

# Inquiry into the promotion of false or misleading health-related information or practices

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7 February 2014

Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee

### **Inquiry into the promotion of false or misleading health-related information or practices**

I am sending you this submission because of my extensive experience in the area of ex-gay/reparative/conversion (henceforth referred to as SOCE – Sexual Orientation Change Efforts) 'therapies' both in Australia and also overseas since 2000. The attached bio will give you an idea of how extensive this has been ([attachment No.1](#)).

### **Personal background**

The realisation that I was attracted to the same sex in my mid teens (1967) was extremely disturbing considering that at that time homosexuals were imprisoned and mental health professionals believed they could be cured using methods such as aversion therapy, shock treatment and lobotomies. The realisation that I could become 'one of those' created great internal conflict, depression and suicidal thoughts. Two things I knew from this was that I had to keep it a secret and that I had to do everything possible to change and become heterosexual.

During my final year at High School, after attempting suicide, I secretly attended sessions with a psychiatrist in order to find the cause of my homosexuality and eventually be cured. I thought I would overcome my attraction to the same sex but of course I didn't. During the school holidays I became a born again Christian believing that I would find forgiveness, God's power to overcome my 'sin' and the miracle I hoped and prayed for daily; that I would become straight/normal.

For the next 22 years I did everything possible to change. Not only did I pray constantly I went through exorcisms to cast homosexual demons out of me. When this wasn't creating the change I'd hoped for I admitted myself to a Christian residential program which worked with people with a 'homosexual problem' and rehabilitated them to become straight. It was actually an abusive/cultish environment and I left after 6 months. I had been told at the beginning that it would take one to two years before I would be rid of homosexual temptations

I moved to regional NSW for work and joined a Pentecostal church there. It was here that I met the girl who would become my wife. I was very much encouraged by the pastor to marry and believed this would be a part of my healing. My wife and I had two beautiful daughters and I loved the idea that I was now 'normal' as a husband and father. Was I straight? No. I was what I would call today a situational heterosexual ([attachment No.2](#)). Thoughts and temptations still existed but I suppressed and denied them with some degree of success but never completely.

Over the next 16 years I rose to become a leader in the Assemblies of God, founded a national evangelistic ministry and every weekend, as a high profile preacher, preached to congregations in their 1,000's in Australia's mega-churches; such as Hillsong.

In 1991 all this changed when I fell in love with a man I'd met. This experience shocked me out of my denial I'd been living in and I was forced to face the reality the 22 years I'd spent doing everything possible, including 16 years of marriage had actually changed nothing. I was not only still gay but was in love with a man.

The story gets very complex around this time but suffice to say I ended up resigning from the ministry, left my marriage, family, church and faith believing I could never actually be gay and a Christian. These were devastating times and we all suffered great trauma having to finally face the truth.

I was out but had been extremely damaged emotionally and psychologically by the toll of years of suppression, denial and self hatred around my sexual orientation. Over the next 6 years the conditioning of shame and self-loathing played out in self destructive behaviours and dysfunctional relationships.

In 1998 I began at last to do my own research into sexual orientation both scientifically and theologically. I discovered that whilst there appears to be no one cause of homosexuality in human beings, the factors that influence this are prenatal with a combination of hormonal and genetic influences. This is a very different to the message presented by ex-gay/reparative/conversion organisations and proponents who tell us homosexuality is a choice that is initially caused by sexual abuse, poor relationships with parents or pornography. I also discovered that the bible verses I'd read and had been quoted to me so often that I was an abomination and could never be a Christian as an accepting gay man, were actually not speaking about homosexuality as we know it today but were about same sex practices in the contexts of pagan rituals and temple prostitution. It was a huge discovery to find out the word homosexual had never appeared in an English translation of the Bible till 1946.

## My experience with ex-gay survivors

With my new liberating understanding I determined that I would do all I could to ensure that not one person spent one day in the unnecessary internal torment I lived in for 22 years.

### *Online ex-gay survivor community*

In **2000** I commenced Australia's only online support group for ex-gay survivors (people who have done ex-gay/reparative/conversion therapy or attended groups. As the group grew to over 400 people it gave me a real insight into the experience of others and that mine was not that unique. What became increasingly obvious was the common impacts, coming from a place of internal torment and shame, had on those who had submitted themselves to any SOCE.

- Depression
- Thoughts of suicide
- Attempted suicide
- Self destructive behaviours
- Obsessive or addictive behaviour patterns
- Other mental health issues
- Isolation - a sense of disconnection from both the LGBT and Christian communities

For many these were not just experienced going through SOCE but had lingered on after the event; sometimes for years. And there were some who were permanently traumatised to the point where they were unable to function normally and were receiving government assistance as they were unable to work. Whilst lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people from faith backgrounds have struggles reconciling the perceived conflict between their faith and sexuality ([attachment No.3](#)) those who have actively sort help from Christian SOCE organisations have been the most damaged.

### *A Life of Unlearning opens the floodgate of hidden ex-gay survivors*

In **2004** I released my autobiography *A Life of Unlearning –coming out of the Church, one man's struggle*. This opened a floodgate of responses from readers whose emails frequently commenced with the words "your story is my story". By far the vast majority of these people had never spoken to anyone else about their experiences. This once again brought me in contact with more closeted ex-gay survivors. I say closeted, as even though they had now accepted their sexuality there was such a deep sense of failure and shame attached to their

SOCE experience they were only now finding someone safe to share it with and who they could relate to.

## *Freedom2b*

In **2005** I co-founded [Freedom2b](#) which has become Australia's largest support network for LGBT people from Christian backgrounds. The majority of people who connected with the online forums and chapter meetings were from Pentecostal, Charismatic and Evangelical backgrounds. It is from these backgrounds that SOCE organisations and practices have flourished. Freedom2b has literally saved lives. [Shan - 19 year old country guy trying to make sense of things...](#) is just one of those. It was during my 6 years growing and leading the organisation that I came in contact with even more ex-gay survivors. Yes, Freedom2b had a powerful impact, but we were not able to help them all. Sadly, [Damien Christie](#), whose [story](#) was told in the Sydney Morning Herald on April 8, 2012, took his own life in 2013. Damien had been severely damaged psychologically during his time seeking SOCE.

