



# A Report From “Love Won Out: Addressing, Understanding, and Preventing Homosexuality”

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and  
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## INTRODUCTION

On September 18, 2004, a “Love Won Out” conference sponsored by the national conservative evangelical Christian organization Focus on the Family<sup>1</sup> (FOF) was convened in Minneapolis, Minnesota. According to FOF, “The Love Won Out ministry provides Christ-centered, comprehensive conferences enlightening, empowering, and equipping families, church and youth leaders, educators, counselors, policy-makers, and the gay community on the truth about homosexuality and its impact on our culture.”<sup>2</sup> This report details the authors’ first-hand account of the conference and describes the frames and world view put forth by ex-gay leaders. In doing so, it occasionally uses language and assumptions that do not reflect the views of the authors or those of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. It also provides information and analysis about Love Won Out and concludes with some political implications of the ex-gay movement for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people.<sup>3</sup>

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## HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The ex-gay movement began in 1973 with the founding of “Love in Action,” the first residential ministry aimed at lesbians and gay men who wanted to change their sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual.<sup>4</sup> Today, the ex-gay movement is comprised of publishing enterprises, tailored therapies, residential facilities, support groups,

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1. Focus on the Family (FOF) is one of the largest conservative evangelical Christian organizations in the world. With a reported revenue of almost \$128 million in 2003, FOF claims to respond to over 2.5 million phone calls, letters, emails, and other inquiries per year. Retrieved December 30, 2004, from <http://www.guidestar.org/Documents/2003/953/188/2003-953188150-1-9.pdf>
2. See “The Ministries of Focus on the Family,” p.7, included as an attachment to FOF’s 2003 IRS 990 form, retrieved December 30, 2004, from <http://www.guidestar.org/Documents/2003/953/188/2003-953188150-1-9.pdf>
3. A word is in order about our motivations in attending the conference. We are academic researchers with scholarly and political interests in anti-gay politics. Jyl Josephson, Director of Women’s Studies at Rutgers University, Newark campus, has been active in Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and in safe schools work. She is interested in Christian right responses and opposition to such political projects, and more generally, in how political discourses regarding gender and sexuality shape public policy. Cynthia Burack, Associate Professor of Women’s Studies at Ohio State University, is currently writing a book on the Christian right and is interested in understanding the theology and psychology of conservative Christian anti-gay thought and activism.
4. Pennington, S. (1989). *Ex-gays? There are none*. Hawthorne, CA: Lambda Christian Fellowship, p. 35. Cited in, Besen, W. R. (2003). *Anything but straight: Unmasking the scandals and lies behind the ex-gay myth*. New York: Harrington Park Press, p. 63.



and activities such as conferences that deliver support and information for same-sex attracted people, their families, and members of the community. Its major organizations are the National Association for Research and Treatment of Homosexuality (NARTH), Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays (PFOX), and Exodus International. Exodus and PFOX have chapters and affiliates around the country that specialize in supporting the attempts of lesbians and gay men to change their sexual orientation.<sup>5</sup> The Love Won Out conference featured a number of booths that represented chapters of these national organizations as well as those of affiliated local groups and purveyors of ex-gay therapeutic services.

The “Love Won Out” brand is a recent entry into the ex-gay movement. It originated in a 1998 media campaign sponsored by 15 Christian right organizations. It is also the title of the 1999 book by John and Anne Paulk. The ex-gay movement achieved national prominence through a 1998 media campaign that placed a series of full-page ads in mainstream newspapers (*The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Los Angeles Times*) that carried a message of “hope” for lesbians and gay men and their families. The ads’ message that homosexuality was curable was publicly challenged in September 2000, when John Paulk, then head of Love Won Out, was caught in a popular Washington, DC gay bar and subsequently removed from the ministry.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note another, less widely-circulated message of the Love Won Out ads. A related full-page ad in the conservative *Washington Times* took a more aggressive stance against “gay activists” and catered to its conservative readers by endorsing the belief that “homosexual activists” practice coercion and blackmail to keep accurate information about homosexuality from the American people. The difference between the ads in mainstream venues and the ad placed in the conservative venue mirrors and exemplifies the two distinct messages that emerged from the Love Won Out conference in Minneapolis.

FOF holds Love Won Out conferences four times a year in different cities across the country; the one we attended was in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The registration cost for this day-long conference was \$50. We initially found information about the conference on the FOF website at [www.lovetwonout.com](http://www.lovetwonout.com). The conference materials received in the mail specified that disruption of the event would result in dismissal from the conference. A few isolated protestors were removed from the church grounds during the conference, including a small group that walked silently around the churchyard during the lunch break carrying signs that expressed disapproval of the event.

Minnesota is an interesting location for a Love Won Out Conference; according to the conference organizers this was the second such conference held in Minnesota.

