled my disclosure of the abuse, but

I never ever blamed them for what happened,” Chaim said. “They had no way of knowing what was going on ... until this day, I don’t understand how that was connected to my father. The only thing I could think of was the whole distant father thing, but, again, my father had no hand in continuing that abuse.”

How did the re-enactment make him feel? “Not good,” Chaim told the jury. “I didn’t want to relive it, even if it was not in the literal sense, but, once again, I was — I was told that this is part of the work that you have to do, and I — and I — in the back of my head I always remembered what Arthur Goldberg said, that the people who don’t change don’t change because they didn’t do the work.”

There was much more strangeness to come — nude sessions on other weekends in the woods, even one nude, closed-door therapy session with Downing that was supposed to relieve his “body shame” — but the reliving of his childhood sexual abuse trauma is one experience that Chaim Levin will never forget.

“[R]eliving or that being re-enacted right in front of me ... didn’t seem like a real smart idea at the time,” he said, adding that none of the “therapy” changed his sexuality in the least. “And it definitely doesn’t seem like that today.” ▲

## A TIMELINE

# Homophobia and 'Reparative Therapy'

While some ancient societies had no problem with homosexuality and others treated it with savage violence, there also have been hundreds of years of attempts made by some to “cure” or “repair” homosexuality. Many have been barbaric, like using electric shock therapy in conjunction with gay pornographic images, but that kind of treatment has virtually disappeared at this point. The following timeline describes some of the high and low points in the battle over whether homosexuality is a treatable disorder or disease that can be overcome with therapy or prayer.

### 1075 BC

The Middle Assyrian Empire's Code of Assura imposes castration on soldiers who engage in same-sex intercourse.

### 390 AD

Christian emperors criminalize homosexual sex, with public burning as the punishment.

### 654

The Visigoths in southwestern Europe criminalize sodomy, making it punishable by castration, the first such law on the continent.

### 1179

The Third Lateran Council of Rome decrees that sodomy is punishable by excommunication.

### 1533

Anal intercourse is made punishable by death in England.

### 1610

Virginia makes sodomy punishable by death, the first of many such laws in the American colonies.

### 1889

Baron Albert von Schrenck-Notzing of Munich, Germany, a leading advocate of hypnosis and its supposed therapeutic qualities as well as a student of parapsychology, tells the First International Congress on Hypnotism that it took him 45 hypnosis sessions over four months to “cure” a gay patient of his homosexuality. Three years later, Schrenck-Notzing will claim to have completely cured or significantly improved a total of 70 people with homosexual or other “perverse inclinations.”



### 1892

Graeme Hammond, a leading American neurologist and proponent of physical exercise to treat mental conditions, proposes riding a bicycle in order to treat a variety of supposed disorders that includes homosexuality.

### 1899

Dr. Denslow Lewis says some lesbians suffer from hyperesthesia, or excessive sensitivity to stimuli, and suggests cures including “the application of cocaine solutions, saline cathartics, the surgical ‘liberation’ of adherent clitorises, or even the

administration of strychnine by hypodermic,” according to the *The Gay & Lesbian Review*.



### 1905-1923

Sigmund Freud, known as the father of psychoanalysis, publishes works dealing with homosexuality in both men and women. He declines to characterize homosexuality as a pathology or illness, but does believe that it is a form of arrested psychosexual development — the same general idea that later secular conversion therapy groups like JONAH will build on. Still, Freud does not think that most gay people can change their sexual orientation. Indeed, he will write in 1935 to the mother of a gay man that “it is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality.”



### 1917

Prominent Viennese endocrinologist Eugen Steinach, who earlier experimented with transplantations of testes and ovaries in rats and guinea pigs, publishes a report describing his transplantation of a testicle from a heterosexual man to an “effeminate, passive homosexual man.” Steinach and his Biological Institute claim that the second man was completely “cured” of his homosexuality.

### 1929

A Swiss report on prisoners who were castrated because of alleged sexual mental illnesses claims that five of eight cases of “perverse sexual practices” were cured. According to *The Gay & Lesbian Review*, it concludes that “[t]he operation is indicated in cases of persistent exhibitionism, rape, and homosexuality.”

### 1933

The Nazis ban gay groups and send homosexuals to German concentration camps, where thousands will die. Two years later, the regime will add 10 new “homosexual” offenses to the criminal code, including men kissing or embracing one another.



### 1938

Dr. Walter Jackson Freeman II, an American neurologist, becomes a very early practitioner of lobotomies meant to treat mental illness. In coming years, he will develop a form of surgery known as an “icepick” lobotomy, which involves poking a sharp instrument through the eye socket into the brain, where it is manipulated to sever the pre-frontal cortex from the frontal lobes. Freeman will perform more than 3,500 lobotomies, some 30% to 40% of which are intended to treat homosexuality. As many as 100 of Freeman’s patients will die as a result.



### 1944

Danish endocrinologist Carl Vaernet, who has developed a method of slowly releasing testosterone into the body over a prolonged period, implants his capsule in 10 gay prisoners at the Nazis’ Buchenwald concentration camp in an effort to change their sexual orientation. At least one of the men dies during the experiment.

### 1952

The American Psychiatric Association classifies homosexuality as a mental disorder characterized as “sociopathic personality disturbance.”

### 1957

American psychologist Evelyn Hooker publishes a paper, “The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual,” that finds no detectable difference between the mental health of heterosexual and homosexual men and concludes that the widespread belief that homosexuality is a mental illness is false. Hooker’s work, which will continue for many more years, is critical to the American Psychiatric Association’s 1973 decision to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder.

### 1962

American psychoanalyst Irving Bieber and nine associates publish *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study of Male Homosexuals*, which portrays gay



men as the products of pathological families, with a distant and rejecting father and a dominant and overbearing mother. This basic idea, which is later discredited and will be rejected by virtually all the relevant medical associations, becomes the basis of much of the “science” underlying the secular reparative therapy movement. Bieber’s study also claims that 27% of his 106 subjects became “exclusively heterosexual during the course of psychoanalytic treatment.” But the study is fatally flawed. Because very few gay men are out at the time, Bieber’s sample of 106 men is drawn from mental institutions or mentally ill patients and includes 28 schizophrenics, 31 neurotics, and 42 men who suffer from character disorders — 101 of his 106 subjects.

British psychologist Ian Oswald injects gay patients with nausea-inducing drugs while surrounding them with containers of urine and playing audio recordings of men having sex. Oswald says the goal is to “overdose” gay men on homosexuality, which he theorizes will result in them turning “to women for relief.”

### 1965

*Time* magazine runs a short story, “Homosexuals Can Be Cured,” reporting on University of Pennsylvania psychiatrist Samuel Hadden’s claim that gay men “are more treatable and curable than is generally believed.”



### 1968-1976

Pioneering sexologists William Masters and Virginia Johnson oversee a program aimed at converting gay people to heterosexuality that claims a success rate of

72%. In 1979, they will publish a book on that topic, *Homosexuality in Perspective*, based on 14 years of research. But both Johnson and another top associate will later reject Masters’ theory that sexual orientation can be changed, even suggesting that his data might have been faked or composites of many cases.



### 1969

The Stonewall riots in New York become the first widely known instance of gay men rising up against police repression in the United States.

