

I request that I would be put on the schedule to speak and provide verbal testimony at the hearing. My name is Daren Mehl, I'm a resident of Warroad Minnesota, I am a Pastor, and I also once lived as a homosexual but I do not anymore. My romantic and sexual desires / attractions have changed. I want to address the committee directly verbally during the hearing.

I have also attached testimonies and their supporting documents related to HF16 and would like these provided to the committee and made available on the website.

1. Daren Mehl Testimony – Minnesota HF16.pdf
2. Gracie Poole Testimony – Minnesota HF16.pdf
3. Agape-Guide-1.1.pdf
4. Daren Mehl 8 week Study.pdf
5. G Zachariah White - Successful Resolution to Sexual-Religious Identity Conflict.pdf
6. Amazon Censors alternative views on Homosexuality.pdf
7. Changed Book Testimonies.pdf
8. differingviews.pdf
9. Facebook restores Christian ministries' pages after being removed _ U.S. News.pdf
10. Frontiers-in-Psychology-A-Retrospective-Study-of-US-Sexual-Minority-Adults-2016-2018.pdf
11. NATIONAL-TASK-FORCE-FOR-THERAPY-EQUALITY-FTC-COMPLAINT.pdf
12. Petition update What is _ex-gay_ and why do their books matter_Change.org.pdf
13. Two Prisms - Blogs and bits.pdf

I request that I would be put on the schedule to speak and provide verbal testimony at the hearing.

Thank you,

Pastor Daren Mehl
Warroad, MN

My name is Daren Mehl. I was created by God as a heterosexual male, was deceived to believe I was a gay man, lived as a homosexual for many years, and then Jesus Christ set me free from the death of that lifestyle and set me free from the desire to be sodomized by men or to sodomize other men. I am now a Pastor and a licensed minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ and provide spiritual and pastoral care to anyone who seeks to align their beliefs and behaviors to the teachings of Jesus Christ. I believe HF16 will harm me and those who seek to leave the LGBTQ cult community if it is passed and becomes law in Minnesota. I also believe it is wholly unconstitutional abridgement of my free speech and practice of religion.

To understand the claims I have about HF16 you must understand my journey of faith in Jesus Christ. Let me briefly tell my testimony of Jesus Christ:

Having been relentlessly teased by girls and boys in elementary and high school as a sissy, pansy, girly boy, gay, queer, and other pejoratives, I began to embrace the thoughts that perhaps they were right, I was gay. So I did what is common among many bullied people, I took the humiliation of being called gay and made it my identity, believing it would rob them of their strength and lose its power over me. However, in hindsight, adopting the homosexual identity became a power over me that lead me away from Jesus Christ and into a lifestyle of sin. And so I found I chose homosexuality as an identity to try to live out what I thought was how I was created (as gay) and never would be able to achieve the dream of having a wife and kids. It just wasn't in the cards for me. I was "other".

Even though I was a confessing Christian at the time of choosing a homosexual identity and behaviors, I couldn't reconcile that chosen behaviors of sodomy with the teachings of Jesus Christ. So for a time I chose to merge them into a vain imaginary 'gay Christian' identity. I tried this identity and belief merger by ignoring what I read in the Bible where sodomy is called a sin and that practicing homosexuals do not inherit the Kingdom of God. I also adopted an imaginary belief not found in the bible, but taught to me by the LGBTQ church, that I was created gay by God and couldn't change and didn't need to because it was a gift from God. With these in mind I hoped perhaps I could find peace as I lived this way for 8 years. I even attended a gay affirming church and had several serial "romantic" and "monogamous" relationships with men, practicing sodomy as an outward expression of what I believed at the time was love for them.

By the grace of Jesus Christ, because of a close friend choosing to share deep truths about God from his own journey with Jesus and the grace of God given to him, I was lead to begin a healing journey with Jesus. Jesus took me back to my childhood and started removing the barbs of lies and hurts that were tied around identity as a gay man.

As Jesus worked on my heart and mind over several years, I asked God to be made righteous according to God's standards through faith in Jesus Christ. By the mercy and grace of God, Jesus Christ delivered me. God gave me grace through faith in Jesus Christ resulting in persistent change of identity, desires, and behavior. I experienced change from exclusive homosexual desires to exclusive heterosexual desires. Jesus did this through at least a dozen sovereign interventions such giving me grace to forgive those who bullied and shamed me, lead me to being disciplined by reading the Bible and other testimony/discipleship books (some now banned by Amazon), speaking to Christian licensed therapists, prayer with others, and receiving pastoral care. All of which today according to HF16 would be labeled 'conversion therapy' and be prohibited.

When I accepted the homosexual identity, I had to give up my boyhood dream of being married to a woman and having children. But by the miracle of God, Jesus Christ restored that dream and now I've been married to my wife Rhoda, a female woman, since Dec 11, 2005, and we have a male son, Sebastian, born in 2013, and a female daughter, Esther, who was born in 2015.

I have experienced my romantic and sexual desires restored to heterosexual orientation, and in doing so I believe they are rightly ordered in righteousness and holiness before God. I have been given a family of my own and affirmed as a man and image bearer of God. I believe all this was the

redeeming and sanctifying work of Jesus Christ. I can attribute these miracles and the sustaining power to no other. And HF16 would prevent me from testifying and teaching of Jesus doing so for others.

The irony of my testimony of Jesus Christ that I just shared, in context of HF16, is that it would be labeled as ex-gay ministry, aka 'conversion therapy', and therefore categorized as disproven, discredited, harmful, and discriminatory against the LGBTQ community, and consumer fraud. The government has no authority to declare the work of Jesus Christ in my life as disproven and discredited, or that seeking Jesus, who said He is the way, the truth, and the life, to be harmful and discriminatory, nor a fraud. HF16 would do a great harm to my freedom to live my faith.

I believe I will be harmed by HF16 as it will likely empower the medical associations, specifically the LGBTQ religious belief affirming ones, the ones who see Christianity as a religious stigma to be avoided, put into their practices the "science" to diagnose my beliefs as an illness and recommend treatments to deprogram me from harmful religious dogma. As many statements already made by LGBTQ leaders and these medical associations suggesting that ex-gays are just suffering from 'internalized homophobia' or are victims of stigma created by religion and therefore denying our 'true selves'.

I am a Pastor and a licensed minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. HF16 would have an effect to chill my free speech and the free exercise of my Christian religious belief to 'go and make disciples of men'. I would not be able to provide pastoral care for those who as seeking to align their behaviors and identity to the teachings of Jesus Christ. It would be deemed fraud to say that a homosexual man can repent and experience change in romantic and sexual desires by renewing of the mind by washing of the Word and by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

HF16 would carve out a community of people, those who identify as LGBTQ, and prevent me from evangelizing and discipling them in the Christian faith. HF16 would prohibit proselytizing the LGBTQ community. Scripture says to go and make disciples of ALL people and I believe that to mean all people, even those who have isolated themselves in the LGBTQ community and identity away from Christianity. According to HF16, offering to disciple someone leaving the LGBTQ community and identity would be treated as 'conversion therapy' and be prohibited and considered discriminatory and fraud. God desires all to be reconciled to Him. Who am I not to live out in my calling and offer repentance, salvation, sanctification to those who seek it? No law can stop God's power to bring the Gospel to all people, and I will not stop.

Why does the government decide that LGBTQ identified people are not allowed to hear The Gospel or choose to become Christian disciples? In effect, that's what HF16 does. It chills, if not prevents, conversion from LGBTQ religious beliefs to Christian religious beliefs, especially in recognizing we are all created heterosexual by nature and all have the potential to be healed by Jesus out of the 'sexual orientation' of homosexuality. Effectively, HF16 is the state establishing the tenets of the LGBTQ religion as state doctrine, choosing one religious belief over another, and worse, criminalizing religious beliefs that the state doesn't endorse.

If sexual orientation and gender identity defines LGBTQ in HF16, my faith in Jesus Christ and my sexual orientation as now-heterosexual (ex-gay) and my identity as fully male defines me in the 1964 Civil Rights Act. My sexual orientation, gender, and faith should be treated equal under the law. Yet HF16 allows the state to discriminate against my faith? May it not be so! Sharing the Gospel message is the commandment from my Lord Jesus Christ to share with everyone, and it is GOOD NEWS, not bigotry or fraud. Why does HF16 in spirit work against my faith and make it unlawful to disciple LGBTQ identified people who want to identify as Christian? What interest does the government have in preventing LGBTQ people from converting to Christianity? Why does the government choose the LGBTQ beliefs to be the state's approved religious standard and prohibit my beliefs? Why can't I live out my faith as guaranteed by the First Amendment?

What is the test for religious discrimination if not the discrimination based on the message of the sincerely held belief? I sincerely believe I am heterosexual male created by God and that Jesus was the one who delivered me from sin, sanctified my thinking and desires, away from homosexuality to heterosexuality, away from the LGBTQ community and made me a member of His kingdom and a son in His royal family. He gave me new desires that are not an abomination, but are aligned to His will and to His love, and now I desire to serve Him for His glory.

My work as a Pastor and licensed minister will become restricted by HF16 which would prevent me from using my Constitutional rights to speech and practice of my religion but would call such speech and religious practice as fraud. It is tacitly admitting the goal of the bill is to impact religious practice and free speech. [This of course has been the LGBTQ lobby's agenda from the beginning. <https://bit.ly/SBProxy01>] And so it is targeting my religious belief by denying my Civil Rights and my First Amendment Rights to free speech and free practice of my Christian faith. "You Hypocrites!" What a double standard HF16 would be.

It is also my belief that HF16 would harm my rights as a father to my children. I believe that God ordained my children to be a male son and a female daughter. If my children become confused about their sex, and it is harmful to affirm a child as the opposite sex, both mentally and spiritually, I would be prevented from seeking assistance to help the child align to reality of them being male or female. HF16 would come between my rights to direct the lives of my children according to reality of sexed bodies and the convictions of our religious beliefs in Jesus Christ.

My Christian faith will be discriminated against even more with the passing of HF16. There is nothing equal under the law about how it treats me or those who want to leave LGBTQ. This is effectively a "must stay gay" bill. Those ideologies which cannot stand the test of truth use such tyranny as HF16 by force of law. Our civil rights will be decimated by this bill. We aren't just being sent to the back of the bus in our country, we'll be told to get off the bus, we aren't welcome in public. And then we'll be denied being able to purchase parts to build our own bus! If by some miracle we can build a bus, we won't be allowed to drive where we want to go. All the roads will lead to LGBTQ religion.

HF16 will harm me and our community of ex-LGBTQ Christians (Christians formerly identified as LGBTQ) if it is passed into law. Where is our equality? Are some more equal than others?

In Service and Obedience to Jesus Christ,
Pastor Daren Mehl
Warroad, MN

Religious Doctrines

Sanctification is the work of God to transform us into the image of His son, Jesus Christ. The bible clearly teaches that evil desires are idolatry, and that transgenderism and sodomy are abominations and sin. Yet God has a path for the person trapped by those sins. God demonstrated His love toward us that while we were enemies of our Creator, Jesus died for us. Jesus alone is the savior who reconciles us to Jesus. When the homosexual or transgender receives the gift of repentance, and believes on Jesus as Lord and Savior, they are made new, born again as saints of God, adopted into the Kingdom of God as coheirs with Jesus, children of God. While the new believer is yet a babe in the faith, God's grace through faith in Jesus will persevere them through many trials and testings. God the Father will wash His children's minds with the Word of God, and through baptism of water and with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the believer will be given grace through faith in Jesus to repent of evil desires.

God created us with needs. How we meet those needs, through behaviors, are based on what we believe are the best sources to meet our needs. God has promised to meet ALL OUR NEEDS in Him. When we get our needs met outside His will, in our own way turning to sin, that demonstrates

that we have an idol in our life. Sodomy is a belief that 'love is love' and that the act of sodomy with a man is an intimate and loving thing to meet the needs of male/male bonding. God makes it clear, and natural understanding available to all people makes it clear, that the act of sodomy is not how our bodies were designed. God also defines love as not harming others, not unbecoming, and not rejoicing in evil. Because God has defined sodomy as evil (an abomination as well), we know that it is evil and cannot therefore be called 'love'. We also know that our bodies were not made for penetration the way sodomy does, as it is harmful and everyone in the gay community knows what must be done to reduce harm, pain, and disease, up to and including using drugs. Again, we know for that reason it is not love.

God has created male intimacy in a spiritual brotherhood. There is an intimacy that a man can have with another man which is not romantic or sexual, but brotherly. This is how God has willed that men relate to each other. And by the power of God through faith in Jesus, the repentant homosexual can have a right-mind about relating to men. God can change a man's belief system and heart toward other men such that they no longer desire romantic / sexual behaviors, but rather seek friendship and brotherhood. This is the sanctifying power of God to transform.

God's desire is that none should perish but to repent and come to knowledge of Him. And once we repent, God begins to sanctify us and make us like Jesus – who is perfect and only did the will of the Father. God is a loving God who is the author of life and our lives. He has created every human as male or female for the purpose of marriage and carrying on the image bearing of God through procreation of new human children. The marriage between a man and a woman, for the sake of procreation of more humans, is for the glory of God and for mankind to enjoy being in fellowship with God. The sin of pride entered the world and disrupted our lives and worse separated us from our Creator. Our Created rectified this through Jesus. Those who believe and confess Jesus as Savior and Lord are reconciled to relationship with God. Sodomy and transgenderism is a prideful belief in self that separates the person from God and leads them to eternity without God, and that place is called hell. We desire to teach people there is life in God through faith in Jesus Christ and that eternal life with God is possible through repentance. And after repentance, the joy of living IN THE SPIRIT is to know God and be in fellowship with Him. To be in love with God, in Him, is our destiny. And the Christian is commanded to tell of this good news, this Gospel of Jesus Christ. And this good news is to be told and offered even to the LGBT identified individual. No false law of man can prohibit the good news being told to anyone nor can any false law of man call discipleship in Jesus Christ fraud.

I have attached "DiffereingViews.pdf" as a brief summary of the different doctrines related to LGBT. What I have explained is the fourth column, "Rebuild: Transformation" which would be considered "conversion therapy" and "fraud".

Other Evidence of Change is Possible

Lisa Diamond has made it very clear that sexual orientation is fluid and not immutable. HF16 assumes that sexual orientation is fixed and ontologically people ARE LGBTQ. This is not true nor does science support that claim. Rather that people are LGBTQ and cannot change is a false religious belief claim. See <https://bit.ly/LDExplains01>

Changed Movement

In 2018 a community of overcomers who are no longer sexually attracted to the same sex, that is ex-gay, gathered on the steps of the captiol in California to testify against AB2943 ("Conversion Therapy Ban & Fraud bill, similar to HF16) that Jesus does change hearts and minds and sets people free from homosexuality and that the AB2943 bill is harmful to people who want to leave LGBTQ to follow Jesus. www.changedmovement.com See attached "Changed Book Testimonies.pdf" for more information. Selling this book would be considered "Conversion Therapy Fraud" if HF16 were passed.

Therapy Equality / Scientific Integrity

There is a website I found very useful to explain the harms of therapy bans. www.therapyequality.org and a report about the deceptive APA – The APA REPORT <https://www.therapyequality.org/apareport/index.htm>

There is ample scientific evidence for change that the LGBT lobby works over time to discredit and censor. Attached is the following:

1. *Frontiers-in-Psychology-Absense-of-Behavioral-Harm-Following-Non-efficacious-Sexual-Orientation-Change-Efforts-A-Retrospective-Study-of-US-Sexual-Minority-Adults-2016-2018*
2. *NATIONAL-TASK-FORCE-FOR-THERAPY-EQUALITY-FTC-COMPLAINT.pdf*
3. *Two Prisms - Blogs and bits.pdf*
4. *G Zachariah White - Successful Resolution to Sexual-Religious Identity Conflict.pdf*

Continual Persecution and Civil Rights Violations under the banner of "Conversion Therapy"

Businesses are regularly emboldened to discriminate illegally against Christians for their religious views. Regularly we are being censored from social media just for telling our testimonies. In June 2022 I opened a Instagram account and began sharing testimonies of Jesus setting people of evil desires, the desires for sodomy or transgenderism. Within 3 days my account was closed for 'policy violations'. These organizations use the euphemism of "policy violation" as a means to discriminate against religious views of Christians. They regularly deny us access to their services because of our religious message of sanctification and healing of the repentant homosexual, a civil rights act violation. See the attached evidence of such discrimination,

1. Facebook restores Christian ministries' pages after being removed _ U.S. News.pdf
2. Amazon Censors alternative views on Homosexuality.pdf
3. Petition update · What is _ex-gay_ and why do their books matter_ · Change.org.pdf

I would also encourage you to visit <https://www.voiceofthevoiceless.info> who educate people about alternative views about homosexuality – specifically they amplify the testimonies of those who have left the LGBTQ community to follow Jesus Christ and also provide educational information about the healing / sanctifying process from evil desires for sodomy and transgenderism.

Agape First Ministries

Agape First Ministries equips the church with sound biblical doctrines around the transforming power of Jesus Christ to set the sinner free of sin and to restore them. The ministry has seen many individuals come out of the lgbtq identity and lifestyle to follow Jesus Christ as a dedicated disciple and experience fundamental healing of romantic and sexual desires which were to the same sex to develop for the opposite sex. We have seen many people go on to live full lives in heterosexual marriages and bear their own children, living life abundantly and authentically in Jesus Christ.

Attached is our ministry guide (Agape-Guide-1.1.pdf) which could be considered "conversion therapy" materials and labeled as fraud for claiming freedom in Christ for the repentant homosexual if HF16 were to pass.

The guide provides Christian doctrine, evangelistic information, and discipleship information. These are the kinds of materials that are regularly censored by those who promote LGBT religion and are bigoted toward Christians. We have a 1st amendment guarantee to be able to share this information in public.

The file "Daren Mehl 8 week Study.pdf" is an outline of a class I teach which includes my testimony and biblical study around human sexuality and freedom from homosexuality and transgenderism.

1/17/2023

My name is Grace Poole. I'm from the Twin Cities where I lived openly as a lesbian for 16 years. I moved two and a half years ago just West of the Twin Cities because my life had changed when I met Jesus and I desperately needed a fresh start away from the old LGBTQ identity and community. They rejected my new life and identity as a heterosexual Christian.

I was quite a young woman when someone first labeled me as gay. That false rumor spread and soon most people I knew labeled me as gay as well. The truth is, I had never even had a romantic or sexual thought about girls. I only saw them as friends. People told me I was denying who I was. They said it was clear to them I was queer. I ended up living in shame under the gay identity and an inauthentic life for a long time.

Looking back now over 19 years ago, I see how the loudest voices bullied me and manipulated my thoughts, and formed a gay identity for me based on their biases. I wasn't strong enough, big enough, or loud enough to speak up to defend myself, deny their oppressive labels, or assert my authentic self. I didn't have a safe space.

Now I am speaking up. I am speaking up for all of those who aren't strong enough or loud enough to speak for themselves. I am speaking up for all of those who are bullied and manipulated based off of other's biases.

My life went from dark, lost, scared, angry and confused to finding an unspeakable joy, love like I have never known, and very much found. I was lost but I was found by the love of Jesus. "For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." Luke 19:10 NIV

I found myself one night, very late, on my knees, begging God to take this from me. I didn't want it anymore. I wasn't asking God to take my life. I was asking Him to take this need I had to be affirmed by others of who I was.

It didn't happen right away but the walls that I had built so high started to come down. I found a community of other Christians, and a church that supported me and loved me in my brokenness. They encouraged me as my life changed right before their eyes. They loved me in practical ways and came alongside me and told me that I belonged.

The more time that I spent reading the Bible and spent time with other Christians the faster the dominos of sadness, shame, fear, and hopelessness, they all just faded away. They were replaced with an incredible love and an unspeakable joy.

