

Let's Both Agree That You're Really Sinful

Compassion in the Ex-Gay Movement

Reparative Therapies

In this chapter, I focus on the movement to establish the contexts and details that are essential for understanding the ex-gay movement as a subculture of compassion within antigay Christian conservatism. Even as the more explicitly political segments of the Christian right have become more sophisticated in the construction and execution of punitive projects intended to stigmatize queer people and deprive them of equal rights, the ex-gay movement has developed and refined its compassionate approach to same-sex identity. Analyzing that approach requires understanding a number of facets of the movement: the relationship of the movement to antigay “science,” the psychological infrastructure that justifies the extension of compassion, the ideological value of ex-gay testimonies, and the terms of the foundational ideology that inspires same-sex-attracted people to cooperate in the denigration of their sexual desire and intimate relations.

Because the American ex-gay movement is overwhelmingly Christian-identified, researchers legitimately can approach the movement as a religious social and cultural project. However, unlike postabortion ministries, the ex-gay movement boasts a significant arena of secular, scientific experts and expertise. These experts are dedicated to certifying same-sex sexuality as objectively abnormal and, in many cases, to transforming same-sex attracted people into functioning heterosexuals. Derived as it is from psychoanalysis, most of this secular ex-gay discourse is therapeutic,

and some, which focuses on children's developmental dynamics, is prophylactic; thus, it expresses an ingroup therapeutic concern, not only with treating homosexuality but with preventing it in minors. On the other hand, no doubt because of the censure and criticism to which its practitioners have been subjected, some of this discourse also expresses outrage at the social and cultural damage these experts believe is committed by queers who assert their nonnormative sexuality and refuse to acknowledge the normality and superiority of heterosexuality.

By beginning this discussion of the ex-gay movement with these experts I do not mean to amplify their role in the movement or to dissociate them and the secular, scientific discourse they have created from the largely Christian ex-gay movement as a whole. To the contrary, I begin by demonstrating overlap and coordination between "secular" and Christian spheres of the movement that calls into question the claims of those on the ostensibly scientific side of the movement to intellectual independence and an objective basis for their antigay efforts. Compassion is a feature of both these arenas of the movement as experts, therapists, pastors, family members, and self-identified ex-gays minister to those members of their community with unwanted same-sex attractions. But given the substantial overlap and interpenetration of scientific expertise with Christian beliefs about sexuality, it is accurate to understand and analyze the compassion of the ex-gay movement as *Christian* compassion.

The stigmatizing of same-sex sexuality by the American mental health establishment and its treatment through reparative therapies dates to the early twentieth century in the United States¹ A turning point in the politics of same-sex sexuality and its treatment came in 1973 when the governing board of the American Psychiatric Association voted to overturn the classification of homosexuality as a mental illness in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). The decision was controversial, and was challenged by some members, but it was ratified a year later by a vote of the Association.² Dissenters from this decision and other pro-gay statements by professional organizations such as the American Psychiatric Association and the National Association of Social Workers protested the decision by continuing to carry out "reparative" or "conversion therapies" with homosexual clients and by forming an alternative organization of mental health practitioners: the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH).³

Reparative therapies are one form of treatment in the ex-gay movement's ensemble of interventions. Reparative therapists aspire to treat people who are unhappy with their same-sex desires, to reroute their

sexual desires, and to turn them into functioning heterosexuals. A broad category, reparative therapies have enveloped a range of treatments from aversion therapies to a variety of outpatient and inpatient psychotherapies. And the therapies continue to be contested. The American Psychological Association has recently promulgated its most critical report to date on the practice and therapies designed to change sexual orientation from same-sex to opposite sex.⁴ Responding to criticisms of the therapies by major mental health associations, in 2012 the California legislature passed a law banning the use of reparative therapies with minors. The law has been challenged by NARTH, the American Association of Christian Counselors, and the Pacific Justice Institute.

Today, NARTH is the major international secular institutional center and clearinghouse for reparative therapies. NARTH is widely understood to be a secular organization whose objections to same-sex sexuality are scientific rather than religious, but this identity belies the deep links and cooperation that prevail between the conservative Christian ex-gay movement and NARTH and its affiliated mental health practitioners. These points of contact fall into four categories: fundamental beliefs that cannot be established scientifically, the transfer of ideas from psychological researchers to the religious community, shared personnel, and the ideological perspectives that NARTH and the Christian right share.

Jack Drescher, a psychologist who has written extensively on anti-gay interventions in the mental health professions, notes that as the gap between antigay, “reparative,” psychological theory and the mainstream mental health profession has deepened, the organizations that represent these views behave more and more like “fundamentalist religious denomination[s].”⁵ What Drescher refers to is the commitment of reparative therapies proponents to beliefs that cannot be sustained merely by scientific evidence. So, for example, central to reparative therapies, and to the broader ex-gay movement, are beliefs about the necessity and naturalness of binary and complementary gender roles.⁶ Indeed, the movement is committed to supporting, elaborating, and even self-consciously staging gender role differentiation, a project that is evident in publications, ministries, and even the banter in which ex-gay aspirants engage in venues such as the annual meeting of Exodus International, the world’s largest ex-gay ministry.⁷

