



THE PROPAGANDISTS

Bryan Fischer,
the American Family Association
& the Demonization of LGBT People

*A Special Report from the Southern Poverty Law Center
Montgomery, Alabama*

OCTOBER 10, 2011

THE PROPAGANDISTS

Bryan Fischer,
the American Family Association
& the Demonization of LGBT People

THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER is a nonprofit organization that combats hate, intolerance and discrimination through education and litigation. Its Intelligence Project, which prepared this report and also produces the quarterly investigative magazine *Intelligence Report*, tracks the activities of hate groups and other extremists. Its Teaching Tolerance project helps foster respect and understanding in the classroom. Its litigation arm files lawsuits against hate groups for the violent acts of their members.

MEDIA AND GENERAL INQUIRIES

Mark Potok or Heidi Beirich

Southern Poverty Law Center
400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, Ala.
(334) 956-8200

www.splcenter.org

The SPLC is supported entirely by private donations. No government funds are involved.

© Southern Poverty Law Center. All rights reserved

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
The Propagandist: the AFA's Bryan Fischer	6
In Their Own Words: Quotes from the AFA	10
Profile: American Family Association	13
The Myths: 10 Tall Tales Debunked	16
The Math: Anti-LGBT Hate Violence	22

Executive Summary

The American Family Association (AFA) is one of most powerful religious-right groups in the nation, with a \$20 million budget, a network of 200 radio stations and two Internet television channels. Its spokespersons have appeared on all major networks and cable news channels, and in leading print and radio media. It is also one of the leading purveyors of lies about LGBT people and homosexuality.

The AFA has come under fire repeatedly over the years since it was founded in 1977 by the Rev. Donald Wildmon, who was sharply criticized in the 1980s for suggesting that obscene content on television and in the movies is largely due to the media being controlled by Jews. It once demanded that an openly gay Arizona congressman be barred from speaking at the Republican National Convention and suggested that he be arrested under a state law criminalizing sodomy. It regularly attacked corporations like Disney, which it described as a “two-faced” company that “welcomed hordes of homosexuals to celebrate their sexual perversions.”

But in the last three years, since hiring a radical Idaho preacher named Bryan Fischer as its director of issue analysis, the AFA has gone even further. Since moving to Mississippi to join the group, Fischer has declared that “homosexuality gave us Adolph Hitler ... the Nazi war machine and six million dead Jews” — a complete falsehood, as any historian knows. He has suggested that gay sex be recriminalized. He has routinely claimed that gay men molest children at rates far higher than those of heterosexual men — another falsehood, as all the relevant professional scientific associations have long agreed. Fischer has said that President Obama “nurtures a hatred for the white man” and suggested that welfare incentivizes black “people who rut like rabbits.” He has said that non-Christian religions “have no First Amendment right to the free exercise of religion,” claimed that the “sexual immorality of Native Americans” was part of what made them “morally disqualified from sovereign control of American soil,” and suggested that the best way to deal with promiscuity would be to kill the promiscuous.

Words like these have consequences. While the AFA would certainly deny it, it seems obvious that its regular demonizing of members of the LGBT

community as child molesters and the like creates an atmosphere where violence is all but inevitable. And that violence is dramatic. A study by the Southern Poverty Law Center found, based on an analysis of 14 years of FBI hate crime data, that LGBT people were by far the American minority most victimized by such crimes. They were more than twice as likely to be attacked in a violent hate crime as Jews or black people, and four times as likely as Muslims. And that doesn’t take into account the anti-gay bullying that has resulted in so many recent teen suicides.

Based on the foregoing and other evidence, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) last year began listing the AFA as a hate group. The listing, as was said at the time, was based on the group’s use of known falsehoods to attack and demonize members of the LGBT community — not, as some have gratuitously claimed, because the organization is Christian, or because it opposes same-sex marriage, or because it believes that the Bible describes homosexual practice as a sin.

Many thoughtful Christian commentators have said as much. Warren Throckmorton, a respected professor and past president of the American Mental Health Counselors Association, wrote last year that the AFA and other “newly labeled hate groups” were seeking to “avoid addressing the issues the SPLC raised, instead preferring to attack the credibility of the SPLC.” Reviewing an SPLC list of myths propagated by anti-gay religious-right groups, he said many are “provably false” and “rooted in ignorance.” The criticisms, Throckmorton concluded, are “legitimate and have damaged the credibility of the groups on the list. Going forward, I hope Christians don’t rally around these groups but rather call them to accountability.”

We hope public figures will do the same.

THE PROPAGANDIST

The American Family Association and its spokesman, Bryan Fischer, are famous for their anti-gay bigotry. What's less known is how 'mainstream' Idahoans jump-started Fischer's career

For a week or two this August, the spotlight of national media attention cast a harsh light on a prayer rally in Houston entitled "The Response: a Call to Prayer for a Nation in Crisis." Although it was billed as a non-political event held only to ask God for unity and righteousness, The Response drew a roster of hard-line religious rightists best known for their gay-bashing rhetoric.

Some of those who were scheduled to speak merely caused the eyes of the critics to roll, like the "prophetess" who earlier in the year blamed the mass die-off of blackbirds in Arkansas on the acceptance of homosexuality. The heavy criticism centered on the American Family Association (AFA), a group that aggressively promotes "decency" in the media with a \$20 million-a-year budget and a network of some 200 American Family Radio stations, and that paid for the event.

The AFA, after all, had come under fire many times since its founding in 1977 by the Rev. Donald Wildmon, who has repeatedly suggested that obscene content on television and in the movies is largely due to the media being controlled by Jews. On one occasion, the AFA demanded that an openly gay Arizona congressman be barred from speaking at the Republican National Convention and suggested that he be arrested under a state law criminalizing sodomy. A former network entertainment executive once called the AFA's boycotts "the first step toward a police state."

But the criticism this summer of the AFA, fueled in part by the Southern Poverty Law Center's 2010 listing of the organization as a hate group, really came down to the remarkable utterances of one man: Bryan Fischer, the loquacious, baby-faced "director of issue analysis" who joined the Tupelo, Miss.-based group



Former Idaho preacher Bryan Fischer, now an AFA official, says gay men and lesbians should face criminal penalties and be forced into "reparative therapy" to "cure" their homosexuality.

in 2009 and has become its best known, and most eyebrow-raising, spokesman.

Fischer, 60, graduated from Stanford University with a philosophy degree, but that hasn't stopped him from claiming that "[h]omosexuality gave us Adolph Hitler, and homosexuals in the military gave us the Brown Shirts, the Nazi war machine and six million dead Jews" — a complete falsehood, as any historian knows.

Nor has it prevented him from suggesting that gay sex should be penalized in the same way heroin use is, or asserting that gay men and lesbians should be forced into controversial "reparative therapy," which improbably claims to "cure" people of their homosexuality. Since joining the AFA, Fischer has said, against all the evidence, that "homosexuals, as a group, are the single greatest perpetrators of hate crimes on the planet, outside the Muslim religion." He has claimed that non-Christian religions "have no First Amendment right to the free exercise of religion," which would have been a surprise to the authors of the Bill of Rights. He said that the "sexual immorality of Native Americans" was part of what made them "morally disqualified from sovereign control of American soil." He even suggested the best way to deal with promiscuity would be to kill the promiscuous.

Not content with insulting the LGBT community, the sexually active, and Muslims and virtually all other non-Christians, Fischer has even crossed the Rubicon of race, saying that President Obama "nurtures this hatred for the United States of America and, I believe, nurtures a hatred for the white man." In case that wasn't enough, he recently added that welfare had "destroyed the African American family" and was incentivizing black "people who rut like rabbits."