My life will never be the same because of the love of Jesus and a few college friends who loved me enough to hang with me while God worked in me. I found a community where I belong and where I have been able to find healing.

Just like the caterpillar ceases to exist when the butterfly emerges, so to it was with me. I am someone completely new, with a new perspective, and a new purpose. I can stand tall, and complete not dependent on who anyone else says that I should be. I know who I am and Who's I am.

Please vote no on this bill. There are so many others with a story like mine that have been bullied and manipulated. Give them the chance to find that unspeakable joy and love if they so choose. Don't force them to stay trapped in darkness and pain when some of them long to find healing and hope.

Gracie Poole
Annadale, MN



AGAPE FIRST MINISTRIES

FREEDOM UNITED

MINISTRY GUIDE

A collection of teachings from Agape First Ministries

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This guide can be found on our website at <https://www.agapefirstministries.org/ministryguide>

All Agape First Ministries team members are missionaries and are self-funded. Please consider supporting Agape First Ministries directly as well as individually for each missionary. <https://www.agapefirstministries.org/agapestaff>

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Understanding Homosexuality: How Sin has Impacted Our Sexuality

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:31-32

Introduction

Every good story ends with a wedding. It is the ultimate consummation of love and devotion. Our desire for a wedding is built into the very fabric of our DNA. Why is this so important? This is our story. This is our destiny. As God’s people, we were created by Love for Love to love. We were created for a wedding, to be Jesus’ equally yoked partner for all of eternity. What a high and lofty calling!

However, for every truth there is a counterfeit; and the devil, the enemy of your soul, is working overtime to distort and destroy the high calling of God for your life. *“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy”* (John 10:10). Homosexuality is one of the significant ways the enemy is trying to destroy the destiny of this generation. As homosexuality distorts our understanding of sex and gender and God’s desire for a wedding, it keeps God’s people from embracing the fullness of His destiny for them as the Bride of Christ.

The Beginning of Understanding

To understand homosexuality biblically, we must go back to the very beginning. Genesis 1:26-27 says, *“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”* Men and women are called to bear God’s image here on the earth. Individually, both men and women equally reflect unique aspects of God’s image. God’s design for His people is communion, so when man and woman come together in marriage, they bear the fullness of God’s image here on the earth. It is in the context of heterosexual marriage that we have the fullest picture of who God is and how He acts in relationship. It is the great dance of the masculine and the feminine on full display.

We were also created for intimacy without shame. Genesis 2:24-25 says, *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”* In God’s original design, Adam and Eve were completely known and yet, felt no shame about who they were. Life in the garden was perfect. Adam understood what it meant to be a man created in God’s image. Likewise, Eve understood what it meant to be a woman created in God’s image. They understood that when they came together in marriage, they formed a more complete picture of who God is. There was no confusion or disorder.

Yet despite their intimacy with God, Adam and Eve entered into a conversation with darkness (Gen. 3:1). Dialogue with darkness *always* ends in darkness. Adam and Eve were deceived. They sinned. They forgot who they were and to whom they belonged. This led to fear, shame, hiding, confusion, and disorder. The results of this conversation are still seen today.

At the core of the homosexual struggle is identity confusion. Each of us—regardless of whether or not we struggle with homosexuality—is struggling to figure out who we are. There are powerful voices all around us—the enemy, the world, our flesh—that try to name and speak identity into us apart from the reality of who God created us to be. Homosexuality is just one more way to try to find what was lost in the garden: identity. Deception leads to identity confusion, which leads to gender confusion, sexual confusion, and marriage confusion. There is a disconnect between the goodness of our given identity and our self-understanding of that identity. As Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, a leading therapist for the treatment of homosexuality, puts it,

Self-deception about our gender is at the heart of the homosexual condition. A child who imagines that he or she can be the opposite sex or be both sexes is holding on to a fantasy solution to his or her [gender] confusion. This is a revolt against reality and a rebellion against the limits built into our created human natures
A Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality, Nicolosi, 22

A Basic Understanding

Regarding the issue of homosexuality, God's Word is very clear: homosexual behavior is always sin (Lev. 18:22, 1 Cor. 6:9-10). Period. That being said, whenever homosexuality is referenced, the Bible always addresses the behavior of homosexuality, not the person. This is a crucial distinction to make. While God clearly condemns homosexual behavior, He honors the reality that even those who struggle with homosexuality have been created in His image and have intrinsic value and worth. In other words, you and I are not simply the sum of our sin and brokenness. **We are not named or identified by our fallenness. This means also that there is no such thing as a homosexual person from God's point of view, only broken heterosexuals in God's heterosexual creation.**

The development of homosexuality is a very complex issue. It would be unfair to generalize how and why different people develop homosexual attractions. Each one struggling is an individual with a unique story, and there are a multitude of factors that may set someone up for a struggle with this issue. While the particulars of a struggle may be different, ultimately homosexuality is not really about sex; instead it is a confused desire for love. We were made with a desire to love and be loved at the core of who we are. Yet when that deepest longing of the human heart isn't met, it can become confused and even sexualized.

Before we go any further, let's look at some oversimplifications about homosexuality:

"People choose to be homosexual." People do not choose to have homosexual attractions. In fact, for many the revelation of these attractions can be a terrifying discovery. That said, one always has the choice of what to do with homosexual attractions and whether those attractions will become a part of one's identity (i.e. gay).

"Homosexuals are demon-possessed." Whenever there is a stronghold of sin and brokenness in one's life, the presence of demonic strongholds must always be considered. However, the presence of homosexual attractions demonstrates a breakdown in personal, spiritual, and relational development. Thus, homosexuality should not simply be understood as a spiritual stronghold in need of deliverance.

"People are born gay." There is no scientific proof that homosexuality is inborn. None. However, homosexual attractions are often the result of longstanding relational patterns, and thus have been developed and reinforced over a significant period of time. In other words, while homosexual attractions may not be inborn, in many ways they may feel "natural" to those who experience them.

At the core of a homosexual struggle (or its variants) is attachment loss. For whatever reason baby boy or girl was not able to attach to mom or dad and their same-sex peers in a way that their identity was fully informed. (Remember our attachments inform our identity.) The Good News is Jesus has made a way for us to once again experience attachment to the Heavenly Father, and the Father has all the information needed to inform our identities.

A breakdown in healthy bonding can be caused by many factors:

- Physical, emotional, or spiritual absence of the father
- Emotionally engulfing mother
- Abusive parent
- Illness in baby or mom after birth
- Early childhood exposure to pornography
- Positive reinforcement of same-sex sexual experiences
- Teasing / bullying
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Generational sin

Generally, it is not usually one of these factors, but several, that add up over time. When baby, or little boy/girl, does not form the necessary attachments to inform their identity, the little one will struggle to develop a healthy sense of belonging. Foundational truths such as, "I belong to a family; I belong to the world of my same-sex peers;" or simply, "I belong;" never take root. This lack of sense of belonging can make it really hard for a same-sex attracted person to assimilate into a Church body.

More Specific Understanding Regarding Men and Women

For men, a struggle with homosexuality is indicative of a **disconnection** from the masculine (a core sense of strength.) It is through little boy's attachment to dad (or a father substitute) and the world of men that he comes to understand who he is as a man. Men learn how to be men by being with other men and doing what they do.

Disconnected from the true masculine, little boy will instinctively look for a solution to repair the deficit in his soul. The enemy is quick to offer sex as a solution to little boy's attachment

loss and sense of gender emptiness. The lie being, “maybe if you attach to another man sexually you will get the missing information about who you are as a man.”

For women, a struggle with homosexuality reveals a **rejection** of femininity. Many women struggling with same-sex attractions report experiencing some form of abuse as a little girl, or they witnessed mom experiencing abuse. Femininity becomes a vulnerability and is rejected as a way to self-protect from further hurt (usually from a man.)

Nevertheless, little girl remains disconnected from a vital part of her identity as a woman. And, once again, sex is offered as a solution to said disconnect. Attaching to femininity in another woman through sex soothes the pain of being internally disintegrated from the good the feminine.

But sex can never put back together the fractured parts of our identity. For this, we need a Savior. Through the cross, men and women alike can reconnect with the Heavenly Father. And, rightfully bonded to our Creator, the broken person can finally receive the Truth that will heal the gender disintegration hindering their capacity to love and be loved rightly.

Ultimately, homosexuality is an affront to the image of God and His created intent for His people. The enemy knows this and is using this issue to plant deception in the hearts of God’s people about who they are and how they should act.

How God Heals

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus Christ has life-changing power. He has power to heal and restore. The power of God, made available through the finished work of the cross, is a reality available to all believers, even those struggling with homosexuality. God is in the business of healing and transforming lives affected by homosexuality!

Ultimately, the foundational work of healing is about receiving a new identity. For those who are in Christ, that new identity is one that is bestowed at salvation:

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NIV)

Jesus has been in the business of healing homosexuality and giving new identity for over 2000 years!

Healing means that homosexuality no longer has the power to name you. Often a struggle with homosexuality can be life-dominating. Rooted in stunted emotional, spiritual, and relational development—it feels very natural. Though it is a broken attempt at receiving love and identity, much of its power comes from the fact that it does, in some ways, meet those needs. It gives

meaning to one’s pain and often provides the struggler with a sense of belonging (i.e. the gay community). Nevertheless, because of the new identity bestowed on all believers at salvation, we have been given a new identity and the power to live beyond the pain of our unmet needs. In fact, God can meet those very needs!

Healing is about coming into agreement with God regarding who He is and His original intent for humanity. This means renouncing lies about who you are. This includes false names and labels spoken over you such as “gay,” “queer,” “girl,” “dyke,” and “lezzie.” Renouncing these labels means taking authority against the lies of the enemy through the power of the blood of Jesus.

Healing also involves moving beyond lies and embracing the fullness of your true identity in Christ. As men and women, each of us has been given the honor of bearing God’s image in our bodies and in how we relate to others. For your part, you must choose to come into agreement with God’s Word about who He has created you to be as a man or woman. Regardless of feelings, this is an essential part of the healing process, and one that must be walked out daily. Just as false names and labels often form identity and self-perception, so the process of renewing your mind and bringing it into alignment with God’s mind is just that—a process. Say yes to the process, and God will be faithful to daily meet you and strengthen you as you come into agreement with His heart. He is for you!

Journeying Toward Wholeness

God’s healing work in your life is a process. Healing can be an event, but it is also something you must walk out daily. Ultimately, God heals the homosexual the same way He heals everyone: through the finished work of the Cross. Through relationship, we are filled and empowered to live differently. Healing is about relationship.

This means healing isn’t about getting a quick fix. God isn’t interested in “zapping” you so that you can simply go back to living a selfish, narcissistic life. Instead, He desires that in the place of your wounding, you will experience healing. Although we are all wounded in relationship, our healing comes through relationship as well. Healing comes in learning to live in relationship with God.

Homosexual attractions may not simply disappear after six months (or ever, for that matter). In calling us into relationship with Himself, God does not take away our past. He doesn’t give us a frontal lobotomy. We must cooperate with Him in doing the hard work of living differently, making different choices about who we are, and determining where we will look to for love, life, meaning and purpose.

Ultimately, the opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality, it is holiness.

Conclusion

Jesus wants a wedding. Revelation 19:6-7 says,

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunders, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

Jesus is returning for a pure and spotless bride. The real question this generation must ask is *not*, what is my sexual identity? Am I gay, straight, or bisexual? The most important question you can ask yourself is, am I ready for Jesus? Is my heart ready to meet Him? Am I prepared for eternity?

Some Pastoral Care Helps:

1. **Attachment.** *"At the core of a homosexual struggle (or its variants) is attachment loss."* Helping the struggler attach to God in a meaningful way should always be first and foremost in our pastoral care. This includes helping the struggler learn to have a life-giving prayer life as well as how to connect with God in worship and through acts of service. This is a time to model unconditional love and grace to the struggler. They will not be able to attach to God and the body of Christ if they do not first feel safe, and their sense of safety is bolstered by building trust over time with a pastoral caregiver.
2. **Identity.** *"Our attachments inform our identity."* Providing a healthy diet of truth to the struggler regarding who they are as a man or woman created in God's image is essential. It is paramount that the struggler grows in their understanding of their intrinsic value and worth simply because they are created in God's image. Truth about our identity is a powerful force against shame and fear. Knowing that they are known by God and others (e.g. the pastoral caregiver) is another means of building trust and establishing a sense of safety.

Belonging. *"When baby, or little boy/girl, does not form the necessary attachments to inform identity, the little one will struggle to develop a healthy sense of belonging."* The struggler may need lots of help integrating into your church body. Again, time and grace are of the essence. It is important here to major on the majors and minor on the minors. Some things, while they may be off putting to some in church culture, really aren't worth correcting on the front end.

Confronting "Gay Christian" Theology

I have been in ministry to people with unwanted same-sex attractions for over 20 years. During this time, I have watched the cultural landscape shift radically in regard to the issue of homosexuality. Nowadays, the "gay lifestyle" is embraced, accepted, and even celebrated in all spheres of life. It is normal to see gay couples get married or engaging in sexual behaviors on primetime television. This was not the case all that long ago. The shift came quickly and took many in the Church by surprise.

Now I am watching the landscape of the Church change in this regard as well. In the same way, the shift is coming quickly and is taking many by surprise. Most mainline denominations more than tolerate—they ordain gay clergy, marry gay couples, and encourage same-sex attracted youth to embrace their "gayness" as a gift from God and a blessing to others. What is even more shocking is now, once-stalwart evangelical churches and organizations are falling prey to "gay Christian" theology—the thinking that it is okay to be a Christ-follower and embrace a gay identity. While there are different expressions of the "gay Christian" (some choose celibacy while others marry their partners), the bottom line is clear: to embrace the gay identity in any way is an affront to the image of God in men and women, and it is contrary to what God has commanded in His Word.

God's creation is heterosexual (Genesis 1:26-27). Within God's heterosexual creation, there are two sexes: male and female; and two genders: masculine and feminine. ("Sex" is the unchangeable biological reality of being male or female. In this article, I am using the traditional/Biblical definition of the term "gender" which speaks of spiritual realities found in the Image and character of God.) In God's created order, there is always one and then the other. In the macro understanding of this principle, we have God who, in the masculine, initiated a love relationship with the Church, His Bride. We see the macro played out in the micro: married love between a man and a woman (Ephesians 5:31-32).

"Hetero" is different from the prefix "homo" which means "same." There are, not two, but one. The good news for the same-sex attracted is that in God's creation, there is no such thing as a homosexual, only heterosexuals, however broken he or she may have gotten in this world. We all have to live in the flow of the reality God has established, regardless of our feelings or attractions.

Gender is a way of categorizing characteristics. The historical meaning of gender is "things we treat differently because of their inherent differences." Biblical gender is the compilation of characteristics that make up who God is (the feminine) and how He acts within relationships (the masculine.) It includes the distinction between God's being and His activity. Right away in Genesis 1:1, we see God as a gendered being—In the beginning God (being) created the heavens and the earth (activity). God continues to make distinctions as He creates: light and dark, day and night, land and sea, the heavens and the earth. God solidifies distinction within Himself—He IS and He DOES. He creates for six days (activity) and on the seventh day He rests (being). Distinction is important to God.

God continues to make distinction in Genesis 1:26-27: Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

In God's creation, unity or union does not do away with distinction. There will always be a distinction between God and man, man and creation, and male and female.

Paganism always tries to do away with distinction. The goal of paganism is that all would become one; God and man, man and creation, male and female, etc. are simply "one with the universe." We see this lack of distinction being played out in human culture's many sordid expressions of sexuality. It seems anything goes these days! Culture wants to do away with any gender distinction or the gender binary. Dr. Peter Jones, author of *The God of Sex*, says that when the primary binary (God and His creation) is eliminated, all other binaries crumble.

Homosexuality has its roots in paganism. This is why the movement to promote homosexuality is so powerful. It is not just about sex, or even whom you choose to love; it has a spiritual component. When the creature is worshiped rather than the Creator, demons are present. Our sexuality is a reflection of our spirituality.

To take on a gay identity is to step outside of God's created order and out of the flow of reality. It is to reject one's sense of belonging in God's creation. Taking on a gay identity essentially shuts down the healing process and hinders receptivity of future blessings the Lord has in His heart for the struggler. It is letting the "old man" remain and refusing to walk in righteousness and holiness. God will never ask you to be or do what He forbids in His word.

But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:20-24).

These words may seem bold or even harsh, but now is the time for boldness and courage, Church! I believe that "gay Christian" theology (in all its varied forms) is the greatest danger to the Western Church today. It threatens the very foundation of our understanding of God, His creation, and our place within His creation. It is an assault on the image of God and the distinction He has established between Himself and creation.

Let me conclude by clarifying a couple of issues. First, one's temptations and life-dominating issues do not determine salvation. There are many individuals who are born-again believers, yet they still struggle with unwanted same-sex attractions. We are saved by God's grace available through Jesus Christ, not by our ability to keep His Law or to avoid temptation.

Second, God loves everyone within the "gay community." His heart is burning to see His children return to Him. Many individuals have been wounded and rejected by the Church's poor response to their struggle with same-sex attractions. A compassionate, biblical understanding of homosexuality within the Church has been needed for a very long time.

With that said, the current "gay Christian" conversation and shift that is now taking place within the Church is not based on a biblical understanding of homosexuality. The Church is sorely lacking a scriptural understanding of biblical gender and the image of God.

We must be firm in our convictions in this hour. We must dig deeply into Genesis 1:26-27 and seek the Lord for wisdom and understanding of His image. There is great clarity that comes from returning to the Word of God and beholding His character. Let us make haste to see God rightly for only then can we truly see one another as He intended.

Understanding Biblical Gender: How Men and Women are Created in God's Image

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:26-27

While the biblical witness is clear that the living God transcends sexuality, that he is neither male nor female, it is equally clear that he encompasses masculinity and femininity within himself. Indeed, we are created in his image as male and female. (See Genesis 1:27; 5:1,2)

Donald Bloesch, The Battle for the Trinity

Gender is a reality and a more fundamental reality than sex.

C.S. Lewis, Perelandra

Introduction

You were created to bear God's image. Your spirit, soul, and body were meant to reflect the nature and character of the One who created you. This is a privilege that has only been given to human beings. Think about it: the God of the universe not only *allows* you; He *calls* you to demonstrate who He is to the world. This means something to God, and it means something to the enemy as well.

Before we get too far, let's start with some definitions. In this resource guide, the terms sex and gender will be used *differently*. Biblical gender is the characteristics that make up who God is and how He acts in relationship. This is different from the term "sex," which refers to the physical characteristics that distinguish male and female. Biblical gender is about spiritual

realities found in the image of God which we discern through the Bible. Sex is about our bodies. Culture would say gender is a social construct or something that originates in the mind; but God is the source of gender and the goal of this resource is to point you to Him.

As Sam A. Andreades, author of *enGendered*, wrote, “Gender is hard to understand because God is hard to understand.” But, we are praying for a great release of wisdom in the body of Christ—that the knowledge of the Holy would once again be among us. For, it is only when we understand our relationship to our Creator that we can truly relate to one another in love and truth.

God—the Source of Gender

God has gender. That is to say, He is fully masculine and fully feminine. Within the Image of God we see the power to act (the masculine) and the capacity to be (the feminine.) In fact, we see God as a being with gender right away in Genesis 1:1: *In the beginning God (being) created the heavens and the earth (doing).* God IS and God DOES. Understanding gender within the Image of God helps us understand ourselves as men and women and it points us toward our eternal destiny as Image Bearers. Andrew Comisky, founder of Desert Stream Ministries and pioneer in ministry to the sexually and relationally broken, writes, “Gender difference—and harmony in that difference—points beyond itself; it offers us a glimpse of heaven. Rightfully ordered, the dance of [masculinity and femininity]—desire and restraint, initiative and response, fruitfulness and frustration—gives us a window to our cosmic destiny.”