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An ad in the *Washington Times* endorsed the belief that “homosexual activists” practice coercion and blackmail to keep accurate information about homosexuality from the American people.

5. For more detailed information about the history and mission of the ex-gay movement, see Khan, S. (1998). *Calculated compassion: How the ex-gay movement serves the right's attack on democracy*. New York: Political Research Associates, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, and Equal Partners in Faith. Available at <http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/calcomp.pdf>

6. For a more detailed account of John Paulk's story, see Besen, W. R. (2003). *Anything but straight: Unmasking the scandals and lies behind the ex-gay myth*. New York: Harrington Park Press. Paulk claims he had just stopped at the bar to use the bathroom.



Historically the state has been socially liberal and fiscally conservative, but politics in Minnesota has been significantly altered by the changes in party politics that brought about and resulted from the election of Jesse Ventura as Governor in 1998 as a third party candidate. The conference took place at North Heights Lutheran Church, a very large suburban church that was originally affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). As a result of the movement among some churches and members in the ELCA for greater inclusion of LGBT people, a conservative movement has arisen in the church, and Minnesota has been one center of that movement.

Republican Minnesota State Senator Michele Bachmann opened the conference with a greeting and blessing. The conference was organized with alternating plenary and small breakout sessions for the several hundred attendees. It relied upon the expertise of a number of featured speakers, including five who identified themselves as ex-gay or ex-lesbian: Mike Haley,<sup>7</sup> Melissa Fryrear,<sup>8</sup> Joe Dallas,<sup>9</sup> Jane Boyer,<sup>10</sup> and Alan Chambers.<sup>11</sup> Two other featured speakers, Joseph Nicolosi<sup>12</sup> and Dick Carpenter II,<sup>13</sup> did not so identify. All of these featured experts are or have been employed by FOF or an ex-gay organization, and most have written books on the subject of their recovery from same-sex attraction. The personal testimony of ex-gays, delivered in a variety of settings, is a lynchpin of the ex-gay movement and of FOF founder James Dobson's claim that "Prevention [of homosexuality] is effective. Change is possible. Hope is available."<sup>14</sup>

7. According to the Love Won Out website: "Mike offers tremendous insight into the causes and recovery of the homosexual condition. He has an undergraduate degree in Christian education from Biola University and is pursuing a Master's degree in counseling. Mike currently manages the Homosexuality and Gender Department for Focus on the Family's Public Policy Division and also serves as Chairman of the Board of Exodus International, North America. He and his wife, Angie, have two sons." Retrieved December 29, 2004, from <http://www.lovewonout.com>. Biola University is a private Christian institution located in La Mirada, California.
8. According to the Love Won Out website: "Prior to joining Focus on the Family as its Homosexuality and Gender Analyst, Melissa served as Executive Director of CrossOver Ministries, located in Lexington, Kentucky. She continues to serve as the Eastern Great Lakes Regional Representative for Exodus International, North America. With over two decades of experience with gender issues, she is actively involved in public speaking, writing and educating Focus constituents on homosexuality. Melissa is currently completing a Master of Divinity from Asbury Theological Seminary and lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado." Retrieved December 29, 2004, from <http://www.lovewonout.com>; Asbury Theological Seminary is a private evangelical Christian seminary with campuses in Kentucky and Florida.
9. According to the Love Won Out website: "Joe is a counselor, author and public speaker. He directs a Christian counseling ministry in Tustin, California, and conducts the 'Every Man's Battle' seminar on sexual purity once a month in different states throughout the country. Joe has served as the President of Exodus International, North America and has addressed conferences and churches internationally. He and his wife have two sons and live in Orange County, California." Retrieved December 29, 2004, from <http://www.lovewonout.com>
10. According to the Love Won Out website: "After overcoming lesbianism, Jane represented Exodus International, North America as a speaker and board member. Currently, she works as a nurse practitioner in Colorado. She has been a guest on 'Phil Donahue,' 'Geraldo' and 'The 700 Club.' Jane and her husband of more than 20 years have two children and live in Colorado Springs, Colorado." Retrieved December 29, 2004, from <http://www.lovewonout.com>
11. According to Exodus International's website: "Alan Chambers joined Exodus in 2001 as its third President after having served on the Exodus Board of Directors for one year. An accomplished speaker, Alan has been featured in media venues such as ABC's '20/20' and 'Nightline,' MSNBC's 'Buchanan and Press,' and is a frequent contributor on Janet Parshall's 'America.'" He writes for magazines and newspapers regularly and is currently working on the cover article for the October edition of "Charisma", a Christian magazine with over 250,000 subscribers. Alan and Leslie Chambers live in Orlando, Florida and are expecting their first child through adoption." Retrieved December 29, 2004, from [http://exodus.to/about\\_exodus\\_directors.shtml](http://exodus.to/about_exodus_directors.shtml)
12. According to the Love Won Out website: "Dr. Nicolosi is the president and principal research investigator for the National Association of Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH). He is the author of several books, including *Reparative therapy of male homosexuality*, *Healing homosexuality: case stories of reparative therapy*, and *A parent's guide to preventing homosexuality*. He and his wife have one son and live in Thousand Oaks, California." Retrieved December 29, 2004, from <http://www.lovewonout.com>
13. According to the Love Won Out website: "As a veteran and award-winning teacher, principal, public policy analyst and college professor, Dr. Carpenter brings a wealth of wisdom and skill to bear on his work with Love Won Out. He writes and speaks frequently on legislative and cultural issues in both popular media outlets and in academic venues. Dr. Carpenter currently serves as assistant professor of educational leadership in a major research university system." Retrieved December 29, 2004, from <http://www.lovewonout.com>
14. Dobson, J. (2001). *Bringing up boys*. Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, p. 117.



