

## **What a tangled web we weave...the rest of the story**

Clive Perraton Mountford, September 2014

In March 2013, I finished a draft of “What a tangled we weave” concluding part way through section 7. It was accepted for publication in the BACP’s *Therapy Today*. In January 2014, following extensive email and telephone discussions, and having made requested clarifications, I was told by email that it would definitely *not* be published.

*Why?*

Consider the following indicative timeline:<sup>1</sup>

2009, April 22<sup>nd</sup>: *Scientific American* notes a “British Survey” finding “that one in 25 therapists would assist gay and bisexual patients attempting to convert to heterosexuality.”<sup>2</sup>

2010, July: *Therapy Today* reports that the British Medical Association are calling on “the Royal College of Psychiatrists and other mental health standards bodies to reject so-called ‘gay conversion therapies’”<sup>3</sup>

2012, April 13<sup>th</sup>: *The Independent* reports that Transport For London is banning “gay cure” advertisements planned for London buses. Boris Johnson is implicated. This is one in an ongoing series of reports on “reparative” therapy by the newspaper.<sup>4</sup>

2012, September 18<sup>th</sup>: the BACP’s “Statement of ethical practice” is issued.

2013, April: *Therapy Today* accepts my article.

2013, October: My article has not appeared. I email to ask why. Response: “I’m afraid your article...fell into a crack and was passed over when it was self-evidently time-limited.”<sup>5</sup> There is email discussion. I submit an updated version for imminent publication.

2013, November: *Therapy Today* reports on two interesting parliamentary events—Geraint Davies’s private member’s Bill requiring all counsellors to register with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC)<sup>6</sup> and a debate on “gay conversion therapy” involving government condemnation of the practice.<sup>7</sup>

2013, December: I learn there is concern within the BACP that my article does not recognize<sup>8</sup>

...the harm caused by [reparative] interventions and the collusion with the implicit homophobia that lurks in any exploration of change of sexual orientation.

Some think my article should not be published given the ongoing debate about, and government interest in, *fix-it* approaches to sexual orientation.

2014, January: An amended draft of the article is submitted following email and telephone discussions, and arguments raised on my behalf.<sup>9</sup>

2014, April 6<sup>th</sup>: *The Guardian* reports that Norman Lamb, the health minister, finds “gay conversion therapy...abhorrent”. The government is considering banning it.<sup>10</sup>

2014, April 15: My article is not to be published. In explanation, I am told:

...recent developments with the Association of Christian Counsellors who have given different legal grounds for their statement on GRT from those used by BACP.<sup>11</sup>

I check out these developments. As reported by *The Guardian*, Monday 13 January 2014<sup>12</sup>, the ACC statement

...said [reparative or conversion therapy] should be stopped ‘in the interests of public safety’

and because it

...implies that sexuality can be 'repaired' and so introduces the idea of treatment or cure... it suggests that a specific outcome is possible and appears to make an a priori assumption that it should happen.

In addition, the ACC statement:<sup>13</sup>

- Cites ethical considerations I can imagine no counselling association rejecting
- Characterises the therapeutic relationship in terms Carl Rogers would have been comfortable with
- Finds “Reparative (or Conversion) Therapy...incompatible with the Equality Act 2010

I see nothing overtly objectionable in the ACC statement and nothing to warrant the BACP’s concern. Furthermore, each of the

associations contributing to the UKCP *Consensus Statement* already offers differing grounds for rejecting “reparative” therapy. However, the email shutting me down continues in a different and more illuminating vein:

This is likely to lead to further contentious debate in the near future. BACP are of the view that your article, if published in its own journal, could easily be misinterpreted—as a statement by BACP—or misquoted in the media or elsewhere as so often happens. They do not wish to run the risk of this...

Contentious and “ongrowing” debate is guaranteed given that—according to *The Guardian* article I cited—other groups of Christian counsellors vehemently reject the ACC’s position. *But what is the BACP so afraid of?*

I do not *know*, but to me it seems clear what the BACP fears. It wishes to be seen to be aligned with government so that government does not take the job of regulating counselling and psychotherapy upon itself. One might argue that the BACP thus acts in the interests of counsellors, psychotherapists, and their clients. One might also say that it is acting in its own institutional interests and seeking regulation-by-proxy. Whatever the case—and concern for “implicit homophobia” notwithstanding—“reparative” therapy is not the main issue here.

When I think again about the person who finds their sexual orientation intolerable, I find the BACP’s position morally intolerable. *How can we practice thoughtful, responsible, reflective counselling and psychotherapy without open, honest, and controversial discussion?* The more a cause is taken up by the press and politicians, the more important it is to have those discussions. Politics inevitably distorts complexity, and counsellors and psychotherapists bring a unique perspective to democratic process.

Finally, thank you to *Self and Society* for publishing what the BACP would not; especial thanks to Richard House for encouraging the further development of my original brief article.

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<sup>1</sup> It is not intended to be exhaustive so much as illustrative.

<sup>2</sup> Maier, Thomas (April 22, 2009) "Can Psychiatrists Really "Cure" Homosexuality?", *Scientific American*, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/homosexuality-cure-masters-johnson/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Therapy Today*, Volume 21, Issue 6, July 2010, "News", <http://www.therapytoday.net/article/show/2004/>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/advertising/tfl-bans-christian-groups-gay-cure-advert-from-london-buses-7640814.html?origin=internalSearch>

<sup>5</sup> Email correspondence with the Deputy Editor, *Therapy Today*.

<sup>6</sup> *Therapy Today*, Volume 24, Issue 9, November 2013, "News", <http://www.therapytoday.net/article/show/3965/>.

<sup>7</sup> *Therapy Today*, Volume 24, Issue 9, November 2013, "In the news", <http://www.therapytoday.net/article/show/4010/>. It is worth reading *Hansard*: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm131120/halltext/131120h0002.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Email correspondence and telephone discussion with the Deputy Editor, *Therapy Today*.

<sup>9</sup> Email correspondence and telephone discussion with the Deputy Editor, *Therapy Today*.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/apr/06/gay-conversion-therapy-nhs-health-minister>

<sup>11</sup> Email correspondence with the Editor, *Therapy Today*.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/13/christian-therapists-stop-conversion-therapy-turn-gay-patients-straight>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.acc-uk.org/pdfs/ACC%20statement%20to%20its%20members%20January%202014.pdf>