These facts are well known. But what may be most remarkable of all about Fischer, aside from the fact that an organization that has more than 2 million people on its E-mail list hired him, are some of the details of how he spent almost 30 years as an increasingly radical pastor in Idaho. Despite being passed over as senior pastor of one church and abruptly leaving another, Fischer eventually came to be treated as the state's leading voice of the Christian Right, wrote regular guest columns in the state's largest newspaper, and was named chaplain of the Idaho State Senate.

The Early Years

Bryan Fischer was born on April 8, 1951, in a small town in Colorado, and moved in his early teens to California. Later, while attending Stanford, he landed an internship at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, where he was befriended by senior pastor David Roper, a man who would influence him strongly. Three years after graduating in 1973, he married Deborah Marie Rogers, who is still his wife.

Roper had attended Dallas Theological Seminary, the top ideological powerhouse of the most conservative wing of the evangelical movement. Fischer followed in his mentor's footsteps, graduating from the seminary in 1980.

While Fischer was in Dallas, Roper left California to become pastor of the Cole Community Church in Boise, Idaho, where he would remain for the following 17 years. Roper told the *Intelligence Report* that, later in 1980, he invited Fischer to join him in Idaho to help start the Cole Center for Biblical Studies. The center would become known regionally for the prominent locals who it graduated.

At the time, however, Fischer had markedly different theological views than he does today, said Dennis Mansfield, who started the Idaho Family Forum and was then the state's leading Christian Right spokesman: "Bryan brought me in to debate about his opposition to Christians being involved in government; he was a fierce opponent of it then. My opinion was that we should be involved in everything, and his was theological isolationism. I remember three debates where I crossed swords with him and found him to be one of the most intelligent men I'd ever known. But I won the debates, and ... he did not like being beaten by the likes of me."

As time passed, Fischer increasingly embraced the strain of "dominionist" theology that suggests that Christians should seek to control government



Bryan Fischer became a leading religious-right spokesman in Idaho around the year 2000. Here, he rallies supporters of a Ten Commandments monument in a public park.

as well as spiritual matters. Simultaneously, a church insider said, Fischer developed a group of his own personal followers and was ultimately asked to leave the church.

Roper denied that, saying Fischer left because he had "decided he wanted to do more in the political realm." But Mansfield, who remains friends with Fischer after many years, said that Fischer was passed over when Roper decided to leave Cole Community Church. "Roper announced he was leaving and that he would select a successor," Mansfield said in an interview. "A church of three to four thousand people is a significant Pacific Northwest church to be leader of. Ultimately, when the decision was announced, Roper chose a different pastor to head it up. Brian was dumbstruck and he told me he was resigning from his position.

"I would imagine he felt so dishonored that the order of things didn't follow his ideas," Mansfield said. "He and his wife were distraught they weren't chosen. He departed Cole Community [in 1993] and never looked back."

Mansfield said that very few people came forward to support Fischer then and that the two became close as a result. At a lunch held to discuss Fischer's future, Mansfield said he detected "a real brokenness and humility in Bryan, and openness to new opportunities. He came up with the idea of a community church, one that would have a different angle... That became Community Church of the Valley."

As he consolidated his new Boise church, Fischer began to gain real prominence in the state. He was

first quoted in *The Idaho Statesman*, the state's largest newspaper, in 1999. It was the beginning of his rise to national stature.

"I used to be the go-to religious-right person for media in Boise because of IFF [the Idaho Family Forum]," said Mansfield, whose theological views have since softened considerably. "Then I ran for Congress and lost to [now-Gov.] Butch Otter in 2000 and, of course, became invisible. There was a gap without a spokesman for the religious right, so Bryan stood up to be that person."

Onward and Upward

Bryan Fischer was on his way to local celebrity. But that ascent was only really cemented in 2001, when the state's Republican then-majority leader, present-day U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, appointed him as the Idaho State Senate chaplain.

Even though the position was essentially honorary, paying \$16.86 an hour to deliver prayers to the Idaho Senate, it gave Fischer easy access to the Republican leadership in a state that has long been completely dominated by the GOP. Word of the appointment of Fischer was not universally welcomed.

"The choice of one of Idaho's most polarizing religious leaders has sent shock waves through the state's churches and has some powerful senators reeling," *The Idaho Statesman* reported in a Jan. 13, 2001, news story. It said that the Senate's assistant majority leader and majority caucus chairman had no idea that Fischer had been hired until he delivered the opening Senate session prayer that year.

Betsy Russell, president of the Idaho Press Club and long-time Boise bureau chief for *The (Spokane, Wash.) Spokesman-Review*, said the post mattered. "One of the reasons he was able to achieve a platform is because he was given one by the state of Idaho quite officially: He was chaplain of the Senate. He held an official position... I guess you could say he was a state-endorsed clergyman."

In the immediate aftermath of Fischer's appointment, a woman named Jennifer Boyd wrote a letter to *The Idaho Statesman*. Boyd said she was a former member of Fischer's Community Church of the Valley and recounted how she was excommunicated. "Fischer removed me from his congregation after my divorce," she wrote, "which he deemed unacceptable, non-biblical and sinful." She angrily accused Fischer of speaking "out of both sides of his mouth. ... [H]e said one thing while he did another. ... [H]e judges people ... based on limited knowledge."

Despite the controversy, *The Idaho Statesman* began to quote Fischer regularly. Between 1999 and 2009, when Fischer would leave the state, the newspaper quoted him in nearly 100 news stories and printed 16 of his guest editorials — huge numbers in the relatively small Boise media market.

"Obviously, Fischer relies on polarizing messages that catch the attention of reporters, but it felt like he was able to control the narrative around issues of reproductive, queer and immigrant rights," said Amy Herzfeld, executive director of the Boise-based Idaho Human Rights Education Center, a nonprofit group. "I do think that many Idaho news outlets helped Fischer earn national accolades."

Like Jennifer Boyd, Mansfield recalled being disillusioned with his friend's ministry. In 2000, his son was arrested for possession of a marijuana pipe. The story made the local papers because Mansfield was then running for Congress.

"We went to Bryan and asked what to do, and he was at a loss," Mansfield said. "He didn't have a practical solution. I thought, 'This isn't helping anybody!' We went looking for another church that had solutions." Mansfield said that families already had begun leaving the congregation "in battalions." For him, the church had become a "professorial, debate-society culture" that did not offer solutions.

Fischer did not react well to his departure, Mansfield said. "With Bryan, it was as if I had betrayed him. I was just another person who left his church."

Another Church Conflict

In the following years, Fischer developed a reputation for asserting men's "authority" over women — a position that made some in his congregation uncomfortable, along with many in the larger community. On Aug. 21, 2005, for instance, Fischer said in a sermon that while Scripture says that men and women are "equal in essence and existence and worth," they are "NOT equal in authority."

That fall, the Dalai Lama was scheduled to visit Idaho as part of events surrounding the fourth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. In the run-up to the visit, Fischer disparaged Buddhism in remarks to his congregation, calling it a "godless myth" and a "terrible deception" that came "from the father of lies."

But that didn't stop him from joining an interfaith discussion with the Dalai Lama, along with 100 other representatives of a variety of faiths and denominations in the region. There, he questioned the Dalai Lama about the nature of evil, telling a reporter

afterward that the Dalai Lama's view of it was "simplistic."

Things were coming to a head at the Community Church of the Valley, Mansfield, who had helped get the church started, said that church elders "had a meeting about a conflict with Bryan over who had the final say in the church." Fischer insisted that he did, but Mansfield said it was actually the board.

Exactly what that conflict was remains something of a mystery. Four days after the Dalai Lama's visit, Fischer gave his last sermon at the church he had founded 12 years earlier. The following Sunday, a former ally, elder Robert Weisel, gave an emotional sermon about the prior week, saying how "sick last Sunday" had made him and speaking of the "ruin of friends." He mentioned how another elder had been "vilified" and apologized to his fellow elders as a group. He said without explanation that the congregation had defeated the enemy of the Gospel.