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## PSYCHOLOGY

The psychology of same-sex attraction was perhaps the key theme of the Love Won Out conference. Unlike the political arenas of the anti-gay movement that explain homosexuality as a choice, the ex-gay movement is grounded in a model of homosexual development that emphasizes the childhood origins of same-sex desire. In the course of the conference, speakers offered a number of claims about both the development of same-sex desire and how those close to the person so afflicted should respond. A consistent theme was that while gay is a “social identity,” “homosexual is a psychological condition.”

- Joseph Nicolosi, Ph.D. Psychology,<sup>15</sup> claimed that “we are all heterosexual in our true nature,” but that “some of us have a homosexual problem”
- Homosexual behavior is an attempt to “repair childhood emotional hurts” through same-sex sexuality. As such, homosexuality is a kind of reparative drive.
- Homosexuality is “compensatory”—compensation for the lack of appropriate or fulfilling relations, especially the relationship with the same-sex parent (i.e. between a daughter and her mother). The idea that homosexuality is a sign of a missing, deficient, or damaged relationship with the same-sex parent is a common theme in the ex-gay literature. Speakers noted that deficiencies in early relations may be real or merely perceived by the affected child. Whether real or perceived, the alleged consequences in gender and sexual identity of the child are immense.
- When addressing the psychology of homosexuality, speakers deemphasized sexuality itself in favor of conceptualizing same-sex attraction as a sign of the misplaced yearning for love, approval, wholeness, or affection.
- Melissa Fryrear noted the problem of identifying parental behavior as the principal source of homosexuality in children while trying not to blame parents for this outcome. However, she also described mothers whose characteristics may lead to lesbianism as “doormat[s],” “manipulative,” “domineering,” and “self-consumed.” Another speaker noted that there is “no such thing as a perfect parent.”
- Speakers spoke of those who identify as lesbians and gay men (to differentiate them from those “struggling” with their same-sex attraction) as unhappy, empty, in pain, defensive, broken, and enraged. With regard to this final point, Nicolosi suggested that for many developmentally damaged children, the enforced goodness of childhood provokes envy of “bad boys” who act out. He argued that this envy is the root of both the bad and socially transgressive behavior of gay activists and the alleged exhibitionism of lesbians and gay men in gay pride parades.
- Jane Boyer spoke of homosexuality as a kind of “neurotic behavior” that operates as a defense against suffering. Unlike other speakers, she emphasized the necessity for the “healing of memories” that constitute “infected pockets in our souls.” Therapy based on “healing of memories” is controversial in the ex-gay community, and often is associated with two therapeutic figures: Agnes Sanford and Leanne Payne.

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15. Nicolosi graduated from the California School of Psychology in 1977. In 1996, the school was ranked 176th out of 185 graduate psychology programs ranked by the American Psychological Society. From, Heller, M. (1998, August 21). Seeking the heterosexual within. *LA Weekly*. Cited in, Besen, W. R. (2003). *Anything but straight: Unmasking the scandals and lies behind the ex-gay myth*. New York: Harrington Park Press, p. 134.



- Speakers frequently claimed that childhood sexual abuse is a prominent cause of lesbian orientation. They explicitly relied upon, and referred to, the results of the questionnaire Anne Paulk gave to a sample of women “struggling” with same-sex attraction; the questionnaire and results are published in Paulk’s 2003 book, *Restoring Sexual Identity: Hope For Women Who Struggle with Same-Sex Attraction*.<sup>16</sup>
- A number of speakers emphasized the importance of gender-normative roles, behaviors, and modes of dress and grooming as crucial to the healing of homosexuality. They also presented gender non-normative forms of dress, behavior, and roles as both signs and reinforcers of homosexuality.