### 1973

The American Psychiatric Association declassifies homosexuality as a mental disorder, removing it from its official *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. It is the first major U.S. medical association to do so. But the diagnosis of homosexuality is replaced by “sexual orientation disturbance,” which in turn will be replaced in 1980 by “ego-dystonic homosexuality,” referring to patients who have gay attractions but do not want them. In 1987, that, too, will be dropped.



Love in Action, the first contemporary reparative therapy ministry in America, is founded in Marin County, Calif., by Frank Worthen and the Rev. Kent Philpott. But John Evans, a prominent early member, will later quit the group and denounce it after a friend, Jack McIntyre, reportedly commits suicide over his inability to become heterosexual. John

Smid, a later executive director of the group, also will eventually denounce sexual orientation change efforts as fruitless and dangerous, saying in 2011 that he “never met a man who experienced a change from homosexual to heterosexual.” In 2014, Smid will marry his same-sex partner. In 2012, the group, now based in Memphis, Tenn., will be renamed Restoration Path.

## 1975

The American Psychological Association removes homosexuality from its list of psychological disorders. Many similar professional groups follow.

Love in Action's Kent Philpott publishes *The Third Sex?*, a book that details how six gay people were supposedly "saved through Christ." LGBT activist Wayne Besen later will write that the book prompted the creation over the following three years of more than a dozen ex-gay ministries around the country. In 1979, John Evans and three others who were among Philpott's six subjects will write Philpott's publisher to say his claims of successful sexual orientation conversions are "100% false."

Robert D. Card, a Mormon therapist in private practice, publicly describes his method of administering electric shock therapy to treat gay men. The men are shown homoerotic images while attached to a device measuring their arousal; when that occurs, a shock is administered, often directly to their genitals. Then the images are switched to heterosexual sex, accompanied by soothing music and no shocks.



## EXODUS

### 1976

Exodus International is founded in Anaheim, Calif., as a nonprofit, interdenominational ex-gay umbrella group that will grow to include some 400 ex-gay ministries in America and abroad.

Homosexuals Anonymous is founded by former Seventh-day Adventist preacher Colin Cook and Douglas McIntyre, both of whom say they have overcome their own unwanted same-sex attractions. Although Cook is for a time the best-known ex-gay activist in the country, his group will collapse in 1987, when he admits engaging in erotic hugs, nude massages and mutual masturbation with male clients.

### 1980

E. Mansell Pattison and his wife, Myrna Loy Pattison, introduce the scientific community to the term "ex-gay" in an article in the *American Journal*

*of Psychiatry* that claims that 11 men changed from gay to straight as part of a "religiously mediated" transition effort. Two of the 11, Michael Bussee and Gary Cooper, organized the conference that led to the creation of Exodus International in 1976 but left the group in 1979 to become a couple. In 2007, after Cooper's death, Bussee will apologize for his promotion of reparative therapy.

### 1988

The American Psychiatric Association issues a statement saying that it "opposes any psychiatric treatment, such as reparative or conversion therapy, which is based on the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder" or that assumes that gay people should change their sexual orientation.



### 1991

Joseph Nicolosi writes *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*, an important early book promoting the idea that sexual orientation can be changed. Three similar titles by Nicolosi will follow.

Lyn Duff, a 14-year-old girl who recently came out as a lesbian, is taken against her will by her mother to the Rivendell Psychiatric Center in West Jordan, Utah, where she is subjected to various forms of conversion therapy — being shown lesbian pornography while forced to sniff ammonia, undergoing hypnosis, taking psychotropic drugs, enduring solitary confinement and more. The next year, after 168 days of captivity, Duff will escape and go public about her experience, becoming an early symbol of the horrors of involuntary conversion therapy and, years later, a journalist of international stature.

### 1992

Claiming that the American Psychiatric Association and similar bodies have quashed any real discussion of homosexuality, Charles Socarides, Joseph Nicolosi and Benjamin Kaufman found the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), which will grow into

a leading ex-gay group. Based for many years in Nicolosi's Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic in Encino, Calif., before moving to Salt Lake City, Utah, NARTH presents its methods as based on scientific fact rather than religious belief.



### 1998

Janet Folger (later, Janet Porter), a Christian activist who directs the Center for Reclaiming America, convenes a gathering of 15 religious-right groups that decides to fund full-page advertisements in leading American newspapers. The \$600,000 campaign, entitled “Truth in Love,” claims gay people can change their sexual orientation. *Newsweek* runs a related cover story headlined “Gay for Life?” that features the ad campaign’s poster children, John and Anne Paulk, who are married but say they were both formerly homosexual. In 2000, John Paulk, who is also an official with Focus on the Family and the founder of an ex-gay group called Love Won Out, will be photographed cruising in a gay bar. Many years after that, Paulk will say he does not believe conversion therapy works and that “countless people” were hurt by his advocacy of it.

### 1999

The American Counseling Association adopts a resolution “opposing the promotion of ‘reparative therapy’ and a ‘cure’ for individuals who are homosexual.” In 2003, the professional counseling association will permanently expel Richard Cohen, founder of the International Healing Foundation and past president of Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays, over a series of ethical violations.

### 2000

Arthur Goldberg, a convicted con man who once went by Arthur Abba Goldberg, forms JONAH, an ex-gay organization based in Jersey City, N.J., whose acronym stands for Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality. Later, the last two words of the group’s full name will be changed to “for Healing.”



### 2001

Columbia University professor Robert Spitzer, a well-known psychiatrist who led the successful 1973 campaign to get the American Psychiatric Association to declassify homosexuality as a mental illness, issues a study that asserts that

changing sexual orientation is possible for some highly motivated individuals. The study, which will be published in 2003 in the prestigious journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, gives a major boost to reparative therapy backers. In 2012, three years before his death, Spitzer will ask his publisher to retract the study, which he says he has come to realize was seriously flawed, and apologize to the LGBT community.



U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher issues a report that says, among other things, that there is little evidence that sexual orientation can be changed. The report and Dr. Satcher are immediately attacked by Focus on the Family.

### 2003

The U.S. Supreme Court strikes down sodomy laws in 13 states in *Lawrence v. Texas*, ending the criminalization of gay sex throughout the country. In his majority opinion, which overturns a 1986 decision by the same court, Justice Anthony Kennedy cites the 14th Amendment and writes that the petitioners “are entitled to respect for their private lives. The State cannot demean their existence or control their destiny by making their private sexual conduct a crime.”

### 2006

The American Psychological Association issues a statement saying that conversion therapy is “not supported by the science.” Furthermore, it says, the claims made about conversion therapy by ex-gay groups NARTH and Focus on the Family “create an environment in which prejudice and discrimination can flourish.”

AP IMAGES/CLIFF OWEN (PORTER); REDUX/ALEX DI SUVERO/THE NEW YORK TIMES (SPITZER); AP IMAGES/RICK BOWMER (SATCHER)

---

President George W. Bush invites Exodus International leader Alan Chambers and another Exodus official to the White House to endorse Bush's proposed constitutional ban on same-sex marriage.

---



Colorado-based Ted Haggard's offer of resigning as the leader of the National Association of Evangelicals is accepted just days after a male prostitute, angry because Haggard is championing a measure to ban same-sex marriage, accuses the pastor of paying him for sex for three years. Although Haggard's statements about the matter will change over time, he goes into intensive counseling with senior evangelicals for three weeks, after which one of them pronounces him "completely heterosexual." In 2011, after similar accusations of other gay encounters surface, Haggard will say that if he were 21, he would consider himself bisexual.