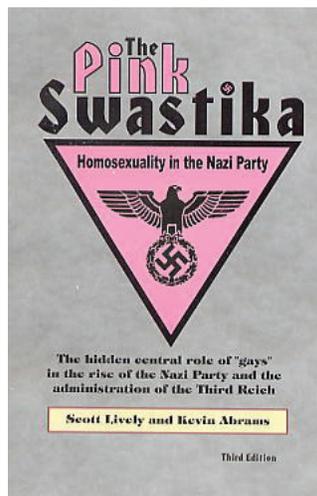
Fischer departed the church. The next summer, it changed its name to Christian Life Fellowship, but many members left for other congregations in the aftermath of what looked to the larger community like a major split.

Fischer rebounded quickly. In late 2005, he incorporated the Idaho Values Alliance (IVA) as a nonprofit controlled by Fischer, his wife and their daughter. In 2007, the IVA became the state affiliate of the American Family Association.

Off the Deep End

Fischer was now a public figure who was well known for his fondness for "hot rhetoric," as the Idaho Press Club's Russell put it. But he crossed another line in May 2008, when a fundamentalist conference called "Shake the Nation" was held in Idaho. One of the invited speakers was Scott Lively, whose book *The Pink Swastika* falsely claims that gay men largely orchestrated the Holocaust.

After getting some criticism, Fischer responded with a press release saying the book was "well researched" and "documents the well-known historical fact that the Nazi Party was birthed in a gay bar, that Adolph Hitler's inner circle included many



Bryan Fischer's claim that gay men largely orchestrated the Holocaust is based on *The Pink Swastika*, a thoroughly discredited book co-authored by anti-gay activist Scott Lively.

homosexuals, and that many if not most of the Brown Shirts, his notorious 'Storm

Troopers,' were also homosexuals." None of this, of course, was true.

But that didn't seem to bother Fischer. And it clearly didn't bother the AFA, which hired Fischer the next year as its director of issue analysis and moved him to Tupelo, Miss. Since that time, he has been a prolific blogger and the host of a daily two-hour AFA radio program, "Focal Point." In recent months, the AFA has added a disclaimer to Fischer's blog postings, but he remains its top spokesman.

And what a spokesman he is.

This summer, he said that despite the Supreme Court's 2003 decision to the contrary, there is "no reason" why gay sex should not be recriminalized in all 50 states. Earlier, he summed up his view of "homosexual activists."

"Ladies and gentlemen, they are Nazis," he said in July on his AFA radio show. "Do not be under any illusions about what homosexual activists will do with your freedoms and your religion if they have the opportunity. They'll do the same thing to you that the Nazis did to their opponents in Nazi Germany."

That seems highly unlikely, to say the least. But it did underline the attitude of the AFA, whose officials did not seem to have read any of Fischer's comments when they signed on to an ad accusing their many critics of "character assassination."

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Quotes from the AFA

The principal officials of the American Family Association have a long history of making extremely provocative remarks on everything from the role of Jews in the national media to the supposed dangers posed by Muslims and their faith. But over the years, the most outrageous comments of all — and the ones that are most often simple falsehoods dressed up as “research” — are aimed at LGBT people.

“Most television producers are of the Jewish perspective.”

— AFA founder and chairman
Don Wildmon, *People* magazine, 1981

“[Fifty-nine] percent of the people who are responsible for network programming were raised in Jewish homes. If the people who control the networks in Hollywood were 59 percent Christian and if they were only 1 percent as anti-Semitic as the networks are currently anti-Christian, there would [be] a massive public outcry from the national liberal secular media.”

— Don Wildmon, in a speech before the National Religious Broadcasters, 1985

“Only a relatively small handful of people determine what Americans can and will see on network television. These people are overtly hostile to the Christian faith.”

— Don Wildmon, in his book
The Home Invaders, 1985

“Hollywood and the theater world is heavily influenced by Jewish people.”

— Don Wildmon, *The Home Invaders*, 1985

“The television elite are highly secular. Ninety-six percent had a religious upbringing, the majority (59 percent) in the Jewish faith.”

— Don Wildmon, “What Hollywood Believes and Wants,” *AFA Journal*, 1989

“[T]he homosexual lifestyle is characterized by anonymous sexual encounters and celebration of sexual obsession and perversion unparalleled in any other social group.”

— Richard G. Howe, “Homosexuality in America: Exposing the Myths,” published by the AFA, 1994

“This year many pointed their compasses toward Disney World in Orlando, Florida, unaware of an impending cultural collision with a two-faced ‘family entertainment’ company that welcomed hordes of homosexuals to celebrate their sexual perversions at ‘The Sixth Annual Gay and Lesbian Day at the Magical Kingdom that Walt Built.’”

— *AFA Journal* on Disney World’s “Gay Days,” 1996

“I never dreamed I would see the day when sodomy would be called normal, and those who held to traditional values based on Christian teaching would be called bigots.”

— Don Wildmon, “Principles Which Guide the AFA’s Opposition to the Homosexual Agenda,” ca. 1999 (still on the AFA website)

“As with smoking, homosexual behavior’s ‘second hand’ effects threaten public health.”

— Gary Glenn, state director of AFA Michigan, 2001

“We fear the focus will now become homosexual indoctrination among young girls. ... Lesbianism, cross-dressing, and abortion are all part of [Patricia] Ireland’s history. It soon will become YWCA’s present.”

— Don Wildmon, on the YWCA hiring Patricia Ireland, former president of the National Organization for Women, AFA Action Alert, 2003

“Homosexuality is not only harmful to homosexuals themselves, but also to children and to society.”

— Stephen Bennett, AFA website, 2004

“Keith Ellison, D-Minn., the first Muslim elected to the United States Congress, has announced that he will not take his oath of office on the Bible, but on the bible of Islam, the Koran. He should not be allowed

to do so — not because of any American hostility to the Koran, but because the act undermines American civilization.”

— Don Wildmon, AFA Action Alert, 2006

“The homosexual agenda represents the single greatest modern threat to freedom of religion and conscience... . Gay activists are so driven by their agenda that they cannot even permit a private institution to maintain standards of sexuality that differ from theirs.

— Bryan Fischer, in a press release from his Idaho Values Alliance (a chapter of the AFA), about a gay rights group’s visits to campuses, April 12, 2007

“[S]ame-sex marriage will only increase sexual confusion in children and encourage dangerous sexual experimentation among the nation’s youth.”

— Bryan Fischer, Idaho Values Alliance press release, July 7, 2008

“If President Obama, congressional Democrats, and homosexual activists get their wish, your son or daughter may be forced to share military showers and barracks with active and open homosexuals who may very well view them with sexual interest.”

— AFA Action Alert on the repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy on gay people in the military, Feb. 8, 2010

“Muslims, by custom and religion, are simply unwilling to integrate into cultures with Western values and it is folly to pretend otherwise. In fact, they remain dedicated to subjecting all of America to sharia law and are working ceaselessly until that day of Islamic imposition comes.”

— Bryan Fischer, AFA director of issue analysis, AFA blog post, April 8, 2010

“The homosexual agenda represents a clear and present danger to virtually every fundamental right given to us by our Creator and enshrined for us in our Constitution.”

— Bryan Fischer, blog post, Feb. 26, 2010

“There is an overwhelming correlation between homosexual preference and pedophilia. This is further evidence that homosexuality is in fact sexual deviancy. For this reason alone, no homosexual should be elevated to the United States Supreme Court.”

