

Homosexuality: A Catholic's Journey

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## **PART 1: PSYCHOLOGY OR GENETICS**

When I decided to become a Catholic, the first thing I had to do was phone my girlfriend and tell her that we could no longer be together. We had been partners for a number of years, and had even started discussing “formalizing” our union, so it was tremendously difficult to explain to her why the faith that I had chosen prohibited our relationship. It was even more difficult because I had, at the time, only a passing understanding of the Church’s teachings on sexuality.

I knew nothing about natural law, had no concept of sexual complementarity, and had only the vaguest possible notions about the import of the sacrament of matrimony. All that I really knew was that I had, three months earlier, made a deal with God: I told him that I wanted to know him, and that I wanted to follow him, and that if he told me to join a faith that prohibited homosexuality, then I would give it up for his sake.

And now, finally, after three months of discernment, I had been forced to accept that he was telling me to join the Church.

I can’t say for certain when I first became involved in a homosexual relationship — it was certainly at a very young age, and I know that I already felt that I had been attracted to women for some time. My story is sufficiently undistinguished that I could probably copy it verbatim from half of the autobiographical books ever written by homosexual writers: I started to have homosexual feelings around puberty, and during high school I met another young woman who had similar feelings. A relationship developed between us — and yet I still didn’t want to admit that I was gay.

I attempted to date boys, with results that ranged from unsuccessful to positively disastrous, and then eventually I “realized” that I was just going to have to accept it: I was a lesbian.

The first thing that must be understood, is that for all of the misrepresentations and faulty logic employed by gay activist groups, their primary claim — that homosexuality is not a choice — really does reflect the experience of persons with same-sex attractions.

While, as the Catechism frankly states, “Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained,” we do know that there are numerous psychological and possibly biological factors involved that cause a person to feel that they are really, fundamentally and immutably homosexual. This is not simply an excuse used by the gay community in order to give their movement more legitimacy and to generate sympathy for their cause —

rather, it is a reflection of their own feelings that this is something that is a part of them, which has always been a part of them, and for which they are in no way responsible.

Essentially, homosexuality seems to be in the same sort of category as something like chronic depression or poor self-image: There may be both physical and psychological components contributing to these disorders, they often arise very early in life, and they are usually the result of factors in early childhood over which the person involved had little, if any, control.

This is not to say that they aren't responsible for any homosexual activities (although, to quote the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "circumstances may exist, or may have existed in the past, which would reduce or remove the culpability of the individual in a given instance"), but rather that they are not usually at fault for their homosexual orientation — just as a person suffering from depression is not to be blamed for feeling depressed, but may still be probably morally culpable if he commits suicide.

There also does not appear to be one single factor that is constant in all cases (as in Freud's theory that all homosexual males had overbearing mothers and passive fathers), although there are numerous factors that are present in many cases. In other words, there seem to be a lot of psychological pressures that push someone in the direction of homosexual attraction, but there isn't one thing that we can point to as the cause of homosexuality.

It is important, however, to understand what some of the most common factors are, because many of them can cause serious complications when trying to dialogue with or convert persons with same-sex attractions.

To begin with, it is important to understand that there are substantial differences in the psychological causes of same-sex attractions in men and in women.

For one thing, women who experience same-sex attractions are more likely to identify themselves as bisexual, to change their own definition of their sexual identity periodically, or to have had intensive, long-term relationships with members of the opposite sex. This suggests, though it doesn't necessarily prove, that same-sex attractions in women may tend to be the result of less fundamental wounds, or that it may result from personality developments that occur later in life than those that typically lead to homosexual feelings in men.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of the research that has been done surrounding homosexuality deals with men, often under the assumption that the basic causes are more or less the same.

Considering the intimate relationships between sexual identity and gender, and also the differences reported by clinical psychologists working with lesbian patients, this doesn't really seem to hold true.

Taking this into account, we can know for certain that same-sex attractions, in both men and women, are the result of psychological wounds that directly affect sexual identity.

In the case of men, these wounds are often the result of distorted paternal relationships. Those working in therapy to help men with same-sex attractions achieve a heterosexual orientation say that one of the most common factors is a father figure who is weak, distant or disapproving. As a result of this, many (not all) men with same-sex attractions feel that they are inadequate or disappointing in the eyes of their fathers. In order to escape from this, they try to find other male figures (usually lovers) who will accept and affirm them.

This has two important consequences: First, it reveals that homosexual men are often committed to the homosexual community for reasons that go beyond mere sexual fulfillment. (This is also why so many gay activists become insulted when their sexuality is treated merely as a sexual perversion — their experience of homosexuality is one of personal acceptance, not merely one of sexual pleasure.) Secondly, it suggests that many homosexual men will tend to reject Catholicism, or indeed any major monotheism, because they will subconsciously equate God the Father with their own father, and therefore they perceive him as an unappealing, judgmental figure who expects more of them than they are capable of giving, and who rejects them without understanding — or as a distant, unapproachable person who has little to no interest in them or their affairs.