Just as evident in a movement that advertises itself as “offering help to those who struggle with unwanted homosexuality”⁸ are the visceral denunciations of those who transgress normative heterosexuality. The reader can judge the prose style of this scientific writing from, for example,

an essay on studies of lesbian parenting by Gerard J. M. van den Aardweg, a member of the NARTH Scientific Advisory Committee: "Of course, all damage by gay parenting will be blamed on malignant homophobia and not on the blind selfishness of . . . lesbian mothers, who may imagine they love their children, but, in fact, do them serious injustice. They sacrifice their children, who are so vulnerable because they naturally love their mothers, on the altar of their 'holy homophilia.' If this is not psychological violence, child abuse, what is?" Adherence to—or, for that matter, defiance of—creeds such as gender role complementarity and the essential depravity of homosexuals is more often associated with political activism than it is with science, and this adherence allies the researchers of NARTH with the Christian right and traditionalist believers.

In addition to fundamental beliefs that resist scientific proof in both movements, there are other connections between the "secular" proponents of reparative therapies and traditionalist religion. Second is the transfer of ideas, in which the Christian ex-gay movement relies on psychologists and psychoanalysts in the ranks of the antigay mental health community for its own theories about how same-sex attraction develops. This intellectual transfer has given the ex-gay movement a reliable source of ostensibly scientific ideas and arguments. These constitute a domain of "suppressed" "stigmatized knowledge" that conflicts with dominant academic and therapeutic knowledge.¹⁰ One example of such an expert is Joseph Nicolosi, a founder of NARTH, a psychologist by training and practice, and one of the principal successors of early antigay psychoanalysts. His writings provide key arguments about how particular gender and family dynamics cause homosexual desire, how it is that all people are heterosexual by nature, and why, although all of the major psychological professional associations disagree with the conclusion, homosexuality *is* an illness. But these ideas did not originate with Nicolosi. After Freud's ambivalent theorizing of same-sex sexuality, which was progressive for his time, a number of psychoanalysts took up the issue in a decidedly negative way. Among those who began in the 1960s to establish the key tenets of antigay psychodynamic theory that Nicolosi now disseminates were Sandor Rado, Lionel Ovesey, Irving Bieber, and Charles Socarides, another founder of NARTH.

Christian conservatives consistently have borrowed the arguments of these figures for over forty years. Major texts of the ex-gay movement demonstrate that as the antigay psychodynamic psychologies of same-sex attraction have changed in subtle ways, the conservative Christian ex-gay literature has changed to reflect the new psychological explanations. Anti-

gay clinicians have produced a narrative of development that the Christian ex-gay movement relies on in its counseling of repentant homosexuals as well as in its literature on Christian parenting and childhood. The major themes of the narrative of development were well developed in midcentury psychoanalytic works. In the 1970s and 1980s antigay psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic ideas were absorbed into a literature that mixed Christian moralizing and political attunement with developmental psychological theory.¹¹ By the 1990s, such works almost uniformly offered critiques of mainstream scientific studies on the possible biological origins and immutability of same-sex sexual orientation.¹²

A third connection between the “secular” work of NARTH and its psychodynamic researchers and the antigay work of the Christian right involves the extensive elite personnel intersections between the two groups. Joseph Nicolosi was a frequent expert contributor at Focus on the Family’s Love Won Out ex-gay conferences, where he spoke both as a psychologist and as a traditional (in his case, Catholic) believer. Child psychologist and Focus on the Family founder, James Dobson, provided a blurb for Nicolosi’s book, *A Parents’ Guide to Preventing Homosexuality*, and routinely recommended it to parents concerned with the nonnormative gender behavior of a child. Jeffrey Satinover, one of NARTH’s prominent psychiatrists and a member of its Scientific Advisory Committee, once served as medical advisor for Focus on the Family. The website of NARTH’s Janelle Hallman notes that “her passion is to share God’s word in a way that speaks to some of the deepest needs of broken and hurting people. She has spoken for Focus on the Family, Exodus International, and other Christian organizations.”¹³

Finally, viewing NARTH as a text clarifies the deep connections—indeed, coconstruction—of the ostensibly secular and religious arms of the antigay movement. I surveyed the NARTH website as I began to write this chapter, and the NARTH homepage for September 12, 2006, included the following headlines: “UK Christian Faces Court for Handing Out Bible Verse Leaflets at Gay Rally,” “Exodus [International] Releases First Book: A Guide to Help Evangelicals Reach the Gay Community,” and “Christian Psychologist Suspended by Police over Former Affiliation with Pro-Family Group.” Other headlines directed readers to such sources as ChristianNewsWire, LifeSite (“Your Life, Family, and Culture Outpost”), and Focus on the Family’s Newsletter, CitizenLink, for articles whose themes were Christian conservative, rather than scientific. In August 2011, NARTH featured a news item, “Presidential Politics Places NARTH Issues on Front Page!” that focused on the presidential candidacy of Republican Michele

Bachmann. As the title suggests, the article highlights NARTH's framing of same-sex sexuality, but the reparative therapy that initiated mainstream news interest in Bachmann's husband, Marcus, was being performed at the Bachmanns' Christian counseling clinic.¹⁴