— Bryan Fischer, blog post, April 16, 2010

“Now the only people that are going to be allowed to wear the uniform of the United States military will either be sexual perverts, sexual deviants, or people who support sexual perversion or sexual deviancy.”

— Bryan Fischer, on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” speaking on his AFA “Focal Point” radio show, Sept. 21, 2010

“So Hitler himself was an active homosexual. And some people wonder, didn’t the Germans, didn’t the Nazis, persecute homosexuals? And it is true they did; they persecuted effeminate homosexuals. But Hitler recruited around him homosexuals to make up his Stormtroopers, they were his enforcers, they were his thugs. And Hitler discovered that he could not get straight soldiers to be savage and brutal and vicious enough to carry out his orders, but that homosexual soldiers basically had no limits and the savagery and brutality they were willing to inflict on whomever Hitler sent them after.”

— Bryan Fischer, “Focal Point,” May 24, 2010

“[T]he nation had lapsed into rampant immorality. ... [Phineas] found an Israelite in flagrante with a Philistine woman and he ran them both through with a spear... . And that shook up the nation, it got their attention and they transformed... . [T]hey turned from that behavior and renewed their commitment to follow God. ... God is obviously looking for more Phineases in our day.”

— Bryan Fischer, “Focal Point,” citing the Old Testament to suggest that God wants sexual promiscuity today to be cured by killing promiscuous people, May 21, 2010

“Homosexuality gave us Adolph Hitler, and homosexuals in the military gave us the Brown Shirts, the Nazi war machine and six million dead Jews.”

— Bryan Fischer, blog post, May 27, 2010

“[H]ere we have the leader of our nation [and the Democrat Party celebrating sexual behavior which is contrary to nature and pushing a household structure that we know is harmful to children. ... “[O]ur President is so committed to normalizing homosexual conduct that he is putting the twisted sexual desires of adults ahead of the needs of children.”

— AFA President Tim Wildmon, press release, referring to President Obama’s Father’s Day recognition of same-sex parents, June 21, 2010

“Many of the tribal reservations today remain mired in poverty and alcoholism because many native Americans continue to cling to the darkness of indigenous superstition instead of coming into the light of Christianity and assimilating into Christian culture.”

— Bryan Fischer, blog post, Feb. 8, 2011

“Islam has no fundamental First Amendment claims, for the simple reason that it was not written to protect the religion of Islam. Islam is entitled only to the religious liberty we extend to it out of courtesy... . Our government has no obligation to allow a treasonous ideology to receive special protections in America, but this is exactly what the Democrats are trying to do right now with Islam.”

— Bryan Fischer, blog post, March 23, 2011

“There is no spirit of God in Islam. It is the spirit of Satan. It is the spirit of darkness. It is the spirit of tyranny. It is the spirit of bondage.”

— Bryan Fischer, “Focal Point,” March 29, 2011

“From now on, no more immigrants from Islamic countries. Can’t have it. It’s going to corrode Western culture.”

— Bryan Fischer, “Focal Point,” March 29, 2011

“Welfare has destroyed the African-American family by telling young black women that husbands and fathers are unnecessary and obsolete. Welfare has subsidized illegitimacy by offering financial rewards to women who have more children out of wedlock. We have incentivized fornication rather than marriage, and it’s no wonder we are now awash in the disastrous social consequences of people who rut like rabbits.”

— Bryan Fischer, blog post, April 5, 2011

“Homosexuals comprise less than three percent of the population, but are responsible for fully a third of all instances of pedophilia. ... Bottom line: homosexual or bisexual men are about 10 times more likely to molest children than heterosexual men.”

— Bryan Fischer, blog post, June 28, 2011

“But by the time of the founding until the late 20th century, homosexual activity was a felony offense in the United States of America, there is no reason why it cannot be a criminal offense once again, absolutely none.”

— Bryan Fischer, “Focal Point,” Aug. 29, 2011

“If we do not stop Islam at our shores, we will have to stop it in our streets. That day, in fact, is already here. Let’s stop the contagion while we can.”

— Bryan Fischer, blog post, Sept. 9, 2011

PROFILE

American Family Association

Founded: 1977

Location: Tupelo, Miss.

Initially founded as the National Federation for Decency, the American Family Association (AFA) originally focused on what it considered indecent television programming and pornography. The AFA says it promotes “traditional moral values” in media. A large part of that work involves “combating the homosexual agenda” through various means, including publicizing companies that have pro-gay policies and organizing boycotts against them. The AFA has a variety of outlets to disseminate its message, including the American Family Radio Network, its online One News Now and the monthly *AFA Journal*. In early 2011, the AFA claimed more than 2 million online supporters and 180,000 subscribers to its *Journal*.

In Its Own Words

“[T]he homosexual lifestyle is characterized by anonymous sexual encounters and celebration of sexual obsession and perversion unparalleled in any other social group.”

— Richard Howe, “Homosexuality in America,”
AFA publication, 1994

“As with smoking, homosexual behavior’s ‘second hand’ effects threaten public health... . Thus, individuals who choose to engage in homosexual behavior threaten not only their own lives, but the lives of the general population.”

— Gary Glenn, president of
Michigan chapter of AFA, 2001

“Homosexuality is not only harmful to homosexuals themselves, but also to children and to society.”

— Stephen Bennett, AFA writer, 2004

“If President Obama, Congressional Democrats, and homosexual activists get their wish, your son or daughter may be forced to share military showers and barracks with active and open homosexuals who may very well view them with sexual interest.”

— AFA press release, February 2010

“The homosexual movement is a progressive outgrowth of the sexual revolution of the past 40 years

and will lead to the normalization of even more deviant behavior.”

— Don Wildmon, AFA website, 1999
(still posted as of 2011).

“Homosexuality gave us Adolph Hitler, and homosexuals in the military gave us the Brown Shirts, the Nazi war machine and six million dead Jews.”

— Bryan Fischer, AFA director of issue analysis
for government and public policy, 2010

Background

Founded in 1977 by Methodist minister Donald E. Wildmon as the National Federation for Decency, the American Family Association (AFA) worked in its early years to remove what it considered indecent programming from television. Its other major focus was battling pornography. In 1988, the group’s name was changed to the AFA, because the organization’s concerns, Wildmon said in 2007, had expanded.

In 1985, Wildmon was appointed to former Attorney General Ed Meese’s Commission on Pornography by its director, Alan Sears, who later would become president of the Alliance Defense Fund, a Christian-based legal organization. Wildmon successfully orchestrated the removal of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* from some 17,000 convenience stores. Also in the 1980s, Wildmon started ramping up the AFA’s anti-LGBT propaganda and succeeded in getting some corporations to pull their ads

from shows like “Thirtysomething,” which had been added to Wildmon’s list of “Trash TV” because its plot included a gay romance.

Wildmon has never made a secret of his anti-LGBT views. One of his statements on the AFA’s website reads, “I never dreamed I would see the day when sodomy would be called normal, and those who held to traditional values based on Christian teaching would be called bigots.” According to the AFA, the primary goal of the “homosexual movement” is to “abolish the traditional, Judeo-Christian view of human sexuality, marriage, and family.”

The AFA has been extremely vocal over the years in its opposition to LGBT rights, marriage equality and allowing gay men and lesbians to serve in the military. The group’s arguments are filled with claims that equate homosexuality with pedophilia and argue that there’s a “homosexual agenda” afoot that is set to bring about the downfall of American (and ultimately, Western) civilization. In one October 2004 article, the *AFA Journal* suggested that gay influences are leading to a “grotesque culture” that will include “quick encounters in the middle school boys’ restroom.”