## *One on one coaching with gay and lesbian people in heterosexual marriages*

I have also worked as coach and some of my clients have been gay and lesbian people who are in heterosexual marriages. Some of these had gone through SOCE in earlier years and like myself were encouraged to get married or believed this would be the final solution to their 'problem'. But now, often in midlife, they are coming to terms with the fact that they have been and always will be gay. The aftermath of disclosure can be devastating not only for them but of course for their spouses and children. I was horrified to hear [Ron Brookman](#), the leader of the Living Waters program (a SOCE) say to The Senate Same-Sex Marriage Inquiry on 28 May 2012 that he encouraged gay men he worked with to get married. *'In the last six months I have celebrated the weddings of two ex-gay men who have married beautiful wives and two couples who have given birth to babies who would never have been born had they not transitioned from homosexuality'*. History tells us that the vast majority of these mixed orientation marriages will end in devastation and disillusionment.

## *The Cure Documentary*

Whilst numerous documentaries have been made in the USA about the harm of SOCE and telling survivor stories, [The Cure](#) is the only Australian made [documentary](#) which deals with the topic. Produced by Rambling Women Media their website says " *The narrative of the film is a chronological retelling of the history of ex-gay therapies in Australia and New Zealand, as told by participants and one-time group leaders of prominent organisations such as Exodus and Living Waters. "The Cure" sets out to inform the audience by valuing the ethics of*

*balanced filmmaking, and in spite of the notoriously secretive nature of reorientation programs in Australia the filmmakers were able to secure an interview with Ron Brookman, current leader of Living Waters Inc Australia and one-time gay man."*

The film was premiered at the 2012 Mardi Gras Film festival and has had sell out showings at similar events. From there it captured mainstream media attention as many Australians were completely unaware of the existence of such programs. I was able to assist Rambling Women Media with initial consultation and connect them with former participants of SOCE who were prepared to tell their stories in such a public way. Once again it revealed the emotional trauma experienced during this time and after as well as contributions from psychologist Paul Martin. The interview with Ron Brookman, leader of the Living Waters program, revealed that even though heterosexuality is regularly proclaimed by such leaders because of marriage and children, that same sex attractions still exist. But these are passed off as thoughts/temptations as opposed to orientation. It's a form of double-speak/denial.

### ***Online programs are the most insidious and dangerous***

Imagine this. You are a young teenager who lives in a Christian home, possibly goes to a Christian school, and all your friends are in the local Christian youth group. You are heavily involved in a church. In all these contexts the only thing you have ever heard is that homosexuality is a sin and abomination. When you begin to realise that you might be gay or lesbian, because of what you've heard, you can't talk to your parents, friends, teachers, youth leader or pastor – so what do you do? In the secrecy of your room you Google 'unwanted same sex attraction' looking for solutions to your dilemma. You find sites like [Door of Hope - Setting Captives Free](#) and [Living Hope Ministries](#) who offer online support. All this is done anonymously both by the seeker and also the person providing advice and support. We don't know what qualifications these people have, if any. There is no duty of care. No reporting. No-one they are accountable to. I know of several young people who connected with overseas online programs and attempted suicide whilst doing the program or soon afterwards when they felt they had 'failed'. All of these young people were under 18 at the time.

## **Recent developments**

- The UK based Association of Christian Counsellors [released a statement to its members in January 2014](#) prohibiting reparative therapy.

- In the USA, California and New Jersey have banned SOCE for minors. SOCE practitioners appealed these decisions but lost their case. Maryland, Minnesota and New York states are currently considering introducing the same legislation.
- The President of Exodus International, the umbrella organisation for religious SOCE ministries and organisations admitted publicly in 2012 that 99% of the people he met through his organisation had not changed their sexual orientation. In June last year, at the invitation of Mr Chambers, [I attended](#) the final annual Exodus Conference in Los Angeles where the organisation was closed down after nearly four decades. In the previous year, Exodus had denounced reparative therapy. The day before the conference Chambers issued an [apology](#) which included admitting the harm they had caused. *"I have begun thinking again about how to apologize to the people that have been hurt by Exodus International through an experience or by a message. I have heard many firsthand stories from people called ex-gay survivors. Stories of people who went to Exodus affiliated ministries or ministers for help only to experience more trauma. I have heard stories of shame, sexual misconduct, and false hope".*
- Randy Thomas, the vice president, of Exodus, went even further in his apology saying *"I look back on my time as a Living Waters coordinator (eleven years ago) with the most remorse. Even though there is some good in this program, it often ripped open old wounds in the name of healing by attempting to manufacture an environment for the Lord to work in. I have to apologize for the times some people may have felt manipulated to bare their souls to a group full of strangers. I apologize for any pressure we, on the Living Waters team I led, might have placed on group participants as we tried to help them cultivate "authentic experiences."*

*As a trained Living Waters coordinator, I used to hang on to every word Andrew Comiskey said. I even did some online consulting work for him. But today, over a year after leaving his employ as a consultant, I look back and recognize there were signs that something was wrong. In retrospect, I realize I helped build Andrew Comiskey's online platforms – platforms which have increasingly gotten more vitriolic and stigmatizing toward the LGBT community. I regret that and I'm sorry."*

## Considering that:

- SOCE participants have stated the harm they experienced being a part of these programs as well as the ongoing negative impact ([attachment No.4](#))
- All mental health professional bodies have said there is no scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be changed and that SOCE cause harm ([attachment No.5](#))
- SOCE former leaders in Australia have stated it didn't work including :

- [Former Ex-gay Leader - John Meteyard](#) Exodus Asia Pacific & Living Waters Leader and on the International Advisory Board of Exodus
- [Former Ex-gay Leader - Vonnie Pitts \(Veronica Canning\)](#) Christian City Church Pastor and Living Waters Leader Sydney
- [Former Ex-gay Leader - Kim Brett](#) Exodus - Associate Former Leader - Living Waters and Liberty Inc Brisbane
- [Former Ex-gay Leader - Wendy Lawson](#) Exodus Leader Melbourne
- [Former Ex-gay Leader - Paul Martin](#) Exodus Leader – Melbourne
- [Former Aussie Ex-gay Founder Simon Tinkler say like so many others "I was wrong"](#) Founder of Ministry One Brisbane
- [Alan le May – A Christian heterosexual man's journey from tolerance to advocacy](#) Living Waters leader Brisbane
- SOCE's have contributed to mental health issues and even suicide.
- SOCE practitioners and organisations have no formally recognised qualifications to work with people at this level.
- SOCE practitioners and organisations have no duty of care policies that ensure people who leave their programs are safe and supported.

### **My recommendations to the committee are:**

- That all SOCE practices be banned
- That Australian and overseas online SOCE organisations and individuals offering help for people who have 'unwanted same sex attraction' be blocked.

Should you require any additional information I'd be happy to supply it.

Sincerely

#### **Anthony Venn-Brown**

Founder and CEO of Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International (ABBI).