The Christian conservative and scientific parts of the antigay movement have been inextricably related to—indeed, dependent on—each other. The Christian ex-gay movement has relied for its intellectual underpinnings on ostensibly secular knowledge about human development and teleology, even though much of that knowledge is repudiated by the contemporary scientific community. Although compassion has not been a prominent part of the rhetoric associated with the antigay psychiatric literature and with “secular” reparative therapies, there is a protocompassionate element to the literature and therapies. These clinicians believe that people who do not experience opposite-sex desire are both profoundly damaged and unable to create and enjoy foundational human relationships. The attempt of reparative therapists to therapeutically repair developmental damage and enable heterosexual love does suggest the kind of compassionate concern that's often associated with the clinical relationship. The Christian conservative ex-gay movement incorporates salient aspects of secular literature and clinical practices and integrates them with a message of God's commandments and Christian compassion for homosexuals. What results from this convergence are narratives of development that hold out hope that damaged gays can become, if not healed former gays, at least people who better understand the environmental dynamics that can predispose them to tenacious same-sex desire.

The Narrative of Development

The Christian ex-gay movement long has been “the right's kinder and gentler anti-gay campaign.”¹⁵ This descriptor suggests that other precincts of the Christian right's antigay movement are less kind and gentle, and so they are. When Didi Herman mapped the changes in the orientation of the Christian right over a period of fifty years, she found that in the early years of Christian conservative attention to the problem of homosexuality, pity coexisted with firm resistance to normalization. By the early 1970s, the concern with “gay militancy” was rising among Christian conservatives, and compassion would give way, at least in the explicitly political sectors of the movement, to the conception of same-sex sexuality as “a sin with a movement behind it” that must be fought.¹⁶ Even as the larger

Christian right movement mobilized against homosexuality, however, the ex-gay movement continued to cultivate compassionate dimensions.

The 1970s saw the first Christian ministries to homosexuals seeking to become heterosexual, and the movement was quickly institutionalized, first by the founding of Exodus International in 1976 and, second, by the establishing of the first ex-gay residential ministry, Love in Action, in 1979.¹⁷ In the early years, Christian counselors applied an exclusively spiritual message of change that promised reformation of sexuality without inquiring into the psychological dynamics of same-sex attraction.¹⁸ And as the movement matured into the 1980s the literatures and therapies of the Christian ex-gay movement came to reflect psychodynamic explanations produced by antigay psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, now embedded in a context of Christian conservative spirituality and exhortation.¹⁹

For believers, compassion follows from the understanding that same-sex desire is usually a matter of unchosen developmental dynamics. The explanation for lesbian desire includes developmental failures but is often more complicated—or incoherent—and in addition to interpersonal family dynamics includes the likelihood of sexual trauma.²⁰ Because unchosen developmental issues are understood to cause same-sex desire, the narrative of development relieves same-sex-attracted (often shortened to SSA) people of responsibility for their condition.²¹ Those who fall victim to these dynamics or traumatic events are not responsible for them except in the sense that they are charged by God to resist their immoral sexual urges.

Most authors of the development literature disarticulate same-sex desire from gay identity. Thus, they fix identity either at the point of behavioral capitulation to desire or at the point of willful entry into a “homosexual lifestyle.” One blunt articulation of this distinction is from the website of the ex-gay organization Love in Action, and it is consistent with the basic argument about sexuality found in the writings of NARTH researchers: “There is no such creation as a ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’ person. There is only homosexual attraction and behavior; accordingly, there can be no change from a sexual identity that never existed in the first place.”²² In the ex-gay movement lexicon, “strugglers,” also known as “overcoming” women and men, are those who ask God to remove their same-sex feelings and desires to form romantic relationships with people of the same sex. Toward strugglers who actively resist their same-sex desires, the appropriate response is helpfulness and loving compassion, a charge that entails not validating an active lesbian or gay life. Many participants in the movement come to understand themselves as celibate “ex-gays”—not

heterosexual, but not, or no longer, actively involved in same-sex relationships and community.²³ In 2007 Alan Chambers, president of Exodus International, disclosed his own skepticism about the term, “ex-gay.” Chambers noted that after many years as a husband and father he still struggled with same-sex attraction and that he doubted the transition to heterosexuality could be either “sudden or complete.”²⁴

Although different authors and thinkers in the ex-gay movement attribute same-sex desire to different influences, the most widely cited of all causes has been some species of dysfunctional family dynamics—the going awry of gender identifications and the homosexual orientation that results. From 1998 until 2009 Love Won Out, the ex-gay brand of Focus on the Family founded by Focus gender specialist John Paulk, disseminated the theme of familial dysfunction as a cause of homosexuality.²⁵ In 2004 Jyl Josephson and I attended a Focus on the Family Love Won Out meeting at North Heights Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in which the participants were instructed in this developmental narrative. It was a common feature of Love Won Out meetings that a mental health professional provided the psychological scaffolding that ex-gay speakers would use in their own testimonies and teaching. In Minneapolis, NARTH’s Nicolosi presented a broad outline of the kinds of developmental failures that occur in families and precipitate the deficits, arrests, failed identifications, and compensatory defenses that result in homosexuality.²⁶ In the developmental narrative, the fault of same-sex desire does not lie in those afflicted with it, but in their histories, and particularly in their family relations.