When we lose a right view of the Image of God, we lose touch with who we are as Image Bearers. The wisdom of righteousness is interpreted as chains and shackles that bind instead of truth that sets one free to truly love (See Proverbs 29:18; Psalm 2.)

And, in knowing this proverbial reality we can clearly discern the enemy’s strategy: systematically remove the good of gender distinction from society so that men and women do not order their lives in such a way that they get to the marriage supper of the Lamb. First, he sought to undefine marriage and now gender is in his sights. Beloved, it is time for the Church to rise up in strength and declare the truth. Time is of the essence. This guide will help you.

Understanding Gender—Spirit, Soul and Body

God is spirit. Therefore, to be “created in His Image” goes much deeper than just our physical bodies. Your human spirit is the deepest part of who you are. It is the place you were meant to have union with God—His Spirit and your spirit communing together. Your human spirit reveals the Image of God, as does your soul and your body. Your body (the physical) reveals something about your spirit (the unseen part of you.) This means your biological sex (the body you were born in) matters in light of eternity.

Your body denotes the gender to which you *belong*—men to the masculine and women to the feminine. This is not to say that women do not possess the power to act and men are not able to simply be. Quite the contrary. Men are made to be as well as do, but they must do it as men

in a male body. And likewise, women are made to act as well as be, but they must do it as women in a female body.

Mario Bergner, author of *Setting Love in Order*, writes, “Clearly, it is correct for a man to say that his is a masculine gender identity and for a woman to say that hers is a feminine one. We not only possess masculine and feminine qualities, but also by our sex we belong to one gender or the other. A secure sense of belonging to one’s gender is central to having a healthy personal identity.”

Our Creator, holding all that is true and real within Himself, reflects both the masculine and feminine, and so do we. The more nearly we function in His image, the more nearly we reflect both the masculine and the feminine their proper balance—that is, in the differing degrees and aptitudes appropriate to our sexual identities as male and female.
Leanne Payne, *Crisis in Masculinity*

As we walk out the truth of who we were created to be (spirit, soul, and body) we are walking in radical holiness. And this holiness is available to all who make Jesus Christ Lord of their lives—no matter how marred God’s Image is within them. Jesus died to set those bound up in unrealities regarding their sex and gender free. And, there is power in His blood for the hurting to make peace with his or her sex and gender. Through the cross, Jesus has made a way to bind up the *disintegrated* parts of who we are and fully transform us into His likeness. For, *by His wounds we are healed* (Isaiah 53:5d).

God’s Heterosexual Creation

God’s creation is heterosexual. The prefix “hetero” means, “different or distinction.” This is opposed to the prefix “homo” which means “same.” In God’s creation there are always two—one and the *other*. This is the foundation for gender distinction or the gender binary. Culture wants to do away with the gender binary; but such an action would be doing away with the image of God as revealed in male and female, masculine and feminine.

God’s image cannot be seen or experienced within homosexuality (or its variations) because there is no binary—there is no other. This is why so called “gay marriage” is so destructive to society. Again, no right vision of God, no restraint in our behavior.

“Our sexuality is a reflection of our spirituality” (Dr. Peter Jones, *The God of Sex*.) The issue of homosexuality is not just about who one chooses to love, it is about our view of God who is Love. Despite what culture may say, “love” is not always Love.

Understanding the Divine Order

What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it.
C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*

In God's heterosexual creation, both the masculine and the feminine are needed, as each represent aspects of who God is and how He acts in relationship. One isn't better than the other. In fact, they complement one another. Biblical masculinity and femininity highlight different characteristics of God's heart. That being said, in God's design there is an order: the masculine comes first and the feminine follows.

In relation to God, we are all feminine. According to 1 John 4:19, God, the Great Initiator, first loved us, and this selfless love has awakened our hearts to respond to Him in love and adoration. "...All of humanity, males and females alike, are in the feminine position of responding to God's acts of initiation. Moreover, when we refer to the church as she (or as the Bride of Christ), we do not mean that it is composed of females. Nor when we refer to God as He (or to Christ as our Bridegroom) do we mean that God is male (Mario Bergner, *Setting Love in Order*).

This Divine Initiative and human response are at the heart of our understanding of creation and our place within it as gendered people. God is the Creator and we are His creation. He is the Potter and we are the clay.

The Broken Image

In Genesis 3:1, Adam and Eve were invited into a conversation with the serpent, "Has God indeed said ...?" With one simple question, the enemy attacked the True Masculine and the True Feminine. As the serpent came into the garden, Adam, who was called to embody the True Masculine, was meant to protect Eve from the deception of the serpent. He did not act. Unprotected, Eve responded to the serpent by simply operating in her natural capacity for relationship, True Femininity. Her protector was not present to keep her from deception, and as a result, gender has been disordered ever since.

We live in a fallen world. We are wounded by the presence of sin and brokenness, hindered in our ability to give and receive love. Ultimately, we are hindered in our ability to bear God's image in and through our bodies. As men and women, we are all created to uniquely bear God's image. But as we pursue life and relationship apart from God, that image in us is distorted.

Dialogue with darkness ends in darkness. We were never meant to have conversations with the enemy. It didn't end well for Adam and Eve and it won't end well for us. Our attachments (securely formed relationships) inform our identity. In the garden, the enemy called the character of God into question which caused Adam and Eve to doubt the goodness of the Lord. The enemy attacked Adam and Eve's secure attachment to the Lord. Disconnected from their Source and walking in unbelief, Adam and Eve were disempowered to walk in the good of their gender.

Enter fear, shame, and disorder. But, we must remember this was not God's original intent. We cannot deny the reality of sin's impact on creation in the face of the massive gender confusion present in society. As the Church, we must lovingly and gracefully correct the unreality of the sexually and relationally broken. For, "love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth"(1 Corinthians 13:6).

A Call to Action

We are living in a Psalm 2 crisis. The people are plotting in vain and the rulers have set themselves against the Lord and His Anointed saying, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us." Culture desires to cast off the restraint of gender difference and sexual boundaries set forth by our Creator to protect us and free us to love rightly.

Our first course of action as a Church must be to REPENT.

"...If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14).

I want to highlight 5 areas where the Church of America needs to repent regarding the LGBTQ issue:

1. **Passivity**—Like Adam in the garden we have allowed the serpent to walk right into our congregations and inform the people on issues of sex and gender. "Did God really say homosexual behavior was sin? Did God really say a man dressing like a woman (or vice versa) was sin? After all, Jesus didn't have a sexual ethic, He only had a love ethic." Our passivity has led to a great deception in the Church and the only cure is to turn to God. Like the Laodicean Church (Revelation 2:14-22) we must anoint our eyes with eye salve so that we can clearly see the wave of delusion sweeping across the Body of Christ.
2. **Fear of Intimidation**—One of the main strategies of the LGBTQ activists is intimidation. They threaten lawsuits, defamation of character, and the destruction of businesses that uphold Biblical values. And, to be fair, the gay lobby *is* powerful and well-funded. But, have we forgotten our Lord Jesus is far more powerful and far more well-funded? It is time for the strength and courage of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (See Daniel 3). We know our God is mighty to save, but even if He doesn't, we must no longer bow down to the god of this age.
3. **Agreement with Culture**—The Biblical witness is clear. God is never found in agreement with the understanding or expression of sexuality promoted by culture. In fact, He sent prophet after prophet to exhort His children to turn from the worship of Baal and Asherah—worship which included homosexual practice and temple prostitution.

Sadly, many churches are now walking in agreement with the witness of culture instead of the Biblical witness on LGBTQ issues. We must break our agreement with this present darkness and come into agreement with what God says regarding sex and gender.

4. **Denying the Transforming Power of the Gospel**—Jesus Christ has life-changing power that can radically transform the core of the repentant sinner. Unfortunately, many in

the Church no longer believe this truth for the LGBTQ person. Instead, they encourage gay and lesbian men and women to wear the label “gay Christian.” “It’s OK to be gay, just don’t act it.” WRONG!

Jesus Christ is able to transform anyone who humbly turns to Him—homosexuals included (See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We must have a higher vision of Jesus and His ability to perfect our faith. The process may take a lifetime, but nonetheless He is able to complete the good work He began in us. (More on this later...).

5. **Not Having the Lord’s Heart for the LGBTQ Community**—Jesus longs for those lost in the LGBTQ lifestyle to return to Him. They are dear to Him. He died for them. Those in the LGBTQ community are precious to the Lord and we must share His heart as we seek and save the lost.

We must make a place for LGBTQ people to belong in our congregations, even while they are still being sanctified. They are not going to do the process perfectly, but no one does! They need grace, and safety, and lots of love if they are going to learn the trust they will need to attach to the Lord and His body in such a way that they can heal and overcome their brokenness.

And so, let us make haste to the place of prayer. Let us repent deeply that we might shine brightly. And let us hold out the word of life to a world desperately in need of True Love.

Maintaining Hope

...those who hope in Me will not be disappointed (Isaiah 49:23).“

Upon the heels of the US Supreme Court legalizing “gay marriage” in all 50 states, the transgender movement exploded on the scene, further muddying the waters of sex and gender. Now parents are raising their children “gender neutral,” allowing for time for them to decide their sex at will.

As strangers in this world, we don’t understand such episodes and examples of nonsense, wickedness and evil. As believers we should be ever growing in our comprehension of love. Darkness makes less and less sense to those living in the light. It’s true that we too once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air and were, therefore, sons of disobedience (see Eph. 2:1-3). But, now we have been made alive. The curse has been reversed. We are sons of God. And we see things very differently now. We have hope.

But how do we maintain this hope in the midst of growing confusion, darkness, nonsense, and evil?

To hope is to desire with expectation of obtainment, to expect with confidence. The biblical concept of hope is not mere expectation and desire, as in Greek understanding, but includes trust, confidence, and refuge in God.

For Christians, hope is supernatural. It is the result of the Holy Spirit empowering our desire for God and His great and precious promises. This supernatural hope empowers the soul to trust in the character of

God even, as Corrie Ten Boom says, “when life gives you reasons not to.” Our hearts can be confident in love before God.

God is the source of our expectation—He gives us vision. We begin to hope. By hoping we are coming into agreement with God—He is the God of all hope. Where there is agreement with God there is blessing and empowerment. There is unity with the Holy Spirit in our souls. We walk by faith.

Life in this fallen world is hard. It can be discouraging to be surrounded by so much evil. But, in the midst of the difficulty, we must maintain our hope. Hope is the basis of our faith in God. It is an expression of our love. And it is a powerful weapon of righteousness. The enemy of our souls desires to destroy our hope! But we must not lose heart.

A hopeful soul is an empowered soul. A downcast soul is a disempowered soul. Beloved, in this hour of human history we must hold onto hope for dear life!

The key to maintaining hope (and joy for that matter) is to choose to see Love and the opportunity for togetherness in every situation. It is the attitude of relationship.

The despairing soul is not able to see Love in every circumstance. It is the attitude of abandonment. With no hope of togetherness all that is left is the lonely task of trying to do the impossible by oneself. Talk about depressing!

If you have lost hope in a particular area of life, you need a fresh vision of Love in this matter. New vision gives new opportunity to choose hope. Remember, the Holy Spirit will be quick to empower you in the hard work of hope!

I’ll never forget a scene one month after the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre when 26 people were murdered by pure evil. Some of the parents of the murdered children spoke out at a press conference. A mom whose little girl, Anna, had been tragically ripped from her life, talked of how her faith in God had been a sustaining factor in the midst of unthinkable tragedy. Her closing statement was this: “We choose love. Love wins in Newtown and may love win in America.” WOW! She maintained hope because she could see Love in the midst of evil!

Hope does not disappoint. There will be justice for this precious mom and the many others who lost loved ones in this tragedy. Ultimately, there will be justice for those who choose to stand for the truth of God’s image in the midst of great sexual immorality. Evil does not win. Terror does not win. LOVE wins! WE WIN!

Very soon “The kingdoms of this world [will] become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). There is much to hope for in this hour. Jesus is soon returning and He will make the wrong things right. He brings judgment to those who refuse Him and reward to those who love Him.

I hope for that day of victory. I hope for the fullness of my salvation—a new, resurrected body. I hope for justice once and for all—evil driven off of the planet forever. I hope for eternity with my Bridegroom—the One who loved me and gave Himself for me. I hope for the Father making His dwelling place, His resting place, with me eternally. I will not be disappointed. And neither will you, my friend.

My hope is a powerful weapon. It sustains my heart through trial and tribulation. It supports my faith in times of suffering. It drives my heart into joy. Hoping in the Lord renews my strength and guards my soul against weariness (see Isaiah 40:31).

As you seek to grow in hope, pray Ephesians 1:17-19 for the opening of your eyes of faith.

Do not be downcast. Do not be disturbed. Learn to see love in every situation. Look for the opportunity for relationship with God in every circumstance. Choose to walk and to love in every situation. Watch mountains move and see that relationship with God works every time.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit
Romans 15:13

God's Strategy in the Midst of Persecution

Overcoming the life- dominating aspects of unwanted same-sex attractions (SSA) is difficult. Homosexuality is rooted in deep woundedness and driven by pain and anger; it can feel like the prison door will never open. Add to that the shifts in our culture and freedom can seem even more elusive. Nearly all spheres of life are now supportive of embracing a gay identity, including much of the Western Church. Someone who chooses to walk away from unwanted SSA in this day and age is a target for much persecution. We at Agape First Ministries are very much a hated entity by the world in which we live.

But we do not lose heart. Jesus warned us of such hatred and persecution. In fact, His counsel was to not be surprised by such things—the world hated Him first because He testified that its works are evil (John 7:7). “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you (John 15:18). We are in good company. Furthermore, He went on to say, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you (John 15:19.) The hatred of the world is a testimony that we are not of the world. We have been chosen OUT of this world! Hallelujah! Therefore, we do not marvel at the world's hatred of us but at the reality that we are now God' children by His love. We do not fix our eyes on hatred, but on love.

The key to moving well through persecution is where we fix our gaze. The devil loves to pull away our focus. In many ways, his primary goal is the persecution of the saints—to get their eyes off of Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith.

King David understood the importance of gazing upon the beauty of the Lord in times of trouble. Psalm 27 is a prime example of his warfare strategy. In verses 1-3, he declared that the Lord is his light and his salvation in the midst of impending war. His confidence came from what he saw in the light: a strong God who was fighting for him. What did he have to be afraid of? God was on his side.

In 27:4 he proclaimed, “One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.” David did not want to be caught up in what he could see or hear in the natural realm. He wanted to behold the beauty of the Lord and talk to God about the many issues he was facing as the new king of Israel. What a profound strategy and life vision!

When I fail to see God in my circumstances, I quickly lose hope. I mean, let's face it, no one wants to experience hatred. We certainly weren't created for such an experience. Persecution for the Christian faith is happening in our country and will most likely increase in the coming years. I refuse to let self-pity or fear rob me of my glory as a son of God.

King David made good on his life vision. After he was anointed king over all of Israel and established his throne in Jerusalem, he brought the Ark of the Covenant to Mount Zion and established a worship center. The sacrifices offered in this tabernacle were very different from the tabernacle of Moses; they were not just animals, but ones of praise, joy, and thanksgiving (Psalm 95:2, 100:4, 141:2). David hired, and paid out of his own pocket, for singers and musicians to worship the Lord day and night. David and his kingdom were blessed and protected.

In this evil age, I have taken a page out of David's playbook and established a House of Prayer with the goal of offering the sacrifices of praise, joy, and thanksgiving, as well as our petitions to the Lord day and night. I am convinced that this is the only way to operate wisely in the changing culture. Like David, we believe we will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Psalm 27:13). We will be blessed and protected.

Fixing our eyes on the Unseen can be difficult. It definitely takes practice. I have learned to quiet my heart at different points throughout my day and simply ask the question, “Jesus, where are You?” I am not doubting He is with me, but reacquainting myself with the reality of His presence. This has been called “practicing the presence of God” by saints of old. Ultimately, it is about doing my day with God, from the mundane to the serious.

Practicing God's presence has been a saving grace for me on many occasions, especially during various forms of persecution. Knowing God is with me and for me truly is, like David said, the strength of my life.

Practicing His presence, it is also the key to my working with mentees. Oftentimes, the issues of opposition they report are quite overwhelming. One can wonder how in the world they will overcome. But as I remember that not only is Jesus with me but He also lives in me, I have hope. Christ in me is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27)! If Jesus lives in us, there is always hope for overcoming unto glory.

Times have changed. Persecution is beginning for Christians in this nation, but God is still on the throne. He is still sovereign and still beautiful. If the shifting culture has gotten you down, turn off the news, open your Bible, and gaze upon God's endless beauty. “Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord” (Psalm 27:14).

Discipleship Matters

As believers, we have the wonderful comfort of the instruction of the Word of God; but to those who depart from it, there is little hope (see Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-18). Isn't it reassuring that we have received instruction from our Lord and Savior? He instructed us to, “Go make disciples.” Scripture is unmistakably clear on this issue (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18).

Our goal in discipleship is the maturing of a believer into the character of Jesus and helping them make additional disciples.

Often, as it was with Jesus, we must go up to the mountain with the Lord and seek Him on who we will disciple and allow Holy Spirit to hover over our hearts. (Luke 6:12-16) Discipleship often begins with intercession as we go to God on behalf of another. The discipler must divest themselves of any agenda and fully surrender to the Lord. With the guidance of Holy Spirit the discipler must be prepared to be humble, a good learner of people, able to model and practice the fruit of the Spirit as well as Christlike character. It is important to recognize that we are not trying to make converts. When trials or difficulties come, converts fall away. Disciples are willing to die for the One whom they love.

To the extent that we allow Jesus to transform us, lead us, teach us, and correct us, we will be used in the discipleship of others. In our obedience to the Lord's commission, we are either modeling Christ for them, or we are modeling ourselves to them. Therefore, people will either be growing in Christlikeness because of our relationship with Jesus Christ, or they will be becoming disciples of us and our own imagination of who Jesus is. Their progression in discipleship will reflect our maturity in Jesus Christ (John 15:1-17).

Parenthood is a wonderful illustration of discipleship. For many people, their children may have been their first experience with discipleship. In the same way we don't leave a newborn to fend for itself, we also should not leave a new believer to fend for themselves. They may come into The Kingdom loud, messy, disruptive, needy, etc. and requiring a great deal of kindness and patience. We will need to teach them to worship, pray, study their Bible, love, serve, and so on. Most of this they will need to see in action. When guiding individuals out of the LGBTQ community to become a disciple of Jesus, we must have both a father's heart and a mother's heart toward them.

The disciple maker has the authority of Jesus Christ to disciple from any tribe, tongue, or people group, including the LGBTQ community. We are called to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teach them everything Jesus has taught us. We are to teach the disciple all of Scripture, and to build in them the fullness of Christ until the end of the age.

In making disciples, we must always remember that the divine instructions given by God in Genesis 1:26-28 applies to all disciples. Affirming the individual that they have been given the authority and divine empowerment to accomplish these instructions is critical to the development of the identity of a disciple. Those coming out of the LGBTQ community to be disciples, often come with doubts that they are part of God's Kingdom and that the Genesis 1 mandates cannot, or do not, apply to them.

These mandates are to:

- Have authority to rule (have dominion over) the earth
- Be fruitful and to multiply
- Tend to and cultivate (bring out the best in) all of God's creation
- Continue living out our commission until death

Finally, remember this model for discipleship as it is demonstrated in Acts 42-47:

1. Disciple maker does, disciple watches
2. Disciple does, disciple maker watches
3. Disciple does (goes and make disciples)

Relationship Building Ideas For Discipleship

Healthy discipleship exists in relationship between Jesus and the disciple; as well as the disciple maker and the disciple. Here are some key ideas to help you build relationships that will lead to productive discipleship in Jesus Christ.