Honoured to be voted one of the 25 Most Influential Gay & Lesbian Australians (2007 & 2009) and finalist for the 2011 ACON Community Hero Award

*Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International's mission is to create understanding and acceptance for LGBTI people. To discuss all your LGBTI awareness raising, training or consultancy needs please contact us for further details.*

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## Attachment No.1

### *Anthony Venn-Brown Bio*

Formerly a leader in the Assemblies of God and regular preacher in mega-churches of Australia and overseas, for 22 years Anthony tried to change his homosexuality through psychiatric treatment, exorcisms, 'ex-gay' programs, 40-day fasts and daily struggles with his 'problem'. Although happily married for 16 years with two daughters, eventually he had to admit that nothing had changed. At this time, Anthony faced the toughest decision of his life; be true to himself (which would result in losing everything he held dear) or live a lie.

Anthony's autobiography, '**A Life of Unlearning**' was awarded the SGLBA's '2004 Book of the Year'. The revised third edition (with additional 100 pages) to be released late 2013. Anthony has appeared on national television shows such as ['60 Minutes'](#), ['Channel 7's Sunrise and The Morning Show'](#), ['Mornings with Kerri Anne'](#), [ABC's Hungry Beast](#) and [SMH's Sexperts](#) as well as radio and in the mainstream and gay print media.

In 2005 Anthony co-founded Freedom2b and under his six year leadership has become the largest network of LGBT people from Christian backgrounds in Australia.. In 2011 he founded [Ambassadors & Bridge Builders International](#) which provides training and consultancy for churches, leaders, denominations and organisations about LGBT issues.

Anthony has been monitoring ex-gay/conversion/reparative activities/organisations in Australia and overseas since 2000. During this time he has gained a wealth of knowledge and experience working with people who have attended 'ex-gay' programs; assisting them to deal with the aftermath of a belief system that said, because they were same-sex-oriented, they were sick, dysfunctional and 'abnormal'. After leaving an 'ex-gay' program, unsuccessful candidates are often vulnerable and traumatized as they try to deal with the sense of shame and failure.

Anthony has been twice voted one of the 25 Most Influential Gay & Lesbian Australians and was one of four finalists for the 2011 ACON Community Hero Award.

- Over 13 years experience working with gay and lesbian people in heterosexual marriages and 'ex-gay' survivors
- Well read on the scientific research from both sides of the debate re changing sexual orientation
- Networked with similar international groups [Beyond Ex-gay](#), [The Ex-gay Watch](#), [Box Turtle Bulletin](#), [Truth Wins Out](#), [Soulforce](#) and [Courage](#)

- 2013 Attended [the final Exodus International Conference](#) in California at the invitation of the president Alan Chambers
- 2012 Researched and [documented](#) the decline of ex-gay organisations in Australia and New Zealand
- 2012 Released [Ex-gay survivor Stories](#)
- 2011- 2012 Involved in initial stages of research for the documentary [The Cure](#), assisting with background information and contacts for the film makers. Also appeared in the documentary.
- 2011 [Successfully campaigned](#) for US 'ex-gay' Adam Hood's meetings to be closed down
- 2011 First presentation of [A Glimpse into Australia's Ex-gay World \(PP\)](#)
- 2010 '[Situational Heterosexuality](#)' - the most misunderstood concept in the 'ex-gay' and Christian worlds
- 2010 Organised a group of Ex-gay Survivors to march in the [Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras](#)
- 2009 Participated in the '[Ending the Harm Caused by Reparative Therapies Conference](#)' – Florida USA
- 2008 Launched [Ex-gay Australia, Asia, NZ & the Pacific](#)
- 2008 Released [20 Questions for "Ex-gay" Ministry Leaders](#)
- 2007 Organised and released statements and apologies from five former [Australian 'Ex-gay' Leaders](#)
- 2007 Attended the first '[Ex-gay Survivors Conference](#)' in California USA
- 2005 Co-founded [Freedom 2 b\[e\]](#), which has become Australia's largest network for LGBT people from Christian backgrounds
- 2000 Commenced an online support group [Exex-gay](#) for survivors of 'ex-gay' ministries.
- 1972 Spent six months in Australia's first live-in 'Ex-gay' program ([read entire chapter here](#))

## Attachment No.2

### *Situational Heterosexually*

#### INTRODUCTION

**Situational heterosexual** is a term I've used for several years to describe myself when people have asked how I could have been married for so many years and yet be gay. This term has also helped people gain a clearer understanding of what really happens when someone who is homosexual marries someone of the opposite sex and claims change. Confusion about what really happens in these situations still exists and often wrongly reinforces the 'homosexuality is a choice' and 'homosexuals can change' myths.

How often have you heard someone say something like this '***They couldn't be gay, they're married***' assuming that having a wife by your side and produced children means a person must be straight. When someone says that to me, I just smile.....remain silent for a while having been a gay man in a heterosexual marriage) and wait for what I'm actually thinking to sink into the consciousness of the person who made the naïve statement.

#### **'SITUATIONAL HOMOSEXUALITY'**

The term 'situational homosexuality' is used to describe same sex behaviours in prison, the military, single sex boarding schools, or other sex-segregated communities, where members of those communities might engage in homosexual activity or relationships. Once they come out of that situation they have not become homosexual, they revert to their natural orientation; sex and relationships with the opposite sex. It's only the situation that created the behaviour; the orientation wasn't changed.

#### **CONFUSION OVER BEHAVIOUR VS ORIENTATION**

People who believe that a heterosexual marriage and children are proof that a person is no longer homosexual seem to be ignorant of the true dynamics of sexual orientation and have a simplistic view of sexual behaviour. Alfred Kinsey's ground breaking research (late 40's and early 50's) in the area of human sexuality revealed many things. Whilst not all his discoveries have become standard psychological practise he opened the way for us to look at human sexuality in more realistic terms instead of making assumptions based on a Victorian, repressed and ignorant cultural mindset. Kinsey developed a seven point scale with 0 representing individuals who had only heterosexual intercourse and with 6 representing those who engaged in only same-sex activities. This created the concept of

bi-sexuality and that some people may, from time to time, engage in same sex behaviours but not actually be homosexual in orientation.

Kinsey and his associates found that 37 per cent of the males and 13 percent of the females in their sample had had at least one homosexual encounter. Are these people homosexual in orientation, bisexual or heterosexuals who were playing up, being opportunistic or experimenting?

**Further research over the last five decades has given us a more comprehensive understanding of sexual orientation.**

Our sexual orientation involves brain wiring, thought processing, hormones and release of chemicals in the body with the final outcome demonstrated in our behaviour.