The narrative of development is complicated at its core, and that is probably one reason why it has begun to fall out of fashion in some quarters of the ex-gay movement. It constitutes a powerful indictment of many Christian families that few in the movement follow to its logical conclusion. One who does is Anita Worthen; the mother of a gay son, the wife of an ex-gay man, and the co-author of *Someone I Love Is Gay*, Anita and her husband, Frank Worthen, founded New Hope Ministries in San Rafael, California.²⁷ Tanya Erzen, who spent eighteen months doing ethnographic research at New Hope for her book, *Straight to Jesus*, cites Anita Worthen’s views on family—including her own—responsibility for homosexuality: “Anita believes that parents have to acknowledge their role in causing homosexuality in their children and to try not to alienate them at the same time. . . . ‘I don’t want the parents to go away feeling that they’re horrible people,’ Anita explained. ‘But I feel the only healing for parents is if they accept their responsibility—of what they’ve done. I

can't tell them what they've done. I can tell them my story because I did everything wrong and nobody can take that away from me.'"²⁸

However, most authors and spokespersons in the movement try to minimize the impact of the indictment of families and family relations even while they relate their own personal stories that often include familial abuse, neglect, and estrangement. In an attempt to reconcile the developmental narrative with the imperative to serve families of strugglers, Focus on the Family's former senior gender analyst, Melissa Fryrear, noted in a 2004 Love Won Out session that there is "no such thing as a perfect parent" but later described the characteristics in mothers that might predispose a daughter to lesbianism: "doormat[s]," "manipulative," "domineering," and/or "self-consumed."²⁹ In offering a master explanation for same-sex desire that's premised on deviance and adaptation to environmental failure, the ex-gay movement has had little choice but to confront parents and family members with evidence of their responsibility for the production of homosexuality *and* for their failure to recognize its signs early enough in the developmental process to try to arrest it.

One way out of this quandary is to suggest, as many have, that the failures that cause same-sex desire may be *perceived* by the prehomosexual child rather than *actual*. In its focus on actual developmental failures, the narrative of development itself does not tend to support this hopeful interpretation, but it is a useful caveat when the movement addresses itself to the Christian conservative family members of strugglers and unreformed lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men. In a session for friends and family members of gays and lesbians I attended at the 2008 Exodus International Freedom Conference, Fryrear emphasized this caveat. So even when the psychological-developmental narratives on which ex-gay ideology rely blame parents for developmental failures, Christian parents may avail themselves of the explanation of a child's misplaced perceptions.

In July 2008, Angelia Wilson and I attended the annual International Freedom Conference of Exodus International at the Ridgecrest Christian Conference Center in Ridgecrest (near Asheville), North Carolina.³⁰ There, strugglers; self-identified ex-gays; Christian conservatives involved in ex-gay ministries; and relatives and friends of gays and ex-gays gathered to receive and provide information, share testimonies, and worship together. The psychological infrastructure of the event was familiar because it is widely shared across the ex-gay movement and, indeed, continually constructed and disseminated by hegemonic actors such as Exodus. In keeping with extant ideology, most speakers reinforced the narrative of development and offered testimonies that emphasized the

malign consequences of a homosexual lifestyle. Many outlined appropriate gender differences and the pleasures of gender complementarity. Following a common script, many attributed a variety of problems in living—chronic loneliness, drug and/or alcohol addiction, compulsive sexual promiscuity, failed relationships, depression, and the urge to commit suicide—to their gay lifestyle and celebrated their freedom from homosexuality, which was simultaneously freedom from these painful life circumstances.³¹

By following the scripts provided by antigay psychological narratives of development, the literature of the ex-gay movement and discourse in ex-gay venues create a Christian popular psychology of emotion. This Christian pop psychology reinterprets academic and psychoanalytic theories of emotion, in some respects turning them on their head, to achieve accounts of emotion that advance ex-gay ideology. So, for example, strugglers learn a distinction between true and false selves that is quite different than the concept that was developed in the context of psychoanalytic theory proper: the true self is the heterosexual woman or man that God wants each of us to be; the false self is the deceptive self we may create under circumstances of homosexuality to hide what we are doing from the world. By contrast, Donald Winnicott's formulation of these concepts emphasized the difference between a sense of self created in response to a profound lack of attunement from caregivers and a more spontaneous self formed in an environment of emotional attunement.³²

Likewise with shame and guilt: shame is the feeling we may have when acting out same-sex sexuality that our essential being is wrong and bad. Compassionate ex-gay leaders do not endorse this comprehensive sense of shame, and the compassion of the movement is meant to discharge it if the circumstances are appropriate—if, for example, the aspiring ex-gay person is committed to no longer indulging in sexual sin. In contrast to shame, guilt is the certain knowledge that we have done something wrong. Indeed, as these examples, drawn from Christian therapy and ministries websites demonstrate, guilt is the indictment from God that confirms we have transgressed his rules for us.³³

Guilt is what takes place when a person realizes their failure. . . . While guilt is seeing what you've done, shame is seeing yourself as a failure because of what you've done.³⁴

Despite what some would have us believe, there is such a thing as true moral guilt. . . . We do people no favor by saying "Don't

feel guilty” when in fact, according to God’s Word, they are guilty. Our goal should be a conscience cleansed of sin, not a conscience that denies sin.³⁵

Like all things, guilt is a Godly designed emotion. . . . Guilt, as recognition of our wrongs, is a necessary first step in the path to repentance.³⁶

So guilt is more than a feeling—you are *actually* guilty because you have broken God’s loving and wise standards. Most of the time when you feel guilty, it’s because you *are* guilty.³⁷

The real purpose of guilt is to help us to admit and learn from our mistakes. God gives each of us a conscious [sic] that helps us to do the right thing and to make the right choices.³⁸

For Christian conservatives, the meaning of emotions is transparent. Whether the emotion is guilt, shame, or disgust, the emotions of the righteous reflect the truth of God’s divine order just as the emotions of those who struggle with sexual sin reflect their degraded spiritual condition and the distance between their current self and the mature Christian ideal toward which they strive.