Practical Considerations

- Get their contact information, full name, cell phone number, email address
- Talk to them about the next time you will both meet to do discipleship, and then immediately send them a follow-up communication
- Schedule regular meetings with them (no less than once a week, no less than 1 hour)
- Let them be part of you everyday life. Include them in special events like holidays, birthday parties, family outings. Take them with you as you disciple others, go to the grocery store, go to the gym. Find out what they like to do and do it with them.
- Avoid pairing disciples and disciple makers who struggle with the same relationship sins; such as addiction to porn or acting out sexually in any way
- Meet in public places such as at church or at a coffee shop
- Agree to an appropriate Bible translation, but be mindful of where they are, not where you want them to be. Understanding and comprehending the content of some translations as well as literacy in general is still a common issue for many. Use a children's Bible or audio version if needed.

Holding Disciples Accountable

- Hold them accountable to reading Scripture and to times of prayer:
 1. Plan mutual times of reading and praying together with you
 2. Have them plan times of reading and praying on their own
- Watch for forward progression in their maturity, if there isn't there may be a number of reasons (religion, lack of being in the Word, an area of freedom needed, misbeliefs, heart issue). Inquire of the Lord how to proceed.

- Cultivate humility and teachability by modeling it. It is prudent for us to take the learners chair and ask questions that will encourage the disciple to look to God's Word as their source for truth. Character issues will resolve in a community focused on joy and connection with a strong group identity. Insisting they fully engage in a faith community is crucial.
- Teach them about God honoring relationships and to discern which friends or relationships are edifying to their spiritual growth, maturity, or walk with Jesus Christ

Discipleship of the LGBTQ+ community

In regards to the discipling those coming out of the LGBTQ Lifestyle, there are several areas of awareness that will be of importance:

1. Community-the LGBT Community is know for its acceptance, sense of belonging, hospitality, lack of judgement, etc. In most cases the church currently fails at meeting the need for community. In order to be successful as a discipler, one must be willing to let people be part of your life.
2. Most individuals with LGBT history struggle with toxic shame and a lack of relational connection. This will require empathy and compassion to navigate them through.
3. Resources and testimonies of transformed ex-gays is vital as the disciple will benefit from a sense of being related to, knowing they can still be different and belong, as well as find comfort and hope in knowing someone else has overcome.

Remember: Our goal in discipleship is to help them become who God created them to be in order to fulfill their God given purpose in life and encourage them to follow the model laid out in Scripture. If we model discipleship as Jesus did our disciples will make disciples.

The Biblical Basis For Transformation

"Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."
1 Corinthians 6:11 NASB95

"Such WERE some of you" - this indicates a change, which is transformation.

The definition of transformation according to the Oxford Dictionary is, "A thorough or dramatic change."

According to Webster's, the definition is, "The act or process of changing completely."

We see a lot of examples in the Bible of people struggling in sin, but then being transformed by the power of God. In the book of Hosea, Gomer, who was an adulterer, was reconciled to her husband, Hosea, and transformed into a godly wife. In the book of Exodus, Moses was identified as a murderer and hid from Pharoah because of what he had done. Yet, this murderer

was later transformed by God into the leader of His people, and would stand up to Pharoah rather than hide from him. In the Gospel of John, chapter 4, the woman at the well was transformed from adulterer into an evangelist because of Jesus' kindness and authority. Saul of Tarsus went from being known as the one who persecuted the Church to being transformed by Jesus into the Apostle Paul who wrote 13 of the 27 books in the New Testament.

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

John 15:4-5

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Galatians 5:22-23

When a sinner turns from their sin, towards God in true repentance, we begin to see the manifestation of transformation within them. We see this by way of the fruits of the Spirit as mentioned in Galatians 5; and in John 15 it mentions, "remain in me" and we will produce fruit. This shows us that we cannot make this change on our own. To achieve transformation, our part is repentance and obedience, His part is the sanctification*and transformation. Our part is faith, His part is grace.

Ephesians chapter 2 tells us, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the Kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved."

Later, the Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:8-10, "For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord."

The Bible clearly tells us that transformation is a changed life, and that life will bear new fruit. One who once lived a life contrary to what pleases God, bearing evil fruit, will change into a life that no longer conforms to the ways or the "pattern" of this world (Rom 12:2). This transformation occurs through the renewing of our mind and our flesh, and will then manifest itself through new actions, which is the bearing of good fruit. John 15 tells us that Jesus is the Vine, and we are the branches, IF we remain in Him, and He in us, we will bear much fruit—apart from Him we can do nothing. It is Jesus who causes fruit to bear.

More examples in the Bible can be found in places such as Colossians 1:9-10, which shows us that it is the Spirit that gives us wisdom and understanding in order that we may bear fruit in **every good work**; and this is a life that pleases the Lord.

Sanctification is a process

Philippians 1:6 says, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” God never stops working within us. Those who were once in darkness and now are light in the Lord, the Spirit is constantly working in them to make them more in the likeness of Jesus. The veil in the temple was there to protect the people from the holiness of God; but when Jesus died, that veil was torn and that makes it so that we can come into His presence. We who come with “unveiled faces” are being transformed into Jesus’ image. This happens because of the Spirit and “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:12-18). No chains. No condemnation. Freedom. Transformation. Hope!

If God is constantly at work in us, then this is a continual process until the day of Christ Jesus. This process starts with the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom 1:16). It is in the Gospel that we see that we need to put off the old nature, which belongs to our former way of living, and now put on our new nature (Eph 4:22-24). Other places, it says we are to “walk in the Spirit.” Transformation in the Bible is very much described like taking off old clothes. We take off, or as the Bible says, “put off,” or do away with our “old self.” If the old self has died, we cannot put it back on. We can only “put on” the new and learn to live in that new self.

Paul tells us that the Lord said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, My power is made perfect in weakness” (2Cor. 12:9). We cannot be changed or transformed on our own. WE cannot “will” it in our own strength. It is by the power of the love of God through the constant work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a repentant heart that we will experience transformation.

How the Church Has Hurt the LGBTQ+ Community

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
John 13:34-35

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.’”
Mark 16:15

Every day, headlines across the world mention the LGBTQ+ community. This topic is overwhelming our news outlets, our clothing stores, our advertisements, our places of employment, our doctor’s offices, sports, and even our schools, colleges, and universities. So, why is it that all we are getting from the American Church on this topic is nothing but crickets?

According to a NBC news report done in 2020 by Dan Avery,

“The vast majority of religious LGBTQ Americans are Christian — split fairly evenly among Catholics (25 percent), Protestants (28 percent) and other Christian denominations (24.5 percent). Only about 2.5 percent identify as Jewish and 2 percent as Muslim.”

Even with these numbers, the American Church continues to conduct *business as usual*. What is it that has made such a large group of people leave the Church in preference of the LGBTQ+ community? Or, to put it more plainly: *How has the Church hurt the LGBTQ+ ?*

When it comes to LGBTQ-identifying members of the church, we typically see two extreme approaches. On one hand, we have a watered-down gospel approach, full of acceptance and even an unchanged message. On the other hand, we see the opposite approach—they preach a message of condemnation, creating a hierarchy of sin, which leaves no hope.

Neither of these approaches follow what God’s Word says the Church should do; and both of these approaches hurt the LGBTQ+ identified individual. Even more than this, it makes the challenge of sharing the need to repent an even more difficult task. We are Christ’s ambassadors and, therefore, have *His* message to bring—not our own. We have hurt LGBTQ+ identified individuals by not bringing them the message of Jesus Christ. Instead, we have sent *our* message, and have become a stumbling block to those who are lost.

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

2 Corinthians 5:20

The world around us is changing; but if the Church focuses on being *progressive* and *inclusive*, instead of being doctrinally sound, we are bound to have some problems. All of the churches that desire to be inclusive and affirming of LGBTQ+ individuals may be coming from a place of wanting to show Christ’s love, but they have lost sight of the truth. They have conformed to the thought process of this world—they have lost sight of what God’s Word says; and that His Word is the highest authority.

"Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

"Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin."

Romans 6:6

"So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, [excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

Ephesians 4:17-24

When we preach a message of acceptance rather than that of repentance, we are preaching a false sense of security, and that is not love. This message gives the lost the sense that they have no need for a Savior. They have nothing to be saved from because they can remain unchanged. There is nothing that they need to die to, and nothing to "put off."

And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

Luke 9:23

Would we say that it is love to allow our child to run through a burning building? It's what they want to do, and that is how they express themselves. However, I think that we would all agree that love in that case is to do whatever we need to do to protect our child from harm, or even death. This is what we are doing when we preach a message of acceptance rather than that of repentance; we are allowing others to run to the flames while we stand there and tell them you are loved.

Example: *"This is what the Church is doing when it preaches a message of acceptance rather than that of repentance. This false gospel affirms people in their current state—standing by and watching them run into the flames while the Church just stands by and loves them to death."*

In addition to this fallacy, there is yet another error the Church clings to:

"You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination."

Leviticus 18:22

It is from this word *abomination* that many churches use as a launching pad into a hierarchy of sin. This is the other extreme. Instead of being progressive, they are more legalistic. Their practice is led out of fear and leads to a lack of compassion as well as a lack of hope.

When we are led by fear it cripples us so that we are unable to move. If we are unable to move our lips, that makes us silent on issues that we should address. If we are unable to move, our hands we are unable to embrace the hurting. If we are unable to move our feet, we are not able to go to those who are so very lost. If we are unable to move our minds, from the things of this world to the things above, we will lack compassion. All of this breeds a lack of hope.

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline."

2 Timothy 1:7

These churches have lost sight of the fact that mankind is made in the image of God. To be made in the image of God means that, in the eyes of God, each of us are worth saving. All of us are in need of a Savior; and Jesus is willing to go get the one while leaving the ninety-nine. He does this so that each one can have a relationship with Him.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

Genesis 1:26-27

It is also here that we see a lack of understanding to what Jesus has commanded us to do—love! This may stir up some people who stand on this point, believing that to love is to accept everything and everyone just as they are. But is that what the Bible instructs?? What is it really that drives churches to say, *"I don't want to compromise the doctrinal stance of our*

denomination by showing the LGBTQ+ Community love.” Couldn’t one even argue that not showing love IS compromising your faith?

If these two sides are not what the Bible tells us, then what is the solution? The American Church has hurt LGBTQ-identifying individuals by watering down the message of Jesus, as well as poisoning the Gospel with a lack of compassion for the lost.

When Jesus commanded us to love, He wasn’t telling us *anything goes*. He was telling us that love is selfless. Love is costly. Love keeps no record of wrongs. Love is not harsh. Love rejoices with the truth, but does not delight in evil. All of this tells us that to love is not easy; but loving one another is how the world will know that we are His.

The greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with everything we have so that means everything stems from that commandment. If we first must love God and to do so we must keep His commandments, then that should lead us right to proclaiming what Jesus proclaimed, “Repent!” and that message is to who Jesus came for. Not the healthy but the sick. Sinners, not the righteous. He came to seek and save the lost. As His ambassadors, shouldn’t it be that we are to do the same? As His disciples, shouldn’t we be preaching that same message to the ends of the earth and walking as He walked?

God loved us—each and every one of us—while we were of least value. It was while we were there that He died for us. Not when our value increased, but while we were of least value. He did it all so that we could come to Him. That is love. It is that same unconditional love that we are to have as we encounter the LGBTQ+ community in order that we may share with them the message of hope found in repentance. If we remain silent, we only bring death, rather than life. If we continue to bring a false security, we allow them to be burned for all of eternity.

*“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”
John 15:13*

In order for the American Church to show the love of Jesus to the LGBTQ+ community, we are going to have to start by humbling ourselves, and then ask God for the grace to love the way He wants us to love them. We need to understand that no matter where we have come from, or what we have done, nothing is so great that our God can’t handle it. No sin is so heavy that Jesus’ blood can’t cover it.

We need to come to a place of seeing that the hierarchy of sin is man made, and that every sin was bought at a price—the same price. Do we really want to show anyone that Jesus’ blood was not great enough to cover their sin?

We have created an atmosphere of hate rather than that of love. We are not to love the practices, but the people. Hate their practices, but to the people, we are to show love. Our

battle is not against the LGBTQ+ individuals, but we—the American Church—have forgotten this. Our battle is against the principalities and powers of this dark age.

We need to put on our armor of God and get rid of the spirit of fear. It has no place amongst God’s people! This spirit of fear has caused us to be silent far too long. It has caused us to show a lack of compassion far too long. It has caused us to accept sin far too long. It has caused us to allow a lack of accountability far too long. But love . . . casts out fear.

How has the Church hurt LGBTQ+ individuals? In so many ways, but in short, we have made it so difficult for them to come to the feet of Jesus. We need to ask God to help us show them love, and be armed with the truth, seasoned with grace, in order that we may share with them the message Jesus has, Today is the day of repentance!

*“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.”
1 John 4:18*

Finally, I want you to consider that these two extremes that we, the American Church, display are a fantastic comparison of the Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were very focused on the law. They were all about the law! The Gentiles were all about loose living. They lived the total opposite of what God required. They were the progressive type. It was Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection that bridged the chasm between the Jews and the Gentiles.

In the same way, Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection bridges the gap between the Church and the LGBTQ+ Community. It is not either extreme that God calls us to, but rather something more in the middle. He calls us to love with a love that demands change or rejection. This is the love that God showed us by sending Jesus to die when we were of least value.

Lord, please help the American Church show your love for the LGBTQ+ we pray!

*“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
Romans 5:8*

Agape First Ministries Hallmarks

Connection verses Change

At Agape First Ministries, we stress connection with Abba Father rather than simply changing sinful behavior. We believe that as you connect with Abba, the change will happen in His timing. Our Heavenly Father meets us right where we are at. Jesus hung out with the broken, the sinners, tax collectors, drunkards, and prostitutes. His relational connection with them transformed them. Jesus died for us while we were sinners so that He could attach to us in that place of death and make us fully alive.

Made to Love verses Betrayal of False Identity

We each were made fully in God's image, and we were made to fully love. Sadly, the enemy has done much to confuse those with sexual brokenness about their immeasurable worth to Abba Father. Toxic shame can easily make us feel like we are deformed, an abomination, or our attempts to love God are wrong. Combine that with wrongly-applied Scripture, and toxic shame becomes enforced—giving us a false identity that yields betrayal. Deeper on the inside, beyond that false identity, we find the "Image of God" we were created in. This image remains unblemished regardless of how much trauma, abuse, or brokenness we encounter. Jesus sets us free to bring out the beauty of who He created us to be—Lovers of God that love others well. This forges us deeply into the identity He sees us as, not the identity the world, others, or that we ourselves would assign to us. Furthermore, we have been made expressly to worship God, and to love Him in a First Love capacity. As we grow in our true identity, being Lovers of God becomes our primary desire.

Freedom to Walk in the Spirit verses Right Behavior through Rules

Many of us make the mistake of just crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires, but never walking into the resurrected life on the other side of that cross we each bear. As Jesus transforms us from the inside out, we learn the freedom His Father created us to have—a vibrant life of walking with the Holy Spirit, who gives us grace. Simply trying to follow rules only ends in failure and further mars our hearts in comparison with the deep healing touch only Jesus can bring. As we learn to walk in the Spirit, we learn to guard our hearts and minds in such a way that the workmanship He is making us into comes forth; and every work becomes His work through us.

Immaturity verses Rebellion

There is a huge difference in the eyes of the Lord between rebellion and immaturity. Even as we struggle with habitual sins, if we have a sincere desire to follow Jesus' lead, we are not in rebellion, and we are not His enemy. We are beloved sons or daughters and there is grace to learn to love Him fully by doing what He commands—to love God fully and love others. There is grace to grow into everything Abba has designed and desires for us to be. The Lord is very patient and kind—He disciplines us as children, He doesn't judge us as He does His enemies. He fights against anything that would hinder us from fully encountering His love.

Fully Integrated & Alive verses Suppression

Suppressing our struggles, locking them away in the depths of our souls, and pretending they are not there is not healing. For most, sexual brokenness is an arrested development. When we have encountered trauma (an overwhelming situation we cannot overcome) we become stuck emotionally, mentally, spiritually, even possibly physically—thus not being able to grow. This suppression begins to fragment who we are in our internal world, causing more rules to follow, more addictions to act upon, more over compensation, all while not being able to return to joy, or to the image of God we were created in. As we begin to bring our trauma in connection with Jesus from a safe place, as we allow Him to unburden the fragments that exile us, and as we find our Abba Father enjoys being with us, even while walking through brokenness, integration releases fullness of life upon the undeveloped parts of us. We begin to actually live fully alive!

Self Acceptance—Seeing Glory & Discerning Identity by the Spirit

A huge part of walking out who God has created us to be is to stand outside of our struggles and let the very Mind of Christ inform us. As we become informed, taking every thought captive, renewing our mind, and guarding our heart and mind, becoming grace-filled—it simply flows naturally from the very presence of Immanuel (God with us.) As the Holy Spirit leads us deeper in our healing journey, the encounters of Jesus speaking our true identity takes place, resulting in transformation. As we begin to discern our true identity from the Word and our encounter, we begin to behold greater glory—we are children (sons or daughters) that have been made free by abiding in His Word, being His disciples!

We never overcome through religion

Having the "will power," striving, legalism, "just stop it," condemnation, and trying harder, are self righteous and only yield religion. This will never bring transformation. A deep, vibrant, relational connection with Abba Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit bring a yielding of our will to His design, resting as He fights our battles, Christ's righteousness fulfilling the law so, we walk in the Spirit, true healing and deliverance and deep abiding intimacy with the One who created us and knows us better than we know ourselves! What a joy-filled life journey that lies ahead of us. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb (Jesus), the word of our testimony, and not loving our own life; but being willing to lay it down. We serve the Faithful Witness, He cannot lie about us. He is leading us into deeper trust, belief, and obedience to His way—LOVE. Welcome to Agape First!

Connecting with God in Hessed Community

How do we walk with each other in a hessed community that fully engages with God? The most practical answer is connection with Him in praise, worship, prayer, and intercession that keeps going back to hessed. A deeper look at the center of God's holiness is His mercy seat. The center of manifestive presence is loving kindness, a place where forgiveness flows; but there were also the tablets containing the 10 Commandments. The fellowship of believers dwelling in hessed is identically modeled: a place of love; but also purity. This mercy is not just functionally the way we treat each other's weaknesses; but it is who we are aspiring to be by walking out the life He has called us to—holiness!

Holiness was made possible by one Man (who is forever God) coming and fulfilling the Law by being sinless (perfect in keeping the righteous requirement) but also taking our punishment (for our disobedience to that Law). In light of Jesus' hessed, our own righteousness would still be filthy rags. Even a strong attempt to "keep or perform" the Law would still pale in comparison. So, what does the Lord require, especially in the light of hessed?

A proper way of understanding the Law Hebraically would be to actually "guard" the Law. I guard the Word of God by loving what it says, agreeing quickly with its truth (even if I have disobeyed); and I begin to see that abiding in His word has made me free of my bondage. I now guard that truth by continuing to abide in deep relationship with Him...(His name is The Word of God).

As Jesus was in the garden praying with His disciples, He admonished them to be on guard — "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). Jesus' prescription to temptation is to be on the guard. What a beautiful way to guard His ways He has fulfilled for us, that we would be free to follow Him fully!

We are also told to "Keep (guard) your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). The reality of not sinning isn't to just do more good things. Psalm 119:11 tells us, "Your word I have hidden (guarded) in my heart, That I might not sin against You." The Scriptures are clear that guarding the places His Word/Law dwell is of utmost importance.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace (Shalom) of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7). This is how hessed works when engaged with our Abba who created us! We guard the way He has asked us to walk in, and He meets us with grace to overcome.