Our true sexual orientation is reflected by:

1. The gender we are attracted to sexually
2. The gender we fantasize about
3. The gender we desire intimacy and affection with
4. The gender we are likely to fall in love with
5. The gender we want to partner with
6. How we identify ourselves
7. With all social, religious and legal restrictions removed and the opportunity to have sexual experience with either gender, which one would we honestly chose. Or as one person put it to me recently 'In the morning, whose arms would you like to wake up in.'

So a person's sexual orientation is determined by much more than their sexual behaviour. Or to put it another way, our sexual behaviour, solely, doesn't indicate our sexual orientation. Genuine bisexuality would also include all of the above with either gender. Some people think they are bisexual because they have had sex with both male and female. I know I thought that for years but this is not necessarily true. For some people using the bisexual tag/identity is a useful and safe place for them to pause on their journey to accepting their gay self/identity.

## **CONFUSION OVER SAME SEX ATTRACTION (SSA) VS SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

I'd like a dollar for every time I've received an [email from someone seeking help](#) telling me they are '*struggling with same sex attraction*' (SSA). The term SSA is frequently used in the 'ex-gay' world by individuals and in their literature. The phrase 'same sex attraction' is usually a deliberate choice to move the person's perception of their sexuality away from an orientation (which gives it a scientific basis and is innate) to a behaviour (which can be suppressed denied or 'possibly' changed).

## SO WHAT IS 'SITUATIONAL HETEROSEXUALITY'?

'Situational heterosexuality' is when a person who is same sex oriented enters a heterosexual marriage and has a degree of 'heterosexual functionality'. This is not a change in orientation only behaviour; created by the situation.

## HOMOSEXUALS IN A HETEROSEXUAL MARRIAGE – WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON?

You will often find men and women in the 'ex-gay' world speaking of their marriage as evidence that they are no longer homosexual. Those who are honest though, tell us they still have to deal with temptations, thoughts and desires towards the same sex. Some 'ex-gay' leaders in Australia have been honest enough to admit to 'strugglers' that '*they will always walk with a limp*', meaning the gay never really goes away. In an interview with the [Los Angeles Times](#), Alan Chambers, the director of Exodus (the global umbrella organisation for ex-gay ministries), sent shock waves through religious circles, when he stated that, "**By no means would we ever say change can be sudden or complete,**" and that he was uncomfortable with the term 'ex-gay' as he doesn't think he's ever met one. Even after years as a husband and father he still struggles at times with homosexual temptation.

It's not uncommon for men who have suppressed, denied and hated their same sex orientation to develop a sexual addiction or obsession. When they get married they have a sexual outlet which is free of shame and guilt and much more socially and religiously acceptable. This is a great relief for them to finally feel 'normal', 'wholesome' even 'pure'. As one research project clearly pointed out they had had sex with 100's men once and sex with one woman 100's of times. It is easy to see how they and others confuse this new found experience with the opposite sex as evidence of change. They do however conveniently ignore the fact that any infidelity within the marriage would never happen with another female, it would only ever be with a man.

What many of us have found out, finally leaving the heterosexual marriage to live as openly gay men and lesbians, that being true to yourself, instead of moving us into a life of promiscuity and sexual abandonment, actually releases us from the addictions and obsessions and new sense of morality and control emerges. **Why didn't someone tell me that when I was 18?**

From my experience, working with 100's of people in these situations, 'situational heterosexuals' rarely experience the depth, frequency or diversity of sexual experience that genuine heterosexuals couples do. One client sadly admitted to me that after many years of marriage **he couldn't recall one moment of intimacy, even though they had sex fairly regularly throughout the marriage.** He didn't actually know what intimacy was as his sexual experiences with men before he got married were mostly brief encounters with no affection or real connection, driven by his addiction and clouded with shame. It wasn't till he came out and fell in love with a man that he discovered intimacy within that relationship and had a life experience to make a comparison. Others have confessed that in order

for them to perform in the bedroom they had to fantasise having sex with men. Others, in the end, just tried to avoid it after years of feeling a sense of duty and obligation no longer worked. What a tragic situation for all concerned.

## THE SADDEST THINGS ABOUT THIS SITUATION

This false assumption by many that a heterosexual marriage means a person is no longer homosexual has caused much unnecessary suffering.

1. **Well meaning Christians** (and sometimes those not so well meaning) will often use these 'ex-gay'/heterosexual marriages as examples that change is possible and pressure those who are gay or lesbian to reject their natural orientation. They do this with limited or no knowledge of sexual orientation or of the finer, personal details of these marriages. Too often parents and friends have been quoted as saying **'look at so and so ....they changed.....they are now married with children, You can do it to with prayer and faith'**
2. **Seekers of sexual orientation change** who come to 'ex-gay' ministries are tormented and desperate. They hate being gay and will latch on to any possibility of change. The 'ex-gay'/heterosexual marriage modelled by the 'ex-gay' leader is just the answer they seek. They look at the marriages and selectively ignore the honest confessions that these people still 'struggle'. This false hope leads people into many wasted years trying to do the impossible, that is, turn from gay to straight. As one former 'ex-gay' leader in Australia said to me recently, after leaving his marriage to be true to himself, **'For 20 years I was sold a very cruel lie'** or as Scott from Perth said **'I lost my entire 20's, I felt like I was robbed of what should have been enjoyable days of my youth'**.
3. **The opposite sex partner** will often believe they are 'called' to walk the journey with their partner to 'heterosexuality'. As history has shown, rarely do these marriages last, leaving the heterosexual partner with a sense of betrayal and the feeling that they may have contributed in some way to their partner not changing. Or they are resentful that they have given the best years of their lives to a person who promised to love and be with them for life. A promise they were unable to fulfil. Former wives of 'ex-gay' men speak out [here](#).
4. **And finally the children.** One thing many people want in this situation is children. We want to be parents. I know I wanted to not only be husband but also a father. I believe now, I was more in love with the idea of being a husband and father (ie being 'normal') than I was in love with my wife. When the marriage finally breaks down, often during mid-life, the children are also traumatised and have to deal with the added shame that their Dad has 'become' gay or their Mother 'become' a lesbian. As many of these kids are a part of a Christian community the scandal is intensified. As my daughter Hannah said recently in an [interview on the ABC](#) **'If you are gay and get married hoping it will change you, then it is a very selfish act as you don't know what hurt you will create in the generations to come.'**

**These are very tragic and unnecessary outcomes for all concerned.**

1. The person living with the false hope that one day they will be straight,
2. The straight partner who is doing everything possible to create the 'miracle' and
3. The children who are anticipating a lifetime of security with a Dad and Mum that will live and love together till death parts them.