Crucial to upholding this philosophy of affective transparency are the testimonies of ex-gays and -lesbians themselves. These testimonies reinscribe the relationship between affective life and divine order. They also serve as vehicles for articulating a particular ideal of love and compassion toward those who struggle to escape the grip of same-sex desire and attachment. The conventions of these ex-gay testimonies are such that a predictable component of the genre is the soliciting of compassion for strugglers. With the standing conferred by sexual brokenness and healing, authors explicate both the nature of true compassion and the form of compassionate relation that should prevail between believers and the same-sex afflicted.

Out of Bondage

Beginning in the 1970s, with Kent Philpott’s *The Third Sex? Six Homosexuals Tell Their Stories*, ex-lesbians and ex-gay men have stepped forward to tell the stories of their conversions to heterosexuality.³⁹ Today,

the first-person conversion literature is so vast that it either attests to the success of reparative therapies or vindicates the cynicism of critics that struggling ex-gays sustain their fervor for sexual change by becoming “full-time professional heterosexuals.”⁴⁰ Most of these works rely in one way or another on collective and/or personal developmental narratives—accounts of the development and progress of homosexual desire before a spiritual awakening that wrenched the author away from sin and into a new life of fidelity to God’s will. Ex-gay testimonies are available on the web, including in blogs, on YouTube, and on websites hosted by individual church ministries and national ex-gay organizations such as Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays (PFOX), Exodus International, and Exodus Student Ministries. Two resources are “Our Stories,” found on the PFOX website, and “Ex-Gay Testimonies,” posted to YouTube.⁴¹ Whether they appear in individual blogs or on the websites of ex-gay or Christian conservative organizations, these brief testimonies tend to share certain characteristics, including an attempt to explain same-sex attraction as the consequence of harmful childhood experiences or family dynamics and the misery of living life as a homosexual before being “convicted” before God and turning away from life as a gay person.

Some ex-gay testimonies take the form of books that are advertised and sold at ex-gay events. These memoirs tend to include an additional component often not present in the abbreviated versions of ex-gay transformation: a plea for love and compassion toward the same-sex attracted, especially those who are struggling with their sexuality and whose destinies God has laid on the hearts of the writers. A recent contribution to this literature is by Janet Boynes, ex-lesbian and founder of Janet Boynes Ministries, a nondenominational outreach dedicated to providing services to individuals who wish to “leave homosexuality” and churches that want to be informed on issues relating to homosexuality. Boynes is a friend and associate of Representative Michele Bachmann (R-MN) and her husband, and Bachmann is prominently quoted on the Boynes Ministries website: “Janet’s life is a powerful testimony of the changes that Christ can bring through His healing power from the bondage of sin. To see Janet is to see the face of joy, freedom, and peace. I wish everyone could meet this dynamic, young, Christ-filled woman who has dedicated her life to spreading the joy that she has found in a deep relationship of forgiveness from the Father. I hope everyone listens closely to Janet’s compelling testimony.”⁴² Providing back cover blurbs for *Called Out: A Former Lesbian’s Discovery of Freedom* are Bishop Harry R. Jackson Jr., senior pastor at Hope Christian Church in Beltsville, Maryland, just outside Washington,

DC, and Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council. Jackson and Perkins have collaborated on many projects, including the attempt to prevent the City Council of Washington, DC from extending the right to marry to same-sex couples in our nation's capital.⁴³

In *Called Out*, Boynes recounts a childhood of poverty, fatherlessness, physical and emotional abuse, and sexual assaults. For several years in her adult life Boynes was exclusively involved in intimate relationships with women. However, on matters of sexual desire and consensual sexual activity Boynes' story appears consistent with a bisexual interest in boys/men as well as girls/women. Boynes describes herself as a child as being "interested in boys, as most little girls are" and having "crushes on boys;" later Boynes has relationships with men, including one she falls in love with and nearly marries. Before Boynes was born again the temptation of sinful same-sex sexuality lurked: "Temptations and desires began creeping up on me and a girl named Leanna began to catch my eye. I still associated with guys and was attracted to them, but I could feel myself changing. Lesbianism was always in the back of my mind, just waiting for me to embrace it."⁴⁴ But it was only after being born again that Boynes succumbed to same-sex desire and began to live as a lesbian. Boynes' memoir of this period is consistent with ex-gay narratives that link same-sex sexuality with other forms of dysfunction and addiction. While engaged in relationships with women Boynes suffered from an eating disorder, used and sold cocaine, lied to police, and beat lovers. Finally, she returned to God and quickly abandoned what she calls the "lesbian lifestyle."