Immanuel Lifestyle Overview

*Joy. What is it?
Have you ever experienced it?
Is it the same as happiness?
Is it possible to have joy in the midst of difficult circumstances?
How do you get joy?
How do you keep joy?
What does joy feel like?*

These are all really good questions. Joy, according to the Dictionary of Psychology, is a feeling of extreme gladness, delight, or exaltation of the spirit, arising from a sense of well-being or satisfaction; or a feeling of great pleasure and happiness. It would seem that joy is the same as happiness, but more intense. If that is true, it would be very hard to have joy in the midst of difficult circumstances, because who is happy with adversity? Getting joy would seem to be getting a lifestyle without conflict, and keeping joy would seem only possible when you maintain a lifestyle without conflict. One dictionary says it is a feeling of extreme happiness or cheerfulness, especially related to the acquisition or expectation of something good, like a child on Christmas morning.

In the book "Building Bounce," one of the authors wrote, "Life is hard. We all get overwhelmed at times. But some people seem to be able to handle hardship better than others...Thanks to the latest brain science, we now understand that there is a secret to emotional resilience. It is joy. The more joy you have, the more hardship you can handle." Dr. Wilder explains joy as, "someone is glad to be with me." We recognize this joy visually in the emotional (or right side) of our brain before we recognize it in the left side (or cognitive side) of the brain. How do we recognize it? Visually, by seeing someone's smile, or the light in their eyes when they see us.

Joy is relational. The more healthy, strong, and safe the relationships we have, the more joy we will experience. The Bible declares again and again that the joy of the Lord is our Strength; He gives strength to the weak and power to the powerless; He is able to make us strong and steadfast; He is our joy. The Bible also talks repeatedly about how God makes His face to shine upon us. He connects with us emotionally. He smiles on us. He is glad to be with us.

Our brains have "circuits" that guide our relational connections with God and others. These circuits are formed and changed in relationships, and so they are called "Relational Circuits." Relational Connection Joy (or Connection) is the experience of being in an attuned relational engagement with God, oneself, or another person, AND perceiving that they are glad to be with you.

Attunement is an especially important form of interpersonal, emotional connection that feels like “we are on the same page”--we feel seen and heard; someone correctly understands our internal experience, and joins us in the emotions we are experiencing. Someone genuinely cares about us and is glad to be with us.

Our minds and brains have been designed to live in a relational world where everything is in shalom; where everything is in the right relationship, at the right time, in the right place, at the right strength, and in the right amount for God and people. At the center of this shalom is our brain’s relational circuits. If we lose our peace, particularly in relationships, these relational circuits can start to shut down. With our vital relational circuits partly or deeply off, problems get bigger, and we can start to treat people like objects. Our cravings become monsters, and we can deeply hurt those we love. We feel alone, disconnected, and purposeless.

The easiest way to know if your relational circuits (or RC’s) are on or off is to ask yourself a few questions:

- Is the problem bigger than the person?
- Do I really want to listen to what they are feeling or saying?
- Is my mind “locked onto” something upsetting?
- Do I just want to get away, fight, or freeze?
- Am I more aggressively interrogating, judging or trying to fix others?
- Do I even want to be connected with someone I usually like?

We can turn our relational circuits back on and regain shalom by deliberately focusing on appreciation/gratitude or having someone else “tune in” to us and how we’re feeling.

The Immanuel Lifestyle is a process that helps us to grow our emotional capacity to withstand adversity by helping us to grow our relational strengths. How do we do that? By helping to increase each person’s capacity to have an interactive relationship with God. It is this experiential connection with God that is the foundation for deep and lasting spiritual growth and maturity; for healing from painful experiences and life events; and for developing relationships with others and unity in the Body of Christ.

We use:

- Knowledge-based teaching that is informed by an understanding of the brain
- Experiential exercises to discover how relational connection occurs with God and others
- Specific explanations and skills to intentionally increase understanding of and capacity for relational connection
- Practical examples, demonstrations, and reflection on Immanuel as a lifestyle, with the foundation laid for Immanuel as an intervention & Immanuel as a prayer ministry.

Immanuel Prayer offers a process that is very useful to help people connect to the Lord in a prayer ministry session. It is a process of connection personally and interactively with the Lord, and removing barriers and hindrances to an intimate, interactive lifestyle of connection with Him. The goal is to build and deepen a securely attached relationship with the Lord, one that increases our capacity to stay connected to Him even in difficult life situations or painful experiences.

God’s End Time Strategy is the Family

“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers [a reconciliation production by repentance], so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse” [of complete destruction]. Malachi 4:5

The moment that every parent anxiously waits for is the sound of their baby’s first breath and its subsequent tiny wails. Sweet baby is immediately placed skin-to-skin with mom, which helps baby in many ways, such as: the regulation of body temperature, decreases crying spells, enables better digestion and food absorption, stabilizes heartbeat, helps baby breast feed, and reduces pain. This also allows mom to share antibodies with baby so baby begins to build a strong immune system. This skin-to-skin contact also enables baby’s brain to begin to develop with positive sensory interaction with mom; and baby begins to experience safety in their new world. For mom, prolactin is released which is important for a strong milk supply; and oxytocin lowers risk of postpartum depression, stress hormones are reduced for both mom and baby, and both mom and baby form attachments to each other. These first close moments are critical for survival of baby, and often mom as well. This is just the beginning of a child’s life, so, imagine what happens if secure attachments are well established throughout childhood.¹

Attachments formed where we are enjoyed, comforted, cared for, and protected help us to feel safe and to feel affirmed; and they give us increased capacity and resilience to thrive in life. Part of our role and mandate as parents is to be this example of secure attachment for our children so that they can learn to securely attach to Jesus. There is something that the father brings and something that the mother brings to the child(ren) through covenant that reveals the nature of the relationship between Jesus and His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:32). We were created for love, to belong to the One who knows us, and Who chose us on purpose. It’s God’s heart for each one of us to develop from a place of joy, fully enjoyed, as we mature and become who He has created us to be,

¹ <https://news.sanfordhealth.org/childrens/the-importance-of-skin-to-skin-after-delivery-you-should-know/>

"Blessed and worthy of praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ, just as [in His love] He chose us in Christ [actually selected us for Himself as His own] before the foundation of the world, so that we would be holy [that is, consecrated, set apart for Him, purpose-driven] and blameless in His sight. In love, He predestined and lovingly planned for us to be adopted to Himself as [His own] children through Jesus Christ, in accordance with the kind intention and good pleasure of His will"

Ephesians 13-5

Unfortunately, many of us have not had healthy, secure attachments with our parents or caregivers. Sometimes, children come into the world amidst chaos and unrest in a family, or there are environmental stressors like an absent parent, poverty, homelessness, illness, and so on, that can cause this lack. Often, because of these difficult and painful things in life we look to fill that place, where we were created for love, with other things. No matter our story, Jesus is there waiting with the Father for us to respond to His call for us to come home to His loving arms.

"But when he [finally] came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough food, while I am dying here of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; [just] treat me like one of your hired men.' So, he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quickly bring out the best robe [for the guest of honor] and put it on him; and give him a ring for his hand, and sandals for his feet. And bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let us [invite everyone and] feast and celebrate; for this son of mine was [as good as] dead and is alive again; he was lost and has been found.' So they began to celebrate"

Luke 15:17-24

God desires reconciliation in all the broken places where we have known only rejection and betrayal; where we are terrified to hope or try because the disappointment is just too painful. The places where our trust has been violated, Jesus is waiting. In those dark places, He desires to bring life, hope, and joy. Jesus wants us to partner with Him in this ministry of reconciliation where we go to those who are lost and hurting on behalf of Him. As we are securely attached to Jesus, we show them, by our love, that He has lavished on us what it is to have family. This may be with our biological family; but it may also be with those He wants us to add to our family. With this family, bonded in love, we can go forth in boldness and strength as warriors and take back the land the enemy has stolen, and see captives released. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

Therefore if anyone is in Christ [that is, grafted in, joined to Him by faith in Him as Savior], he is a new creature [reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit]; the old things [the previous moral and spiritual condition] have passed away. Behold, new things have come [because spiritual awakening brings a new life]. But all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ [making us acceptable to Him] and gave us the ministry of reconciliation [so that by our example we might bring others to Him], that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting people's sins against them [but canceling them]. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation [that is, restoration to favor with God].

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

We, as representatives of the family of God, have been commanded to go to people on behalf of God, securely attached to Jesus, while practicing safe and healthy attachments. Jesus set this example by spending three years traveling, preaching, teaching, caring for, eating, and doing life with His disciples. Yes, He preached on hill sides and did miracles, but He also slept near them, wept with them, shared meals, spent time in their homes, and went away alone to pray. As fathers and mothers in Christ we must live this out with people through secure attachment in order for reconciliation to take place. It is hard work and will cost us everything. This is the place where we are victorious in love through secure attachment with Jesus and others. This will sustain us and increase our capacity to remain faithful together until Jesus returns for us and brings us home.

Paul describes the faithfulness and trustworthiness required as a steward of the Gospel, and the example He set that is tested by many trials and tribulations. He lived like his sons were watching him, exemplifying for us that there is more required of us than simply offering people guidance. Paul suggests we imitate him and become like fathers to those we are discipling.

"For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ,¹ as I teach them everywhere in every church"

1 Corinthians 4:15-17

Daren Mehl presents: Christianity and LGBTQ: A Comprehensive Review: Understanding the Truth and the Lies; Finding Freedom; Enduring Transformation; Ministry of Reconciliation for those trapped in LGBTQ – The doctrines of sanctification, sin, redemption, salvation

It is reported that 39% of Gen Z and 30% of Gen Z Christians identify as LGBTQ. For the average believer, it is incredibly hard to grasp what is happening when it comes to LGBTQ. Simply knowing homosexuality is a sin is not enough. Daren Mehl will be sharing important and comprehensive information regarding understanding and ministering in the LGBTQ space. He will be bringing forward the needed truths to combat the culture drift away from Biblical faithfulness. The first week Daren will be sharing his encouraging testimony of leaving the gay life, getting married to his wife, and finding ensuring freedom in Jesus Christ. Each following week he will cover the top most sought after discussions regarding the truth and lies related to LGBTQ.

Questions answered include:

- What are the predominant four LGBTQ doctrines and which ones are Biblical?
- What is our position as a church? What is the spiritual battle in the church related to these doctrines?
- How can we be faithful to the Lord and love those trapped in the LGBTQ community?
- How do we preserve a Biblical identity in our family and children?
- Do we affirm their identity in LGBTQ or lead them out of it, and is that love or not?
- How do we pray for our prodigals?
- Are there causes to homosexuality? Will seeking Jesus for healing result in depression and suicide?
- What is the history of how we arrived at a culture that embraces LGBTQ as a core identity?
- What is love? What does God say?
- Does the LGBTQ lobby threaten our rights as believers? What can we do about it?
- What does the science say? Are people born gay? Can people change or be healed? Is the brain fixed or can it change? Do desires change?
- How does pornography play into the issue?

There are many more questions that will be discussed and answered during the classes. Daren will help you to love those who identify as LGBTQ boldly, equip you with Biblical truth regarding God's good design for human sexuality and gender, and encourage you to stand for the transforming power of Jesus.

Starting xxxxxxxx, at 9 AM (Room x), Daren will be teaching for 30 minutes and then open the class to 15 minutes of dialog to discuss what was covered. If you cannot make the 9 AM, come to 11 AM! The class will be repeated. We know that the Holy Spirit guides us in truth, so join us as we seek the truth together regarding this very complex issue.

Attendees will receive helpful handouts each week which document the critical truths covered and direct them to further home study on the topics. Pastor Scott and Pastor Daren will be available throughout the week for individual pastoral care and counseling in this area as well. You can schedule a call with him.

Class Outline:

Week 1 - Testimony of Transformation - How a gay identified man married a queer woman and God healed him from homosexuality. The powerful testimony of the transforming power of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ and a Biblical identity in Jesus Christ. A discussion of desire and identity, sanctification, and the enduring power of Grace.

Week 2 - Same Sex Attraction (SSA) and the Brain - Same sex attraction is very often an attachment problem, a detachment from God and others, and so the person is often only informed by trauma in their isolation. Many times we find ourselves disconnected from God and others, isolated, left on islands of anger, despair, disgust, fear, shame, and sadness. However, our brains are wired for joy! Returning to joy happens in a secure relationship with Jesus. Intimacy with Christ leads to truth, freedom, and healing. We will discuss this spiritual truth which is supported by scripture and is a common thread in the testimonies of those who have come out of LGBTQ and found enduring transformation.

Week 3 - Beliefs related to LGBTQ fall into 4 major religious doctrines which have matured over decades and generations. We will cover the CHURCH position first. We will then review the most common doctrines surrounding the LGBTQ issue and how to identify where the person is and how to move them toward Jesus and the truth.

Week 4 - Continuing discussion on LGBTQ religious doctrines and turning to the the Bible for answers. Equipping believers to identify and respond to false doctrines by knowing the truth. Learn how LGBTQ religious beliefs are backed up by their "science" and how is it all manipulated. We will discuss the definition of love, review holiness, righteousness, grace, desire, transformation, and enduring faith. We will cover how living in the spirit different is than living in the flesh. What hope does someone trapped in LGBTQ (sin) but wants to leave have in Jesus?

Week 5 - LGBTQ Living Loud- What are the cultural ramifications of embracing LGBTQ for decades? How has the LGBTQ weaponized their religious beliefs with the help of popular culture including politics (law), news media, education, science, and entertainment. What are the threats to the church, the family, parents, women, and children and how can we boldly and courageously respond as Christians. Where is the safety and victory for our children? What are the most effective ways Christians can be influential in their communities, being the salt and light in the LGBTQ space? How do we protect our children? How can we minister to other families, individuals, and children?

Week 6 - LGBTQ and Parenting - How do parents respond to a child who "comes out?" How do family members respond? Learn how to stand in truth and navigate what it means to love our children and family well in truth and faithfulness to Jesus. What is the definition of love? What is the design of family and what are the roles for father and mother? What is biblical identity and how do we preserve it for our children? Daren will pass out copies of the parent's guide and discuss other resources that will be helpful.

Week 7 - <Siblings in Christ, The Church> LOVE WELL

Week 8 – Message to the silent/hidden struggler – come out as Christian. They have a safe place to be disciplined and to have safe fellowship. You now have a voice of the voiceless in your church. They will stand with you and not lead you astray. <<>> Church: Go be the voice of the voiceless and set the captives free!

[Class curriculum subject to change based on needs of attendees and church leadership.]

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM
SUCCESSFUL RESOLUTION OF SEXUAL-RELIGIOUS IDENTITY CONFLICT:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES

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Department at Argosy University Twin Cities in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology

Eagan, Minnesota
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Demographic Information

One bisexual man, one gay man, and six lesbians participated in the study. There was one participant in the 26 to 30 year age range, one in the 31 to 39 year age range, two in the 40 to 49 year age range, and four in the 50 to 59 year age range. Participants were asked to identify their own ethnicity or race. Two participants self-identified as African American, four as Caucasian, and two as White.

Participants were asked to identify their religious affiliation at three stages of life: their religious affiliation as a child, their religious affiliation as an adult, and their current religious affiliation. Four participants reported a childhood religious affiliation of Catholic, one of Southern Baptist, one of Baptist, one of “Methodist by family,” and one of Lutheran. One participant reported an adult religious affiliation of “Quaker” (The Religious Society of Friends), one of “spiritualism,” one of “UU” (Unitarian Universalist Association), one of “MCC” (The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches), one of “United Methodist” (The United Methodist Church), one of “Christian,” one of “Lutheran,” and one of “Church of Christ” (Churches of Christ, distinct from United Church of Christ). One participant reported a current religious affiliation of “Quaker,” one of “spiritualism (mostly consisting of Native American and Buddhist practices),” one of “Pagan/Wiccan”, one of “Unity” (Association of Unity Churches International), one of “United Methodist,” one of “Christian – Non-denominational,” one of “Lutheran,” and one of “Naturalist.” Regarding level of activity or observance of their spiritual or religious practices, three participants reported being “very involved,” three reported “regular” involvement, and two reported being

“sometimes” involved. No participants reported “minimal” involvement or being involved “not at all.”

Regarding highest level of education completed, one participant reported obtaining a high school degree or equivalent; one reported obtaining an associate’s, vocational, or technical degree; two reported obtaining a college degree; two reported obtaining a master’s degree; and two reported obtaining a doctorate. Regarding current occupation, two participants reported a current occupation of “psychologist,” one of “RN [registered nurse],” one of “management consultant,” one of “supervisor – group home for MI/MR [mentally ill/mentally retarded],” one of “information technology,” one of “nanny,” and one of “grad student.”

Participants were asked about their current sexual relationships and whether they have children. Regarding current sexual relationship status, five participants reported having one monogamous partner, one reported having “recently broke[en] up after three years,” one reported having casual sexual partners, and one reported having no sexual partner. Regarding children, six participants reported having no children, one reported providing adult foster care for two men in their thirties, and one reported having fourteen foster children aged eighteen to twenty-six. One of the participants reporting no children, hoped to have a child “soon.”

Every participant was given a pseudonym to preserve anonymity. The pseudonyms given are Alice, Connie, Felix, Gina, Olivia, Quinton, Whitney, and Zelda. Within quotations, names of others have been changed and personally identifying details have been omitted.

Exploration

Exploration is a key component of sexual identity development models, as described above. Exploration is also a key component of the stage of spiritual development (as described by Fowler, 1981) that is often brought on by such precipitating factors as sexual-religious conflict. Participants were asked to tell the story of how their sexual identity and spiritual or religious identity came into conflict and how they resolved that conflict. The most prominent theme of participants' stories was that of the process of exploration as it applies to sexual-religious conflict resolution. All eight participants in this study reported extensively on exploratory activities related to their attainment of sexual-religious conflict resolution.

Modes of Exploration

Exploration took many forms. The various modes of exploration are enumerated here. The pseudonyms of the participant whose responses were categorized with a given mode of exploration are listed in parentheses after that mode. A brief description of each mode is given along with select quotations exemplifying the mode.

Contemplation (Connie, Gina, Quinton, Zelda). A number of participants described how they engaged in contemplation to evaluate conflicting concepts. Gina said, "I just started going through all of the arguments that everybody had made all along, and I started arguing them in my own head." For Quinton, contemplation was an efficient and effective means of resolving conflict:

The way my mind operates, or the way I operate is I try and gather, when it comes to, like, any kind of major decision making, is I sit, and I ponder. I gather as many facts and as many things as I need, give myself a chance to kind of, like, ruminate over them, and then, eventually, a decision comes, and when it does, it's pretty decisive.

Connie was deeply involved in contemplation: "I couldn't wait to get done with work and come home and get in my process. You know, sit down, and I had this list of ideas to ponder and things to research." For Gina, contemplation, beyond its utility for resolving her conflict, is a life-long process. "[Resolution] took years of exposure to alternate thoughts, and I'm not done. I'll continue on that journey forever."

Counseling (Felix, Quinton, Whitney, Zelda). Participants described their experiences with counseling. Whitney found counseling very helpful once she found a compatible therapist.

What happens when you're ashamed and embarrassed, you're angry all the time, and angry becomes explosive. Any little thing happens, and all of a sudden, you're bearing all this extra garbage, and then you're upset, and you don't even know what it was that triggered you being upset, but you're upset. So therapy really helped me focus on who I was, and did I want to change who I was, and then if I didn't want to change who I was, I needed to live with what decision I made. An exceptional, exceptional therapist, and know that in my journey to find a therapist, she was probably the fifth person. . . . The journey to find a good therapist is not an easy one, and you have to realize when you, the match isn't there, you almost have to find a soul mate to be a good therapist 'cause you just don't want to talk to somebody, they need to truly feel and understand, and then I don't want to be molded by the therapist's ideas, I need to form my own. The greatest gift my therapist gave me was that when I would ask her what should I do, she'd never answer the question, and I would say, 'Well just tell me what to do, and I'll just do it,' and she'd always say, 'No, I can't do that. You already have all the answers to who you are inside. The best thing I can do for you is to teach you how to unlock those answers that you already possess.' Most wonderful, wonderful person on the face of the earth, and so that's exactly what she taught me, an incredible amount of who I was, where the conflicts came, my conflicts with my parents, you know, that old saying, you know, well I don't want to talk about do I love my mother, my father, that's, you know, always been like garbage, but you know, that is where the conflicts were.