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## “DOMESTIC” THEMES

A striking aspect of ex-gay literature and teaching is the distinction it makes between its own Christian audience and the outside realm of fallen culture and politics. The ex-gay movement treats “domestic” themes related to Christians who “struggle” with same-sex attraction and their families quite differently than it treats issues that arise outside the conservative Christian community. Compassion for those struggling with same-sex sexual attraction was a central theme of the program. This is consistent with much of the literature of the ex-gay movement. However, the emphasis on compassion creates a difference between the ex-gay movement and other segments of the larger Christian right. It also creates a fault line within the ex-gay movement itself—a distinction between how the movement treats and regards repentant “struggling” gays and teens and how it treats lesbian and gay adults who do not seek to change their sexual orientation. There are a number of noteworthy issues related to this emphasis on compassion:

- Compassion follows from a “developmental” understanding of the origins of same-sex sexual desire. In this understanding, people do not “choose” same-sex attraction but are conditioned for it by failures (or perceptions of failure) in their early relationships.
- Because dysfunctional family dynamics and relations create same-sex attraction, those who experience homosexual attraction are not responsible for their desires but only for the ways in which they may act on their sexual desires.
- Although dysfunctional family dynamics and relations, especially those between parents and children, create same-sex attraction in children, it is important not to blame family members of same-sex attracted people for their condition. Love Won Out reaches out to family members of same-sex attracted people and offers them compassion for their situation.
- Ex-gay conference speakers and authors urge conservative Christians to extend compassion toward strugglers and those who may turn to Jesus and to examine their own attitudes of disgust and outrage toward homosexuals.

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16. Paulk, A. (2003). *Restoring sexual identity: Hope for women who struggle with same-sex attraction*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers.



- Compassion is the appropriate attitude toward those whose youth makes them not yet responsible for embracing a lesbian or gay identity. Several speakers emphasized that sexuality was only a small part of human personality, and materials aimed toward youth emphasize this theme.
- Compassion is appropriate for those who accept Jesus as their personal savior and embrace celibacy.
- Compassion does not extend to those who refuse to renounce their same-sex attractions or who embrace a public *identity* as lesbian or gay. Presenters specifically said that a person could be a Christian and homosexual, but could not be a Christian and be gay or lesbian. People who are homosexual are struggling against their same-sex attraction and seek to renounce it.
- There is a tacit, and sometimes explicit, understanding in the ex-gay movement that the movement primarily serves those reared in conservative Christian families. Hence, the theme of compassion is primarily turned inward toward members of the Christian community, both same-sex attracted people and their families and congregations. All ex-gay speakers at Love Won Out spoke in their testimonies about their Christian families of origin and/or their childhood salvation experiences. The narratives did not focus on how their families of origin treated them when they were living as gay or lesbian people. Rather, they focused on the depravity of this lifestyle, and on the joy of reuniting with families of origin once they became ex-gay.

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## COMPASSION FOR FAMILIES

- In a session specifically for family members, leader Melissa Fryrear cited the cycle of loss that parents and family members experience when they learn that a loved one is gay. This is the perspective that Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & Gays (PFLAG) once took in its materials for parents.
- Speakers emphasized the importance of being kind to a loved one's same-sex partner. Fryrear stated that showing love and kindness was not advocating homosexuality and that partners would be more likely to be won over and perhaps eventually converted through kindness. She also noted that the loved one and her or his partner may "move manipulatively to try to change" the Christian family member's perspective on homosexuality. She urged family members not to be persuaded to accept homosexuality and cited as support for this position the claim that we each have to stand individually at the Final Judgment and answer for our actions.
- Fryrear also noted examples she had seen of mothers and fathers going to their sons and daughters to ask them for forgiveness for not giving the child what they needed in the developmental process, and how this had enabled healing in families.



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## POLITICAL THEMES

Presentations at the Minnesota conference alternated between “domestic” family themes and political themes. The tone of instruction alternated with the themes; a warm and nurturing tone predominated during presentations of domestic themes, and a stern and punitive tone emerged during presentation of political themes. In the political presentations, speakers offered strategic advice and information.

### STRATEGIES

#### **Avoid the appearance of punitiveness**

- Presentations showed examples of how the Christian right is portrayed by the media. We saw a visual image of Fred Phelps’ group with their usual signs at a protest and the contrast between these protesters and high school students (whose presentation of “The Laramie Project” was the subject of the protest). The concern is that Christians often look hateful in mainstream media representations while lesbians and gay men look thoughtful and reasonable.
- Speakers offered specific advice on political and interpersonal strategies: form coalitions with diverse groups of parents in relation to schools, be friendly with teachers before gay issues arise, avoid punitive and hateful signs at political protests, and do not use hateful political slogans.