Whilst I'm grateful for the years of married life and the lovely children and grandchildren I've had, I also have to live with the knowledge that I have been the source of the greatest trauma, pain and shame in the lives of the people I cared most about. **Could I have turned back the hands of time I would not have chosen that for them or myself.**

After Ron Brookman from the 'ex-gay' program Living Waters [declared proudly](#) that he recently performed marriages for three men he had helped become 'ex-gay' a former wife of an ex-gay man had this to say.

*I'm sad for Ron Brookman's wife, and for the wives (and children if these marriages don't make it) of the other two men he talks about in this interview. I'm sad for everyone who will believe what he says. I'm sad for myself... separated, now divorced from my Christian, closeted, gay-in-denial ex-husband (also in ministry). I'm sad for my ex-husband's first wife and children. I'm sad that he quite possibly will do this again to a 3rd woman because of fear and shame, and because of messages like this one from Ron Brookman that say that it's possible to be a "former homosexual". I support equality in marriage. I support honesty, authenticity, and integrity. I'm a Christian, but sadly the Australian Christian Lobby or Ron Brookman doesn't want or welcome my point of view. And... I should also have said that I'm very very sad for my ex-husband, and for all the unnecessary anxiety, depression, fear and shame that keeps him in the closet.*

© **Anthony Venn-Brown**

## Attachment No.3

### *The Impacts of Faith/Sexuality Conflict*

Since 2004, when my autobiography '[A Life of Unlearning](#)' was released, I have been privileged to be the first contact point for 1,000's of LGBT people from faith and religious backgrounds; especially those experiencing faith/sexuality conflict within strongly biblically based contexts. It's a like my inbox has become a microscope into a hidden world as many isolated and alienated people have found someone they relate to; often for the first time. Common themes have emerged from the many emails I've received, listening to individual stories and from the stories posted on the Freedom 2 b[e] forum. [Telling Our Stories](#)

LGBT people of faith and religion are an emerging group whose specific needs have not always been identified or catered for. In order to work more effectively with these target groups, it's important for community workers and service providers to be aware of the particular issues they face.

LGBT people of faith and religion experience the usual issues of resolving their sexuality or gender identity, coming out, finding their place in the community and learning what it means to live authentically in a predominately straight world.

**They often however, experience these things with greater intensity and also have additional issues to deal with.**

#### **What are the impacts of faith/sexuality conflict?**

- **Intense cognitive dissonance** because the acceptance or rejection of their sexuality has eternal consequences.
- **Suicidality.** Research shows this group have either thoughts of, or attempts to suicide more often than those from non- faith backgrounds.
- **Mental health issues.** The dissonance created by the perceived conflict of faith and sexuality causes anxiety, stress and depression.
- **Self destructive behaviours.** When people leave religious backgrounds, they are often left with strong feelings of failure and shame.
- **Obsessive behaviours and addictions.** Unhealthy behaviours develop when people suppress or deny their sexual orientation.
- **Trauma and grief.** Extricating oneself from the religion can be traumatic and the loss of family, friends and faith devastating.



- **Internalised homophobia.** Even after coming out, years of negative conditioning and self-hatred continue to have impact.
- **Loss of purpose and self esteem.** The new gay identity, initially, may not be as profound as the previous Christian identity.
- **Inability to connect.** Leaving the church means entire social network is lost and the new LGBT world difficult to negotiate.
- **Higher risk of HIV & STI infection.** People from church backgrounds rarely have access to safe-sex education.
- **Discrimination.** LGBT people of faith experience discrimination not only from their churches but also within the LGBT community.

## Attachment No.4

### *Extracts from Former SOCE Participants Stories*

Below you will read some extracts from the many 100's of emails I have received from readers of my autobiography 'A Life of Unlearning' and others who contacted me after coming out of 'ex-gay' programs or reparative therapy or were a part of my Yahoo ex-gay survivors group I ran since 2000. Many of these people were seeking help and support as they dealt with the aftermath of their experience. Extracts below are from people who have been involved in either one or a number of the approximately 270 individual ministries globally that sit under the umbrella organisation Exodus International (also known as Exodus Global Alliance).

This includes ministries such as Living Waters, Liberty Christian Ministries, Liberty Inc., Door of Hope (Setting Captives Free), Beyond Egypt, Exodus Asia Pacific. Love in Action, On Eagles Wings to Asia, Choices Singapore, Choices Sydney, Purple Heart (formerly Exodus South Melbourne) .....to name just a few.

*Mum requested that I go and see Christian counsellors about my homosexuality. They swiftly blamed my Dad. Oh, I wanted to change. Almost every Friday night I spent the entire night in prayer, hoping that if I became spiritual enough my sexuality would change. I got ex-gay counselling. Only one thing kept me from sticking with it. I couldn't change my sexuality.*

#### **Gay Male 34...**

*I spent three months listening to a series of talks given by a man who had been about to undergo a sex-change operation before God intervened and spoke to him. He has since changed his life and become married with kids and leaves you with the impression that changing your orientation is possible. We also talked about our attractions amongst others in the group but not wanting to disclose personal information about my sexual life to a group of strangers did little to help me understand more about myself. Most, if not all, of the other men in the group found repressing their feelings and not acting out almost impossible, as they would confess to being attracted to other men every week. Some men who were married also confessed to cheating on their wives with other men. After going through the program, no change had taken place and I longed to try and understand why. I went through the program again in case I missed something the first time through and also talked to counsellors who specialized in same-sex attraction. I did all the things the man from the talks had done but no answers came.*

#### **Shane**

*During that time I Felt paranoid and guilty; it could have contributed to 2 different psychiatric ward*

visits. I also had a sense of loneliness (because I really couldn't talk about it to anyone outside of the group).