Quinton used counseling in his preparation to explore relationships in the GLB community:

I didn't really know what was out there, in terms of what's out there in the gay and lesbian world, so I decided to do a little bit of therapy to kind of find out, what's, you know, what's out there, what's, you know, and how does one integrate into that? So I did an intake interview at the old Gay and Lesbian

Community Services, which existed in the early '80s, and they actually referred me to a counselor at Catholic Charities, who was a gay man who worked there and was, you know, fairly out, so I did a little bit of work about three months with him, and then kind of, you know, turned myself loose.

Zelda attempted to use counseling in her exploration process. She encountered a therapist who violated appropriate boundaries in his role as therapist:

I went to the counselor, she's like, 'Um, I'm going to refer you to the psychologist 'cause you don't want to do anything that you're going to regret later,' so I get referred to the psychologist, very nice man who wound up being a very good friend for a long time, but he's like, after a number of sessions, 'Are you sure?' I was, 'Yeah, I love her da-da-da.' 'Well, have you tried a man?' 'No.' 'Well, would you like to try a man?' 'I don't think so.' 'Well, um, you could try it with me, and we could see.' 'No thank you.' Boundaries, I realized later.

Felix said he "never went to counseling" but he did report going to an introductory meeting of Exodus, an "ex-gay" ministry:

They gave you a whole spiel about, you know, 'I was gay, and now I'm married,' and I realized that was so not for me because they looked at it as like a cure, sort of. I mean, not to stereotype, but I mean, it was really close to, you know, 'I've been cured,' and I so didn't think that it was a disease to be cured, and—so I didn't even—I went to a dinner where they introduced the whole concept, and that was it. I said no way.

Discussion (Alice, Connie, Felix, Gina, Zelda). Discussion was a common mode of exploration among participants. Felix described the importance of a particular discussion with the woman whom he would later marry:

I was hanging out with Tillie on my own, we had some really heart-to-heart talks about Christianity, and how I view it, and the fundamentals that I believe in, and the way I want to live my life. . . . That was when I kinda started to realize my conflict because I never had anybody to talk to about it with—talk about it with them. So Tillie was the first person I actually really talked about it with. I mean, I'd sorta told Charles [a good friend], but Tillie, being third party that I kinda don't know yet—you know, there's no harm in telling her, kinda thing? So I let it all out, and then we hung out again and again.

Connie demonstrated that different modes of exploration (e.g., reading, education, and discussion) interact with one another:

I read about every book I could find, and then I talked with people. I talked with people about my process, my feelings, and also about what I was reading. Yeah, so education, primarily, or knowledge, and then processing that with people.

Education (Connie, Felix, Quinton, Whitney, Zelda). Pursuing higher education was a part of the exploration process for participants. Course content exposed some to new ideas, and extracurricular contact with others allowed for new experiences.

At private school, I was at a Friends school, Quaker school, so it was a wonderful to have that meditation time. That was something I learned there, the silence of it, what some of the principles were around social justice, so that was a very wonderful learning experience (Zelda).

At that time, my concept of God had begun to change, though. God was no longer a male, or an old white male who was kind and gentle and wise. God became something that was more spirit based and without form, and so without gender, also. And that concept of God was more freeing to me. It seemed to fit more with where my thinking was going, from what I had learned in college, and from what I had seen about—seen and studied more about the other, all the other different kinds of religions. 'Cause every religion I had studied at that point, if I remember correctly, or most of them, certainly, said that they were the one, and then even particular groups within the religion said they were the one, so . . . So I wanted to have something for myself that didn't get stuck in all that stuff. So I'm glad that my view of God had begun to change and open up because I really needed that in my struggle of 'be who I am' (Connie).

I had dated girls all through high school and it wasn't until I got to college, like out of [my home town] that I realized, 'Oh my god, there's a different world out there' (Felix).

The atmosphere [in graduate school] was very different. Most of the instructors were lay, were laypeople that, non-clergy, non-religious, not priests or nuns. Probably the majority were women, and where I was actually one of the youngest in the program, even at, what was I, I was 30, and I was one of the younger people in the program, so it was a very different environment, a much more free environment to inquire, to look at issues, to deal with issues, that kind of stuff (Quinton).

Experience with spiritual community (Alice, Felix, Gina, Olivia, Quinton, Whitney, Zelda). Participants reported on experiences with spiritual communities. Felix described experiences within spiritual community that helped him develop his faith:

My youth leader, and the [family I lived with], neither of them really looked at homosexuality as, you know, like it's a worse sin than any other sin. They just focused, helped me focus on my relationship with God, and in learning about God and that kind of stuff, and learning how to be like Christ, stuff like that. So it was character development, and they weren't—you know, the rule was is I couldn't, obviously, have sex and I had to be home at a certain time and stuff like that just to keep me accountable to my faith (Felix).

Many experiences took the form of testing out new spiritual communities for compatibility. Zelda said she tried many congregations over a number of years. She described her strategy for assessing her fit with a community:

I had decided any church I go to I'll come, share time for, you know, three to four months to really see what it's like. Be consistent, and then see what I'm hearing in the message. Hearing negative things about issues I think are important to me and to my well-being, and to the universe, or in political issues, where is the leaning of this, seemingly, of this minister and congregation. If I think I might be getting close to a place that could meet my needs with music, spiritually, the types of programs they have, I'm gonna go to the minister, and ask them about their theology on GLBT issues, the theology of the church.

A number of attempts to find a home church resulted in participants being rejected in some way for being gay or lesbian. Olivia described her experience with one congregation she tried:

I was at a church . . . for a while, and I'm a nanny, I take care of kids for a living, it's what I do full time, and you know, I love kids. . . . I was with them all the time, alone, you know, with the girl, one-on-one alone and stuff, and I went to this church, and I said, you know, I wanna go on these retreats, I wanna go on these trips, and they're like, 'You know what, you're gay. You can't be with these children alone.' I'm like, 'Are you kidding me?' Like, 'No, you can't. You can't come to these things. We don't want you at these things. What if you?' You know, and we went out of town for a music festival, and had my own pup tent, so I was very excluded with the women in the church, and the children of the church, and I'm like, this is not a place for me, so it didn't really turn me off to Christianity, just to that church pretty much.

Quinton described a precipitating event that ended a long-time effort to be both gay and involved in Catholicism:

In 1988, I was still involved at [a progressive Catholic parish], and I believe that's when the Vatican declaration on, you know, treatment of homosexual persons

came out that said basically, you know, if you're gay and lesbian, you're intrinsically evil, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. That was the end of my involvement at [that parish] and pretty much the Catholic Church. I decided, 'This is a crock of shit,' and a lot of people basically, sooner or later, came to that same conclusion who were involved at [that parish]. There was, I remember specifically, there was a gay male couple that was involved there, and they sent out a letter, general letter to the entire parish community explaining what they felt, you know, how they felt, and why they could no longer in good conscience serve in that parish, so that was kind of like the end of that.

Some experiences with spiritual communities were generally positive, yet did not result in a match for more subtle reasons. Such was Alice's experience.

I belonged to a meditation center for 10 years. And that was very good I learned a lot, but the community didn't quite work, and there was, maybe spiritually even, there was something that didn't quite resonate with me.

At one point in her exploration, Alice attempted to leave spirituality behind altogether.

I tried to be an atheist 'cause I was mad at God, but it didn't work 'cause I just have this, just so a part of me, this sense of something greater than myself, this sense of wanting to connect, wanting to have this kind of spiritual support and stream of something in my life, so it's just always been with me.

Physical sensations and feelings of attraction (Alice, Felix, Olivia, Zelda).

Experiences of the physical sensations of loving others and of having a body were areas of exploration that some participants discussed. Alice recommended, for others facing a religious-sexual conflict,

that they use their body, not just read and talk, but that they actually get more familiar, do more physical things. I'm going on a hiking thing . . . actually, in a couple weeks. Just be more embodied. You know, dancing, singing, massages, you know, just more physical things.

Interactions with GLB people (Felix, Quinton, Zelda). As noted above, Quinton consciously undertook an exploration of integration into "the gay and lesbian world" and used therapy to prepare for his new interactions with GLB people. Felix reported that his understanding of what it means to be gay began to develop during his interactions with other GLB people. "I was going to college, and I was starting, you know, it's in the city,

so I'm starting to meet gay people, and I'm starting to learn what it means to be gay."

Zelda's description of meeting other LBG people demonstrates the exhilaration she felt.

I went to visit my cousin, a good cousin who I used to hang out with all the time when I was a little kid, and I got there, and she was looking kind of butchy, and—but then she introduced me to her friend who was like really butchy, and I'm like, ah, something's going on here, and she's—and so then, you know, after she left that night, she says, 'I have to tell you something. I'm a lesbian.' I'm like, 'Oh, okay, so am I.' 'Oh, great!' We're like, [squeal]!

Interactions with members of other faiths (Gina, Quinton, Zelda). One way that Gina developed her current religious beliefs was through "exposure to people who seemed a hell of a lot more comfortable worshipping Gaia and being one with their Earth than being punished by an angry male-figure God." A person of another faith challenged Zelda on her spiritual practices.

A friend was challenging me, she's a Native American woman, and she does all of her spiritual work by herself, she said, 'Zelda, why do you need to need to find a church? Why do you need to?' I said, 'cause I want camaraderie. I want a communal feeling.

Quinton became involved with a new spiritual community through an invitation from a friend. "I kind of gravitated mostly because a very good friend of mine was involved in the Universalist-Unitarian church. . . . So I got active in them for about a year, or probably closer to two."

Introspection (Alice, Connie, Felix, Gina, Quinton, Whitney). Many participants described how they engaged in the exploration of their own thoughts and beliefs through direct and conscious examination of them.

One of the things that I did is I self-reflected and said, 'What are my priorities? What's important to me?' And I actually did write them down, and my top priority was my relationship my Creator, and then everything else came underneath that. So I looked at my priorities, and I said, 'What am I doing that doesn't match my priorities?' (Felix).

It took years to ask myself question after question after question of what I believed (Gina).

You really have to examine because I would have told you I had no inner conflict at the time of the first breakup, that I was perfectly comfortable, and that was absolutely untrue, and so you have to really look inward to yourself to really resolve your own inner conflict (Whitney).

That was a time of suffering for me, was time of going through the fire, examining everything about what I believed and about who I was and about from where I came, and not from a physical sense, but from a spiritual, metaphysical sense. . . . I would go through piece by piece and just, really just examine everything in me (Connie).

Observation (Alice, Connie, Gina, Olivia, Quinton, Zelda). Many participants reported incorporating observations of others into their exploration. Participants often developed evaluations of their own behavior and sense of belonging based on their observations. Alice observed how her peers engaged in sexual relationships.

My friends had resolved that [the issue of whether to be sexually active outside of marriage] for themselves, and so people were sleeping with their boyfriends and, you know, and living together and, you know, and so, you know, it was like it didn't seem like a very big deal at that point. Although it was [a big deal] earlier.

Olivia's observations of other LGB people as members and leaders within the church allowed her to model her own identity from their examples.

I knew she [my pastor] was gay, and then I knew my friend's sister was gay, and I'm like, 'Everybody, they're all gay, and they've all, I've all,' like these people all growing up and stuff, and they're all, you know, really into church, so it's like, 'Well, I guess, then that's kind of how I am, so I'm in a church, and I'm gay, and it's okay.'

Connie, Gina, Olivia, and Zelda reported being affected by the hypocrisy they observed in church members and leaders. Connie, like others, cited her observation of hypocrisy as a major factor in reducing her adherence to her family's religion.

I could have walked into that [my family's religion] more long term if I had seen people observing the same rules that they made sure that I observed. And this lack of rule observance, and from what I had been taught through Sunday school,

lack of being Christian, or Christ-like, that that was a problem, and that led to a reduction in my faith and certainly a questioning of many things.

Olivia rejected the condemnation of her same-sex relationships by others in her church, pointing out the hypocrisy of their positions.

I have the choice to not be sexual, I guess, and be physical, but it's a choice I made to be physical, to, you know, meet my earthly needs, or whatever they may call it that they don't appreciate, but, you know, how many people do I know that had sex in high school with random, lots of random boys and are Christian. . . . Or do it now with guys. How many people that go to church have sex with random guys that are straight, and that's okay, but because I'm gay, it's absolutely a sin, horrible and wrong?

Political action on GLBT issues (Quinton). Quinton cited political action on GLBT issues as an important part of his exploration.

I went to the march for GLBT rights in Washington in '93, and, you know, and 'empowering' gets so overused, but that truly was, to be in a place where there were, like, literally millions of us, kind of opened my eyes and actually finally gave me the impetus to do what I wanted to do.

Prayer (Alice, Felix, Whitney). Some participants reported engaging in prayer in the process of exploration. Felix's prayer was both an expression of his desire for relationship and an opening to being shown what that might be.

I reflected on my faith, I told God, I said, 'I don't care what everybody's telling me.' You know, some people say it's okay to be gay, some people say it's wrong, some people say gay marriage is okay, some people say it's wrong. I said, 'I don't care. I want a relationship on Earth that's physical,' and I said, 'I believe it's your plan for me to have a relationship.' . . . I said, 'Just whatever, you know, when you tell me this is the person, I will believe you.'

Whitney described her use of prayer, which helped her in her exploration and continues to help her.

I believe that Jesus and God already have a path for me, and I'm already moving in a path that they've already told me to move into. I do pray a lot, and I meditate because only in silent meditation can you hear the prayers being answered. When your mind is all cluttered, and—Trust me, there are days where I couldn't hear a prayer to save my soul because I'm thinking about work and about the hundred different projects I have to do at work, then I hear nothing, but when I can quiet

my mind and ask one question and then quiet it enough, God has always given me an answer, and so that's, this is the answer, this is the direction I'm following is His direction, and He'll lead me, and if it's meant that I need to come out and say who I am and all, then I guess that's the road I'll take.

Alice did not use the word "prayer," but rather reported turning to an "internal experience of the divine" for "guidance."

Reading (Alice, Connie, Gina, Whitney). Four participants claimed that reading was an important part of their exploration process. Participants read the Bible, books about the Bible, and books about other religions. Whitney's description is representative of others. "I not only read the Bible regularly, but I read books about the Bible, and then I read books that aren't necessarily by religious historians because sometimes it's nice to get the whole, a different picture."

Speaking or preaching (Felix, Whitney). Felix and Whitney reported preaching on topics important to each one's faith. Whitney's preaching was intertwined with her reading activities.

I do quite a bit of speaking. As I do speaking, I do reading. Pastor James was just gone on vacation for two weeks, and so I did the Sunday service, and I guess in reading, it is not so much—I'm not a fan of the Old Testament. I'm clearly a fan of the New Testament, and really have my heart set on preaching the Word of Jesus Christ.

One way that Felix explored love was by preaching on his understanding of the nature of love.

That's what God had been laying on my heart, and actually what I preach in [my church]. It was four years long. It was a sermon that God was giving me for four years about what it means to love.

Writing (Felix). Felix reported using writing to facilitate the examination of his priorities. "I actually did write them [my priorities] down."

Relationships (Alice, Connie, Felix, Gina, Olivia, Quinton, Whitney, Zelda).

Relationships were the primary mode of exploration facilitating sexual orientation identity development. Every participant spoke about the learning and growth that occurred within the context of relationships with friends and with partners while flirting, dating, and exploring sexuality. Felix reported “exploring [his] sexuality online” and “chatting online with gay people” before he “actually got the boldness to go meet somebody.” He described his journey to sexual-religious resolution largely in terms of what he learned in relationships with others. For example:

Being in a relationship with Andrew for two years was a good thing. It really helped me understand myself and what I wanted. Oh it’s such—what a good self reflection. It did. It really helped me realize what I wanted in a relationship and what I didn’t want. There’s a lot more of what I didn’t want. And it also taught me my sexuality, you know, what I liked, what I didn’t like.

It was through his experiences in relationships with both men and women that Felix’s sexual orientation identity changed from gay to bisexual.

I knew that I was bi because I really, with the right woman, I really enjoy women, you know? And with the right guy, I enjoy guys, so my sexuality is, you know, it’s more that emotional tie is what it is for me, and then sex is just a physical thing, to me. It is intimate, yes, with the right person. Other than that, it’s just a fun thing to do.

Likewise, Gina’s experiences in relationships with both men and women played a major role in the confirmation of her sexual orientation identity as a lesbian.

I should note that in between these experiences with women, I did attempt to have several experiences with men, including some sexual experiences to try to cure myself and to try to do what God wanted and what the church wanted and what the school and my friends wanted. After a number of tries, where I very much cared about the man that I was with, and I would have physical responses to the man that I was with, it just became absolutely, undeniably clear that where it was at for me was with women.

It is clear from her explanation that she might not have attempted to have sexual relationships with men had she not been attempting to reconcile her sexuality with her

religion. Connie found that she could cope with the tension between having same-sex attraction and living with her religion’s prohibitions against same-sex relationships until she experienced something new in relationship with another woman.

I first became aware of the conflict when I wanted to have—when I fell in love with someone. I was aware that I was attracted to women, but I could have that feeling, or I could be attracted and maybe, you know, go on a date from time to time or whatever, but I could always back away from it. But when I fell in love with someone and realized that I want to be with this person. It’s not that saying, ‘Oh, I want to be a Lesbian.’ I wanted to love someone and do what I needed to do to have that happen if she were in agreement also to have a relationship occur and not be circumvented from doing that by someone else’s thoughts or my own chains. So that’s when I realized that love made me see the chains that bound me.

Some participants spoke about a direct relationship with the divine and its impact on their spiritual development. The relationship with the divine, as mediated by prayer and internal experience, is described in the section on prayer.

Aids to Exploration

Participants were asked what they found helpful as they attempted to resolve conflicting sexual and religious identities. The following items were identified as facilitating the exploration process. As in the previous section, participants who gave responses indicative of each item are listed in parentheses, and select quotations are given as examples.

Being rejected by others condemning of same-sex attraction (Felix, Quinton, Zelda). Some participants described being rejected by friends, family, or community for being or being perceived as LBG. Participants sometimes characterized these rejections as “unhelpful” perhaps because of the painful emotions they prompted. However, the experiences of rejection described by participants invariably led to further exploration of other relationships or communities.

One of the things that really pushed me over the edge with deciding to go gay, you know, to try homosexuality was a good a chunk of my Christian friends, when I told them that I was gay, or that I was struggling with homosexuality, more or less didn't want to have anything to do with me. For some reason, they forgot about love and not judging and caring for one another, and when my best, best friend growing up through life broke ties with me that was—that pushed me over (Felix).

Separation from others with negative views of same-sex attraction (Alice, Connie, Felix, Quinton, Whitney, Zelda). Most participants reported separating themselves or becoming separated from family or communities that condemned any exploration of the implications of their same-sex attraction. Zelda said, "I'm not having any downers, any people who just can't get beyond using religion and its constructs to oppress other people, whoever they are, whatever religion or non-religion." Felix said, "Staying away from the Christians that were condemning helped." Connie reserved space in her life for her contemplation, reading, and introspection away from others who might discourage her.

When I have my mind set to something, I create a space to do it in, and maybe that's part of it, too, is that I do my life, and whatever I need to concentrate on, I carve out space, specific space to do that in. Then I do the rest of my life over here as I figure this out. And then, once it's figured out, I integrate it. And that's the way I did this as well. Like when I went to work and stuff, I tried to leave this [sexual-religious conflict] at home, and I just worked or did whatever. And then when I came home, you know, there were no people standing in my way saying, you know, 'Don't do this.' or 'What're you thinking about this?' or whatever like that.