#### **Cultivate the appearance and reality of compassion**

- For Joe Dallas, Christian critics of same-sex sexuality need to “provide tangible evidence” that they love the sinner. He noted to the audience that they/we “have the hate part down” of love the sinner/hate the sin. He suggested speaking up when other people put gay people down. He also argued that it is less important to politically defeat gay and lesbian people than it is to save their souls.
- Ex-gay men noted how Christian anti-gay depictions of homosexuals and especially gay male sexual behavior have been mendacious and inaccurate. Such depictions may backfire on Christians and send a message to gay people that Christians hate them.
- Speakers encouraged conferees to cultivate a Christian attitude. Compassion is also a political strategy: people are more likely to be persuasive if they are kind to the opposition and do not seem hateful or extreme.

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#### **Use language strategically**

- Family members were told not to accuse loved ones of having chosen their homosexuality because such language is provocative and inaccurate. This is consistent with the instruction participants received about the developmental model of same-sex attraction throughout the conference.
- One speaker gave specific instructions on phrases not to use, especially when advocating anti-gay policies: “love the sinner/hate the sin;” “Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.”

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- Participants received specific instruction about activism in schools: do not quote the Bible; use references to scientific research; “emphasize the inaccuracies in information about homosexuality” (Love Won Out program booklet).

### **The role of race/ethnicity**

- There was little explicit reference to race or ethnicity during the sessions. Inattentiveness to race/ethnicity is consistent with the politics of the conservative white evangelical movement. Few people of color were in attendance at the conference, and a small group who attended the morning session did not appear to remain for the afternoon session.
- Discussions of same-sex marriage did not consider the frequent legal and political comparisons between same-sex marriage and the Supreme Court decision in *Loving v. Virginia*. This case removed barriers erected by states to interracial marriage.
- As is often the case in mainstream (white) political discourse, there were often subtle references to race. These showed up, for example, in Joe Dallas’ talk that concluded the day. Dallas made comparisons, for example, between gay activism and the 1991 L.A. riots/uprising. This is an exemplary case of how references to race—here, to perceptions of inner-city African Americans as symbolic of cultural decay and immorality—are a code to reinforce ideas regarding LGBT activism as productive of social disorder. Minnesota has become more racially diverse in the past two decades, but the audience at the conference was overwhelmingly white.

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### **Strategies in schools**

- Engage in preemptive activism in schools because a “homosexuality curriculum is easier to keep out than remove once it is in place.”
- Get to know teachers so you will already have their trust when issues regarding sexual orientation arise.
- Form coalitions with parents who “don’t look alike” to increase your legitimacy when making claims.
- Present the “other side” of the debate about homosexuality.
- Recommend ex-gay and reparative therapies based on the etiology of homosexuality/lesbianism and the distinction between homosexual and gay identity.
- Use school “controversial issues” policies that require presenting more than one side of such issues.

### **Frame anti-gay critics as victims**

- Free speech: the gay rights movement silences the speech of opponents and is therefore a threat to freedom of speech. In 1998, a coalition of Christian groups employed this tactic in an advertising series that included full-page ads in *USA Today* and the *Washington Times*, featuring comments from Green Bay Packers defensive end Reggie White under the headline “In defense of free speech.”
- Emotional foundation/motivation: anti-gay Christian conservatives are embattled and under siege. The culture/media/political leaders are on the other side.



## INFORMATION ABOUT LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) PEOPLE AND THE LGBT MOVEMENT

- The term “gay activist” does not denote a political orientation and does not necessarily describe political activity undertaken on behalf of LGBT people. Gay activists are those who lead a gay “lifestyle” and do not try to rid themselves of their same-sex sexuality. Nicolosi described “gay activists” as holding onto the “androgynous fantasy” of infancy—that human beings do not have to be either females or males. In sessions attended by the authors, no speaker addressed the issue of bisexual or transgender identity.
- Presenters used LGBT materials such as *It’s Elementary* and *That’s a Family* to illustrate points:
  - One presenter noted how dangerous *That’s a Family* is, since it is from the perspective of children and presents families with lesbian or gay parents as just another form of the diversity of families.
  - Political presentations used clips or references to LGBT activists to undermine the case for gay rights. For example, data on the suicide rates of gay youth was discounted using Kevin Jennings’ (GLSEN) “Sexuality 101” presentation, in which he discusses the resiliency of LGBT youth. The early 1990’s claim that gay people constitute ten percent of the population was also discounted.

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### Prophetic role of Christians in a democracy

- Joe Dallas argued that the church is the “conscience” of the state. Christian conservatives argue that it is their role to provide the state its conscience. A state without a conscience (i.e., one that is not led by the church and/or by religious values?) is dangerous and “sociopathic.”
- Dallas also noted that the biggest temptation for the church in the coming years will be to appease the gay rights movement, but if the church is silenced on this it will be silenced on other things. (Note then the centrality of this issue to this version of Christianity’s self-identity).
- This leads in turn to calls to action: the church has a prophetic role. This is a mandate, and Christians who do not act politically are being unfaithful. “Your voice has to be unsparing in its conviction and in its compassion.”

