

Jaime Alfredo T. Bautista

Ms. Jasmin Ibanez

English 12

11 November 2015

The Gradual Change of American Psychiatry's View on Homosexuality

As of 1975, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) states that, "homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social and vocational capabilities" (Fox). This simply means that those who identify themselves as homosexuals are not incapable of functioning as any heterosexual would (Fox). Yet, the APA's revocation of this misdiagnosis was delayed for too long and had already caused many distinguishable negative effects in various aspects in society. One of these aspect was in the practice of Psychiatry wherein many homosexuals in the 20th century had to endure very adverse curative measures, such as castration and hormone treatment, in an attempt of psychologists to cure their misdiagnosed "condition" (Herek 695). In much simpler terms, Bronski states that, "[o]ver the past twenty-five years, the lesbian and gay movements experience more legal protection and have achieved greater visibility [compared to their predecessors]" (Rimmerman 1). Over the past few decades, there have been distinct developments concerning the view of American Psychiatry on homosexuality.

The experience most homosexuals had in the 20th century was highly brought about by the APA's diagnosis of homosexuality as a mental illness (Herek 693). This diagnosis was highly influenced by the migration of psychoanalysts from Europe to America during World War II; the said psychoanalysts brought with them the diagnosis of homosexuality as a disorder brought about by "an overbearing mother and a physically or emotionally absent father in the child's life" ("A New Civil Rights Movement" 11). In addition to this, the attitudes which were most dominant in Western society then was one of heterosexism and homophobia (Cohler Hammack 222). Heterosexism, as defined by Herek in 1993, is the "ideology that denigrates and stigmatizes nonheterosexual [sic] lifestyles and privileges heterosexuality" (Cohler Hammack 222). Therefore, it was no surprise how easily many psychologists adapted the view that homosexuality was an illness that needed to be cured. Many homosexuals were subject to very radical treatments utilized by psychoanalysts of that time since it was backed by the reasoning that homosexuals can be transformed to heterosexuals ("A New Civil Rights Movement" 12). Examples of these radical treatments were intensive talk therapy, aversion therapy through the showing of pornography to patients, and for more extreme cases, there was the electroshock treatment ("A New Civil Rights Movement" 12). Aside from the direct influence of the APA's diagnosis of homosexuality as a mental illness, it also affected other aspects of American society then, particularly in the military. As stated by Korb and Rothman, "[t]he Department of Defense Directive of 1982 justified the ban on gays [and lesbians] on the premise that [their] presence would undermine military readiness" (276). As evidently seen, the presence of these ideologies led to many abuses and caused many gays and lesbians of that time to fear their identities for it could lead to various dire consequences, not only to them directly but to those around them as well.

Given the repressive background wherein many gays and lesbians had to reside in, most homosexuals eventually fought back and this happened in the late 1960's ("A New Civil Rights Movement" 12). It was during this very decade that the Stonewall Riots occurred on June 27, 1969 in Greenwich Village, New York, which, as stated by Duberman, is still regarded to this very day the reason why the gay liberation movement sparked (Armstrong and Cragg 724). This placed the American Psychiatric Association in a very high pressure situation due to the massive increase in demonstrations and protests of homosexuals against their diagnosis of homosexuality as a mental illness in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (Herek 696). According to Bayer, this resulted in the APA's Board of Directors decision to remove homosexuality from the DSM (Herek 696). Since then, the APA has become "a more socially conscious group"; even releasing a statement in 1990 that opposed the "exclusion and dismissal from the armed services on the basis of sexual orientation" (Drescher 448). More importantly, the nullification of homosexuality as a mental illness has been an important key for removing the commonly stigmatized view of society on homosexuals, as well as reversing antigay laws and policies which were enacted in the 20th century (Herek 696). Although it is undeniable that the APA's misdiagnosis of homosexuality as a mental illness had caused numerous mishaps, it is also good to take note that the revocation of their DSM diagnosis led to the many changes in how homosexuals are treated in American society today.

Within the span of roughly six decades, American Psychiatry has evolved from a view of homosexuality as a disorder which needed to be cured to promoting the non-stigmatization of homosexuals in all aspects of society, ranging from local, state, and federal levels (Conger). Although there have been great victories in the gay civil rights movement, particularly the recent legalization of same-sex marriage across all 50 states and the repeal of

the Department of Defense directive last September 20, 2011, more still needs to be done since remnants of the effects of the APA's misdiagnosis are still felt today (Bumiller; Chappell; Herek 696).

Works Cited

“A New Civil Rights Movement.” p.8-23. Web. 12 Oct 2015.

Armstrong, E. A., and S. M. Crage. "Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth." *American Sociological Review* 71.5 (2006): 724-51. Web. 11 Oct. 2015.

Bumiller, Elisabeth. "Obama Ends 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Policy." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 22 July 2011. Web. 10 Nov. 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/23/us/23military.html?_r=0>.

Chappell, Bill. "Supreme Court Declares Same-Sex Marriage Legal In All 50 States." *NPR*. NPR, 26 June 2015. Web. 10 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/26/417717613/supreme-court-rules-all-states-must-allow-same-sex-marriages>>.

Cohler, Bertram J., and Phillip L. Hammack. "Homosexuality." *Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology* (2004): 215-25. Web. 12 Oct. 2015.

Conger, J. J. (1975). Proceedings of the American Psychological Association, Incorporated, for the year 1974: Minutes of the annual meeting of the Council of Representatives. *American Psychologist*, 30, 620–651. doi:10.1037/h0078455

Drescher, Jack. "Queer Diagnoses: Parallels and Contrasts in the History of Homosexuality, Gender Variance, and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 39.2 (2009): 427-60. Web. 8 Nov. 2015.

Fox, R. E. (1988). Proceedings of the American Psychological Association, Incorporated, for the year 1987: Minutes of the annual meeting of the Council of Representatives. *American Psychologist*, 43, 508–531. doi:10.1037/h0091999

Herek, G. M. "Sexual Orientation Differences as Deficits: Science and Stigma in the History of American Psychology." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 5.6 (2010): 693-99. Web. 12 Oct. 2015.

Korb, Lawrence J., and Alexander Rothman. "Formalizing the Ban: My Experience in the Reagan Administration." *Journal of Homosexuality* 60.2-3 (2013): 273-81. Web. 9 Nov. 2015.

Rimmerman, Craig A. "Perspectives on the Lesbian and Gay Movements." *From Identity to Politics: The Lesbian and Gay Movements in the United States*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2002. 1-17. Print.