### 2007

Some 200 people attend the "Ex-Gay Survivor's Conference" in Irvine, Calif., the first event of its kind. The conference, which is intended to start a conversation about the psychological harm caused by reparative therapy, is the idea of Peterson Toscano and Christine Bakke, both formerly involved with Exodus International. The pair also launches the "Beyond Ex-Gay" website.



Longtime ex-gay counselor Chris Austin, who has given speeches for both Evergreen International and the National Association for the Research & Therapy of Homosexuality, is convicted of sexually assaulting a male client, sentenced to 10 years in prison and required to register as a sex offender. According to LGBT activist Wayne Besen, Austin, whose therapy practice is based in Irving,

Texas, faced similar accusations six years earlier but they were withdrawn before trial.

### 2009

The American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation completes a massive review of the literature on reparative therapy. The 130-page report results in an official APA resolution saying there is "insufficient evidence" to support sexual orientation change efforts; advising young people to avoid any such efforts that depict homosexuality as a disorder; and calling on therapists not to claim that such efforts can be successful.

---

Love Won Out, Focus on the Family's ex-gay ministry and the host of scores of conferences on reparative therapy over the years, is sold to Exodus International as the result of a financial crisis at Focus. It will later be known as True Story.



### 2010

LGBT activists expose JONAH founder and NARTH Executive Secretary Arthur Goldberg as a con man who was sentenced in 1989 to 18 months in prison as a result of a \$2 billion bond scheme and later disbarred. (Goldberg had long used his full name, Arthur Abba Goldberg, but dropped his distinctive middle name after leaving prison.) A short time later, Goldberg resigned his post at NARTH, which said it had known nothing of his past until then.

---

George Rekers, a NARTH board member and also a member of its scientific advisory board, is found to have paid a male prostitute to accompany him on a European vacation. While Rekers says the man was hired only to carry his luggage, the man says he in fact gave Rekers daily nude massages that included genital contact. A week later, Rekers, a founding board member of the Family Research Council who has testified as an expert witness repeatedly against LGBT people but been sharply criticized by the judges in some of those cases for slanted testimony, resigns from NARTH.

AP IMAGES/DAVID ZALUBOVSKI (HAGGARD); COURTESY OF PETERSON TOSCANO (TOSCANO); IRVING TEXAS POLICE DEPARTMENT (AUSTIN); AP IMAGES/ALEX REMNICK/THE STAR-LEDGER (GOLDBERG)

### June 2012

The American Psychoanalytic Association issues a statement condemning “interference or coercive interventions attempting to change sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.” It adds: “Psychoanalytic technique does not encompass purposeful efforts to ‘convert,’ ‘repair,’ change or shift an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such directed efforts are against fundamental principles of psychoanalytic treatment and often result in substantial psychological pain by reinforcing damaging internalized attitudes.”

### July 31, 2012

A Pew Research Center poll finds that 51% of Americans do not believe that gay men and lesbians can change their sexual orientation, while 36% think they can. Answering the same question for Pew a decade earlier, in 2003, 42% said sexual orientation could be changed and 42% said it could not.



### Sept. 29, 2012

California Gov. Jerry Brown signs the nation’s first law banning reparative therapy for minors.

### November 2012

The Southern Poverty Law Center files a lawsuit against JONAH, founder Arthur Goldberg, counselor Alan Downing, and Alan Downing Life Coaching, LLC, under New Jersey’s consumer fraud law.



British Health Minister Norman Lamb tells Parliament that the government “does not condone the concept of therapists offering ‘cures’ for homosexuality” and adds that such practices “may well cause significant harm.”

### June 19, 2013

The board of Exodus International, an ex-gay umbrella group battered by gay sex scandals and under criticism for promoting harmful therapy, decides to close down. In his announcement, Exodus President Alan Chambers apologizes for



the “pain and hurt” the group has caused and for promoting “sexual orientation change efforts and reparative theories about sexual orientation that stigmatized parents.” But a larger ex-gay network created by Exodus, Exodus Global Alliance, remains.

### Aug. 19, 2013

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie signs a state law banning reparative therapy for minors.

### 2014

NARTH puts itself under a newly created umbrella, the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity, in an attempt to rebrand itself as standing up for “free choice” in therapy — an apparent response to mounting criticism of reparative therapy.

### June 7, 2014

The Republican Party of Texas adopts a resolution recognizing the “legitimacy and efficacy” of reparative therapy for those “seeking healing and wholeness from their homosexual lifestyle.” It asserts that no laws should bar the practice.

### July 31, 2014

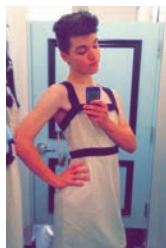
Nine former ex-gay leaders release a joint letter condemning reparative therapy for the “terrible emotional and spiritual damage it can cause, especially for LGBT youth.” The signatories include Brad Allen, Michael Bussee, Jeremy Marks, Yvette Cantu Schneider and John Smid, all one-time officials with Exodus International or its projects; Darlene Bogle of Paraklete Ministries; Catherine Chapman of the Portland Fellowship; Bill Prickett of Coming Back; and Tim Rymel of Love Won Out.

### Dec. 22, 2014

Washington, D.C., Mayor Vincent Gray signs a law banning reparative therapy for minors in the district.

### Dec. 28, 2014

Leelah Alcorn, a 17-year-old transgender girl in Ohio, commits suicide by walking into interstate



highway traffic after her parents took her out of school, isolated her and forced her to go to a Christian-based conversion therapy program. In a suicide note she arranged to automatically post to Tumblr after her death, Leelah angrily describes how her parents demeaned her, says

she is “never going to transition successfully” or be happy, and begs people to “[f]ix society. Please.” Her death sparks vigils and a national conversation about the harms of reparative therapy.



**April 8, 2015**

Saying in a statement that the practice “can cause substantial harm,” President Obama calls for an end to reparative therapy for minors nationwide. The president is acting in response to a petition to outlaw such therapy sparked by the suicide of transgender teenager Leelah Alcorn.

**April 15, 2015**

Calvin Chang, a gay lawyer who works for the California Department of Corrections, files suit against NARTH co-founder Benjamin Kaufman, who he accuses of defaming him to his employer and confining him with “a large dog under compelled coercion.” Chang alleges that he was denied promotion because of his sexual orientation, then ordered to see Kaufman, who Chang says subjected him to reparative therapy without his consent. Chang also accuses Kaufman of threatening to have him fired (which he later will be) if he doesn’t accept a demotion.



**May 19, 2015**

U.S. Rep. Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) introduces the Therapeutic Fraud Prevention Act, which would classify conversion therapy as a fraudulent practice banned under the Federal Trade Commission Act. The law, co-sponsored by House Minority

Leader Nancy Pelosi, would prohibit advertising for or providing such therapy for money.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown signs a law banning reparative therapy for minors.



**June 24, 2015**

In a first-of-its-kind decision, a state jury in New Jersey finds that JONAH committed consumer fraud by selling services that it claimed could turn clients from gay to straight.

**Aug. 20, 2015**

Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner signs a law banning reparative therapy for minors, making his state the fourth to do so, along with Washington, D.C.

