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## Study finds "ex-gay" ministries unsuccessful at conversions

by Wayne Besen  
Special to Q-Notes

WASHINGTON, DC—Therapies and "ex-gay ministries" that purport to change gay people to straight cannot substantiate their claims of "success" and are well outside clinical research and thinking in the psychotherapeutic world, according to a new report by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC.)

"Mission Impossible: Why Reparative Therapy and Ex-Gay Ministries Fail" examines the empty promises of these techniques and points out that their recent rise to prominence is the result of the agenda of religious political groups such as Family Research Council, the Christian Coalition and Focus on the Family.

"There has been no recent mad rush by gay people to change into heterosexuals," said Kim I. Mills, HRC's education director and author of the report. "These programs have been thrust into the spotlight recently because James Dobson, head of Focus on the Family, wants the Republican Party to hew to his conservative agenda. Right after Dobson's highly publicized meeting with top congressional GOP leaders in May, three things happened: Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott compared homosexuality to kleptomania, Congress began to consider a raft of anti-gay legislation and these techniques were showcased in a series of national newspaper advertisements. These are not coincidences."

"Mission Impossible" points out that neither this type of therapy nor these "ex-gay ministries" really deliver what they promise.

"Ex-gay ministries dangle false promises before troubled people in order to lure them into their programs," Mills said. "The clearest evidence that these programs are not effective are the testimonials of people who once participated in them — and the fact that so many of the most prominent ex-gay leaders returned to their former gay lives, only to be replaced by people who were never gay themselves and therefore cannot create new public relations disasters."

These programs make inflated claims of

"success," but when journalists or others ask for substantiation, they cannot provide it, according to the report. When the Public Broadcasting Service made the 1994 documentary *One Nation Under God*, Exodus claimed a "change rate" of 71.6 percent, yet could not provide documents to back up their figure. Four years later, they still could not substantiate it.

Both ex-gay ministries and reparative therapists refuse to confront the underlying reasons for the apparent unhappiness of many of the gay people who seek their help, the study found. They presume that all gay people are mentally and emotionally unwell, ignoring the hundreds of thousands of happy, well-adjusted, successful lesbians and gay men across this nation.

Plus, not everyone they deal with is gay; yet they never make a distinction when they claim to have altered peoples' most basic natures. This is what reporter Justin Chin wrote after participating in an ex-gay program affiliated with the Exodus Ministry: "Ex-gays are sexually celibate, but homosexuality is still central to them. Everything in their lives revolves around homosexuality and avoiding it...The ex-gays try to drown their homosexuality in Bible verses, marriage, family and their own new subcultural niche, but their homosexuality remains."

"Mission Impossible" also examines the policy statements of the preeminent professional associations in the psychotherapeutic world, all of which warn against so-called reparative therapy. The report points out that the chief proponent of the therapy — an organization called the National Association for the Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, or NARTH — also cannot credibly substantiate the "change" rates they claim for their clients.

"The results of the one NARTH study are suspect because 63 percent of respondents were still undergoing 'reparative therapy' at the time of the survey, which certainly colored their thinking," Mills said. "Plus, many were apparently bisexual. And, most important, the study did not follow these people over a long period of time." ▼

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