

Peter May surveys the role of ideology in the debate over homosexuality

WHEN IDEOLOGY REPLACES SCIENCE

key points

- The RCPSych appears to have locked itself into a 'born gay' ideology by ignoring the evidence to the contrary.
- A Private Members' Motion to regulate psychotherapy includes a highly illiberal clause outlawing psychotherapy for people who want help in reducing unwanted same-sex desires.
- The UK Council for Psychotherapy has been repeatedly asked to provide evidence for their claim that reparative therapy is harmful – but none has been offered.

In January 2013, a retired engineer published a remarkable paper. He examined in detail the 2007 submission by the Royal College of Psychiatrists to the Church of England's Listening Exercise on Human Sexuality and their almost identical submission to the Pilling Commission in 2012. Rarely, when doctors read medical papers do they examine all the footnotes, but Dermot O'Callaghan did.

The origins of homosexuality

He noticed that the College had made a significant alteration to their original report. The first said, 'It would appear that sexual orientation is biological in nature, determined by a complex interplay of genetic factors and the early uterine environment.' The second version however, says that it is 'determined by genetic factors *and/or* the early uterine environment'.

While the first version implied that genetic and hormonal influences work together in this, the second version logically allows that orientation could be caused entirely by genes or entirely by hormones. Conversely, it may have nothing to do with genes or nothing to do with hormones. The College thereby admits that there is no compelling evidence to say it is genetic or hormonal. Where then is the evidence that orientation is biological in nature?

Regrettably, the College ignores twin studies, a major research field for two decades. An important study published in 2000¹ showed that among male identical twins, where one was gay, there was an 89% chance that his co-twin was not. As they shared essentially identical genes and intrauterine environments, this implies the importance of later postnatal, non-biological causes, such as life events or choices, in determining sexual orientation. Certainly, genes do not dictate behaviour. Alcoholics, for instance, can resist their genetically influenced cravings. These studies also show that the common analogy with skin colour is demonstrably false.

The College claims, 'There is no substantive evidence to support the suggestion that the nature of parenting or early childhood experiences play any role in the formation of a person's fundamental heterosexual or homosexual orientation.'

Yet in 2006, a major Danish study reported, 'population-based, prospective evidence that childhood family experiences are important determinants of heterosexual and homosexual marriage decisions in adulthood.'² The College appears to have locked itself into a 'born gay' ideology by ignoring the evidence to the contrary. Its argument that causation is 'biological' has led to the

widespread belief that LGB people are being 'true to their nature' in homosexual behaviour.

The psychological and social wellbeing of LGB people

The College claims that 'discrimination in society... means... that some LGB people experience a greater than expected prevalence of mental health and substance misuse problems'.

It tells us that the first civil partnerships were in Denmark (1989) but doesn't mention a study carried out in that 'undiscriminating' society. Over a twelve year period, the incidence of suicide for homosexual men in civil partnerships was found to be eight times that of heterosexual men in marriages.³

To support its contention that increased mental illness is mainly due to discrimination and social rejection, the College cites three papers, which do not actually support that view. One stated, 'the precise causal mechanism at this point remains unknown. Therefore studies are needed... to evaluate the relative salience of social stigmatisation and lifestyle factors...'.⁴

The second paper was by Prof Michael King,⁵ the lead author of the College submissions. While the College says that 'discrimination in society... means that some LGB people experience a greater than expected prevalence of mental health and substance misuse problems', his academic paper goes on to state, 'Conversely, gay men and lesbians may have lifestyles that make them vulnerable to psychological disorder.' Why does King not admit this in his submissions to the Church?

The third paper goes further: 'many people will conclude that widespread prejudice against homosexual people causes them to be unhappy or mentally ill. [This view] would be premature however and should be discouraged. In fact a number of potential interpretations need to be considered...'.⁶ While none of their referenced papers actually supports the College viewpoint, this paper specifically cautions against it.

Reparative therapy

The College submission addresses the issue of reparative therapy, shortly to come before Parliament. A Private Members' Motion to regulate psychotherapy includes a highly illiberal clause outlawing psychotherapy for people who want help in reducing unwanted same-sex desires. This may be to safeguard their marriages, protect the wellbeing of their children, or because they believe that homosexual acts are wrong or such desires are socially uncomfortable. Several matters require comment.