### Importance of the LGBT issue for the Christian community and the nation

- Joe Dallas argued that the success of the gay movement brings accompanying restrictions on freedom of conscience, religion, and speech. He cited Dutch author Corrie ten Boom (*The Hiding Place*) to compare the gay rights movement to the creeping threat of Nazism and the danger of appeasement. He also quoted Orwell on freedom of speech and noted that Christians are an “inconvenient minority.”

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- Dallas noted that Archie Bunker was a social conservative, and argued that the religious right is regarded as Archie Bunker was (the inconvenient and embarrassing minority).

#### Use of data, evidence, and scientific verification

- Speakers pointed out the failure of science to isolate a gay gene or to demonstrate a biological basis for same-sex sexuality. The argument is very simple (with clear logical fallacies): science has not found a gay gene, ergo being homosexual is not biological, and it is preventable. However, Alan Chambers argued that even if a biological basis for same-sex sexuality is discovered, such sexuality remains a violation of God's will and is therefore anathema.
- Some arguments were made by analogy. Speakers frequently compared gay rights activists to Nazis, warning that the success of the gay rights movement would lead to Nazism or totalitarianism. Another example was a comparison between gay rights and the L.A. riots. The riots were used as a reference to the kind of social disorder that is created by gay rights activists. An afternoon speaker referred to protests during the morning session as the kind of social disorder typical of gay activism.
- There were references to the data indicating a higher suicide rate among teenagers who identify as sexual minorities. But during the course of the day these references were used to make contradictory arguments. Dick Carpenter criticized the methodology of the original data for the HHS<sup>17</sup> study. But multiple speakers also made reference to the findings of this study as proving that same-sex attraction is harmful, is accompanied by depression and mental illness, and requires reparative therapy.
- Although it is rejected by the psychological community, the ex-gay movement relies upon its own developmental psychological research. This research continues to be generated by conservative Christian authors and academics who are committed to the conclusion that same-sex sexuality is dysfunctional and contrary to God's will.

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#### Speakers used credentials and academic authority to create legitimacy for their positions

- Joseph Nicolosi relied upon his credentials as a Ph.D. psychologist to bolster his claims to heal men struggling with same-sex attraction. The positions of Nicolosi and his organization, NARTH, on same-sex sexuality are opposed by the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological Association. He argued that the latter organization has been "basically taken over by gay activists."
- Although his academic affiliation is not included in the bio in the Love Won Out program, Professor Dick Carpenter teaches in the College of Education at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. At the same time that he and other speakers represent the academy and secular professions negatively (see Nicolosi's representation of the APA above), Carpenter appears to use the appellation "major research university system" in his bio to bolster his authority for a largely nonacademic

17. Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration: Department of Health and Human Services. Report of the Secretary's task force on youth suicide. (DHHS Publication No. ADM 89-1623). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989.



audience. In fact, according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Learning, the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs is a Masters University I, not a Doctoral/Research University as Carpenter's bio implies.

- Speakers (both ex-gay and others) referred to how powerfully ex-gay people can witness and worship. Those who identify as ex-gay are important spokespersons for the message of the ex-gay movement.

#### **Borrowing from progressive and LGBT sources**

- A session for families made reference to the grief that results from the homosexuality of a child or family member. This may have been borrowed from old PFLAG materials; PFLAG no longer refers to grief as an inevitable result of the coming out of a child.
- Presenters referred to feminist and "queer theory" literature, for example in representing women's sexuality as "fluid" (and therefore open to reparative reorientation to heterosexuality).

#### **References to other issues, especially gender/feminism/abortion**

- Most common jokes told during the day were jokes that made reference to gender differences that were (by inference) natural. These jokes were often used to defuse tension when a speaker had said some provocative things or talked about being confrontational on gay rights issues. These references appealed to connections between sexual orientation and appropriate gender roles/behavior.
- Multiple references to abortion suggested the connection that anti-gay Christian conservatives often make between abortion and homosexuality as socially destructive sins.

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## CONTRADICTIONS AND TENSIONS IN LOVE WON OUT

Throughout the course of the conference we became aware of a number of contradictions in the arguments of the speakers and foundational convictions of Love Won Out. These fissures do not represent theological differences but, rather, contradictions in the rhetoric and assumptions that undergird Love Won Out as a psychological and political enterprise. Understanding these contradictions may help those who oppose the ex-gay movement and its related projects (such as opposition to safe schools and same-sex marriage) to develop more fruitful strategies for confronting these projects.

- Presenters acknowledged the tension between the developmental model of the origins of homosexuality and the importance of not blaming parents, some of whom are the consumers of and audience for ex-gay ministries. We observed a number of people attending the conference together who appeared to be parents with their teenaged children. In spite of careful rhetoric about not blaming parents, their developmental model does blame parents who bring their children to ex-gay ministries for children's same-sex attraction.