For years, until 2010, the AFA had a section on its website that supposedly exposed “The Homosexual Agenda.” There, a reader could find articles and other AFA publications that claimed LGBT people were trying to force the acceptance of homosexuality on children through sex education programs in schools; condemned companies like Disney for supporting LGBT rights and programming; and, also until 2010, featured a particularly noxious booklet the AFA had published in 1994. That booklet, *Homosexuality in America: Exposing the Myths*, included the bogus research of thoroughly discredited psychologist Paul Cameron as a source. One of the publication’s authors, Richard Howe, used Cameron’s “research” to claim that LGBT people don’t live as long as heterosexuals, that they’re more promiscuous and that the “disgusting details of the homosexual lifestyle explain why so many diseases are present in the homosexual community.” Another claim was that “[p]rominent homosexual leaders and publications have voiced support for pedophilia, incest, sadomasochism, and even bestiality.”

In 1998, in what would become a scandal for the group, the AFA signed on to a huge television and newspaper “ex-gay” campaign called “Truth in Love,” a project that advocated an idea popular in religious-right circles: that LGBT people can be “cured” so that they become heterosexual. A man named Michael

Johnston was the star of the campaign. In one television ad shot with his mother present, Johnston discussed “leaving homosexuality” and was open about his HIV-positive status. Previously, Johnston had worked with Jerry Falwell as an ex-gay leader and done a “Truth in Love” commercial for Coral Ridge Ministries. He had also started his own ex-gay ministry, Kerusso, in 1989. Johnston was extremely active on the ex-gay circuit, and was the founder of “Coming out of Homosexuality Day” (which coincides with National Coming Out Day).

In 2000, Johnston’s story was made available as a film by the AFA, titled “It’s Not Gay.” In the film, he is joined by other ex-gay activists who load the film with unsupported statistics, like “80% of homosexual men have a sexually transmitted disease.” One of the other ex-gay activists in the film, Richard Cohen, has been discredited for his “healing touch” therapy, in which grown men are cradled and held like babies to get used to “appropriate male touch” and to “re-create the father-son bond.” A broken father-son bond, Cohen claims, can “cause” homosexuality. In other “therapy” sessions, Cohen has clients beat pillows with tennis racquets while blaming their mothers for making them gay.

Three years later, in 2003, news outlets reported that Johnston, while traveling around the country decrying “the homosexual lifestyle,” was hosting orgies, taking drugs and having unprotected sex with other men without disclosing his HIV status. In the publicity and accusations that ensued, Johnston shut down his ministry and sought refuge at a live-in facility with Pure Life Ministries in Dry Ridge, Ky. As of 2011, Johnston was listed as Pure Life’s director of donor and media relations. He states in his bio that in 2002 he “was living a completely double life” and is “now walking in true freedom.”

The AFA, meanwhile, admitted that Johnston had “relapsed.” In early 2007, Wayne Besen of ex-gay watchdog group Truth Wins Out, filed complaints with two attorneys general against the AFA and another anti-gay group, Americans for Truth About Homosexuality, for promoting and selling “It’s Not Gay,” which Besen called “deceptive.” The AFA addressed Besen’s complaints in an article in its March 2007 *AFA Journal*. Buddy Smith, AFA executive assistant then, claimed that the AFA had stopped selling “It’s Not Gay” as a result of the scandal. But in 2005, the AFA started selling the DVD again, after meeting with Johnston at Pure Life. Smith stated that the AFA felt confident then “that Michael had been

fully restored and was walking in victory.” The DVD is still available on the AFA’s website, without any mention of the scandal. It is described as “a fair and balanced approach to this challenging subject.”

The AFA’s fundraising appeals are known for their shrillness. One mailer from the early 2000s read: “For the sake of our children and society, we must OPPOSE the spread of homosexual activity! Just as we must oppose murder, stealing, and adultery!” It continued, “Since homosexuals cannot reproduce, the only way for them to ‘breed’ is to RECRUIT! And who are their targets for recruitment? Children!” In other appeals, the AFA has used a standard propaganda ploy against LGBT individuals: They’re a danger to children.

In the summer of 2010, the AFA announced a boycott of Home Depot stores because Home Depot allegedly supports the “homosexual agenda.” The AFA said that the home repair chain was “deliberately exposing children to lascivious displays of sexual conduct by homosexuals” through its support of pride parades.

The AFA has had very active state chapters, many of which have served as training grounds for anti-gay activists like Scott Lively, founder of the anti-gay hate group Abiding Truth Ministries. Lively, a former director of the AFA’s California chapter, claimed in his discredited 1995 co-authored book *The Pink Swastika* that Germany’s Nazi Party was full of gay men who were primarily responsible for the Holocaust. In 2007, Lively co-founded the virulent anti-gay group Watchmen on the Walls, which is particularly popular in Eastern European countries and among some Eastern European immigrants to the United States.

Gary Glenn, current president of the AFA’s Michigan chapter, maintains a “Homosexual Agenda” link on the AFA-MI website. He has called anti-bullying legislation a way to indoctrinate children – and, by extension, American society – with “the homosexual agenda” (a common claim used by the anti-gay right). He has claimed that gay soldiers would cause disease in the military’s ranks through “battlefield blood transfusions” and that gay soldiers are respon-

sible for high rates of sexual assault in the military.

In 2009, the AFA hired Bryan Fischer, the former executive director of the AFA-affiliated Idaho Values Alliance, as its director of issue analysis for government and public policy and as a radio host. Taking a page from Lively’s book, Fischer claimed on his radio show in May 2010 that Hitler chose gay soldiers as his elite officers because they were far more brutal and savage than heterosexual soldiers. In defense of that show, Fischer wrote that “homosexuality gave us Adolph Hitler, and homosexuals in the military gave us the Brown Shirts, the Nazi war machine and six million dead Jews.” He also called for criminalizing gay sex in a February 2010 blog post – because doing so would ensure that “controversies” over “gays in the military” and “gay indoctrination in the schools” would end. He has also advocated forcing gay people into ex-gay therapy, which supposedly can “cure” their condition, because homosexuality should be treated in the same way as intravenous drug use. “Both,” he told radio host Alan Colmes, “are equally dangerous and risky to human health.” By August 2010, the AFA had appended a disclaimer to Fischer’s posts, stating that his opinions are his own.

That didn’t stop Fischer’s outrageous postings. In early 2011, Fischer called for an end to Muslim recruits in the U.S. military and an end to Muslim immigration to the U.S. At around the same time, he claimed that Native Americans remained mired in poverty because they refused to accept Christianity. The outcry over that blog post was so great that the AFA actually took it down. A week later, Fischer published a blog item stating that Native Americans should have followed Pocahontas’ lead, because she had accepted “the superior culture” of the new arrivals to the New World.

In 2010, Don Wildmon stepped down from his chairmanship of the AFA after 33 years, citing health problems. His son, Tim, took over, continuing the group’s long tradition of anti-gay propagandizing and activism.

THE MYTHS

10 Tall Tales Debunked

Ever since born-again singer and orange juice pitchwoman Anita Bryant helped kick off the contemporary anti-gay movement more than 30 years ago, hard-line elements of the religious right have been searching for ways to demonize gay people — or, at a minimum, to find arguments that will prevent their normalization in society. For the former Florida beauty queen and her Save Our Children group, it was the alleged plans of gay men and lesbians to “recruit” in schools that provided the fodder for their crusade.

But in addition to hawking that myth, the legions of anti-gay activists who followed have added a panoply of others, ranging from the extremely doubtful claim that sexual orientation is a choice, to unalloyed lies like the claims that gay men molest children far more than heterosexuals or that hate crime laws will lead to the legalization of bestiality and necrophilia. These fairy tales are important to the anti-gay right because they form the basis of its claim that homosexuality is a social evil that must be suppressed — an opinion rejected by virtually all relevant medical and scientific authorities. They also almost certainly contribute to hate crime violence directed at the LGBT community, which is targeted for such attacks more than any other minority in America. What follows are 10 key myths propagated by the anti-gay movement, along with the truth behind the propaganda.