First, there is an underlying assumption being made that a person's sexual orientation is fixed and it would be harmful to try and change it. However, there is considerable evidence that, for some, sexual orientation is fluid, and can change over the course of life, with or without therapy. This is particularly well documented among young people⁷ and among women.^{8,9} Furthermore, it is now recognised that

more people are bisexual than homosexual, their orientation being essentially fluid.¹⁰

Second, evidence of harm harks back to 50 years ago, when electric shock and drug therapies were being used to 'cure' homosexual behaviour. This has nothing to do with modern psychotherapeutic methods aimed at changing or ameliorating intrusive desires. The College says one study 'showed... considerable harm',¹¹ but that research was retrospective, did not use any measures of harm and was unable to show a causal relationship between therapy and harm.

Third, the College, which claims to believe strongly in evidence-based treatment, ignores very good evidence of psychotherapeutic benefits. The best study available today concludes, 'the findings... appear to contradict the commonly expressed view that sexual orientation is not changeable and that the attempt to change is highly likely to result in harm.'¹²

Another study is said by the College to have claimed change 'in 13% of LGB people, most of whom could be regarded as bisexual at the outset'. In fact, that study actually claimed that *the majority of participants experienced change from predominantly or exclusively homosexual orientation*.¹³ This is seriously misrepresented by the College.

Finally, the UK Council for Psychotherapy has been repeatedly asked to provide evidence for their claim that such treatment is harmful – but none has been offered.

Outcome

These findings were published in a booklet¹⁴ and sent to Prof Sue Bailey, President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists on 11 April 2013, with a letter inviting the College to do one of three things: to withdraw, amend or publicly re-affirm their submission to the Church in the light of these findings. She has taken a fourth option: she has not replied!

The booklet was also sent to Sir Joseph Pilling, Chairman of the Church of England's Working Group on Human Sexuality, suggesting that he, on behalf of the Church, might engage directly with the College on these scientific matters. In his Report¹⁵ he has commented unfavourably on the College's use of science but does not appear to have taken up any of these issues with them.

The past year has seen an international revolution in public and political thinking about homosexuality. Gay Marriage has been approved by Parliament and the Pilling Commission has reported to the Church. Yet the College has refused to address any of these fundamental issues, which undermine the advice they have given.

Now we are faced with a debate in Parliament as to whether people with unwanted same-sex desires have any right in law to seek counselling to change or ameliorate those desires. Prof Michael King has said, 'It is anachronistic even to have these debates. Society has moved on from this issue.'

But moved on from what – the science? Given its provisional nature, science itself can move on.



Christians have a mandate from Christ to love and care for all people, including those who struggle with their sexuality

The Counsellors and Psychotherapists (Regulation) Bill states: 'The code must include a prohibition on gay to straight conversion therapy' [Section 2 (3)] and 'A breach of that section of the code relating to prohibition of gay to straight therapy shall result in permanent removal from the register.' [Section 3 (2)]

Editor's note:

At the time of going to press, we understand the College is reviewing its statement on sexuality in the light of these criticisms.

references

1. Bailey JM, Dunne MP, Martin NG. Genetic and environmental influences on sexual orientation and its correlates in an Australian twin sample. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2000;78(3):524-536
2. Frisch M et al. Childhood Family Correlates of Heterosexual and Homosexual Marriages. *Arch Sex Behav* 2006;35:533-47
3. Mathy RM et al. The association between relationship markers for sexual orientation and suicide: Denmark 1990-2001. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol* 2011;46:111-117
4. Gilman S E et al. Risk of psychiatric disorders among individuals reporting same sex sexual partners. *Am J Public Health* 2001;91(6):933-9
5. King M et al. Mental health and quality of life of gay men and lesbians in England and Wales. *Br J Psychiatry* 2003;183:552-8
6. Bailey JM. Homosexuality and mental illness. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 1999;56(10):883-4
7. Savin-William RC & Ream GL. Prevalence and stability of sexual orientation components during adolescence and young adulthood. *Arch Sex Behav* 2007;36:385-394
8. Diamond L. Developmental Psychology. *American Psychological Association* 2008;44(1):5-14
9. Mock, SE & Eibach, RP. Stability and change in sexual orientation identity over a ten-year period in adulthood. *Arch Sex Behav* 2012;41(3):641-8
10. Gates GJ. *How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual?* Williams Institute, April 2011
11. Shidlo A & Schroeder M. Changing sexual orientation: A consumers' report. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 2002;33(3):249-259
12. Jones S & Yarhouse M. A longitudinal study of attempted religiously mediated sexual orientation change. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 2011;37(5):404-427
13. Spitzer RL. Can some gay men and lesbians change their sexual orientation? *Arch Sex Behav* 2003;32(5):403-17
14. May P, O'Callaghan D. *Beyond Critique: The Misuse of Science by UK Professional Mental Health Bodies*. Core Issues Trust, 2nd edition 2013.
15. The Pilling Report to the House of Bishops, *Working Group on Human Sexuality*, Church House Publishing, November 2013, paras 207/8, p.63; paras 210/211 p.64
16. www.livingout.org
17. A different kind of coming out. *Christianity*, August 2013 bit.ly/1hUtJl4
18. *Ibid.*
19. A battle I face. *Evangelicals Now*, October 2012 bit.ly/1jmimrn

But if you move on from the objectivity of science, what do you move towards? Only to a fantasy world, where all truth is subjective, malleable, prejudiced and relative. It is a world where all truths appear to be tolerated, until a bullying intolerant Bill, like the current one, comes before Parliament.

