



EXODUS
INTERNATIONAL

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RE: Ethics Complaint

Dear Henry C. Weinstein, M.D.

I am writing to bring a complaint of ethical misconduct against one of your members: Alicia Salzer. This complaint stems from her appearance with me on the Montel Williams Show on March 15, 2007. During the episode called Homosexuality...Can it be cured?, Dr. Salzer said in response to me:

This is marketing; this is not science...Science has shown us that 96% of people cannot change and along the way, absorb an enormous amount of self-loathing, a lot of confusion, a lot of family conflict, so I know the harm."

I was very surprised at her statement. Although I am not a therapist or a scientist, I am conversant with the research on this topic. I did not know of any study or research that could support such a claim. Since then I have learned that Dr. Salzer relied on the research of Ariel Shidlo and Michael Schroeder to make that claim. I learned this from reading the following account on the blog of Dr. Warren Throckmorton:

Surprised that she would make this dogmatic statement, I [contacted the show](#) to ask how she arrived at the 96% figure. The producer Melissa Borusso called to say Dr. Salzer relied on the 2002 study by Ariel Shidlo and Michael Schroeder, titled "Changing Sexual Orientation: A Consumer's Report" published in the APA journal *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. I am quite familiar with this research. I presented along side Drs. Shidlo and Schroeder at the 2000 APA convention in Washington DC, where they made their results public in a symposium titled "Gays, ex-gays, and ex-ex-gays: Examining key religious, ethical and diversity issues." The symposium was organized by Mark Yarhouse and also included a presentation by Doug Haldeman. The Shidlo and Schroeder study is valuable in that it provides documentation that some efforts to reorient sexuality may have harmful outcomes for some people.

However, the Shidlo and Schroeder study cannot provide a basis for Dr. Salzer's claim made before a national audience. In fact, Drs. Shidlo and Schroeder were very clear about this in their research report, saying:

The data presented in this article do not provide information on the incidence and the prevalence of failure, success, harm, help, or ethical violations in conversion therapy. (italics in the original, p. 250).

Exactly. Probability of change cannot be gleaned from this study. The cautious rendering of the research would be that some people report being harmed and some people report benefit from efforts to modify aspects of their sexuality. At present, we do not know with precision how likely either outcome is to occur for anyone. (1)

As Dr. Throckmorton points out, the results of the study used by Dr. Salzer to make her public statement cannot be used to support what she said. The research report by Drs. Shidlo and Schroeder even states this explicitly. Furthermore, Shidlo and Schroeder specifically sought people who were dissatisfied with their therapy experiences. The sample of people was not representative of those who seek counseling or ministry help relating to their same-sex attractions. Surely, Dr. Salzer knew these facts about this study and yet, she has offered no other support for her televised claim.

Since then I have learned that making such public statements are opposed by psychiatric codes of ethics. I found this very specific code from the AMA Code of Ethics (<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/13351.html>) that is directly relevant to the statement of Dr. Salzer:

Section 7

A physician shall recognize a responsibility to participate in activities contributing to the improvement of the community and the betterment of public health.

1. Psychiatrists should foster the cooperation of those legitimately concerned with the medical, psychological, social, and legal aspects of mental health and illness. Psychiatrists are encouraged to serve society by advising and consulting with the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches of the government. A psychiatrist should clarify whether he/ she speaks as an individual or as a representative of an organization. Furthermore, psychiatrists should avoid cloaking their public statements with the authority of the profession (e.g., "Psychiatrists know that...").

First of all, her stance with me was combative and oppositional. Even though she disagrees with my beliefs about homosexuality, she should attempt to cooperate with those she disagrees with to facilitate better mental health -- as is stated in the code point above. I am sure there is much I can learn from people I disagree with. I was on the show to explain our point of view, not convince her she was wrong. She on the other hand misrepresented research. She also very inappropriately brought up and mischaracterized aspects of the personal sex life of me and my wife.

Second, she did not clarify that she was speaking for herself and not "psychiatry." She was on the show as an expert in her field and misstated research findings.

Third, and most obvious, was her invocation of professional authority by saying dogmatically: "**Science has shown us** that 96% of people cannot change and along the way, absorb an enormous amount of self-loathing, a lot of confusion, a lot of family conflict, so I know the harm." The public consumer of this information would have no way to interpret this statement other than to assume that the psychiatric profession and indeed, *science* was unanimous in this conclusion. And all of this from one study that explicitly warns against making the statement she made on national television.

I am writing to make a formal complaint and request assistance from you to pursue this complaint in order that Dr. Salzer be asked to make a public retraction and apology for her comments.

Sincerely,

Alan Chambers

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Chambers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and "C".

President, Exodus International

Footnote:

(1) <http://wthrockmorton.com/2007/03/24/montel-williams-dr-salzer-and-abomination/>