Part 2 of *Called Out* is Boynes' "Message," and the key phrase—repeated as the first line of every one of seven chapters and concluding sections—is: "When God calls, He calls in love." In a chapter that offers the message "for the church," Boynes addresses her "brothers and sisters in Christ" with the charge that "as the church, the body of Christ, we have failed to love as we should." She rebukes believers for "hold[ing] up signs with slogans like, 'God hates gays'" and asserts that as "followers of Christ Jesus, our message *cannot* be hate. It *must* be love."⁴⁵ Having reinforced the importance of loving compassion, Boynes advocates for the kind of ministry in which this love could find its proper object. "I would like to suggest something that some might consider a radical way of reaching out to the homosexual community, but it is an option I believe could bear incredible fruit: let us open the doors of our churches and homes to *those who wish to leave homosexuality*. . . . We will never be able to make a difference in the lives of gays and lesbians unless we

are able to offer a realistic alternative, a way out. It starts by opening our doors.”⁴⁶ Boynes exhorts the church to “send out a consistent message, one that speaks and acts in love while not compromising values or becoming accepting of sin.” This condemnation of homosexuality is “tough love” but also “healing love.”⁴⁷

Boynes’ *Called Out* is similar to other books by ex-gays but for one feature that gives her text a particular utility to the movement: because Boynes is African American, her commentary on LGBTQ civil rights claims lends personal credibility to the familiar ex-gay movement boundaries within which compassion should operate. The first portion of Boynes’ answer to the question “Is homosexuality a civil rights issue?” is worth quoting directly: “Homosexuality is *not* a civil right issue—*absolutely not*. I was born black. I became a lesbian. They are *not* the same. I did not choose the color of my skin. I did choose to enter a lesbian relationship and to live a homosexual lifestyle for fourteen years. I also chose to leave that lifestyle, but I cannot choose to stop being black. There is a difference. The color of my skin is an immutable quality of my being while my lesbianism was a deliberate series of actions resulting in a lifestyle choice.”

Boynes continues with an analysis that pairs forms of discrimination against African Americans in U.S. history with the assertion that homosexuals do not suffer these particular forms of harm in the present: “[Homosexuals] have the right to own property and they also have the right not to be property. They have the right to learn to read and to obtain an education. . . . They have the right to cross state lines without fear of being hunted, beaten, and imprisoned. They have the right to let their voices be heard without being lynched. These are all rights blacks had to fight for through hundreds of years of struggle, but homosexuals do not deal with *any* of these civil rights issues.”⁴⁸ By this standard there is no justification for a contemporary civil rights movement for any group of US citizens, a position that would be consistent with the conservative, including the “multicultural conservative,” perspective on the African American civil rights movement. As Angela Dillard suggests, the early phase of the movement—approximately from *Brown* to the Civil Rights Acts of the mid-1960s—is the “heroic” period in which second-class citizenship for African Americans was effectively challenged. This chronology permits black conservatives to salvage a civil rights movement with “moral legitimacy” and distinguish it from all that has transpired under the civil rights banner from the late-1960s to the present.⁴⁹

In foreclosing the possibility that discrimination against sexual minorities violates their civil rights, Boynes makes another move that sets her testimony apart from that of the majority of ex-gays. Only in the

“Questions and Answers” section of the book, a section followed by the epilogue and “Further Resources,” does Boynes refer to the Black Church as an institution and to black churches as religious communities, and she does so explicitly in the context of denying claims for LGBT relief from discrimination. Rather than ignoring homosexuality or merely ministering to those “struggling with homosexuality,” she charges the Black Church with “stand[ing] against the progression of homosexuality in our society”: “I want to encourage every black person reading this book to make it known to your government officials, to your churches, and to society that trying to make homosexuality seem normal is not and never will be the same thing as our long and hard struggle for civil rights.”⁵⁰

Such an antigay appeal to Christian conservative African Americans, a staple of the white Christian right movement since the 1990s, gains force for being articulated by someone who is in a position to compare experiences of minority racial and minority sexual identity.⁵¹ But the appeal also has the effect of reinforcing the boundary between loving compassion and strenuous political opposition. God calls in love, but only when the troubled person is already renouncing a sinful identity. When there is no renunciation, God calls his people to mobilize their neighbors and to contact their government officials.

Not all entrants into the ex-gay literature are repentant homosexuals; a small subcategory of this first-person ex-gay literature is produced not by ex-gays and -lesbians themselves but by ministers or family members of those afflicted by same-sex desire. A contributor to this niche of literature is Nancy Heche, therapist, speaker, and mother of actress Anne Heche. In Heche’s case the homosexuality was not her own but that of, first, her minister husband, and then later, her daughter, who from 1997 to 2000 was involved in an intimate relationship with actor and comedian Ellen Degeneres. In *The Truth Comes Out* Nancy Heche tells her story but also narrates her own transformation as a Christian. When she first discovered that her daughter was involved with Degeneres her attitude was that “Anne’s newfound lesbian love affair [was] like a betrayal of an unspoken vow: *we will never have anything to do with homosexuals*.”⁵² However, this antagonism is finally replaced by grace and the necessity of love:

At the end of the day I must love. I must bless. I must believe.
The Apostle Paul’s thoughts in 1 Corinthians 13 echo through
me:

Nancy, when you speak, people will put their fingers in their
ears and go “lalalalala” if you don’t have love.

Nancy, you can get your academic degrees and know a little about a lot of things, but it means nothing without love. . . .