**Oct. 7, 2015**

NARTH co-founder Benjamin Kaufman, a psychiatrist, surrenders his medical license to California authorities after being accused of an “extreme departure from the standard of care” in treating an alcoholic, severely depressed patient. According to the complaint, which Kaufman does not contest, the psychiatrist repeatedly prescribed the patient identified as “L.S.” Schedule III medications and mood stabilizers without seeing her in person. As a result, it says, the woman’s alcoholism led to “an irreversible neurological condition” and she fell into a coma on Sept. 9, 2011.

**Oct. 14, 2015**

The federal government’s Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration releases a 67-page report, *Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth*, that says

LATER/NECESS/TUMBLR (ALCORN); AP/IMAGES/5/USNA WASH (OBAMA); AP/IMAGES/TOM WILLIAMS/CO-ROLL CALL (LIEU); KARTEN MORAN (CONAH)

“none of the existing research” supports the idea of reparative therapy and calls for an end to its use with minors.

### **December 2015**

JONAH agrees to close its doors as part of a settlement reached in the case brought by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). Its principals also agree to cease all conversion therapy-related commerce and to resign any leadership positions in conversion therapy organizations. The plaintiffs won \$72,400, triple the amount they spent on JONAH sessions and, in one case, for therapy meant to undo JONAH-induced harm. JONAH also agrees to pay as much as \$3.5 million in SPLC and other legal fees and costs.

### **Dec. 9, 2015**

Cincinnati becomes the second city, after Washington, D.C., to ban conversion therapy for minors.

### **February 2016**

Therapists linked to JONAH begin moving their practices to Israel, where reparative therapy is criticized by the government but is fairly widespread in the Orthodox Jewish community. According to The Associated Press, the Orthodox gay group Hod estimates that 20 to 30 licensed psychologists and social workers and 50 nonlicensed therapists practice some form of reparative therapy in Israel.

### **Feb. 24, 2016**

The Southern Poverty Law Center, the Human Rights Campaign and the National Center for Lesbian Rights, noting that People Can Change is a for-profit operation, file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission asking that the reparative therapy group be investigated for unfair and deceptive business practices.

### **March 10, 2016**

The NARTH Insitute/Alliance for Therapeutic Choice presents “initial data” from a longitudinal study of 102 psychotherapy patients at NARTH founder Joseph Nicolosi’s Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic. Nicolosi and Alliance President Carolyn Pela claim that 12 months of

data show “statistically significant reductions in distress and improvements in well-being, significant movement toward heterosexual identity, and significant increases in heterosexual desires and thoughts with accompanying significant decreases in homosexual thoughts and desires.”

### **March 21, 2016**

The World Psychiatric Association, the world’s largest body of psychiatrists with more than 200,000 members in at least 118 countries, releases a statement condemning conversion therapy as “wholly unethical” and “potentially harmful.” It also calls for the decriminalization of homosexuality worldwide, saying that same-sex orientation and behavior are “normal variants of human sexuality.”



### **April 28, 2016**

U.S. Sens. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.) introduce a companion bill to the one offered in the House of Representatives in May 2015 by U.S. Rep. Ted Lieu (D-Calif.). The proposed law would ban advertising or selling reparative therapy, which would be treated as a fraudulent practice under the Federal Trade Commission Act. ▲



AP IMAGES/ANDREW HARNIK (BOOKER); AP IMAGES/BILL CLARK/CQ ROLL CALL (MURRAY)

## CONVERSION THERAPY

# The Groups

Historically, attempts to “cure” gay people of their homosexuality have been marked by real horror stories — the use of castration, shock therapy, brain surgery, aversion therapy, the implantation of a heterosexual man’s testicles and more. But the contemporary reparative therapy movement, which began in earnest with the 1973 creation of Love in Action, has generally taken two calmer routes: the heavily religious, “pray away the gay” avenue, and a purportedly scientific path based on ideas about family structure drawn from Freudian psychotherapy that have been discredited for decades. The clients of these “ex-gay” or “conversion therapy” groups are often gay men and lesbians who feel a conflict between their faith — typically, sexually conservative religions like Catholicism, Orthodox Judaism, Mormonism and fundamentalist Protestantism — and their sexual desires. Some of the groups below provide therapeutic or other services to their LGBT clients, while others act as referral services. A few engage in truly bizarre practices. Many of them have suffered scandals as their leaders, board members or other prominent members were exposed for engaging in secret gay liaisons or, in some cases, sex with their gay clients. In recent years, and especially since the devastating 2015 loss of the ex-gay group JONAH in a civil suit, reparative therapy groups have been increasingly on the defensive. What follows are descriptions of 10 of the most prominent ex-gay groups. There are many other smaller, similar groups, as well as uncounted individual practitioners.

### **COURAGE INTERNATIONAL NORWALK, CONN.**

FOUNDED 1980

FOUNDER **FATHER JOHN HARVEY**

Courage International is a ministry authorized as an apostolate of the Catholic Church and conceived by Cardinal Terence J. Cooke, the archbishop of New York, as a “spiritual support system which would assist men and women with same-sex attractions in living chaste lives in fellowship, truth and love.” Its leaders say they do not practice reparative therapy. But the founder, John Harvey, saw homosexuality as pathological, and the organization has long had a 12-step program, based on the similar Alcoholics Anonymous program, that’s meant to help gay people abstain from sex. Moreover, an early history of the group, found on the EWTN Catholic television website, says sexual orientation change is possible and homosexuality is disordered. Courage International today has chapters in cities



across the United States and abroad and was officially recommended in 2006 by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops as a support group for Catholics with unwanted same-sex attractions. The group, which in the U.S. goes by the name Courage, also has a ministry aimed at relatives and friends of gay people called Encourage.

### **EVERGREEN INTERNATIONAL/NORTH STAR SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH**

FOUNDED 1989

The group originally known simply as Evergreen was founded by 11 men who were troubled by their same-sex attractions in light of their faith in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), which condemns homosexual relations. The group never took a position on the cause of homosexuality, but did say that “many people find success in overcoming homosexual behavior, diminishing





same-sex attraction, resolving internal conflicts, and living according to their personal and religious values.” Elsewhere, it claimed that “studies have shown that between 25% and 50% of those seeking treatment [for homosexuality] experienced significant improvement.” Although Evergreen was not an official part of the LDS church, it upheld all Mormon principles and was frequently addressed by LDS elders. In 1992, Evergreen changed its name to Evergreen International. One of Evergreen’s first board members was Russ Goringe, who struggled with same-sex attractions for years despite being married to a woman. In 1999, by his own account, Goringe nearly committed suicide by leaping to his death from a rope bridge while hiking with his wife and four children, only stopping when one of his daughters saw him and yanked him back. After that, he re-thought his beliefs about homosexuality, divorced his wife, left the LDS church, and, with his children’s support, ultimately married a man in 2005 and shared his last name, becoming Russ Baker-Goringe. In 2014, Evergreen International President David Pruden led the group’s merger with another ex-gay organization called North Star, dropping the Evergreen name. Pruden did not join the merged group but stayed as executive director of the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality. North Star President Ty Mansfield said the newly merged organization takes no position on changing sexual orientation. In 2015, according to LGBT activist Wayne Besen, couples who worked for North Star and Evergreen were featured in a TLC reality show, “My Husband’s Not Gay,” that essentially endorsed the idea that gay men should be encouraged to marry women and work to diminish their homosexual feelings. Two of those men, Preston Dahlgren and Jeff Bennion — who at the time were members of the board of North Star — testified for the defense at the JONAH trial as purported “success story” witnesses for whom conversion therapy had worked. Both admitted under oath to still being attracted to men despite undergoing years of conversion therapy.

