

# Are You Cured?

By Lester Welch, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>

One problem in the rational discussion of any issue is that of “semantics.” Do all involved in the discussion have the same understanding of the meaning of the key words being used? Words have a meaning that one can look up in the dictionary, but that definition hardly confined the understanding that the public envisions when a word is used. The media often utilizes and distorts words for their own purpose to increase sales (forgivable because we do live in a capitalistic society). High on my favorite list is “convicted felon.” How does one become a felon without being convicted, I ask? Other minefield words are, “predator,” “rape,” “violence” and –a word I wish to explore—“cure.”

Suppose a person, “A,” has a limp and he undergoes a process and no longer limps. Is he cured? Suppose the process is not surgical or medicinal but rather therapeutic, does your opinion change? Suppose someone, “B,” has an obsessive drive to wash her hands and does so dozens of times a day, but, then, “B” undergoes a process and no longer washes her hands. Is she cured? Suppose “B” - God forbid - had her hands amputated because of some justifiable medical process (cancer?). Is “B” cured? Or suppose a physically healthy “B” thinks about washing her hands often but only does so at appropriate times (before eating, after bathroom activities, etc.). Is “B” cured? Suppose “A” - five years later - starts to limp again. Was he ever cured? Are the thoughts that “B” had about washing her hands counter indicative to a cure? If “A” thinks about limping, is “A” - even though he doesn’t limp - cured? Should “thoughts” be a diagnostic parameter in the definition of “cure?”

If I’m asked, “are you cured?” I will respond, “what do you mean by “cured?” The answer so often given by professional therapists - “there is no cure,” and followed by the usual mantra about the patient can, however, learn to control their behavior, while well meaning and politically correct, hurts our cause and re-enforces the erroneous opinions about recidivism rates. The public thinks that the lack of a “cure” means a certainty of relapse. I maintain that if someone is controlling their behavior, they are cured because there is no difference between them and someone who never offended in the first place. The same is true of alcoholics. If your behavior is controlled you are not a threat - by definition.

Of course, legislators can legally define “cure” much in same way as they have defined “violent.” A law can be enacted which states that there is no “cure” for alcoholism, sexual misbehavior, and drug addiction. This legislative maneuver will help maintain the fear in the public, assure an emotional response, and delay a rational search for actions to diminish harm - for the sake of increasing the probability of being re-elected.

Are you cured from your last cold?

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<sup>1</sup> Lester Welch, Ph.D., sits on the Sex Abuse Treatment Alliance’s Executive Board. This article is a reprint from SATA-SORT News, Volume 16, Issue 1, Spring 2007.