We observed a number of people attending the conference together who appeared to be parents with their teenaged children.



- A number of speakers emphasized that homosexuality is not more sinful than other sins—that it is one of many sins that require repentance. However, there is no infrastructure analogous to ex-gay conferences for repentance or political reaction to other sins. The particular form of attention given to same-sex sexuality demonstrates the greater importance given to homosexuality.
- Especially during the more “political” sessions, speakers referred to the destructive (social and political) gay agenda but did not acknowledge that conservative Christians also have a social and political agenda. Here, the pejorative “agenda” is contrasted with “the truth” at the same time that an activist conservative political agenda is being formulated and disseminated.
- There is an unacknowledged tension in calls for both compassion and outrage/anger about homosexuality. During the conference, appeals to compassion and anger tended to be segregated in different sessions that were organized around different subjects. However, it may be difficult for those who identify with a political movement to balance compassion with outrage. The conference and literature provide some direction when they direct compassion toward “strugglers” and outrage toward those who refuse to conform with its political and moral agenda.
- The speakers and the ex-gay movement as a whole maintain a contradictory and ambivalent relationship with the professional and research community. On one hand, speakers and “experts” in the movement rely for their authority upon credentials bestowed by the academic community. On the other hand, they routinely impugn the professional organizations and research standards of that community. Ex-gay experts use their own research and clinical work to support the claims of the ex-gay movement, but they display no interest in measuring the success of ex-gay treatments in ways that would be recognized by researchers in their fields. In addition, ex-gay researchers and experts rarely discuss or investigate the failure of individuals to shed their same-sex attractions or to achieve heterosexual functioning. There are no peer-reviewed longitudinal studies of the success rate of reparative or conversion therapies targeting lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

“Experts” in the ex-gay movement rely for their authority upon credentials bestowed by the academic community, but display no interest in measuring the success of ex-gay treatments in ways that would be recognized by researchers in their fields.

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## CONCLUSION

Conferences such as Love Won Out provide important information to activists and scholars who oppose the political aims of the anti-gay conservative Christian movement. Understanding the values, assumptions, principal actors, organizational infrastructure, and political strategies of projects like Love Won Out can help progressive individuals and organizations formulate responses and devise political strategies in an increasingly challenging political environment.

Contesting the evidence offered by the ex-gay movement can be one dimension of political response, but it is insufficient. The arguments discussed in this report are



a combination of theological conviction, emotional appeal, and evidence-based argument. In particular, they make reference to fundamental or core beliefs. Thus, the counter to these arguments must also appeal to fundamental or core beliefs and discuss those beliefs explicitly. These arguments, we believe, should also be supplemented by broader arguments about human dignity and rights and American civic values, as well as arguments about religious beliefs that differ from this version of Christianity.

*Cynthia Burack is Associate Professor of Women's Studies at Ohio State University. Jyl J. Josephson is Director of Women's Studies at Rutgers University.*

The counter to "ex-gay" arguments must also appeal to fundamental or core beliefs and discuss those beliefs explicitly.



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*policy institute bestsellers*

## Black Same-Sex Households in the United States

A REPORT FROM THE 2000 CENSUS

by Alain Dang and Somjen Frazer

Political and religious leaders often claim that LGBT people do not need protection from discrimination because they are white, wealthy, and privileged.

This study breaks that myth through an analysis of the almost 85,000 black same-sex households that self-identified in the 2000 U.S. Census. This study shows that black same-sex couples and their children are disproportionately impacted by anti-LGBT policies and have more to lose when anti-same-sex marriage amendments are on the ballot.

(October 2004; 46 pp.; \$10.00; [www.thetaskforce.org/library/](http://www.thetaskforce.org/library/))

## Caregiving

AMONG LESBIAN, GAY,  
BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER  
ELDERS IN NEW YORK

by Marjorie H. Cantor, Mark Brennan,  
and R. Andrew Shippy

The largest-ever study of caregiving among LGBT people 50 and older documents how central older gay people are to caregiving, both for family of origin members as well as for same-sex partners and close friends. It also examines unequal treatment under key policies such as the Family and Medical Leave Act.

(June 2004; 108 pp.; \$10.00;  
[www.thetaskforce.org/library/](http://www.thetaskforce.org/library/))

## Transitioning our Shelters

A GUIDE FOR MAKING  
HOMELESS SHELTERS SAFE  
FOR TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

by Lisa Mottet and John M. Ohle

The problem of unsafe shelters for transgender people is pervasive. *Transitioning our Shelters* is a guide designed for shelters that want to provide safe shelter for transgender people but are not sure how to do so. A joint publication of the Task Force and the National Coalition for the Homeless, the Guide provides many answers to concerns about safety and privacy for transgender residents based on successes at real shelters across the country, the bulk of which are addressed without monetary expenditures.