## EXODUS INTERNATIONAL

ORLANDO, FLA.

FOUNDED 1976

FOUNDERS **FRANK WORTHEN, MICHAEL BUSSEE,**

**GARY COOPER, RON DENNIS, GREG REID**



Originally named Exodus International North America, Exodus International was formed at a 1976 conference of ministries aimed at gay people, notably including Love in Action, which was started three years earlier as the nation’s first modern group pushing the idea of reparative therapy. Exodus was essentially a nonprofit, interdenominational Christian umbrella group that connected Christian ministries dealing with homosexuality with potential clients, and it termed reparative therapy a potentially “beneficial tool.” On its website, it claimed that “careful reviews” of studies showed that “change rates in the range of 30-50% are not unusual, although ‘success rates’ vary considerably and the measurement of change is problematic.” Exodus ran into embarrassing trouble early on, when co-founders Michael Bussee and Gary Cooper left to be with each other, later divorcing their wives, exchanging vows in a commitment ceremony, and, in the case of Bussee (Cooper died earlier), apologizing for his involvement in promoting sexual orientation change efforts. In the years that followed, Exodus nevertheless grew enormously, starting or linking up with similar programs in Europe, Austria, New Zealand, Brazil, the Philippines, Singapore, and elsewhere. In 1995, these groups formally joined together and took on the new name of Exodus International. That same year, Exodus created an international umbrella coalition called Exodus Global Alliance, which included all the ministries that worked with Exodus International. (The alliance, based in Ajax, Ontario, was independent of Exodus International.) At its height, according to *The Atlantic* magazine, Exodus International had a budget of \$1 million, 25 employees, and was the umbrella for more than 400 local ministries in 17 countries. By then, the organization had suffered another severe embarrassment. John Paulk, who described himself as ex-gay and was the manager of Focus on the Family’s Homosexuality and Gender Division, had been elected chairman of the Exodus board in 1995 and re-elected in 1998. He also was married to self-described ex-lesbian Anne Paulk, and

the couple became poster children of the movement, even appearing on the cover of Newsweek magazine. But in 2000, Paulk was spotted in a Washington, D.C., gay bar and photographed by LGBT activist Wayne Besen. Paulk resigned as board chair and, in 2003, quit his Focus on the Family job. He later publicly renounced the ex-gay movement and, in 2013, divorced Anne, who would remain in the movement and become executive director of the Restored Hope Network. Meanwhile, Exodus President Alan Chambers, another self-described ex-gay man who had married a woman, was beginning to voice rising doubts about reparative therapy. That culminated in 2013, when Exodus International's board decided to close up shop. Chambers apologized for the "pain and hurt" that Exodus had caused and disavowed ex-gay therapies that typically demonize gay people's parents as inadequate. But Exodus' member ministries, who make up the Exodus Global Alliance, continue to operate, many as members of the Restored Hope Network, which was born in 2013.

### **HOMOSEXUALS ANONYMOUS HOUSTON, TEXAS**

FOUNDED 1976

FOUNDERS **COLIN COOK AND DOUGLAS MCINTYRE**



Colin Cook, a former Seventh-day Adventist minister, and Doug McIntyre, a former school principal, originally founded Homosexuals Anonymous as a program offered by the Quest Learning Center, which Cook started in Reading, Pa. Both men said they had struggled with homosexuality and now wanted to help others with the same goals. The program, supported by the Adventist church with \$47,000 a year and also money from its treatments, was based on a 14-step program developed by Cook that was aimed at "recovery from the spiritual, psychological and relational distortions of homosexuality." In 1986, sociology professor Ronald Lawson interviewed 14 men counseled by Cook — who refused to cooperate in Lawson's research — and found not only that none had experienced any change in sexual orientation, but that Cook had had sex with 12 of them during treatment. As a result, Cook resigned from Homosexuals Anonymous, the organization moved to Houston, the Adventist church withdrew

its funding, and the leadership was turned over to McIntyre. In 2009, McIntyre traveled to Kenya to speak to a large church about homosexuality at a time when several U.S. anti-gay ideologues were supporting anti-gay legislation in that country. Today, Homosexuals Anonymous has chapters in the United States, El Salvador, New Zealand and Germany. According to the group's website, McIntyre has died and been replaced by Robert Gollwitzer of Germany.

### **HOPE FOR WHOLENESS SPARTANBURG, S.C.**

FOUNDED 1999

FOUNDER **MCKRAE GAME**



McKrae Game, who says he lived as a gay man for three years before marrying a woman and fathering two children, founded Truth Ministry in 1999, changing the name to Hope for Wholeness in 2011 to coincide with the ministry's release of a curriculum meant to "assist those affected by homosexuality." The group claims not to "attempt to alter anyone's attractions" — and, in fact, criticizes many practices of other ex-gay organizations as "fringe" — but also says "[t]rue, lasting life change is possible, but requires a commitment to the process of healing and transformation." Hope for Wholeness says it helps churches help those "who struggle with same-sex attractions" and also is building an international referral network, often sending clients to approved Christian therapists. In the aftermath of the 2013 shutdown of Exodus International, Hope for Wholeness emerged as a key network for ex-gay ministries. Others include the Restored Hope Network, the Overcomers Network and Voice of the Voiceless, which is led by Christopher Doyle, one of the "experts" who unsuccessfully sought to testify on behalf of JONAH last year.

### **INTERNATIONAL HEALING FOUNDATION/ INSTITUTE FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES BRISTOW, VA.**

FOUNDED 1990

FOUNDER **RICHARD COHEN**



Richard Cohen, a leading advocate of conversion therapy, says he spent the decade of the 1980s

struggling to overcome his sexual attraction to men and finally did so, marrying a woman and fathering three children. Cohen blames his former same-sex attractions on being molested as a child by a male adult and on what many ex-gay therapists describe as the classic “triadic” family relationship that supposedly fosters homosexuality — a sensitive child, a weak and distant father, and an overbearing and clinging mother. Cohen was born into a Jewish family, converted to Christianity, and then moved for about 20 years into the Unification Church (where he was assigned his wife) before finally joining an evangelical Christian church with his family. In 1990, Cohen, who is not a licensed therapist but has a master’s in counseling, started the International Healing Foundation (IHF), a nonprofit that claims to have provided more than 10,000 men, women and adolescents with counseling and other services related to unwanted same-sex attraction. Cohen also served for a time as the president of Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays (PFOX), another reparative therapy-promoting group that was started in 1998 with an \$80,000 grant from the Family Research Council, which the Southern Poverty Law Center lists as an anti-LGBT hate group, to counter a pro-LGBT group called Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). In 2000, Cohen published *Coming Out Straight*, a book describing his therapeutic techniques and some of his early experiences. (“It was a very bizarre time,” he wrote at one point. “I was running around New York City with my boyfriend, and she was at home taking care of our son, knowing her husband was out with a man.”) In 2002, he was permanently expelled from the American Counseling Association for violating six sections of the group’s ethical code after a client complained that he’d been forced to attend Cohen’s classes and buy his books. In 2006, in an appearance on CNN’s “Paula Zahn Now,” Cohen’s bizarre techniques came into the spotlight, with him demonstrating his use of “bioenergetics” (a client smashes a tennis racket into a pillow while shouting out “dad” or “mom,” depending on which parent is blamed for his homosexuality) and also of “holding” therapy, in which male clients are cuddled in a supposedly nonsexual way by other men. After an even more awkward interview on

“The Daily Show,” PFOX scrubbed all mention of Cohen’s name from its website; it is unclear if he still remains a leader of IHF. In 2015, the group, now headed by Executive Director Christopher Doyle (one of the would-be defense “experts” rejected by the judge in the JONAH trial), renamed itself the Institute for Healthy Families.