Another common factor is a failure to form proper associations, especially in childhood, with members of the same sex.

Complementarity is central to sexual attraction — we are designed to seek out those who are different from ourselves. When a young boy or girl is unable to identify themselves properly with members of their own sex, especially if they do find it easier to identify with the opposite sex, the sense of mystery and desirability that usually leads us to seek out members of the opposite sex can be misdirected, leading to same-sex attraction.

A child in this position usually feels fairly lonely and isolated, and is also more likely to suffer paternal rejection (see above), especially if they are a boy who is too “sissy.”

Their desire for acceptance, love and inclusion among members of their own sex leads to sexual desires, which are then cemented when, at last, they find that there are other people who are of their sex and who will accept them: namely the gay community.

Again, you have a massive, and very real, psychological need being fulfilled by the gay community, and so, again, you have the perception of homosexuality as being something that goes beyond the confines of mere sex.

This is not only a community that accepts them as persons with same-sex attractions, it is also the first community where they feel that they really fit in at all.

The fact that many (again, not all) persons with same-sex attractions have experienced this sort of isolation points out the importance of being compassionate and understanding when dealing with persons with same-sex attractions in the Church and in the community. The Church must, first and foremost, be a place where they feel that they are loved and accepted. If they do not feel this way, not only will they not come, they will also not be open to the Church's teachings on homosexuality.

Rather, they will feel that they are insensitive and simplistic dogmas handed down by a group of homophobes who don't understand or care about them.

A third factor that may come into play is a history of pain associated with heterosexual relationships. This is less common among men (though it is sometimes a factor), and more common among women — especially amongst lesbians who were previously married or in a long-term relationship with a man. The homosexual community usually tries to laugh off the idea that homosexuality can be caused by bad experiences with the opposite sex, but, at least within the lesbian community, there does seem to be a fairly high incidence of women who were deeply emotionally (and sometimes physically) wounded by a man in whom they placed a great deal of trust.

Retaining their desire for an intimate relationship, they therefore seek out another woman who will be more nurturing and maternal, easier to understand, easier to get along with, and generally less dominating. As a result of this, women with same-sex attractions tend to seek relationships that are more exclusive, more committed and less centered around sex.

In many cases, they are an attempt to achieve the intimacy and love of a marriage while reducing the emotional risks involved.

This explanation may seem a little unlikely, particularly since many self-identified lesbians are highly masculinized, apparently invincible and frighteningly outspoken. It can be difficult to associate the wounded, vulnerable woman I described above with the short-haired, irate feminists that scream “pro-choice” slogans at Christians who protest abortion. What we must keep in mind is that the anger that fuels this sort of feminism must, necessarily, be derived from fear — no one can hate an abstraction like “patriarchy” so much that it turns them into an abuse-hurling lunatic unless their hatred is fueled by a genuine and deep-seated terror of real men.

In some cases, this is the result of a particular trauma — spousal abuse, sexual molestations, etc. In others, it has less clear and less spectacular origins — and the fear may not be extended to men in general, but only to men with whom one tries to have relationships.

In my own case, I know that from a fairly early age I was emotionally reserved, and that by the time I reached high school this had developed into a positive terror of being emotionally vulnerable. As a feminist, I cemented this with the ideological conviction that dependence, vulnerability and emotionalism were all just forms of weakness that

men, in their desire for superiority, had labeled “feminine.” I enjoyed male company — I actually vastly preferred it to female company, because men are much more likely to accept emotional reservation in their friends. Romantic relationships were, however, an entirely different story.

Men like to be friends with women who are intelligent, independent and emotionally undemanding, but they expect more emotional involvement from a woman whom they’re dating. For the most part, they are more willing to let down their guard and be emotional under these circumstances, and, for obvious reasons, they expect that their own emotional vulnerability will meet with corresponding trust and openness from their partner.

This, for me, was completely terrifying.

Men were my intellectual competition. They had the natural emotional strength that I desired and wanted to imitate. The idea of being vulnerable around them seemed not only impossible, but even demeaning. This meant, of course, that my relationships with men were entirely doomed to failure.

So what made relationships with women different?

For one thing, women weren’t a threat. I wanted romantic relationships, of course, but I didn’t want them to compromise my independence or my control. I always perceived my relationships with men as a power struggle. The complementarity inherent in such a relationship demands mutual self-giving, and that self-giving seemed to compromise my sense of self.

With another woman I could always easily perceive myself as stronger, more intelligent and less dependent, and so there was no need for a struggle. I could have my romance, and still keep my distance.

In my own case, I was blessed with a very rapid healing process.

Once I had given up my homosexual practices, and embraced Mary as an ideal of femininity (more on this next week), I very quickly ceased to find other women attractive. Within a few short years, I have been blessed with a husband whom I love tremendously, and with two wonderful children on whom to practice those maternal virtues that I once eschewed.

Of course, there are many people whose wounds run deeper than mine did, and it is to these that we are called reach out — with charity, with compassion and the Good News of a God who offers healing and forgiveness.

*Next Week:*

*Evangelizing Homosexuals*