MYTH # 1

Gay men molest children at far higher rates than heterosexuals.

THE ARGUMENT

Depicting gay men as a threat to children may be the single most potent weapon for stoking public fears about homosexuality — and for winning elections and referenda, as Anita Bryant found out during her successful 1977 campaign to overturn a Dade County, Fla., ordinance barring discrimination against gay people. Discredited psychologist Paul Cameron, the most ubiquitous purveyor of anti-gay junk science, has been a major promoter of this myth. Despite having been debunked repeatedly and very publicly, Cameron’s work is still widely relied upon by anti-gay organizations, although many no longer quote him by name. Others have cited a group called the American

College of Pediatricians to claim, as Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council did in November 2010, that “the research is overwhelming that homosexuality poses a [molestation] danger to children.”

THE FACTS

According to the American Psychological Association, “homosexual men are not more likely to sexually abuse children than heterosexual men are.” Gregory Herek, a professor at the University of California, Davis, who is one of the nation’s leading researchers on prejudice against sexual minorities, reviewed a series of studies and found no evidence that gay men molest children at higher rates than heterosexual men.

Anti-gay activists who make that claim allege that all men who molest male children should be seen as homosexual. But research by A. Nicholas Groth, a pioneer in the field of sexual abuse of children, shows that is not so. Groth found that there are two types of child molesters: fixated and regressive. The fixated child molester — the stereotypical pedophile — cannot be considered homosexual or heterosexual because “he often finds adults of either sex repulsive” and often molests children of both sexes. Regressive child molesters are generally attracted to other adults, but may “regress” to focusing on children when confronted with stressful situations. Groth found that the majority of regressed offenders were heterosexual in their adult relationships.

The Child Molestation Research and Prevention Institute notes that 90% of child molesters target children in their network of family and friends. Most child molesters, therefore, are not gay people lingering outside schools waiting to snatch children from the playground, as much religious-right rhetoric suggests.

Some anti-gay ideologues cite the American College of Pediatricians’ opposition to same-sex parenting as if

the organization were a legitimate professional body. In fact, the so-called college is a tiny breakaway faction of the similarly named, 60,000-member American Academy of Pediatrics that requires, as a condition of membership, that joiners “hold true to the group’s core beliefs ... [including] that the traditional family unit, headed by an opposite-sex couple, poses far fewer risk factors in the adoption and raising of children.” The group’s 2010 publication *Facts About Youth* was described by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychological Association as non-factual. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health, was one of several legitimate researchers who said *Facts* misrepresented their findings. “It is disturbing to me to see special interest groups distort my scientific observations to make a point against homosexuality,” he wrote. “The information they present is misleading and incorrect.”

MYTH # 2

Same-sex parents harm children.

THE ARGUMENT

Most hard-line anti-gay organizations are heavily invested, from both a religious and a political standpoint, in promoting the traditional nuclear family as the sole framework for the healthy upbringing of children. They maintain a reflexive belief that same-sex parenting must be harmful to children — although the exact nature of that supposed harm varies widely.

THE FACTS

No legitimate research has demonstrated that same-sex couples are any more or any less harmful to children than heterosexual couples.

The American Academy of Pediatrics in a 2002 policy statement declared: “A growing body of scientific literature demonstrates that children who grow up with one or two gay and/or lesbian parents fare as well in emotional, cognitive, social, and sexual functioning as do children whose parents are heterosexual.” That policy statement was reaffirmed in 2009.

The American Psychological Association found that “same-sex couples are remarkably similar to heterosexual couples, and that parenting effectiveness and the adjustment, development and psychological well-being of children is unrelated to parental sexual orientation.”

Similarly, the Child Welfare League of America’s official position with regard to same-sex parents

is that “lesbian, gay, and bisexual parents are as well-suited to raise children as their heterosexual counterparts.”

MYTH # 3

People become gay because they were sexually abused as children or there was a deficiency in sex-role modeling by their parents.

THE ARGUMENT

Many anti-gay rights proponents claim that homosexuality is a mental disorder caused by some psychological trauma or aberration in childhood. This argument is used to counter the common observation that no one, gay or straight, consciously chooses his or her sexual orientation. Joseph Nicolosi, a founder of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, said in 2009 that “if you traumatize a child in a particular way, you will create a homosexual condition.” He also has repeatedly said, “Fathers, if you don’t hug your sons, some other man will.” A side effect of this argument is the demonization of parents of gay men and lesbians, who are led to wonder if they failed to protect a child against sexual abuse or failed as role models in some important way. In 2010, the *Journal of Biosocial Science* published a study by Kansas State University family studies professor Walter Schumm arguing that gay couples are more likely than heterosexuals to raise gay or lesbian children. (The *Journal* was previously affiliated with the Galton Institute, a British organization formerly known as the Eugenics Society.)

THE FACTS

No scientifically sound study has linked sexual orientation or identity with parental role-modeling or childhood sexual abuse.

The American Psychiatric Association noted in a 2000 fact sheet on gay, lesbian and bisexual issues that “no specific psychosocial or family dynamic cause for homosexuality has been identified, including histories of childhood sexual abuse.” The fact sheet goes on to say that sexual abuse does not appear to be any more prevalent among children who grow up and identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual than in children who grow up and identify as heterosexual.

Similarly, the National Organization on Male Sexual Victimization notes on its website that “experts in the human sexuality field do not believe that pre-

mature sexual experiences play a significant role in late adolescent or adult sexual orientation” and added that it’s unlikely that someone can make another person gay or heterosexual.

With regard to Schumm’s study, critics have already said that he appears to have merely aggregated anecdotal data, a biased sample that invalidates his findings.

MYTH # 4

Gay men and lesbians don’t live nearly as long as heterosexuals.

THE ARGUMENT

Anti-gay organizations want to promote heterosexuality as the healthier “choice.” Furthermore, the purportedly shorter life spans and poorer physical and mental health of gays and lesbians are often offered as reasons why they shouldn’t be allowed to adopt or foster children.

THE FACTS

This falsehood can be traced directly to the discredited research of Paul Cameron and his Family Research Institute, specifically a 1994 paper he co-wrote entitled, “The Lifespan of Homosexuals.” Using obituaries collected from gay newspapers, he and his two co-authors concluded that gay men died, on average, at 43, compared to an average life expectancy at the time of around 73 for all U.S. men. On the basis of the same obituaries, Cameron also claimed that gay men are 18 times more likely to die in car accidents than heterosexuals, 22 times more likely to die of heart attacks than whites, and 11 times more likely than blacks to die of the same cause. He also concluded that lesbians are 487 times more likely to die of murder, suicide, or accidents than straight women.

Remarkably, these claims have become staples of the anti-gay right and have frequently made their way into far more mainstream venues. For example, William Bennett, education secretary under President Reagan, used Cameron’s statistics in a 1997 interview he gave to ABC News’ “This Week.”

However, like virtually all of his “research,” Cameron’s methodology is egregiously flawed — most obviously because the sample he selected (the data from the obits) was not remotely statistically representative of the gay population as a whole. Even Nicholas Eberstadt, a demographer at the conser-

vative American Enterprise Institute, has called Cameron’s methods “just ridiculous.”

MYTH # 5

Gay men controlled the Nazi Party and helped to orchestrate the Holocaust.

THE ARGUMENT

This claim comes directly from a 1995 book titled *The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality in the Nazi Party*, by Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams. Lively is the virulently anti-gay founder of Abiding Truth Ministries and Abrams is an organizer of a group called the International Committee for Holocaust Truth, which came together in 1994 and included Lively as a member.