**Jeffrey USA spent 3 years in ex-gay programs**

*I have to say that my time in Eagles Nest included physical, psychological, spiritual and emotional torture. It was a total waste of time and money.*

**Kenneth - Eagle's Nest USA 6 Months**

*Fortunately had a realistic counsellor who said one time 'I don't want to rain on your parade, but the feelings you have won't go away - you may just be able to suppress them'. Helped me become a stable happy gay man. Left hetro marriage with 3 (now adult) children. Have great relationship with ex-wife after 10 years of working through hurts. Am in a stable 10 year relationship with a wonderful guy.*

**Les**

*I was forced to go by my parents after I came out at age 16. Tried for a few months to change who I am to please my parents, then ran away to Melbourne and stayed with a friend and his family for a month (lovely people) I stayed in contact with my mum over this period in Melbourne and she said she wanted me back. I set some ground rules, and she accepted them so now I live with my parents in Sydney. Now I even have my boyfriend over for family dinner :P Kudos to my parents for having a complete turnaround*

**Ryan - went to see a counsellor at his Christian School**

*While attending the group I cried a lot. Got quite depressed when my "tendencies" didn't become any less real. I wasn't severely wounded by the experience, and don't really hold any bitterness. At the same time I am very suspicious of anyone who says their sexual attraction to people of the same sex is diminished by attending such a group. Marriage is no proof that someone is no longer intrinsically gay.*

**Stephen - Liberty Christian Ministries for 6 months**

*but...over 30 years of deliverance, inner healing prayer, speaking out "I'm healed" in faith, counselling, conferences, seminars, ongoing prayer, etc. My orientation did not change ....through those years I was terribly suicidal. I tried to commit suicide once and cut myself up quite badly a 2nd time. I've nearly overdosed on pills another time. I started out with hope that I would change one day, and as the years went by lost it all and so tried to kill myself. Not like that now tho! I...love Jesus, love spending time with God, and I'm gay! (My tagline: I don't do straight very well!)*

**Stephen - Living Waters 21 weeks and Toronto Exodus affiliated group for 6 months. Also at Bundeena Christian Fellowship live in program.**

*Whilst trying to change I experienced severe spiritual and emotional abuse. loss of everything. therapy, near suicide. battling depression, despair. loneliness. kicked out of the church. loss of friends, partner, no local support groups. no family locally, but 1 teen daughter only with me 1-2 days per week. very sad and alone, .....but trying to heal. have accepted who I am and who God created me to be, yet very grievous now at all the losses.*

#### **Johnson at the Vineyard USA**

*I was taught that I was mentally ill and sinful which resulted in severe depression. Starting to work through now, and beginning to accept myself*

#### **Warren went to Choices in Sydney**

*I tried for 18 yrs to change. Suicidal for many years, found it hard to accept myself , hated myself but finally I found Honesty, Love and Acceptance in 2005.*

**Johann went through Liberty Inc (div. Exodus) / Living Waters (CIMP) 4 years all up. Two years in each.**

*The only people who claimed they'd changed were the leaders and I happen to know they haven't. When I went and joined Exodus after a suicide attempt, legally they should have referred me on to a qualified health professional to make sure I was fit to make the decisions I was making. Instead, they just took me on in that place of weakness and self destruction.*

*Exodus has blood on its hands, definitely. I was seventeen and I was very screwed up and was attempting suicide because I was confused. I am only alive now because I am rather inept at killing myself. I know others who have harmed themselves and in the states there are numerous cases of people coming out of the program and committing suicide. I've been pretty much in psychiatric counselling for last five years because of this. I've had numerous suicide attempts because of this. Some people I know have gotten away more lightly. The more determined you were, the more you got hurt. I wanted to make this work, I was celibate for eight years, I did everything I was told."***Adrian Exodus Melbourne**

*Consider finding yourself with a same sex attraction orientation as a Christian, and being asked to change that. It took years for me to even discover the ex-gay movement, and after trying that, psychotherapy, counselling, programs, prayer & accountability over 6 years, nothing essentially shifted. I used to blame myself for not "making it" – but these days I accept myself & believe God loves me, as much as he does the rest of his creation. I'm one of the fortunate ones who stayed around to find these things out. Many, many young men & women take their own lives, believing they are unloved by others, family, christians, society, peers. My prayer is that young people who feel so isolated, rejected, unworthy as believers WILL find the reality that God loves you as much as he does ALL of his creation*

## **Jayem**

*I spent a year seeing a private councillor in an attempt to discover the reasons for my homosexual feelings with no real progress it was then suggested that I approach Living Waters. I spent the next year discovering a whole new meaning to the word depression. Living Waters in their attempt to discover the key element to my 'brokenness' had only managed to make me even more aware that there was no 'brokenness'... I had not been raped, molested, abused, abandoned, not one iota after a year made me think, 'yeah that's what caused it'. This caused my depression to increase...*

## **GMD-82X**

*My parents, true to form, responded in love as best they knew how. They had already had contact with the Brisbane branch of Exodus, called Liberty, and knew its leader, Peter Lane, personally. Within two days, Peter visited our holiday accommodation and a six-year counselling relationship began. Most readers will know the general tenor of the teaching I came into contact with there. Homosexuality was a disordered attempt to achieve affirmation in and intimacy with your own gender, something that had been thwarted with your same-gender parent and/or peers. Healing in these areas, and breaking the "habit" of sex with men, should lead to the "recovery" of your innate heterosexuality. Despite it all, I never went longer than six weeks without a "fall". And I dreaded the meetings with Peter in which I had to confess in explicit detail everything I had done.*

## **Tim**

*I came out of a church two years ago where i had been for five years. They had Exodus teach the "homosexuality" module in their Bible school and used the Exodus model in their own teaching and ministering to the "sexually broken". It caused me to contemplate suicide for the last couple of years within that church community. The only reason i allowed it was not that i wanted to be not gay, but rather i believed it when they preached it was a sin of idolatry and i wanted nothing in my heart that would keep me from an intimate relationship with God. I endured the name calling and the humiliation until they also devastated a "sexually broken" friend of mine. After leaving, i became fully comfortable with my sexuality very quickly as it came hand in hand with an increasingly beautiful, surprising and wondrous intimate relationship with Jesus. No doubt in my mind what Jesus thinks of me and no doubt how damaging this churches agenda and methods were....*

## **Sunflower**

*I became a Christian at the age of 15 and entered full time christian ministry after leaving theological college. For too many years I tried to deny who I was by trying to change my sexuality. I was exorcised, prayed for and attended to ex-gay programs but I only felt more worthless as my sexuality didn't change. I then came crashing into the gay scene in the mid 90's being extremely promiscuous and reckless.....leading to an HIV+ diagnosis in 1996. Its really only been in the last couple of years I have begun to accept and like myself. Reading your book has really challenged me further and I want*

to thank you for your honesty and candor. It's made a huge difference to me. I am now moving on to greater resolution.