It's not about how much you say or how much you know or how much you do; it's about how much you love.⁵³

Heche has been a popular speaker at ex-gay meetings, and she has co-edited a volume that emphasizes the importance of compassion and uncompromising fidelity to scripture in dealing with same-sex desire: *The Complete Christian Guide to Understanding Homosexuality: A Biblical and Compassionate Response to Same-Sex Attraction*.⁵⁴

Although there is some space in the conventions of ex-gay writing to accommodate unique dimensions of authors' lives and experiences, there are common features that owe much to the conventions of ex-gay testimonies as they have developed. Books in the genre offer expansive narratives of fallenness and of the inevitable return to God, but in addition they provide authors the opportunity to expatiate on the role of believers and the church in dealing with same-sex sexuality. Having crossed over from homosexuality, authors can speak to believers of the misery attendant on a homosexual lifestyle. And they can also instruct believers to maintain openness and loving compassion toward the repentant while holding a vigorous line against acceptance of same-sex sexuality. In brief ex-gay testimonies that circulate on the internet authors narrate an abbreviated version of unhappy homosexuality and a final surrender to God's will that propelled them to their present state of commitment to God's will for sexuality. While these narratives often attest to the promise of heterosexuality for their same-sex-attracted readers, they are spare testimonials to the misery of living outside God's grace and the happiness of finally securing it.

In the long and sometimes lonely quest for healing from homosexuality, many strugglers turn to ex-gay ministries and organizations, the testimonies of other ex-gays or strugglers, and other resources. However, because none of these resources is without its own peculiar hazards to the enterprise of coming out of homosexuality: meetings and support groups place strugglers in close proximity with others like themselves; books and materials offer the only ministry-sanctioned accounts of same-sex relations; and in addition to ex-gay testimonies and ministry websites, the internet offers a virtually inexhaustible abundance of sexual material to test the self-restraint of strugglers. As a result of these hazards, strugglers rely on a web of support and correction to help them navigate a world of sexual temptation.

The Compassionate Gaze

In ex-gay residential settings and other meeting places, participants consent to surveillance measures that reinforce the disciplinary rules of the movement. These measures are devised by the communities that embrace same-sex-attracted people, and they function in both real-world and virtual venues. In therapeutic and social settings, prohibitions on “gay” behavior, humor, dress, grooming, and gestures in addition to the prohibition on sexual contact prevail. Tanya Erzen details many of the rules that were in effect during her research at New Hope Ministry, including a prohibition on “camping”—the use of “gay terms and mannerisms.” Quoting from the New Hope program manual, Erzen notes the forms of clothing that were not permitted for men: “short shorts or tight pants, tank tops, spandex or biker pants, and cut-off or half-shirts.” Nude sleeping was also prohibited.⁵⁵

In large group settings such as Love Won Out and Exodus, staff and volunteers have been empowered to call attention to and discipline behavior that violates the movement’s norms and ideology, and participants submit to this discipline in the hope that it will advance their healing from homosexuality.⁵⁶ In spite of our attempt to keep a low profile, when Jyl Josephson and I attended the Love Won Out conference in Minneapolis in 2004, we were scolded by a young volunteer for watching two young female protesters stage a “kiss-in” outside the door of the Lutheran Church in which the event was being held. The appropriate response, which was being modeled by other attendees, was to ignore the protesters, and our failure to do so attracted the young woman’s attention. After the rebuke, we understood that the volunteer—who introduced herself to us with the words, “I’m an ex”—would be watching us and that any additional non-conforming behavior might result in our dismissal from the conference.

When they leave the context of group support and surveillance, strugglers and ex-gays are understood to be particularly vulnerable to temptation. Indeed, because of their private nature, sexual fantasies, sexual conduct, and reading and viewing habits constitute a constant challenge to the program of celibacy and sexual transformation. In response to this challenge, strugglers are taught and encouraged to practice forms of self-surveillance that recall Foucault’s exposition of discipline, in which the individual becomes “the principle of his own subjection.”⁵⁷

One important site of vulnerability, and therefore of self-surveillance, is the internet. A number of filtering services on the market are endorsed by ex-gay leaders, including NetNanny, CyberPatrol, and Surf-watch. These services are marketed to parents as a way of protecting

children from pornography and other dangers. Some of the same services advertised to parents for children also are marketed to adults who use them to bolster their self-control in avoiding sexual websites and chat rooms. However, as is often the case in ex-gay ministries, internet use is a case of the confluence of surveillance and self-surveillance, with mechanisms that provide a web of support and “accountability” for those who subscribe to the movement. Leaders in the ex-gay movement recommend internet services such as Hedgebuilders and CovenantEyes to “overcoming” women and men, who can choose between internet filtering, which blocks access to particular sites, and an accountability function, which automatically provides a record of websites the member has visited to a designated individual, usually an “accountability partner” who is more advanced in his or her Christian “walk.”