What is the science that undergirds our understanding of homosexuality? And who are its custodians? For the past 40 years, psychiatrists have not recognised homosexuality as being a mental illness, so it is no longer their business. Yet when Church and State wish to address the subject, the Royal College of Psychiatrists is the only Royal College to offer submissions – and their views are influential all over the world. Ironically, it has taken an

engineer to expose fundamental flaws in the ideological 'science' they have put forward.

Christians have a mandate from Christ to love and care for all people, including those who struggle with their sexuality. Would Jesus refuse help to a man troubled by unwanted same-sex desires, which threaten his marriage and the security of his children?

We also have a mandate to be passionate and honest about truth and to strive to teach it accurately. All truth belongs to God, and all untruths deny him. We must insist that love and truth are essential values in public discourse.

Peter May is a retired GP in Southampton.

Christians and same-sex attraction

This article by Peter May illustrates just some of the difficulties involved in talking about sex in the public square. Societal attitudes to sexuality have undergone significant and rapid change in recent years. Participation in public discourse has become fraught with difficulties for those of us who uphold that the right context for sex is within marriage between a man and a woman. We are likely to be perceived as lacking love and compassion.

Just because public perceptions have changed, however, it does not follow that Christians are bound to fall in with these changed attitudes. Nor is it of itself 'homophobic' – as the Church of England's 'Pilling Report' rightly insists – to hold to an historical and classic view of sex and marriage.

The Bible is very clear that all sexual relations outside marriage (a life-long exclusive monogamous heterosexual public covenant relationship) are morally wrong (Leviticus 18:6-23, 20:10-21; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; Revelation 22:15). This includes fornication, adultery, same-sex relations and all other sorts of sex imaginable, *even if you are deeply in love with the other person*.

As Christians we need to watch our language. We are witnesses to the love of Christ in our churches, neighbourhoods and in the public square. We need to address those with whom we disagree with utmost courtesy. We need to be aware that there are fellow Christians who experience same-sex attraction where inappropriate language can wound and discourage them in their discipleship.

For these reasons we warmly welcome the recent launch of the *Living Out* website,¹⁶ containing articles, videos and personal stories to help and encourage Christians experiencing same-sex attraction. It is offered by men in pastoral ministry who admit to feelings of same-sex attraction but who also see the Bible's prohibitions on same-sex erotic relationships as non-negotiable.

The testimonies of those Christian leaders featured on the Living Out site are clear, powerful,

hugely encouraging and most welcome at a time when many young evangelicals are genuinely confused about the issue.

Sean Doherty, who has experienced some degree of shift in his sexual feelings and is now married, explains how his own church experience helped him:

*'Church was a place of nurture and unconditional acceptance, but at the same time the teaching was clear that I shouldn't act on those sexual desires. In an environment where young people were being encouraged to experiment, I was really grateful that I had been kept from acting on my feelings.'*¹⁷

He is reluctant to describe himself as gay and instead adopts terminology adopted by blogger Peter Ould who has a similar testimony:

*'I don't speak of myself as an "ex-gay" person. I prefer the term "post-gay". You choose to move away from the label of "gay" altogether, which has come to be associated with a certain lifestyle. I've clearly experienced some change in my feelings so that I am attracted to my wife. But it's definitely not a 180-degree reorientation. All of us will continue to have desires and feelings which aren't right, until Jesus returns.'*¹⁸

Sam Allberry and Ed Shaw share Doherty's perspective, but accept that they will remain celibate if their orientation does not change.

Last year Vaughan Roberts, a leading conservative evangelical, spoke for the first time of his own struggle with same-sex attraction in an interview with *Evangelicals Now*.¹⁹ His testimony is clear, biblical, passionate and pastoral and well worthy of study.

The testimony of these men demonstrates the goodness of God, the wisdom of his pattern for our lives and also the fact that he grants his grace and power to enable us to live in ways which are both fulfilling and also pleasing to him.

John Martin
Peter Saunders
Editors