

book reviews



# Troubled Souls, Fooled Again

BY ROBERT WILLIAM WOLFF

Ex-gay and so-called reparative therapies are major concerns for LGBTQ people everywhere. These organizations and individuals are connected to, or part of, a right-wing Christian anti-gay political movement that aggressively challenges LGBTQ efforts to become full, first class citizens. Wayne Besen has written a must-read book about these groups for diverse audiences, including Christians, youth counselors, lgbt community members and anyone who wants to know the dirty political truth.

Besen had guts to research this ugly material for four-plus years and to birth a powerful, humorous, well-written book revealing these false prophets for profits. From his triumphant (and gloating) account of his "gotcha" photograph of self-proclaimed "ex-gay" icon John Paulk in a Washington, DC gay bar to the eventual defection of Exodus cofounders Michael Busee and Gary Cooper, Besen uncovers the truth that this movement wants to deny: the best they can do is exist in limbo, denying their true sexual feelings, and in some cases living as celibate. His book, however, has one flaw that takes attention from his otherwise excellent research: the vexing habit of describing, in disparaging terms, the personal flaws he perceives in the people he met at support groups and on other occasions.

If you have been the victim of the fundamentalist right-wing religious teachings described in *Anything But Straight*, be advised to quickly get yourself to one of the organizations in the resources section on page 275. Some of the entries there provide sources for Christian theology that fully accepts people as they are, and at least one will explain that God did not make a mistake when creating you. Besen suggests plenty of measures for LGBTQ people who want to defend the community against these right-wing activities.

Besen investigated people who are:

- earning a living by attempting (unsuccessfully) to change others when they might better be looking to themselves;
- raising money for right-wing fundamentalist causes;
- raising the hopes of inno-

**Anything But Straight: Unmasking The Scandals And Lies Behind The Ex-Gay Myth**  
By Wayne R. Besen  
Harrington Park Press  
274 Pages

cent people who have been systematically taught to hate themselves;

- teaching these same people that they can remove their pain by becoming heterosexual;

- claiming innocence when their "client" victims fail to become heterosexual and too frequently commit suicide; and,

- using the mistruth that people can change their sexual attraction from homosexual to heterosexual to fuel political actions aimed at keeping LGBTQ people from being first class citizens with the full rights of heterosexuals.

The only things the victims of these right-wing ideologues can be "guilty" of is being turned on sexually by members of their gender and seeking to establish intimate relationships with them. The reasons for the victims' pain are what many of today's theologians think are misinterpretations of Bible passages.

Right-wing Christians who staff these anti-gay activities appear to believe that people are not gay because they were born gay, but because they related inadequately to their same-sex parent, they have not prayed enough, and have not exercised sufficient willpower to break the "bondage" of homosexuality. Besen uses the input of Tim Bergling, author of *Sissyphobia*, to disprove the concept of same-sex parent distance as predictor of homosexuality. The research of Bergling and psychiatrist Richard A. Isay (*Becoming Gay* and *Being Homosexual*) shows that long before their sons are aware of sexuality or sexual attraction, fathers often move away from their gay sons because of their discomfort with the gay sons' interests and behavior. Other researchers demonstrate that heterosexual men also have had distant fathers. Besen believes that this "cart before the horse" belief of ex-gay and reparative therapy advocates is yet another place where they are incorrect and treacherous.

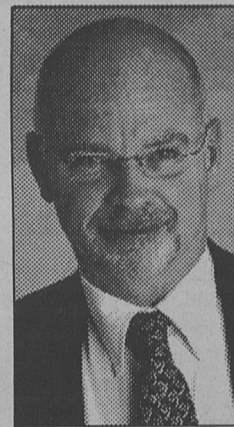
Besen also points out that waving the flag about being *born* gay, rather than nurtured into being gay, is a double-edged sword. Scientific evidence indicates that there are reasons to believe that lesbian and gay individuals are born gay, disproving major teachings of ex-gay and reparative groups. But if gay people are *born* attracted to their own gender, then science can probably find a way to ensure that queer children are not born. Besen creates an opening to identify some negative results of ridding the world of queer children, but he leaves this alone. The author misses an opportunity to make this essential point: if the birth of queer children is prevented at some point in the future, where will we get the beautiful diversity the world provides – or some would say, "God has provided." Queer people have essential things to teach and to do in this world. We don't voice this enough!

The author takes us through the history of the ex-gay, reparative therapy movements, identifying the leaders and telling enough of their stories to show them as the quacks and frauds they are. At each turn it is clear that the self-destructive feelings suffered by these bisexuals, lesbians, and gay males originate in fundamentalist families and their houses of worship. Further it is these same Christian-right circles that seek to "repair" these feelings by getting rid of the natural sexual attraction that bisexuals, lesbians, and gay males experience. We read of the contributions to this evil movement by Moberly, Bergler, Bieber, Socarides, Nicolosi, Kaufman, Cohen and others.

The leaders of the ex-gay movement continually come up against the truth, switch course slightly and are back in operation, using the same unsuccessful techniques to "change" – or more accurately to suppress – sexual attraction to same-gender partners. And through the decades this has been going on, Besen says not a single instance of real change of sexual desire has been proven. Plenty of people in the "ex-gay" movement are living frustrated lives full of suppression, depression and suicidal feelings. ▼

*Robert William Wolff is a theatrical and performance space designer and potter who lives in Randolph. He is also involved in an effort to establish a Metropolitan Community Church in Vermont.*

Clifford D. Trott, Jr., Ph.D.  
Licensed Clinical Psychologist - Doctorate  
168 Battery Street  
Burlington, Vermont 05401  
802.862.0836  
ctrott@together.net



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