The primary argument Lively and Abrams make is that gay people were not victimized by the Holocaust. Rather, Hitler deliberately sought gay men for his inner circle because their “unusual brutality” would help him run the party and mastermind the Holocaust. In fact, “the Nazi party was entirely controlled by militaristic male homosexuals throughout its short history,” the book claims. “While we cannot say that homosexuals caused the Holocaust, we must not ignore their central role in Nazism,” Lively and Abrams add. “To the myth of the ‘pink triangle’ — the notion that all homosexuals in Nazi Germany were persecuted — we must respond with the reality of the ‘pink swastika.’”

These claims have been picked up by a number of anti-gay groups and individuals, including Bryan Fischer of the American Family Association, as proof that gay men and lesbians are violent and sick. The book has also attracted an audience among anti-gay church leaders in Eastern Europe and among Russian-speaking anti-gay activists in America.

THE FACTS

The Pink Swastika has been roundly discredited by legitimate historians and other scholars. Christine Mueller, professor of history at Reed College, did a line-by-line refutation of an earlier (1994) Abrams article on the topic and of the broader claim that the Nazi Party was “entirely controlled” by gay men. Historian Jon David Wynecken at Grove City College also refuted the book, pointing out that Lively and Abrams did no primary research of their own, instead using out-of-context citations of some legitimate sources while ignoring information from

those same sources that ran counter to their thesis.

The myth that the Nazis condoned homosexuality sprang up in the 1930s, started by socialist opponents of the Nazis as a slander against Nazi leaders. Credible historians believe that only one of the half-dozen leaders in Hitler's inner circle, Ernst Röhm, was gay. (Röhm was murdered on Hitler's orders in 1934.) The Nazis considered homosexuality one aspect of the "degeneracy" they were trying to eradicate.

When the National Socialist Party came to power in 1933, it quickly strengthened Germany's existing penalties against homosexuality. Heinrich Himmler, Hitler's security chief, announced that homosexuality was to be "eliminated" in Germany, along with miscegenation among the races. Historians estimate that between 50,000 and 100,000 men were arrested for homosexuality (or suspicion of it) under the Nazi regime. These men were routinely sent to concentration camps and many thousands died there.

In 1942, the Nazis instituted the death penalty for gay men. Offenders in the German military were routinely shot. Himmler put it like this: "We must exterminate these people root and branch. ... We can't permit such danger to the country; the homosexual must be completely eliminated."

MYTH # 6

Hate crime laws will lead to the jailing of pastors who criticize homosexuality and the legalization of practices like bestiality and necrophilia.

THE ARGUMENT

Anti-gay activists, who have long opposed adding LGBT people to those protected by hate crime legislation, have repeatedly claimed that such laws would lead to the jailing of religious figures who preach against homosexuality — part of a bid to gain the backing of the broader religious community for their position. Janet Porter of Faith2Action was one of many who asserted that the federal Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Prevention Act — signed into law by President Obama in October 2009 — would "jail pastors" because it "criminalizes speech against the homosexual agenda."

In a related assertion, anti-gay activists claimed the law would lead to the legalization of psychosexual disorders (paraphilias) like bestiality and pedophilia. Bob Unruh, a conservative Christian journalist who left The Associated Press in 2006 for the right-wing,

conspiracist news site WorldNetDaily, said shortly before the federal law was passed that it would legalize "all 547 forms of sexual deviancy or 'paraphilias' listed by the American Psychiatric Association." This claim was repeated by many anti-gay organizations, including the Illinois Family Institute.

THE FACTS

The claim that hate crime laws could result in the imprisonment of those who "oppose the homosexual lifestyle" is false. The Constitution provides robust protections of free speech, and case law makes it clear that even a preacher who suggested that gays and lesbians should be killed would be protected.

Neither do hate crime laws — which provide for enhanced penalties when persons are victimized because of their "sexual orientation" (among other factors) — "protect pedophiles," as Janet Porter and many others have claimed. According to the American Psychological Association, sexual orientation refers to heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality — not paraphilias such as pedophilia. Paraphilias, as defined by the American Psychiatric Association, are disorders characterized by sexual urges or behaviors directed at nonhuman objects or non-consenting persons like children, or that involve the suffering or humiliation of one's partner.

Even if pedophiles, for example, were protected under a hate crime law — and such a law has not been suggested or contemplated anywhere — that would not legalize or "protect" pedophilia. Pedophilia is illegal sexual activity, and a law that more severely punished people who attacked pedophiles would not change that.

MYTH # 7

Allowing gay people to serve openly will damage the armed forces.

THE ARGUMENT

Anti-gay groups have been adamantly opposed to allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly in the armed forces, not only because of their purported fear that combat readiness will be undermined, but because the military has long been considered the purest meritocracy in America (the armed forces were successfully racially integrated long before American civilian society, for example). If gays serve honorably and effectively in this meritocracy, that suggests that there is no rational basis for discriminating against them in any way.

THE FACTS

Gays and lesbians have long served in the U.S. armed forces, though under the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy that governed the military between 1993 and September 2011, they could not serve openly. At the same time, gays and lesbians have served openly for years in the armed forces of 25 countries, including Britain, Israel, South Africa, Canada and Australia, according to a report released by the Palm Center, a policy think tank at the University of California at Santa Barbara. The Palm Center report concluded that lifting bans against openly gay service personnel in these countries “ha[s] had no negative impact on morale, recruitment, retention, readiness or overall combat effectiveness.” Successful transitions to new policies were attributed to clear signals of leadership support and a focus on a uniform code of behavior without regard to sexual orientation.

A 2008 *Military Times* poll of active-duty military personnel, often cited by anti-gay activists, found that 10% of respondents said they would not re-enlist if the DADT policy were repealed. That would mean some 228,000 people may leave the military in the wake of the 2011 ending of that policy. But a 2009 review of that poll by the Palm Center suggested a wide disparity between what soldiers said they would do and their actual actions. It noted, for example, that far more than 10% of West Point officers in the 1970s said they would leave the service if women were admitted to the academy. “But when the integration became a reality,” the report said, “there was no mass exodus; the opinions turned out to be just opinions.” Similarly, a 1985 survey of 6,500 male Canadian service members and a 1996 survey of 13,500 British service members each revealed that nearly two-thirds expressed strong reservations about serving with gays. Yet when those countries lifted bans on gays serving openly, virtually no one left the service for that reason. “None of the dire predictions of doom came true,” the Palm Center report said.

MYTH # 8

Gay people are more prone to be mentally ill and to abuse drugs and alcohol.

THE ARGUMENT

Anti-gay groups want not only to depict sexual orientation as something that can be changed but also to show that heterosexuality is the most desirable

“choice” — even if religious arguments are set aside. The most frequently used secular argument made by anti-gay groups in that regard is that homosexuality is inherently unhealthy, both mentally and physically. As a result, most anti-gay rights groups reject the 1973 decision by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) to remove homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. Some of these groups, including the particularly hard-line Traditional Values Coalition, claim that “homosexual activists” managed to infiltrate the APA in order to sway its decision.

THE FACTS

All major professional mental health organizations are on record as stating that homosexuality is not a mental disorder.

It is true that LGBT people suffer higher rates of anxiety, depression, and depression-related illnesses and behaviors like alcohol and drug abuse than the general population. But studies done during the past 15 years have determined that it is the stress of being a member of a minority group in an often-hostile society — and not LGBT identity itself — that accounts for the higher levels of mental illness and drug use.

Richard J. Wolitski, an expert on minority status and public health issues at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, put it like this in 2008: “Economic disadvantage, stigma, and discrimination ... increase stress and diminish the ability of individuals [in minority groups] to cope with stress, which in turn contribute to poor physical and mental health.”