**John UK**

*My folks are very homophobic and they hate gays. I tried to come out to them, and they threatened to disown me, take me out of their will, etc. So under extreme pressure from them, I decided to renounce my homosexuality and seek help. I was introduced to Tom Cole of Reconciliation Ministries in Detroit, Michigan. I attended the weekly meetings for 7 weeks, then had to give it up. It depressed me so badly that I attempted suicide and spent a full week in a psychiatric ward. I felt that I NEEDED to change what I was, and I've wrestled with this so much. I just want the struggle to end. I know that I'm gay, but accepting it is proving to be the hardest thing I've ever encountered. I am 31 now, will be 32 next month and still struggling with this issue. I am no longer a Christian; it's too painful for me to even reconsider returning to God. However, I was deeply moved by your story Anthony.*

**Rick USA**

*I went to an ex-gay group called Dominion which was part of a mega church in Perth. It involved one on one 'therapy' with a counsellor. It was very Christian focused with a sprinkle of psychology concepts brought in. If one was successfully progressing in the one on one sessions, there was a group component to the program however I FAILED and never made it to this part. In addition I also saw a number of Christian psychologists over the years. This built up a lot of self-hatred. This caused so much depression and self-destructive behaviour.*

*I started to realise that change wasn't always an option and that being gay is an orientation and not a choice. When I lost my mother to cancer (3 weeks and 3 days after her being diagnosed) I decided that I had to be true to myself and realise that the only choice I have is in what to believe, not who I am.*

*I sought information through the internet and GLBT support groups. Lastly I sought the assistance from a Christian Psychologist who was current with her understanding on sexuality. She helped me to see that I could identify as gay. I developed a plan for coming out which included leaving my employment with my denomination and moved me on a journey to face a number of demons in my life. I now have less depression, an inner peace and confidence in who I am. I'm now focussed back on my goals and dreams without the baggage that held me back. I know I don't have to justify who I am and that no one can tell me that I'm not what God created.*

*One thing I do regret though is that while other people my age were out enjoying themselves I was living in torment. **I LOST a DECADE** of my life.*

**Scott**

*My Catholic family always spoke of these people as abominations. As a teenager I converted from Catholicism and attended a charismatic church where I was informed demonic spirits caused homosexuality. I was commanded to undergo exorcisms. The first two didn't work as apparently I had unconfessed sin in my life. I was assured the third worked. Sadly I soon realised nothing had changed. I hated myself for years and believed God hated me also. I pleaded with him constantly to heal me and make me straight. Eventually I was commanded to go to the Exodus endorsed program Living Waters. The program left me feeling suicidal and more unworthy than ever. After 3 suicide attempts I came to the conclusion I was an abhorrent and detestable human being unworthy of anyone's love. Your book was like a ray of sunshine. The first time I read it was in a city bookstore and I was in tears and couldn't put it down. The next day I went back and bought and have devoured it ever since. Thanks to God and people like yourself I have come to understand and accept who I am and that God does love me. ...and that I am a gay man equal to every human being on the planet. Worthy of the same respect and love."*

**Brian**

*At 16 years old, I entered my first ex-gay program called 'Door of Hope'. This was a 60 day mostly-online course where you were 'cured' from homosexuality. I didn't tell anyone except some church leaders and when my parents asked where I was going I responded by saying 'a friends place'.*

*I was given a mentor. He was 42 years old and married with a family. He always sounded so sure of himself as if he knew 100% that he was no longer gay. His marriage he said was testament to this. Each day it would take about 2-3 hours and I would sit through the constant lessons about how being gay is a sin and that only God can heal you from this terrible affliction. I had to confess everything, whether I had thoughts about men, if I had had sex or masturbated, whether I had looked at pornography. If we failed in one area we were told that we had to put more effort into this and try harder. I was told to pray and ask for forgiveness and told that this demonstrated my lack of faith. I persevered and I finished 45 out of the 60 days before I couldn't take it anymore. My school marks were failing and I could no longer deal with the immense pain I went through every day.*

*After about three months, I entered into another ex-gay program. The same one with the same rules and same hardships. Except this time they were harder on me because I had failed the first. I needed to have more faith or so they told me. After 53 days (better than last time) I gave up once more. I just stopped going. I didn't believe anymore in changing or in God but still the shame, confusion and damage remained.*

*After almost three years of these programs and the intense reparative therapy and reading almost every book from well known ex-gay authors like Sy Rogers, Joe Dallas and Alan Chambers, something finally hit me and I realised that even though I had given my all that nothing had actually changed.*

## Ben

*A few years ago I was a part of an ex gay ministry called Exodus, and another course called Door of Hope. The teachings of it and the churches screwed up the best years of my life. I was taught that homosexuality is a big sin and no one who is homosexual is truly happy. I really thought homosexuality was curable and was told that by the ex gay organisations I was with. However everyone I knew in the organisation was never cured from homosexual desires, and deep down they were not being really true to themselves.*

*Even before I began the ex gay programs I tried to change my sexuality and hated the idea I was gay. I never had any positive gay role models when I was a child or teenager or when I was in my 20s. If I ever had any positive gay role models then it would spare me so much depression and mental problems, as I thought something was very seriously wrong with me due to my sexuality. I only began to accept my sexuality at a slow process starting a few years ago, after I turned 30.*

*When I was going ex gay organisations I was failing university and did not really feel good about myself. Since I began to accept myself as gay my university performance gradually went better. I still have self esteem issues but now I feel more at peace at myself and happier than when I was in the closet and thought that being gay was so wrong.*

## **Stewart**

*My story.....*

*I knew at a young age of my attraction to men which was confusing and in society it was wrong and being in a small town made it worse. I became a Christian at 13 and thought the attraction would go away. I attended Church for quite a few years hiding this secret and not just asking but crying out to God to take this away and make me normal and be acceptable to him. I tried serving and getting involved in church as much as possible, did mission trips, leadership roles, bible college. I guess my thought pattern was serve and cry out to God.*

*I was so desperate to be acceptable to God that I found ex-gay programs to attend. I had so much hope that this was the answer, this will make me normal, " Look God can' u see, arn't u listening, am I not good enough".*

*I got to the point in having suicidal thoughts and depression, so I walked out on God and told him he didn't exist.*

*After a few years I went back to church but same old story and at the moment I do not attend.*

## **IPete**



## Attachment No.5

### *Mental Health Professional Organisations Statements on SOCE*

#### **1994: The American Psychiatric Association**

There is no published scientific evidence supporting the efficacy of 'reparative therapy' as a treatment to change one's sexual orientation. It is not described in the scientific literature. There are a few reports in the literature of efforts to use psychotherapeutic and counselling techniques to treat persons troubled by their homosexuality who desire to become heterosexual; however, results have not been conclusive, nor have they been replicated. There is no evidence that any treatment can change a homosexual person's deep seated sexual feelings for others of the same sex.

#### **1997: The American Psychological Association**

President said....."In the past 10 years, Christian fundamentalists have enlisted a coalition of **old-style psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers** who have become very visible in this country and internationally, and who have as a mission to 'help' homosexuals get rid of their sexual orientation... **Our aim is not to try to stop them per se or interfere with anyone's right to practice [therapy]** but we want to expose the social context that creates this market."