## LOVE IN ACTION/RESTORATION PATH

### MEMPHIS, TENN.

FOUNDED 1973

FOUNDERS **FRANK WORTHEN AND REV. KENT PHILPOTT**

Love in Action was founded in 1973 in San Rafael, Calif., but moved to Memphis, Tenn., almost two decades later, in 1994. It was founded by the Rev. Kent Philpott, a straight man, and Frank Worthen, who was gay. Another man, the late John Evans, is said by LGBT activist Wayne Besen to have been a co-founder, although others have said he was a simply a prominent early member. Besen also has described the ministry as the first modern reparative therapy group in America and one that spawned a large number of other religiously oriented ex-gay organizations. In 1975, Philpott published *The Third Sex*, a book that claimed successful conversions of six gay people “through Christ.” Clients of the group, which charges significant sums for its services, studied the Bible, met with counselors, joined in group therapy-like meetings, and were forbidden to listen to secular music, watch TV, or have any physical contact with other clients beyond a handshake. The ministry drew national attention in 2005, when a 16-year-old Tennessee boy posted a blog entry describing how his parents were forcing him to attend a Love in Action camp called Refuge. The boy eventually left the program and later embraced his homosexuality, appearing in a critical documentary, “This is What Love in Action Looks Like.” The boy’s involuntary treatment sparked a child abuse investigation, but it was ultimately not substantiated. According to Besen, John Evans quit the program in its early years after a friend, Jack McIntyre, committed suicide because he could not change his sexual orientation. In 1979, Evans, who was one of the six people described with a pseudonym in Philpott’s book, joined three

other subjects in writing to Philpott’s publisher to say that the book’s claims about conversion successes were “100% false.” In 1986, John Smid, another gay man, joined the organization and eventually became its executive director. But in 2008 he, too, left, divorcing his wife of 19 years the same year and conceding later that his sexuality had never changed. In November 2014, Smid married his male partner. In March 2012, the group changed its name to Restoration Path and began an e-counseling program. It emphasizes healing sexual addictions as well as dealing with homosexuality.

**NATIONAL ASSOC. FOR RESEARCH & THERAPY  
OF HOMOSEXUALITY/NARTH INSTITUTE  
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH**

FOUNDED 1992

FOUNDERS **CHARLES SOCARIDES, JOSEPH NICOLOSI,  
BENJAMIN KAUFMAN**



Although the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) was formed relatively late in the reparative therapy game, it soon grew into one of the two largest such organizations in the country, along with Exodus International. While Exodus was a religious organization, NARTH claimed from the beginning to be based on secular science, although its materials are also thick with religious references. Its founders, Joseph Nicolosi, Benjamin Kaufman and the late Charles Socarides, said they were starting the group in response to medical authorities’ refusal, starting in the 1970s, to describe homosexuality as a disorder or mental illness. NARTH held annual conferences for years and claims to have “more than 1,000 mental health professionals” as members. (However, Nicolosi testified in 2015 that the numbers are much lower, and that many members are not mental health professionals.) In addition to lobbying for the ex-gay cause, NARTH has primarily functioned as a referral service for clients seeking treatment for “unwanted same-sex attractions.” It has generally adhered to a psychoanalytic model of homosexuality, seeing it as evidence of arrested development toward heterosexuality and blaming molestation of the future gay person as a

child and/or the combination of an overbearing mother and a weak and distant father. NARTH’s first leader was Socarides, at the time the best known advocate of reparative therapy in the country, but was later taken over by Nicolosi, in whose Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic it was based for many years before moving to Salt Lake City. Nicolosi has claimed that about a third of his patients at the clinic are “cured” of homosexuality although they may experience same-sex urges, another third see “significant improvement,” and the last third undergo no change. While NARTH often tries to refrain from name-calling, it slips frequently. In 1997, for example, Socarides — who had a gay son who served as President Bill Clinton’s liaison to the LGBT community — told *The Washington Post*: “Homosexuality is a psychological and psychiatric disorder, there is no question about it. It is a purple menace that is threatening the proper design of gender distinctions in society.” In 2006, NARTH was criticized for an article by Gerald Schoenewolf, a member of NARTH’s scientific advisory board who wrote, among other things, that slaves “were in many ways better off than they had been in Africa.” In 2010, LGBT activists revealed the fact that NARTH’s executive secretary, who went by Arthur Goldberg, was actually Arthur Abba Goldberg, who had been sentenced to 18 months in federal prison for a huge investment scam many years earlier. Goldberg resigned his NARTH post shortly afterward. The same year, NARTH was hit with yet another embarrassment when it was revealed that George Rekers, a member of NARTH’s board and also its scientific advisory board, had taken a trip overseas accompanied by a “rent boy” who worked for a gay escort service. Rekers denies sexual contact, but the male prostitute says he gave Rekers daily nude massages that included genital contact. Rekers left NARTH a week later. Nicolosi also departed as leader of NARTH and was replaced by Philip Sutton. In 2014, NARTH became a part of the previously unknown Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity, an apparent attempt to rebrand itself after a great deal of bad publicity. It also changed its name to the NARTH Institute. On Oct. 7, 2015, NARTH co-founder Benjamin Kaufman, a psychiatrist, surrendered his license

to practice medicine to California authorities after being accused of “an extreme departure from the standard of care” in treating an alcoholic, severely depressed woman. The complaint, which was not disputed by Kaufman, said that he “continued to routinely prescribe Schedule III medications and mood stabilizers to [patient] L.S. without seeing L.S. in person.” Kaufman, it explained, failed “to adequately diagnose and manage chronic alcoholism leading to an irreversible neurological condition which resulted in incapacitation of the patient. ... [O]n September 9, 2011, L.S. fell into a coma.” NARTH said nothing of Kaufman’s troubles, which were revealed in March 2016 by LGBT activist Wayne Besen.