MYTH # 9

No one is born gay.

THE ARGUMENT

Anti-gay activists keenly oppose the granting of “special” civil rights protections to gay people similar to those afforded black Americans and other minorities. But if people are born gay — in the same way people have no choice as to whether they are black or white — discrimination against gay men and lesbians would be vastly more difficult to justify. Thus, anti-gay forces insist that sexual orientation is a behavior that can be changed, not an immutable characteristic.

THE FACTS

Modern science cannot state conclusively what causes sexual orientation, but a great many studies suggest that it is the result of biological and environmen-

tal forces, not a personal “choice.” One of the more recent is a 2008 Swedish study of twins (the world’s largest twin study) that appeared in *The Archives of Sexual Behavior* and concluded that “[h]omosexual behaviour is largely shaped by genetics and random environmental factors.” Dr. Qazi Rahman, study co-author and a leading scientist on human sexual orientation, said: “This study puts cold water on any concerns that we are looking for a single ‘gay gene’ or a single environmental variable which could be used to ‘select out’ homosexuality — the factors which influence sexual orientation are complex. And we are not simply talking about homosexuality here — heterosexual behaviour is also influenced by a mixture of genetic and environmental factors.”

The American Psychological Association (APA) acknowledges that despite much research into the possible genetic, hormonal, social and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no evidence has emerged that would allow scientists to pinpoint the precise causes of sexual orientation. Still, the APA concludes that “most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.”

In 2010, the *Journal of Biosocial Science* published a study by Kansas State University family studies professor Walter Schumm arguing that gay couples are more likely than heterosexuals to raise gay or lesbian children. (The *Journal* was previously affiliated with the Galton Institute, a British organization formerly known as the Eugenics Society.) Schumm told a reporter that he was “trying to prove [homosexuality is] not 100% genetic.” But critics suggested that his data did not prove that, and, in any event, virtually no scientists have suggested that homosexuality is caused only by genes.

MYTH # 10

Gay people can choose to leave homosexuality.

THE ARGUMENT

If people are not born gay, as anti-gay activists claim, then it should be possible for individuals to abandon homosexuality. This view is buttressed among religiously motivated anti-gay activists by the idea that homosexual practice is a sin and humans have the free

will needed to reject sinful urges.

A number of “ex-gay” religious ministries have sprung up in recent years with the aim of teaching gay people to become heterosexuals, and these have become prime purveyors of the claim that gays and lesbians, with the aid of mental therapy and Christian teachings, can “come out of homosexuality.” Exodus International, the largest of these ministries, plainly states, “You don’t have to be gay!” Another, the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, describes itself as “a professional, scientific organization that offers hope to those who struggle with unwanted homosexuality.”

THE FACTS

“Reparative” or sexual reorientation therapy — the pseudo-scientific foundation of the ex-gay movement — has been rejected by all the established and reputable American medical, psychological, psychiatric, and professional counseling organizations. In 2009, for instance, the American Psychological Association adopted a resolution, accompanied by a 138-page report, that repudiated ex-gay therapy. The report concluded that compelling evidence suggested that cases of individuals going from gay to straight were “rare” and that “many individuals continued to experience same-sex sexual attractions” after reparative therapy. The APA resolution added that “there is insufficient evidence to support the use of psychological interventions to change sexual orientation” and asked “mental health professionals to avoid misrepresenting the efficacy of sexual orientation change efforts by promoting or promising change in sexual orientation.” The resolution also affirmed that same-sex sexual and romantic feelings are normal.

Some of the most striking, if anecdotal, evidence of the ineffectiveness of sexual reorientation therapy has been the numerous failures of some of its most ardent advocates. For example, the founder of Exodus International, Michael Bussee, left the organization in 1979 with a fellow male ex-gay counselor because the two had fallen in love. Alan Chambers, current president of Exodus, said in 2007 that with years of therapy, he’s mostly conquered his attraction to men, but then admitted, “By no means would we ever say that change can be sudden or complete.”

THE MATH

Anti-LGBT Hate Violence

In 2010, the Southern Poverty Law Center analyzed 14 years of FBI hate crime data in an effort to determine which American minority group was most victimized by violent hate crime. To the surprise of few who study such crimes, the LGBT community was targeted far more than others.

The bottom line: Gay people are...

More than twice as likely to be attacked as black people
 More than twice as likely to be attacked as Jews
 More than four times as likely to be attacked as Muslims

Here is an explanation of the SPLC's methodology:

The national hate crime statistics published each year by the FBI are notoriously sketchy, in large part because, as a 2005 Department of Justice study found, most hate crimes are never reported to police and those that are typically are not categorized as hate crimes by local jurisdictions. Nevertheless, by examining FBI data, it is possible to make reasonable estimates of the rates of victimization by various targeted minority groups.

To calculate these rates for five categories of minority victims — LGBT people, Jews, blacks, Muslims and Latinos — the SPLC first determined the percentage of the U.S. population represented by each victim group: gay people, 2.1%; Jews, 2.2% (Census Bureau's 2009 Statistical Abstract); blacks, 12.9%; Muslims, 0.8% (2009 estimate from the Pew Research Center); and Latinos, 15.8%. Of these, the percentage of gay men and lesbians in the American population is the most debatable. We use figures on self-identified gays, lesbians and bisexuals from a National Health and Social Life Survey that were also cited by a coalition of 31 leading gay rights organizations as "the most widely accepted study of sexual practices in the United States." The 2.1% proportion is calculated from the finding that 2.8% of men and 1.4% of women are gay.

Next, we compiled the total number of hate crimes against persons (that is, excluding hate crimes against property) in those categories for the years 1995-2008, the period for which there was complete data. We then totaled the crimes for those 14 years in each category and calculated what percentage of all hate

crimes against persons they represented. There were 15,351 anti-gay hate crime offenses during those years, for instance, which amounts to 17.4% of the total of 88,463 reported violent hate crimes. The figures for the remaining victim groups were Jews, 7.7%; blacks, 4.1%; Muslims, 1.5%; and Latinos, 8.8%.

Using the figures from the above two paragraphs, we then compared the level of hate crime aimed at each group to that group's percentage in the population to determine the group's rate of victimization compared to its representation in the population. For gay people, for example, it was calculated that they are victimized at 8.3 times the expected rate (17.4 divided by 2.1). The other categories were as follows: Jews were victimized at 3.5 times the expected rate, blacks at 3.2 times, Muslims at 1.9 times, and Latinos at 0.6 times.

Last, we compared the rate of victimization for gay men and lesbians to that of the other groups. The figures show that gay people are 2.4 times more likely to suffer a violent hate crime attack than Jews (8.3 divided by 3.5). In the same way, gay people are 2.6 times more likely to be attacked than blacks; 4.4 times more likely than Muslims; and 13.8 times more likely than Latinos, according to the FBI figures. (It should be noted that undocumented Latino immigrants, probably the largest group of Latino victims, are also likely the least likely to report attacks to police because of a fear of deportation. Therefore, the figures for Latino victimization rates in this analysis are probably the least reliable.) The basic pattern holds by years as well as across the years.

About the Report

This report was researched and written by Heidi Beirich, Evelyn Schlatter and Robert Steinback, and edited by Mark Potok. The profile of Bryan Fischer – “The Propagandist” – was written for the Southern Poverty Law Center by Idaho-based journalists Jody May-Chang and Jill Kuraitis. The report was designed by Russell Estes.



MEDIA AND GENERAL INQUIRIES

Mark Potok or Heidi Beirich

Southern Poverty Law Center

400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, Ala.

(334) 956-8200

www.splcenter.org

The SPLC is supported entirely by private donations. No government funds are involved.

© Southern Poverty Law Center. All rights reserved