Individuation (Alice, Connie, Quinton, Zelda). The developmental process of individuation was described by some participants. Individuation, the separation from the beliefs and values of one's parents, facilitated participants' exploration of their own values and beliefs. Individuation is evident in Connie's separation of her beliefs from others' beliefs.

And according to the New Testament, I was not condemned to Hell, and that was fine with me. Some people would still interpret it otherwise, but I did not through my search and inquiry. And other people who said that the New Testament did condemn me or that God did or whatever, then my response simply was, to myself is, 'That is not my God. That's your God, but it's not mine.'

Zelda reported a major turning point after which she undertook an extended period of spiritual exploration.

That was college, and so by then, I was like, 'I'm not going to church,' when I came home. 'Not going. Why should I? What's so good about them? How are they any better than me?' You know, and I think, so I think that's when I began the defiant rebellion. 'I'm not going to church, you know, this happens there, that happens there. What's the good in it?' So, you know, I think that's where maybe I made my stand, you know.

The process of individuation reported by participants coincided with going to college or graduate school in early adulthood.

Self-validation (Alice, Felix, Gina, Quinton, Whitney). Many participants described the development of self-validation, which helped them to continue their exploration of what fit for them. Alice's self-validation was related to her individuation from her family.

I think I had come to a little more trust of my own inner process, and so—and since I wasn't—I was never into dogma anyway and biblical stuff, it was more kind of—it was just it's more the community thing, and it was just kind of, you know, and could I break with my family about this.

Quinton reported having sufficient love for himself to take his own path. "After a while, I kind of just tired of the whole Jesus loves you thing. I really don't particularly care if Jesus loves me or not. I love myself."

Deepening spiritual journey (Alice). Asked what was helpful to her, Alice answered, "I would say my deepening spiritual journey. I would say that that's been the most helpful thing." She explained further, "I think it's really been my own deepening

experience of connection, I think. To me, connection is what it's about, you know, am I an acceptable person in all ways, my sexual orientation, just other things about me."

Emotional healing from other things (Alice). Alice reported that "emotional healing from other things" not directly related to her sexual-religious conflict helped with her exploration process.

Exploring with others (Alice, Felix, Quinton, Zelda). Some participants cited exploring with others as an important asset to their own exploration. Quinton said nothing impeded his exploration partly because "most of [his] friends at [the parish he attended] were gay and lesbian as well, and they were going through similar struggles." Alice said, "as other people have struggled, friends, have struggled with these kinds of things, kind of a collective struggle . . . that we've done together is very helpful." Zelda reported that sharing the exploration with others was the single most helpful thing for her.

What have I found helpful? To have other people I can talk with who practice, who are attending to their spiritual growth. They may not be practicing any particular religious construct, but who know themselves as perfect beings just as they are, with their flaws, but it's okay to be gay or lesbian, and it's okay to be a person of color at the same time, and it's okay to believe in God, or believe in a Higher Power, or believe in a Goddess, or to be a witch, white witch, green witch, you know, so having people around me who I can talk to about our spiritual interests, and beliefs, and that's it.

Relationships with others supportive of exploration (Alice, Connie, Felix, Quinton, Whitney, Zelda). Many participants reported being supported in their exploration by friends and family. Quinton knew he had his family's support.

Probably the best thing is have a strong support system because that makes all the difference, and by support system, I don't mean just friends and family, but friends and family that truly you feel care for you as a person. My family's love for me was not something that I ever particularly doubted at any particular time in my life. When I came out to my family, I didn't expect, you know, the big blowups or anything else like that or it's like, 'Oh, god, you're no longer my son. Get out of here. Get out of my sight,' or whatever, and that stuff. That just wasn't going to happen, for many of my family, and it didn't.

Connie was intentional about choosing friends who supported her in her exploration.

I grew up in a quite dysfunctional family, and, you know, I couldn't choose my family either, but as I got older, I realized that I could create add-ons to my family, good friends and community. And who I chose was my choice. So as I grew older and became an adult, I chose friends who were supportive and not closed minded. And so people who stand in my way aren't my friends.

Felix stressed repeatedly the positive impact and importance of the "unconditional love" he received from a very few of his Christian friends.

Charles being a real Christian, what I would consider a real Christian, unconditional love, no judgment, always being there, living like Christ, setting an example, believing in you, you know, not condemning you. It was a real Christian person that, you know, he trusted God to take care of me, that he didn't have to be God.

Just as important to Felix was the acceptance of his spiritual exploration he received from a man he was dating. "So, I [was] dating Andrew, and he [let] me experience my spirituality however I want, you know, he [had] no pressure on me whatsoever, you know, to not be a Christian or anything."

Separation of focus (Felix, Gina, Quinton). Three participants found it helpful to separate the issues of sexual orientation and spirituality and focus on each independently. Gina recommended this approach to others facing a sexual-religious conflict.

Figure them out separately. I think it's too much to take it on. I think it's too much to try to determine what your spiritual beliefs are and what your affectional and sexual preferences are as one subject. I wouldn't say that you just need to live in a state of limbo and either be nonsexual while you figure out your religious, or be nonreligious while you figure out your sexual, but I would say just be patient with both sides, both portions of yourself, and nonjudgmental with both portions of yourself, but very much figure them out separately, and then see how they fit together.

Quinton decided to put aside his focus on attaining priesthood to focus on exploring life as a gay man.

Part of what I did in that time period is I decided I was going to let, you know, the whole seminary, priesthood issue just simply rest for a year, and kinda like put

that aside and, considering that I had been in that whole [seminary] system for almost, over ten years, I decided, you know, I need to find out what's out there, you know, what's out in life, what's out in the big bad world, and so I just said I'm just going to experience life for a year, and then I'll make a decision what I want to do.

Felix criticized his own level of exclusive focus, but acknowledged the benefit of the approach.

It was like, well, you know, I'm so worried about being gay, and everything was gay for a long time, you know, everything funneled through, you know, gay thing because I started focusing on my sexuality. 'Cause you're right, I'm in a conflict. I could focus on my religious side or I could focus on my gay side, so I started focusing on my sexuality, and everything became gay. You know, my movies, my entertainment, my internet, everything became gay, and went through the gay lifestyle, the gay community. It became my focus. Just like I was way too focused on my Christianity for quite a few years, I was getting way too focused, you know, because—I don't know, I guess that's just human nature is to grab onto something and do it, you know. But it was very good for me in the long run because I really dived in for three to four years to really understand my sexuality.

Impediments to Exploration

Participants were asked what impeded their progress toward resolution. Items that interfered with the process of exploration are detailed below. The pseudonyms of participants who gave responses indicative of each item are listed in parentheses after the item. Select quotations representative of each item are given as examples.

Abusive counseling (Zelda). As described above, Zelda encountered a therapist who conflated his own desire for sexual gratification with Zelda's search for clarity, resulting in a therapeutic boundary violation. What was lost was the opportunity for Zelda to sort through her thoughts and feelings in a safe and supportive environment without having to fend off unwanted sexual propositions.

Church's condemnation of same-sex partnering (Connie, Whitney). A church atmosphere condemning of same-sex partnering limited the exploration of some

participants. Connie delayed exploration of same-sex relationships because of her religious upbringing.

The most significant factor in my not coming out sooner was that I was a Christian and that in the Christian, at least as I grew up, Christian philosophy was, if you date someone of your own biological sex, you will go to Hell. And I didn't want to go to Hell, and I didn't want to be displeasing God.

The atmosphere at Whitney's church prevented her from engaging in discussion about matters of same-sex attraction, one of the modes of exploration detailed above. "I knew, even before I read the Book of Discipline, what the United Methodist Church stance was on homosexuality. So I didn't really say anything to anybody."

Deferment (Connie, Felix, Olivia, Zelda). Some participants reported that, at some point, they deferred addressing sexual-religious conflict. Zelda put off thinking about spiritual matters for a while. "I don't think I thought about, does God think this is good or does God think this is bad, I just let it go. I just, I think I tried not to think about it." In a similar way, Connie delayed her spiritual search.

I knew that I was a spiritual person and wanted to have a conscious, active relationship with, at that time I called it God, but I knew that what I was in was not it. And so I knew that when I got older I would search for something else. . . . I had kind of put the search off until the future.

Felix went through a period of time when he did not address matters of his own sexuality because he was not ready to address them yet.

I was really religious and I guess how I was dealing with it at that time was I just wasn't dealing with it, you know. It's like I just put it under the rug and I wasn't going to deal with it 'cause I had so much other things to focus on. I wasn't ready for a relationship. I wasn't ready for sex. I wasn't ready, you know, I mean, I didn't have any time to do anything like that.

Fear of exploration (Connie, Whitney). Two participants cited fear as a block to exploration. Whitney said she "was intimidated for a long time to move forward."

Connie avoided exploration of same-sex relationships out of fear that she would “go to Hell” and “be displeasing [to] God.”

Guilt (Felix). Felix put off exploration of same-sex relationships for periods of time because of the guilt he felt over his exploration.

That was my first crush and my first breakup. . . . I said I was done, you know, I should never have done it; it’s against my beliefs, and all that kind of stuff. And for the longest time, I didn’t—I mean, that was my one touch with the gay world for a while—just—for quite a while.

Invalidation (Felix, Olivia). Two participants described invalidating experiences with friends, family, and church leadership as unhelpful in their exploration process. Olivia was told several times that she was not really gay.

My youth director freaked out on me. She’s like, ‘How can you be gay? You’re just a phase you’re going through. It’s just, you know, you’re not, you know, a phase.’ I’m like, ‘No, it’s not. Something is really going on here,’ and she didn’t believe me. . . . My friends telling me that I was, it was a phase I was going through. My dear friends saying, you know, ‘You’re a church-goer. You’re not gay. You’re not. It’s just, you know, she’s got, she’s controlling your mind. You’re not really gay,’ and my family, I really didn’t come out to my family for a long time, so, you know. My mom still doesn’t believe that I’m gay. She thinks that there’s still a phase after, you know, how many years since I was 14. I’m [in my early thirties] now, so.

Felix’s friends pressured him to accept the label “gay” even though his experience contradicted that label.

[My friends] kept saying, ‘Felix you’re so gay. You’re so gay.’ I’m like, ‘No, I’m not going to be gay.’ And really, I—I think if it wasn’t for [these friends], I probably wouldn’t have tried homosexuality, you know, because I had them constantly telling me I’m gay. But yet I didn’t really feel gay. I mean, really, I was just a messed up bisexual, I guess, because I really did like women, but I liked men, too.

It is worth noting here that even though Felix’s friends may have fostered exploration of his sexuality in some form by pressuring him to think of himself as gay, Felix’s exploration may have taken a different form if those around him had

acknowledged the elements of Felix’s experience that contradicted that label. Thus the same event may be seen as both an aid and an impediment to exploration.

Lack of a partner (Alice, Felix). Sometimes the lack of a partner to explore with is an impediment. Alice said, “I would like to grow more in this area with another human being, with a woman . . . and I haven’t been in a relationship in a while.” At times, Felix was not able to do some of the exploration he would have liked due to the lack of a female partner.

Living with family aligned with strict religious teachings (Alice). Some impediments to exploration are the converse of aids to exploration. Separation from others with negative views of same-sex attraction is described above as an aid to exploration. It is the converse of Alice’s experience of “living at home as an undergraduate” with her parents, who disapproved of sexual activity outside of marriage.

No one to talk to (Zelda). Zelda reported a difficult period of time in her attempts to resolve her sexual-religious conflict. “Who do I turn to? Where do I go? There’s nobody to talk to.”

Partial acceptance from church (Quinton). Quinton reported a long-time effort to reconcile being gay with being Catholic. He described the irony that partial acceptance from his church delayed his exploration of alternatives.

In some ways, back then the Catholic Church was much more flexible and much more trying to reach some kind of honest appreciation of the gay and lesbian people that were in their parishes, in their life, and stuff like that, so in some ways that was very good because it, you kind of felt like we were still trying to, like, kind of, like, journey together kind of stuff, but on the other hand, they would only, you would, you knew it could only go so far, and then the, you know, then that was it. If they had been more intransigent, back then, like they are now, I would have made those decisions sooner, or else I might not ever have really gotten, you know, stayed involved from my seminary days. I probably wouldn’t have gone into the seminary in the first place if it had been much more, if it had

been more obvious like it is now. So in some ways that, you know, that was more helpful. In some ways it was more harmful 'cause I stayed in a situation that, looking at now, you know, I shouldn't have been in because it was still so, I don't want to say friendly, but maybe accommodating.

Pity from friends (Connie). Connie found pity an impediment to her exploration process.

I think though that of the people who cared about me who were involved in my process, which supposedly all of them, the thing that stood in my way the most, and to that degree, was people's pity or sorrow. . . . That is what stood in my way sometimes, them feeling bad about my suffering because then it made me start thinking about, 'Oh, I'm causing them the suffering.' I just needed to get done with my process. Support me 'cause I'm going to do this. Don't be like, 'Oh, I'm so sorry you're so—you're suffering. I'm sorry this is so hard for you.' That wasn't helpful.

Rejection of God due to others' abuses (Zelda). There were times in Zelda's process when she rejected God altogether because she did not like how others related to God. "I used to let what somebody outside was doing, and because they weren't doing it right, then I'm not going to believe in God at all, not believe in a spiritual being."

Shame (Alice, Felix, Whitney). Two participants described experiencing shame around matters of sexuality. Regarding impediments to the resolution of her sexual-religious conflict, Alice said, "It just seems like shame is at the basis of things." Felix said he refrained from talking with some people he respected about his sexuality because of the shame he felt. "I did not come out to the Jensens . . . because I felt so ashamed, because I love them and respect them so much that I didn't want to let them know that I was dating a guy." As a consequence, Felix could not explore matters of sexual orientation with an otherwise supportive family.

Hidden sexual identity (Whitney). Whitney described some of the impacts of hiding her sexual orientation from her church. She has not been able to share openly in the exploration of marriage with other couples in her church even though she herself has

been in a committed relationship for many years. During a time of distress after a difficult breakup, Whitney was unable to share the full reason for her suffering, receiving only part of the support she might have otherwise received.

Portraits of Resolution

Each participant's version of resolution is described in turn. Included are descriptions of beliefs and practices that reconcile previously conflicting aspects of sexual orientation and religious belief. In the descriptions, focus is placed on participants' relationships with their respective religions and spiritual practices rather than the specifics of their denominations. This focus is a matter of clinical utility: Clinicians are more likely to have influence on the approach their clients take to their religious practices and are less likely to recommend changes in religious affiliation.

For all participants, resolution involved the acceptance of same-sex attraction as part of their identity even though one male participant chose to marry a woman. Many participants reported that the realization that their same-sex attraction was not a choice facilitated their sense of acceptance for themselves.

Six of the eight participants reported disassociating from former religions condemning of same-sex partnering. Felix continues to align himself with the religion he adopted in early adolescence. Olivia has not yet found a home church, but is looking for one within the denomination of her childhood. As noted above, all participants reported being at least somewhat involved with religious or spiritual practices.

Alice

Resolution for Alice included a turn toward “following one’s own inner guidance” and away from “the dogma of the church.” Her exploration of different religious paths, including Eastern religions, led her to a “broader view of what it is to experience God.” In addition to her turn toward “following [her] own inner guidance,” Alice described a transition “far away from religion.” She said, “I wouldn’t even use the word religious. . . . I would use the word spiritual.” She reported that her “own deepening experience of [spiritual] connection” allowed her to feel more and more that she is “an acceptable person in all ways, [including her] sexual orientation.” She described the work of resolution as “an internal kind of a job of really coming to believe . . . that me as a sexual person, as with everyone, is a good thing and that it is something that God not only approves of, but recommends greatly.”

Corresponding to these shifts in perspective, Alice made changes in her religious affiliation. As a young woman, she disassociated herself from her childhood religion. Many years later, in middle adulthood, some friends invited Alice to join them at their place of worship. “I immediately felt that I had found my spiritual home and [it] has felt that way ever since. . . . I’ve not doubted one bit.” Alice described her new spiritual home as “open” to her, as a place where her inner experience is respected, and as a place where her social needs are met.

Although Alice reported having resolved the basic conflict between her religion and sexual orientation, she said that she has “a long way to go” before she is satisfied with the fit between the spiritual and sexual parts of herself. Remaining areas of growth

that she identified include “remnants of . . . shame” about her sexuality from her family culture and her ability to accept the erotic parts of life:

It’s like expanding the idea of sexuality beyond just genital sex . . . in terms of ‘Am I okay with myself as a sexual person?’ . . . and ‘Do I really invite the erotic in my life?’ And it doesn’t have to be just sex. I mean . . . ‘Am I in love with life?’

Alice said that some of this remaining work “is my own relationship with God and my body and life,” but that some of her growth might only be accomplished with another person who, like Alice, is “into sex in a committed relationship.”

Connie

Connie’s achievement of resolution was marked by a number of conclusions drawn from a period of intense reading and contemplation. One conclusion was “that the God that I created inside myself and that I had envisioned would not condemn me for being who God made me to be.” She decided that, even if others were correct about God condemning her for being lesbian, she “was going to live free anyway.” She described changes in her concept of God that allowed for resolution:

God was no longer a male, or an old white male who was kind and gentle and wise. God became something that was more spirit based and without form, and so without gender, also. And that concept of God was more freeing to me.

From her examination of the Christian Bible and numerous Christian texts, Connie

decided . . . that, yes, there were some things that I read in the Old Testament that one could say condemned homosexuality, but if we were supposed to be Christians, then Christ came to fulfill that and that was no longer what we lived under anymore. We were to live under Christ’s main rule, or main premise, main guideline for our lives, and from all that I understood at that time, and I still believe that, was love. And I thought that was, as Christ has said, the number one thing.

At the time of her resolution, Connie disidentified as Christian and began to identify as “spiritual.” Connie currently engages in a collection of spiritual practices cultivated from a number of religious and spiritual traditions.

Connie said her sexual self and spiritual self “fit very well together.” She described how she views sexual expression as one way to achieve spiritual growth:

When I think about spirituality, I think about . . . practices that allow one to become more like the aspect of the Great Spirit within us. . . . Things that lend themselves to feeling like that, to moving toward the oneness, increasing oneness, to me, that is spirituality. And so sexuality, to me, is a very blessed and holy, wonderful way to become close to someone, which I think is more like a physical way of practicing the metaphysical way of increasing spirituality, becoming closer to the oneness. So I think they kind of merge like that, but the process is more physical, and it’s directed toward one person. But then that relationship itself takes on an aspect of spirituality because . . . I want to help my partner, and I want to allow my partner to help me, to become the best me that I can and develop the best we that we can. And to me, that is also Spirit because I think this life is kind of like school, and I want to help my partner get an A in spirituality and she me. And I think that sexuality is one way to help do that.

She expanded on her description of sexuality and revealed that she has rediscovered some values about sexuality that are a part of her childhood religion:

Many times in our society, sexuality is shortened to mean intercourse or . . . something that’s more kind of carnal or lustful. . . . Sexuality has never been about that for me . . . probably because I rejected a lot of those things growing up [in my religion]. And as I rethought things and came up with my own way of seeing, I thought, ‘Okay, yeah, I, too . . . do not want to have that associated with something that I consider holy.’ And I think it’s okay to be active and passionate and all those kinds of things, but I think that sex is holy and my sex in my relationship and sexuality in my relationship fits very well with that belief system.

Connie said that achieving resolution of her sexual-religious conflict was “pivotal” for her continued growth. Although she acknowledged the difficulty of achieving resolution (“After I was through it, I was so tired I just wanted to rest.”), Connie said, “I just encourage other people [facing a religious-sexual conflict] that the big conflict leads to, if you travel the path, it leads to a lot of peace, peace and clarity.”