#### **PEOPLE CAN CHANGE**

**RUCKERSVILLE, VA.**

FOUNDED **2000**

FOUNDER **RICH WYLER**



Despite its name, People Can Change, founded by self-described ex-gay man Rich Wyler, insists that it makes no attempt to persuade gay people to try to change their sexual orientation, focusing instead on “only the man who is dissatisfied with his homosexual feelings, dissatisfied with a homosexual life, and for whom pursuing change feels to him that it may be a healing path to his true self.” The group says significant change “may or may not be possible” but simultaneously insists that “[m]any men have successfully diminished or eliminated unwanted homosexual attractions and developed healthy heterosexual attractions.” Some of the methods favored by People Can Change are on display at the group’s 48-hour, \$650 Journey Into Manhood (JIM) and its more advanced \$850 Journey Beyond weekend retreats in the woods. As described in testimony at the JONAH civil trial last year, those methods can include standing in a circle of naked men and trying to ignore any erections that may develop; other naked activities including rebirthing exercises, food fights, blindfolded dancing, swimming and group showers with staff; “guts work,” which often involves reenacting traumas in the lives of clients; and “healthy touch” holding therapy, in which men hold each

other for long periods of time in supposedly non-sexual ways in order to get the nonerotic male affection that they are theoretically starved of. People Can Change began essentially as a website featuring men who had “left” homosexuality, but was joined by psychotherapist David Matheson in 2002 and ultimately claimed to have hosted some 2,000 men from 45 states and 40 countries at the JIM retreats, which are staffed by about 20 volunteers, none of them professional therapists. In February 2016, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Human Rights Campaign and the National Center for Lesbian Rights, noting that People Can Change is a for-profit operation, filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission asking that the group be investigated for unfair and deceptive business practices.

#### **VOICE OF THE VOICELESS**

**BRISTOW, VA.**

FOUNDED **2013**

FOUNDERS **CHRISTOPHER DOYLE AND  
THE REV. DARRYL L. FOSTER**



Voice of the Voiceless, whose mission is “to defend the rights of former homosexuals, individuals with unwanted same-sex attraction, and their families,” was founded by Christopher Doyle, who served as president in its early years, and the Rev. Darryl Foster, its current president. Both men describe themselves as former homosexuals. Doyle is especially active in the ex-gay movement — he is associated with the International Healing Foundation and Hope for Wholeness, and heads Equality and Justice for All and the National Task Force for Therapy Equality. He was also disqualified as an “expert” defense witness by the judge in the civil case against JONAH last year. Voice of the Voiceless portrays itself as a kind of anti-defamation organization, standing up for “ex-gay” people against their critics and depicting opponents of reparative therapy as intolerant authoritarians who will not allow people to pursue their own ideas about sexuality. Foster, who has a ministry in Atlanta and is married to a woman and the father of five children, is an ordained minister and the author of the 2002 book, *Touching a Dead Man*:

One Man's Explosive Story of Deliverance From Homosexuality, which is said to have inspired many other African-American men to battle their same-sex attractions. In a short essay on the website of PFOX, entitled "Christopher's Story," Doyle recounted being molested by an older cousin as a boy and said that later, at around age 10, he "tried to have sex with the little girls that my mother watched in her daycare, and eventually, one of the girls told her parents what I was doing. The shame that was placed on me from my parents was more than I could bear." As a result, Doyle writes, he rejected his own father and "my growth as a man stopped," purportedly resulting in his same-sex attractions. However, despite being a vociferous proponent of conversion therapy, Doyle does not credit it with his own conversion, saying instead that to his "astonishment" his orientation "shift[ed]" on its own when he was 23. ▲

## REPARATIVE THERAPY

# An Interview

Alan Manning Chambers is a Christian who was long attracted to men but felt that that was incompatible with his faith and struggled for years against his desires. After working at an Orlando, Fla., church, he joined Exodus International, the largest ex-gay religious organization in the country, eventually rising to executive director and then president of the organization. Chambers spent 20 years as an activist working against LGBT rights like same-sex marriage, and he married a woman with whom he adopted two children. In 2004, according to the *American Prospect* magazine, he even claimed that he knew “tens of thousands of people who have successfully changed their sexual orientation.” But in recent years, he increasingly began to believe that efforts to change the sexual orientation of gay men and lesbians did not work and actually could harm subjects. In 2013, after years of voicing increasing doubts about reparative therapy and the like, Chambers and his board of directors decided to permanently shut down Exodus International, and he apologized for his past actions. In 2015, Chambers wrote a book, *My Exodus: From Fear to Grace*, that describes his life as an activist, his own personal struggles with same-sex attractions, and how he came to change his beliefs. Today, Chambers remains married to his wife and also a Christian, although his vision of Christianity is considerably more inclusive today than when he was an activist. Chambers spoke to the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Evelyn Schlatter about his journey.

### **Alan, how did you come to be involved in ex-gay ministry?**

In 1991, at the age of 19, I responded to an altar call at the end of an evangelical youth mega-conference. That evening, I uttered the words “I’m gay” to another human being for the first time. Through a series of events stemming from that evening, I was referred to Eleutheros, the Orlando [Fla.] affiliate of Exodus International.

Eleutheros — Exodus — was a lifeline for me. Being raised in a Southern Baptist home and church, and believing in Jesus from an early age, my faith was real and strong. Yet, internal, and sometimes external, torment was my constant companion. I’d felt different my entire life and when, at the onset of puberty, different materialized into gay, gay didn’t jibe with Southern Baptist.

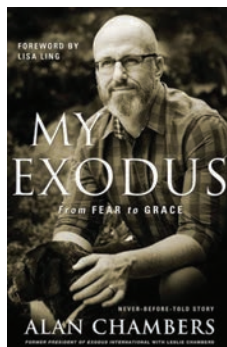
The local ministry undergirded my faith and propelled my trust in God. I had heard that homosexuals wouldn’t inherit the kingdom of God,

but Eleutheros taught me that “such were some of you.” It was mixture of bad and good news for me at the time. A part of me I had no control over was sinful but change was possible. Despite some focus on change, I found hope, acceptance and encouragement. It was 1991 and help for gay Christians was nonexistent. Exodus was it and it was a gift.

### **You were involved with Exodus for many years. Can you tell us how you came to the group and something about your role there?**

During the time I was involved, in the early 1990s, Eleutheros was one of 90 or so local ministries affiliated with Exodus International. The ministries were loosely connected and Exodus’ primary role was as a referral base. Exodus’ main event was its annual conference.

The conference was well-attended, with over 500 people the first year I went. The compelling speakers and topics, great music, and people proved



to be a haven for my extroverted self. I went to my first conference as a 21-year-old emerging leader. I was committed to the ministry, had stuck with it through a season of questioning and experimentation with gay life. I volunteered, took on responsibilities, and looked for opportunities to serve. As a visionary, I shared a lot of ideas and they were well-received. I was young and young was uncommon within broader Exodus circles. Many wanted to reach out to my age group and I was eager to help them do so.

In 1993, I took a volunteer staff position at Eleutheros and then went full time in 1994. By my second conference in the summer of 1994, I was asked to speak in a workshop entitled Exodus 101 for first-time conference attendees. The workshop teacher, a longtime Exodus ministry leader, asked me to talk about my experience as a first-timer the previous year. In a room full of newcomers, I shared my story. Throughout the rest of that conference, I was sought after and other leaders began to notice me.

A few months after that conference, I contacted Exodus International and asked if I could serve as the emcee for the 1995 conference. The emcee was the one who led all of the general sessions, gave the morning and evening announcements, introduced speakers, and worked and warmed up the crowd. My request was granted and I became the only emcee to serve four years in a row, from 1995 to 1998.

In 1995, I was chosen as one of the featured testimonies from Exodus for the Every Student's Choice Campaign — an initiative of Campus Crusade for Christ on over 100 college campuses nationwide. I was the only college-age participant in the campaign.

From 1996 to 1999, while still involved in the annual Exodus conferences, I took a break from local ministry, got married, and worked a secular job. In 1999, I started the first ever full-time Exodus youth ministry at a mega-church where I was hired as an associate pastor. That youth ministry later merged with the local ministry of Eleutheros, which I took over, and we changed the name to Exchange.