The intent to protect adult members, and not just children, from immoral content is clear in the mission and service statements of the companies. “The HEDGEBUILDERS filtering cannot be uninstalled, deleted, or disabled without contacting HB support for a special uninstall code. This feature protects every member in the home including the person who is the computer administrator. Christian homes can feel secure knowing their children are protected. Christian men can protect themselves from messing up and viewing what they shouldn’t. Christian wives can know their husbands are safe on the web.”⁵⁸ CovenantEyes, which is frequently recommended to people struggling with same-sex desire, promises: “Our Accountability software monitors Internet use and emails reports to people you select. Our Filter Service blocks objectionable websites from your computer.”⁵⁹ Products like these constitute a considerable advance in practical, as well as ideological, support for those who join the ex-gay movement.⁶⁰

Many critics of ex-gay ministries have analyzed the movement’s reliance on an addiction model to explain same-sex attraction and its similarities to twelve-step recovery programs.⁶¹ Another model for ex-gay discourse that has received less attention is “positive thought,” which, along with “positive theology” and the “motivation industry” Barbara Ehrenreich analyzes in *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*. Although Ehrenreich doesn’t address the ex-gay movement directly, she documents the requirement in many institutional contexts that members engage in the “constant internal work of self-monitoring [to rid themselves of] ‘negative thoughts’ charged with anxiety or doubt” and that they “purge ‘negative people’” from their lives.⁶² Such exhortations are common in the literature and testimonies of the ex-gay movement. Key to reaping the rewards of positive thought is

the mandate to claim a desired identity before it has become instantiated as reality; in cases Ehrenreich explores, this identity is frequently one of wealth/prosperity, while in the case of same-sex-attracted strugglers the identity is often heterosexuality. The declaration of heterosexual identity that strugglers have often made upon entering the movement confirms for them the hope and promise that the ministries will facilitate their transformation from gay to straight. Such declarations—which show up in academic research produced by antigay researchers—also complicate the process of discerning the efficacy of ex-gay ministries.⁶³

While struggling women and men practice and consent to mechanisms of surveillance that promise to help them achieve their goal of overcoming homosexuality, an additional source of succor for strugglers often comes from “Transforming congregations.” Transforming congregations constitute a “third way” between the exclusion of same-sex-attracted people from gospel churches and the inclusion of openly lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in “Reconciling” and “Welcoming and Affirming” congregations and church networks.⁶⁴ Exodus International practices outreach to theologically and politically conservative churches and denominations through affiliation with the Exodus Church Network and Exodus Member Ministries. Benefits for churches of becoming an Exodus Network Church include training and materials, conferences and seminars, a newsletter, and links to member ministries staffed by ex-gays or by trained and knowledgeable people whose friends or family members have been “involved in homosexuality.”⁶⁵ Unlike in the early days of the ex-gay movement, today, strugglers can rely on a network of trained and compassionate believers whose task it is to help same-sex-attracted women and men negotiate the path out of homosexuality.

Leaving Homosexuality

The ex-gay movement provides a sophisticated set of ministries, therapies, publishing enterprises, and entrepreneurial opportunities. Having begun in the United States, the ex-gay movement is now international, but its theology and psychology continue to reflect its American roots. At the most basic level, what diverse venues of the ex-gay movement have in common is that they are motivated to help people in pain. Their purpose, in a familiar refrain, is to help same-sex-attracted people “leave homosexuality” by “speaking the truth in love” to people with a “homosexual problem” in a world “impacted by homosexuality.”

Unlike the more explicitly political spheres of the Christian right's antigay movement, the ex-gay movement relies on what Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto call "the power of consensual ideology," a state of affairs in which attitudes and beliefs are reproduced and shared not only by members of dominant groups, but also by members of subordinated or less powerful groups, often to their detriment. Consensuality "helps to coordinate behaviors, makes social practices meaningful, gives people psychological security and provides standards for judging people's behavior or potential changes within the society. Consensual ideologies are therefore the thread that weaves the fabric of social relations together."⁶⁶ Although some consensual ideologies are hierarchy-attenuating, others are hierarchy-enhancing;⁶⁷ in the terms of social dominance theory, the ideology that undergirds the ex-gay movement qualifies as a hierarchy-enhancing consensual ideology. The racialized example of consensuality that Sidanius and Pratto offer in a chapter title is "let's both agree that you're really stupid"; the version of consensuality without which the ex-gay movement could not exist is "let's both agree that you're really sinful."

Some same-sex-attracted people who find their way to the ex-gay movement are delivered to it as adolescents by their parents or guardians. However, taking into account that many same-sex-oriented people are strenuously urged by family members or religious leaders to repudiate their same-sex attractions and relationships, most of those who enter the movement do so more or less willingly. These adherents may subscribe to any or all possible frames about same-sex desire in the movement's repertoire, including familial dysfunction, childhood molestation or sexual experimentation, sexual brokenness, sexual addiction, or simply a sinful human nature. Strugglers/overcoming women/men often seek out treatment by Christian therapists trained in reparative therapies; they remove themselves from networks of friends or lovers in order to facilitate their healing; they immerse themselves in settings that are consistent with their aspirations for sexual healing; they read the Bible and literatures associated with the ex-gay movement; and they consent to forms of surveillance and instruction that are calculated to bolster their own resistance to temptation at the risk of scrutiny and humiliation.

The key behavioral requirement of participation in ex-gay ministries is abstinence from sex, but as in abstinence-only sex education it is not only sexual behavior with partners that is proscribed. For example, strugglers and those who regard themselves as celibate ex-gays and ex-lesbians must contend with the movement's strict position on masturbation, which is disseminated in literature and in meetings convened by ex-gay groups.