(January 2004; 56 pp.;  
\$10.00; [www.thetaskforce.org/library/](http://www.thetaskforce.org/library/))

## Education Policy

ISSUES AFFECTING  
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL,  
AND TRANSGENDER YOUTH

by Jason Cianciotto and Sean Cahill

*Education Policy* provides a comprehensive overview of social science research on the extent and impact of harassment and violence against LGBT students, as well as the public policy interventions that support LGBT students and make schools safer. It includes the first in-depth analysis of how President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act affects LGBT students, profiles eight students who stood up to anti-LGBT abuse, and articulates an agenda for future research and policy analysis. (November 2003; 168 pp.; \$20.00; [www.thetaskforce.org/library/](http://www.thetaskforce.org/library/))

## Family Policy

ISSUES AFFECTING GAY,  
LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND  
TRANSGENDER ELDERS

by Sean Cahill, Mitra Ellen, and Sarah Tobias

Groundbreaking in its breadth and depth, this report examines family policy as it relates to LGBT people and their loved ones. It provides information useful to those advancing supportive legislation and policy, particularly at the state and local levels. Covers partner recognition; antigay adoption and foster policies; youth and elder issues; health care and end-of-life concerns; and the impact of welfare reform and the faith-based initiative. (December 2002; 216 pp.; \$20.00; [www.ngltf.org/library/](http://www.ngltf.org/library/))

## Say it Loud and I'm Black Proud

BLACK PRIDE SURVEY 2000

by Juan Battle, Cathy J. Cohen,  
Dorian Warren, Gerard Ferguson,  
and Suzette Audam

This largest-ever study of Black LGBT people is the result of a two-year collaboration between nine Black LGBT Pride organizations, the Task Force Policy Institute, and five African-American researchers. The survey of nearly 2,700 respondents documents significant and often surprising demographics, experiences, and policy priorities of Black LGBT people. (March 2002; 86 pp.; \$10.00; [www.ngltf.org/library/](http://www.ngltf.org/library/))

# Other Task Force Publications

## Transgender Equality

A HANDBOOK FOR ACTIVISTS AND POLICYMAKERS

A handbook providing activists and policymakers with the tools they need to pass transgender-inclusive nondiscrimination and anti-violence legislation. This handbook is an invaluable resource guide providing model legislative language, talking points, responses to frequently asked questions, and a comprehensive resource listing. (June 2000; 96 pp.; \$10.00; [www.nglhf.org/library/](http://www.nglhf.org/library/))

## Campus Climate

FOR GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE: A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Based on a survey of nearly 1700 students, faculty, and staff at 14 colleges and universities across the country, this report, by Susan R. Rankin, documents anti-LGBT bias and harassment, along with levels of institutional support for LGBT people. It highlights differences in experiences between various identity groups and concludes with recommendations for creating an inclusive and supportive environment for LGBT people. (May 2003; 70 pp.; \$10.00; [www.nglhf.org/library/](http://www.nglhf.org/library/))

## The 2000 Census and Same-Sex Households

In 2000, the U.S. Census allowed same-sex couples living together to identify themselves as "unmarried partners." This national data set offers a rich trove of information on members of our community, easily accessible on-line. Maps show concentrations of same-sex households in all 50 states and a dozen major cities. (October 2002; 162 pp.; \$20.00; [www.nglhf.org/library/](http://www.nglhf.org/library/))

## Leaving Our Children Behind

WELFARE REFORM AND THE GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

This report, by Sean Cahill and Kenneth T. Jones, describes the reactionary agenda of senior policymakers in the Bush administration to change social service provision in the United States. It examines welfare reform and the impact of marriage and fatherhood initiatives, abstinence-only-until-marriage education, and the faith-based initiative on the LGBT community. (December 2001; 112 pp.; \$10.00 [www.nglhf.org/library/](http://www.nglhf.org/library/))

## Social Discrimination and Health

THE CASE OF LATINO GAY MEN AND HIV RISK

This report, by renowned AIDS researchers Rafael Diaz and George Ayala, documents the correlations among homophobia, racism, poverty, and HIV risk, and has significant implications for prevention strategies. Although Latinos were the subject of this case study, the findings are relevant to other communities of color and marginalized groups. Available in English and Spanish. (July 2001; SOLD OUT; download at [www.nglhf.org/library/](http://www.nglhf.org/library/))

## Outing Age

PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES AFFECTING GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER ELDERS

This groundbreaking report reviews social science literature and explains what we do and do not know about the demographics of LGBT elders. *Outing Age* outlines major public policy issues facing LGBT seniors—including federal aging programs, disability, long-term care and caregiving, nursing homes, and Social Security—and presents recommendations for advocacy to move public policy toward equal treatment of this population. (Nov. 2000; SOLD OUT; download at [www.nglhf.org/library/](http://www.nglhf.org/library/))

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