In 2000, I was elected by the majority of Exodus ministry directors to the Exodus International

Board of Directors, and in 2001 applied for the position of executive director of Exodus International. I was hired in October 2001, at the age of 29, and went full-time in January 2002. My title was later changed from executive director to president.

### **What is reparative therapy and what role did it have in Exodus?**

The specific practice of reparative therapy derives its name from the assumption that gay men become gay because they suffered a “masculine deficit” in their psychological development due to, among other things, the failure to form a healthy bond with their fathers. That “masculine deficit” sets up a “reparative drive” in the son. That “reparative drive” is defined as the son’s impulse to “repair” the masculine deficit by over-idealizing aspects of masculinity, leading him to be attracted to and seek out relationships with other men. Reparative therapy, therefore, is aimed at addressing that “reparative drive” by ostensibly increasing the client’s self-perception as a male and reframing the boundaries of his relationships with other men.

Reparative therapy hinges on one single theory of male homosexuality, and it is quite rigid on that point. Reparative therapy is not a generic term for sexual orientation change efforts [SOCE] and should be used only when talking about this particular form of therapy intended to address the theorized “reparative drive.”

Though reparative therapy does not describe all forms of SOCE and Exodus International was not a reparative therapy organization, many of our beliefs about the origins of male homosexuality were derived from the secular research and teachings of Dr. Joseph Nicolosi and the National Association for the Research & Therapy of Homosexuality [NARTH]. They seemed to fit with the narrative of those attending Exodus events.

Exodus’ affiliation with NARTH began in the mid-1980s and grew stronger. Our relationship became strained in 2009 and grew increasingly so until I publicly denounced reparative therapy in 2012 after repeated calls from reparative therapists offering me free counseling to “cure” me of my same-sex attractions.

While Exodus was not a reparative therapy-based organization or model, and the overwhelming



majority of Exodus “members” and constituents were not connected to reparative therapy at all, we did have a very small number of therapist members who subscribed to the niche practice. Our total number of member therapists during the last few years of Exodus was around 30 and of those less than 10% were trained or focused on reparative therapy.

But, again, the belief that homosexuality was a reparative drive did permeate our ministry because so many men who came through the doors of our local ministries pointed to broken relationships with their same-sex parent, strong bonds with their opposite-sex parent, and high rates of childhood sexual abuse by a member of the same sex.

**You have described struggling to reconcile your faith and your sexuality. What role do you think religion plays in the lives of LGBT people who seek ex-gay ministry or reparative therapy?**

The role religion plays in everyone’s life, religious or not, is incalculable. I have an atheist gay friend who is constantly talking about the impact of religion on his daily life — the opinions and actions of religious people carry a lot of weight.

Most of the LGBT people I come in contact with are Christians or once identified that way. Many have struggled in their faith and fought to hold on to their Christian beliefs while other Christians sought to marginalize them. Some felt the only option was to embrace their sexuality and leave their faith, which is devastating and was a major impetus for my evolution.

In 2010, a college kid I had mentored all through high school and stayed in touch with through his undergrad years came out to me and then announced he no longer believed in God. I was devastated — not because he was gay, but because he had left a faith that once was such a vibrant part of his life.

From what I’ve seen, religion is the primary motivator for those who seek any form of SOCE. Actual reparative therapy was most common among Catholics, Jews and Mormons.

**What led to your decision to close Exodus?**

In the summer of 2001, when I was going through the hiring process for the position of executive

director of Exodus International, I was asked, “What does success look like for you as the leader of Exodus?” I immediately answered, “Success looks like Exodus going out of business because the church is doing its job.” It was always my stated hope to close Exodus because the Christian church was doing a good job of caring for LGBT people and helping them leave homosexuality.

When we began actually making final plans to close the ministry, I modified my statement to “Exodus must go out of business so the church *can* do its job.” By then, my understanding of the church’s job had drastically changed, too. I no longer believed the work of the church was fixing gay people or saving them from homosexuality. The job, as Jesus commanded it, is for believers to love God and to love our neighbors. All of them. Without condemnation. This did not sit well with some Exodus leaders and supporters.

Exodus’ foundation was broken from its inception. The infighting between its leaders over sin and grace, prayer and professional counseling, and gay, ex-gay, or straight identity, was more than the network could stand.

Finally, while it wasn’t my intention to hurt people, I did and the LGBT community deserved an apology without a hint of irony or limitation. I accepted the responsibility and offered all I had. Gay and lesbian people and their allies earned the right to witness something confounding. Closing the ministry was, in part, the apology in action.

**You’ve said that trying not to be gay is “one big excruciating struggle, because it is impossible.” Given that, why do you suppose ex-gay ministries and reparative therapists continue to be touted by the religious right?**

For those who are not gay and do not understand what being gay is like, SOCE, ex-gay ministry and reparative therapy are popular because it’s their only remedy for the sin of homosexuality and their only hope for homosexual people. The hope that change is possible, the “but such were some of you,” means sexual orientation can and should be changed as the only means to combat “homosexuals won’t inherit the kingdom of God.”

It seems logical, linear. Homosexuality is a sin. Anyone involved in the sin of homosexuality won’t

inherit the kingdom of God. Thus, changing one's orientation becomes the means to the kingdom of God.

While this ideology is contrary to the gospel, many in the Christian church have swallowed it hook, line and sinker. To the gay kid sitting in a pew on Sunday morning, what is proffered as hope — hope for orientation change — becomes a noose.

In conjunction with misguided ideology, there is of course the one-two knockout punch of fear and pride — the fear of judgment and pride in being above judgment. Fear can cause us to take matters into our own hands, to fight for control. Pride puffs us up and seeks safety for our own efforts.

**What do you feel is the future of the ex-gay movement here and abroad?**

I honestly believe it is gasping for air. I don't believe there will ever again be an organization with the size or scope of Exodus International.

My hope is, as I stated very clearly during my closing speech at the Exodus conference in 2013, that every ministry focused on changing orientation will close. I do not believe the ministries or churches that seek to serve people who choose to

be celibate are a danger unless they place conditions or qualifications on God's love.

There will never be a consensus on science or Scripture or politics or much of anything for that matter, but we can seek to unite around the gospel of grace and love and peace. That is a life-changing and revolutionary paradigm.

**There are LGBT people who are or would like to be a part of faith communities. Do you see greater acceptance coming for LGBT people from more faith communities?**

My faith in the Christian church is being renewed. LGBT young people, leaders, and organizations are choosing to respectfully battle to create, find and make space in the church for their community. So many wonderful churches are focusing on spreading the gospel and welcoming and affirming LGBT people who want to do the same.

In these spaces, there is an openness for diversity in personal conviction when the unifying factor and approach is love. This is the work of Jesus. This is the kind of love Jesus talked about when he asked us to love one another. ▲





**MEDIA AND GENERAL INQUIRIES**

**Mark Potok, Heidi Beirich or David Dinielli**

Southern Poverty Law Center

400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, Ala.

(334) 956-8200

[splcenter.org](http://splcenter.org)

This report was prepared by the staff of the Intelligence Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The SPLC is supported entirely by private donations. No government funds are involved.

© Southern Poverty Law Center. All rights reserved.