#### **1997 The American Psychological Association Resolution**

APA officials are **concerned that some who enter therapy are being coerced** by their families, employers, church members etc. Therefore the APA resolution asks that the therapist obtains "*informed consent*" from the client. This includes:

1. a full discussion of the client's potential for happiness as a homosexual,
2. communication to the client that there is no sound scientific evidence that the therapy works,
3. raising the possibility that therapy may exacerbate the client's problems, and
4. an analysis of the client's true motivation for wanting to change.

#### **1999 the American Psychiatric Association**

"The potential risks of 'reparative therapy' are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive behaviour, since therapist alignment with societal prejudices against homosexuality may reinforce self-hatred already experienced by the patient. Many patients who have undergone 'reparative therapy' relate that they were inaccurately told that homosexuals are lonely, unhappy individuals who never achieve acceptance or satisfaction. The possibility that the person might achieve happiness and satisfying interpersonal relationships as a gay man or lesbian is not presented, nor are alternative approaches to dealing with the effects of societal stigmatization discussed."

"Therefore, the **American Psychiatric Association** opposes any psychiatric treatment, such as 'reparative' or 'conversion' therapy which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon a prior assumption that the patient should change his/her homosexual orientation."

#### **1999 the American Psychiatric Association**

Board of Trustees "endorsed a position statement at its December meeting that opposes therapeutic techniques some psychiatrists and mental health professionals claim can shift an individual's sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. The Board also acknowledged that there is no evidence that these so-called 'reparative therapies' have any efficacy in converting someone from one sexual orientation to another." The statement points out that "potential risks of 'reparative therapy' are great, including depression, anxiety, and self-destructive behaviour, since therapist alignment with societal prejudices against homosexuality may reinforce self-hatred already experienced by a patient."

#### **1999 The American Academy of Paediatrics, American Counselling Association, American Association of School Administrators, American Federation of Teachers, American Psychological Association, American School Health Association, Interfaith Alliance Foundation, National Association of School Psychologists, National Association of Social Workers, and National Education Association**

formed the "Just the Facts Coalition." They developed and endorsed "*Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation & Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators and School Personnel*" which stated:

The most important fact about 'reparative therapy,' also sometimes known as 'conversion' therapy, is that it is based on an understanding of homosexuality that has been rejected by all the major health and mental health professions. The American Academy of Paediatrics, the American Counselling Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the National Association of Social Workers, together representing more than **477,000** health and mental health professionals, have all taken the position that **homosexuality is not a mental disorder and thus there is no need for a 'cure'**. **Health and mental health professional organizations do not support efforts to change young people's sexual orientation through 'reparative therapy' and have raised serious concerns about its potential to do harm.**"

#### **2000 Australian Psychological Society Position Statement on the Use of Therapies that Attempt to Change Sexual Orientation**

In the past, defining homosexuality as an illness buttressed society's dislike for same-sex relationships. In the current social climate, claiming homosexuality is a mental disorder stems from efforts to discredit the growing social acceptance of homosexuality as a normal variant of human sexuality. Consequently, the issue of changing sexual orientation has become highly politicised. The

debates surrounding this issue have obscured the scientific data by calling into question the motives and the character of individuals on both sides of the issue.

The validity, efficacy and ethics of clinical attempts to change an individual's sexual orientation have been challenged. To date, there are no scientifically rigorous outcome studies to determine either the actual efficacy or harm of therapies or treatments that attempt to change a person's sexual orientation. There are sparse scientific data about selection criteria, risks versus benefits of the treatment, and long-term outcomes of such therapies. The literature consists of anecdotal reports of individuals who have claimed to change, people who claim that attempts to change were harmful to them, and others who claimed to have changed and then later recanted those claims.

With little data about patients, it is impossible to evaluate the theories, which rationalise the conduct of 'reparative' or conversion therapies. Firstly, they are at odds with the scientific position of the American Psychiatric Association, which has maintained, since 1973, that homosexuality per se is not a mental disorder. The theories of 'reparative' therapists define homosexuality as either a developmental arrest, a severe form of psychopathology, or some combination of both. In recent years, noted practitioners of 'reparative therapy' have openly integrated older psychoanalytic theories that pathologise homosexuality with traditional religious beliefs condemning homosexuality.

The earliest scientific criticisms of the early theories and religious beliefs informing 'reparative' or conversion therapies came primarily from sexology researchers. Later, criticisms emerged from psychoanalytic sources as well. There has also been an increasing body of religious thought arguing against traditional, biblical interpretations that condemn homosexuality and which underlie religious types of 'reparative' therapy.

### **Recommendations:**

1. APS supports the APA 1973 position that homosexuality is not a diagnosable mental disorder.
2. As a general principle, a therapist should not determine the goal of treatment either coercively or through subtle influence. Psychotherapeutic modalities to convert or 'repair' homosexuality are based on developmental theories the scientific validity of which is questionable. Furthermore, anecdotal reports of 'cures' are counterbalanced by anecdotal claims of psychological harm. 'Reparative' therapists have not produced any rigorous scientific research to substantiate their claims of cure. Until there is such research available, APS recommends that ethical practitioners refrain from attempts to change individuals' sexual orientation.
3. The 'reparative' therapy literature uses theories that make it difficult to formulate scientific selection criteria for their treatment modality. This literature not only ignores the impact of social stigma in motivating efforts to cure homosexuality, it is a literature that actively stigmatises homosexuality as well. 'Reparative' therapy literature also tends to overstate the treatment's accomplishments while neglecting any potential risks to patients. APS encourages and supports research in the academic

research community to determine further the efficacy or otherwise of therapies or treatments that attempt to change a person's sexual orientation.

### **2010 Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists Position Statement**

The American Psychological Association published a report of a study that reviewed the **results of 83 studies carried out between 1960 and 2007** on the controversial concept of Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE). The report found that, contrary to the claims of SOCE practitioners and advocates, recent research demonstrates that **there is no sound scientific evidence that sexual orientation can be changed**. The harm such therapies can cause to individuals, the contribution they make to the misrepresentation of homosexuality as a mental disorder, and the prejudice and discrimination that can flourish through the use of such therapies has led all major medical organisations to oppose the use of sexual reorientation therapies.

#### **Recommendations**

- The RANZCP does not support the use of sexual orientation change efforts **of any kind**
- Mental health workers should avoid misrepresenting the efficacy of sexual orientation change efforts when providing assistance to people distressed by their own or others' sexual orientation
- Mental health workers should assist people distressed by their sexual orientation by care and treatment approaches that **involve acceptance, support, and identity exploration**. These should aim to **reduce the stigma associated with homosexuality** and respect the person's religious beliefs.