Felix

Felix had a conflict between his sexual relationships with men and what his “conscience” told him:

I always felt that God was telling me that, for me . . . I shouldn’t be pursuing men . . . you know, that homosexuality wasn’t right for me . . . because my . . . perspective on life is that I want to live my life for God, find out what His desire for me is, what His plan is . . . His will for my life and then follow it. And I’d always felt that . . . it just, it didn’t fit right. It wasn’t right for me.

In his achievement of sexual-religious conflict resolution, Felix retained his religious affiliation, broadened his sense of sexual identity from “gay” to “bi,” and married a woman with whom he felt spiritually and sexually compatible.

Felix shared a number of “revelations” he had that allowed him to come to this resolution. Felix described a shift in perspective that reduced the intensity of his conflict:

Part of the conflict [resolution] was a revelation that sexuality was not who I am, you know, my sex, my—hetero, homo, or bi—is only a small fraction of who I am. I’m a hell of a lot more interesting person than being just gay or bi or straight. And having that revelation really helped. That just came out of nowhere, you know, just one day just I realized, well, why is this such a big deal?

He spoke about the discovery that he could be sexually satisfied in a relationship with a woman:

Really, what I liked about homosexual sex was anal sex. I actually do enjoy that. And it never occurred to me that a woman might not care about that . . . playing that way. You know, there’s toys for that. And I would’ve never guessed that. If someone would have told me that I can date a woman and she will . . . do something like gay sex with me, then, hello, I could have . . . because I, actually, have always wanted to have sex with a woman while a guy is having sex with me. I mean, that was something I always wanted to do because I enjoy having sex with women, actually more so than I do with guys if . . . I could have a toy, so great! . . . I mean, it’s kind of naïve . . . that I didn’t realize that. I mean guys, gay guys have toys and do that, why couldn’t they do that with a woman? But I am still open minded enough to be attracted to men, and I do find the male figure attractive, so, I mean, I know I’m bisexual, but still. . . . My sexual desires are met, so my wife is perfectly comfortable with anything I bring up, and there’s

nothing that's off limits, and she can, you know, do anything any of the guys could do, so I'm happy.

Another revelation was the discovery that he is not alone in struggling with lust:

[My friend] never questioned whether or not, you know, this was a legitimate struggle, you know, he saw it as a legitimate struggle, and he said something that totally blew me away. I mean, it was like so common sense, but, you know, I said, 'God, I just, I struggle with, you know, lust for guys, you know, sometimes I'll see a really hot guy, and I know he's gay, and then it just throws me over the edge, and then I start struggling with gay things again,' and he says, 'You know what? I see a really hot woman, and I struggle with that, and I'm married.' He goes, 'Everybody struggles with lust.' And I thought I was so isolated in it, you know. And when he brought it into perspective, that, you know what, even straight people struggle with that. You know, and that was part of my religious struggle, was lust. You know, that was the biggest thing, you know, and when I realized that, you know, there's a parallel, it's just life, you know, I'm not alone.

In sum, these revelations facilitated the subjugation of Felix's sexual attraction to men to his understanding of what God wanted for him, marriage to a woman.

Felix reported that the emotional intimacy he has with his wife is much deeper than he previously achieved with male partners. The approach Felix and his wife currently take to their relationship is to be extremely open with and accepting of each other:

Pretty much anything goes as long as it's not a secret. . . . We don't keep secrets from each other, so everything's out in the open, all our desires, everything that we think, and we're completely open with each other, like naked emotionally and spiritually.

The intensity in Felix's description of his openness in his relationship with his wife is also present in his description of his feelings about achieving resolution:

There's the joy of where I am today, and the sheer, utter happiness that I'm in with [my wife], and the unbelievable happiness I am with where I am with my relationship with my creator, and how much I love Him for giving me [my wife], and helping me through my struggle.

Contrasting this description of intense happiness, Felix acknowledged that some of his sexual fantasies will go unfulfilled: "Marriage, I believe, is forever, and . . . I got all my sex in with guys as . . . I'll have 'cause [my wife is] not into three-ways, so that's that."

Gina

Gina's resolution included disassociation from her previous religion. As a young adult she "started believing in spirituality and not religion." She developed a sense of acceptance regarding her sexual orientation:

If it's true that everything is created with a purpose, even the good and the bad, then I would have been created with a purpose, and my affectional and sexual desires would have been created with a purpose.

For Gina, a sense of clarity came following exploration of sexual relationships, adding to her acceptance of her sexual orientation:

Between [my] experiences with women, I did attempt to have several experiences with men, including some sexual experiences to try to cure myself and to try to do what God wanted and what the church wanted and what the school and my friends wanted. After a number of tries, where I very much cared about the man that I was with, and I would have physical responses to the man that I was with, it just became absolutely, undeniably clear that where it was at for me was with women. Once I came to that realization, I started caring less about what others thought, and being more comfortable and secure in, 'Look, you can't say that I'm with women because I was sexually abused as a child. You—I mean, you could say it, but I don't think it's true. You can say that I don't like men, but actually, I'm really much more comfortable with men as friends than I am with women, which is kind of odd, but it's true. You can't say that I want to be a man because there are times when I can look kind of butch, and there are times when I can look pretty femme,' and at the time, I looked pretty damn femme. I just started going through all of the arguments that everybody had made all along, and I started arguing them in my own head. I started saying, 'Well, no, that's not it, I am just, I just am. You can find a gene. You can find the hypothalamus, whatever you want to find. This is just me, and I am not, I don't believe that I am harming anyone. I'm not sexually assaulting anybody. I am not proselytizing. How can that be wrong with a spiritual being that creates beautiful trees that shelter and creates tigers that kill deer? There's the good and the bad. There's the parts that we understand and the parts that we don't, the parts that people like and the parts that people don't, parts that we're comfortable with and uncomfortable with, and I just am.' Once I started having those realizations, over a span of many years, I became comfortable with all of the arguments and rationalizations and defenses and coping mechanisms in my own head, and then I conversed fine, quite calmly to others, and that, in turn, fostered more calmness in myself.

Gina said she is “very satisfied” with the fit between the sexual and spiritual areas of her life. However, she conceded:

I have dissatisfactions with the two subjects [sexuality and spirituality] individually, but I have great satisfaction with how they fit, with how they mesh, that there’s not a conflict large enough to make me feel like I have no foundation. It’s just conflict enough to make me continue to think [and] learn.

Describing further some of her current conflict, Gina said:

The only conflict there is now is my long-time partner comes from a very strict [religious] family, and it took about ten years before she would say anything [about our relationship] to anyone of her family members, and we’re still expected to attend church functions, although I don’t believe in many of the rituals that they perform. . . . I’ll go because it makes my partner happy and because I enjoy seeing some of the family members, and some of the experience at the church is intriguing and interesting and even uplifting.

Olivia

Olivia has maintained her association with her childhood denomination. Although some in her church have criticized her for having same-sex relationships and have labeled her behavior as sinful, Olivia maintains a set of beliefs—reinforced by church leaders and gay and lesbian active church members—that ground her in self-acceptance. Olivia explained what she believes the Bible says about homosexual relationships:

I talked to my pastor, who I believe is bisexual. . . . He just told me . . . part of what the Bible says was, you know, what his interpretation was, the men, it wasn’t okay for the men to be with the boys. It never said anything about the women being with other women, and all the, you know, the men can’t be with small boys. I’m like, I agree with that ‘cause I don’t think men should be with children, so that’s fine, so that’s kind of what his explanation was to me, and, you know, it’s fine what you are.

She explained her belief that God made her as she is:

I just knew that [being lesbian] wasn’t a choice. I knew that I couldn’t control it. . . . Why would God make me this way if it wasn’t the way I was supposed to be? Like, this is not fun. This isn’t an easy life. Why would I choose to be with a woman when I want to have kids and get married? Why would I feel this way when I do when I’m with a woman and, you know, try to date boys, it’s like,

there’s nothing, nothing there. There’s no chemistry. It’s not happening. Like, ‘Maybe it’s just not the right guy.’ No, you know, ‘cause with every single girl, it’s like something more is there, so it wasn’t really a struggle for me. . . . ‘cause I pretty much always knew, since that first time she kissed my hand. . . . something was different.

These beliefs, some modeled by church leaders, allow Olivia to remain engaged with her religion without adopting the condemnation of some others in her denomination.

One remaining struggle for Olivia is finding a new church. Olivia said that her “home church was . . . cool” regarding her sexual orientation, but that she now lives in another city.

I haven’t really found a [new] home church yet that actually . . . preaches to a people that are accepting of gays and are [my denomination]. I haven’t really found one yet. I’m looking for one that kind of fits . . . what I really need. . . . There’s one [in this city] but it’s just a little bit too stuffy for me, I think, and there’s one in [a neighboring city] I haven’t checked out yet, but I need to get over there.

She said she tried attending a “gay church” but found that she did not agree with the message:

I tried it. I’m like, you know, I wanna go to a gay church ‘cause I’ll be accepted there, but, [the church I tried] is so all inclusive, they’re like, ‘Okay, if you believe in a god, we don’t really care which one you believe in, just come and believe in a god, and we’ll accept you, and we love you, and you’re gay, and let’s, you know, we love you for who you are, if you’re broken,’ and I’m like, ‘I’m not broken. I’m gay, and I’m a lesbian, and I’m a Christian,’ so it’s like, ‘Deal with it.’

Although Olivia observed that her religion and sexual orientation are “not really conflicting” at this time, she has some conflict between some of her sexual behavior and her morals: “I feel guilty with the whole being sexual with people I’m not in love with sometimes, but, you know, just maybe morals more than my Christianity kind of thing, but so it’s not a huge, huge struggle.”

Quinton

Quinton said the resolution of his conflict regarding religion and sexual orientation was “pretty short and pretty fast and pretty decisive.” He denied ever having any feelings of distress about being gay. (“I’ve never particularly felt like unclean, like I’m dirty, or that God doesn’t love me.”) His conflict was not marked by distress, but rather was reflected in a long-time effort to integrate his sexual orientation into his intended life as a priest. After an impasse was reached in this effort, Quinton disassociated from his original religion. He “pretty much left religion of any sorts” for about ten years after that, but has since found a spiritual community that “resonates” and feels “natural” and “comfortable.”

One of the pieces that allowed Quinton to achieve resolution, a strong sense of self-loving, was obtained as a young adult. He had graduated from a high school seminary and was in his second year of a college clergy preparation program with the intention of becoming a priest. He described how working through a personal crisis led to the achievement of radical self acceptance, explaining that his sexual orientation, while not a “central” issue, was a “good focus point . . . that other issues could crystallize around.”

My big conflict . . . was not religious in nature, it was much more personal. It was much more finding a place . . . where I felt loved, and that happened to me in my very, very early 20s, and it was not specifically, you know, religious or—It was dealing with gay issues within myself, but it was in a larger context, and just in terms of, ‘Who am I as a person? You know, what am I doing here? What’s, you know—Am I loved? Am I, you know, is there anyone who can, you know, who’s concerned about me?’ And it came at a point where I was actually on retreat in my college seminary, with my college seminary class, and came to the point where I was almost ready to commit, to consider suicide because I was at a very low point in my life. I was a sophomore in college, really confused about where my life was going, what I was doing. All of the friends that I made in high school were gone ‘cause they went to a completely different place, so didn’t

follow any of my schoolmates from high school. [I] made some good friends in my freshman year college. They all left the seminary program at the end of that year, so I . . . felt like really alone, really not having any friends, not anyone I could talk to. [I] was starting, you know, to do the adult thing of just, you know, moving myself away from my family to become more an adult, and stuff like that, and through about two nights, and it’s one of those about five instances in my life that I can, you know, count on one hand that were really life changing for my life, and, you know, whether it was a moment of transcendence or what it was, however you would describe that, I decided that it was going to be sufficient for my life that I love myself, and over a two-week period, that just strengthened and kind of grew, and that was a launching point, I think, for my personality, for my person for probably the next 30 years, so, you know, was it religious? Yeah, kind of. Did it involve sexuality issues? Yeah, but it was bigger than that, although that was certainly . . . the impetus to look at some deeper issues that were within myself.

Quinton continued to progress through the seminary system, maintaining the goal of becoming a priest. However, he was dismissed from the seminary before he could achieve that goal.

[I] went to [a seminary] for graduate school for three years, and then was kicked out, not because of necessarily of sexuality issues, but some of the staff was wondering if I was questioning my sexuality or anything else like that. I wasn’t questioning my sexuality. What I was questioning was what was the best way to integrate it into a life of, you know, priesthood and quote-unquote celibacy, and stuff like that. Basically, ostensibly, the reason that I was kicked out was ‘cause I did not have the proper respect for authority.

After he was dismissed from the seminary, Quinton continued to be involved in a “progressive” parish of the same religion until it became clear that no reconciliation could be made between his sexual orientation and the church. He said,

[In the] conflict between my Catholicism and my sexuality, my sexuality won hands down. It just might have taken a while for it to . . . finally crystallize, and then when it did, around that Vatican statement [describing homosexuality as ‘objectively disordered’], then it was no contest.

Following his disassociation from Catholicism, Quinton experimented with a few different spiritual communities. He said he now has a high level of satisfaction with the fit between his sexual self and his spiritual self.

The way I look at it now is . . . basically, my body, my sexuality, and the expression thereof is as much an expression of the divine or the demonic as anything else about me as a person. There's nothing that specifically says, you know, 'Oh, gay sex is bad,' you know. No, it's just like every other aspect of myself as a person, and of any other person. You know, you can make it good, you can make it bad, and that's as much an expression of the divine as anything else.

Quinton said he is pleased that he is in a committed relationship with his partner, "something that I've always wanted."

Whitney

Whitney disassociated from her childhood religion, but has been very active in her current church for many years. She has been in a monogamous same-sex relationship for many years. Whitney said she has reconciled her beliefs about God with her lesbian identity such that she experiences no internal conflict about the fit of these two areas.

I guess they fit together for me because I'm comfortable with who I am, and I know Jesus Christ is comfortable with who I am. You know, when I think about the teachings of Christ, He wanted me to be kind, compassionate, giving to other people. You know, I think He wanted that monogamy. He didn't want you to commit adultery. You know, He wanted you to be kind in word and deed, and . . . I basically try very hard to lead my life in the teachings of Jesus Christ, and I don't feel that His teachings are in any way in conflict with the relationship I have with Erica. Like I said, we are monogamous . . . and we have a very loving relationship, and it's very thoughtful, and, you know, we still do the please and the thank yous and appreciate what each one does for the other.

Whitney said she feels a sense of "peace and resolve" regarding her sexual orientation in the context of her relationship with God. Having come to this resolution, Whitney said, "It's easier for me to preach . . . because I don't believe I'm a hypocrite." She has attained a level of comfort with herself:

I'm a Christian first and believe in the principles of Jesus Christ, and, you know, maybe I'm gay second, but to me there is no conflict, and because I don't feel any conflict with that, it's easier for me to talk about it, and I hope . . . that's the

message I portray to you, that I'm comfortable with who I am, and I hope that's the message I give to other people.

In contrast to her internal sense of resolution, Whitney has found it necessary to be somewhat secretive about her sexual orientation ("I'm not out at church.") because of her denomination's rules about those seeking ministry.

I've been very active in church. I sit on many committees at church. I do a lot of functions, but there always kinda hidden in the background—I have wanted to pursue ministry for probably the last ten years, but always in the back of my mind, it's, 'I'm gay. I can't be a minister.'

Some in her church, including her pastor, know that Whitney is a lesbian and are supportive of her pursuit of ministry. As she prepares for possible scrutiny of her sexual orientation, Whitney has decided that she will not lie if confronted. If discovery of her sexual orientation should bar her from ministry within her current denomination, Whitney intends to change her affiliation to another denomination that she believes to be more accepting of gay men and lesbians in the ministry so that "I can come out and move forward."

Zelda

In achieving resolution between her religious upbringing and her sexual orientation, Zelda rejected external authority on the meaning of the Bible—and rejected the Bible itself as a definitive text—turning instead to an understanding based on her own inner knowing.

When people bring up, you know, Sodom and Gomorra to me or, you know, the Bible says this or that, I am not a scholar of the Bible. I—The best I can say is, you know, the Bible or the Torah, the Bible I can say for sure, I would imagine the same for the Torah, and for the Qur'an, and other religious books, they were written by men. Why—How in the world can every document be written by men, and be exactly right and perfect for everybody? It can't be, that's what. That's what I tell myself. And for the Bible, I know. It is a known fact that there were

other books that were set aside, that it has been revised by different, different elements of the Christian religion, that no books by women were accepted into it as a representation of whatever was to have gone on before Christ, and during Christ, and after, and what was written about Christ was sometimes hundreds of years later, so anybody comes to me with the Bible, I could dismiss it all. It's like I don't have to believe any of it, but the way in which I want to believe it. I'm satisfied with the metaphysical. I'm satisfied with the idea of giving a metaphysical interpretation to it. That's just as good as somebody preaching it strictly that you're supposed to do this. Well, if you're going to preach it strictly, where's the hand for a hand, and the eye for an eye? Where are all those very specific things going on in today's world? You can't apply it in that way.

Zelda couples her reliance on inner knowing with an acceptance of her sexual orientation as a part of her: "My sexual self is a part of me, just like I'm an African American, I'm a woman, I'm a feminist . . . I'm a social justice advocate, I am a spiritual being, I am a spark of the Divine." Zelda reported that she is "very satisfied" with the fit between her sexual orientation and her sense of spirituality.

Zelda now attends a church that resonates with her internal sense of knowing and with the principles of a "metaphysical" interpretation of the Bible. She reported that she finds participation in the church socially satisfying:

People support me and my partner. . . . I have what I feel is a church family there, people who support me, people who accept me for who I am, people who call upon me for my skills . . . and they don't worry about other things [my sexual orientation], and that makes me feel good.

Zelda added that she finds the church open and relevant to her as an African American and a lesbian:

They have lots of persons of color in leadership roles, ministry. They have GLBT ministers. They have GLBT weekend focuses, just like they have focuses on other things, on an annual basis. So there's a support group there, and so that makes me feel good.

Zelda noted ties to her childhood religion. She still at times considers the church she grew up in to be her church:

I still know people from the church. I kinda still call it my church when I go back to [my home town] because I know people who're there, [even though] many of them, the elders who I would be with, with my mom, have passed away.

The other tie she noted was that, after she joined her current church, Zelda realized that her mother had often shared publications from this denomination with her.

And so I came full circle of being in the church . . . and thinking that the church as an institution is just a terrible place, and totally forsaking it, and coming back around to a place where I felt I could trust an institution.

Zelda was surprised to find that her current spiritual practices were, in part, a reflection of the values her mother shared with her as a child.

Zelda noted some remaining questions about her current church. She said she is concerned about how the church started ("focused on the male . . . as the founder") and about the church's history of racial discrimination prior to the 1960s.



Reverse Amazon's decision to censor alternative views on Homosexuality.



[Voice of the Voiceless](#) started this petition to [Amazon.com](#) and [4 others](#)

Last week Amazon abruptly removed several books which represented alternative views on homosexuality. This included a variety of personal testimonies (autobiographies), religious texts, Reparative Therapy, psychological research, and addiction recovery resources. This is tantamount to religious discrimination and discrimination based on sexual orientation.

We are outraged that a smear campaign by one individual ([who stated here that he never read these books](#)) could convince Amazon to censor all books, audiobooks, and Kindle material related to our experiences and viewpoints.

For every major issue there are two sides to each story. For one side to be bullied and censored on every platform is counter to the values we have long held in common with Amazon.

We demand an immediate reversal of this decision and the restoration of these and all other books that were removed on this topic:

- [7/22/2019] **Achieving Heterosexuality: A Universal, Scientific, and Faith-Based Perspective** - By Marie Davidson
- **Shame and Attachment Loss: The Practical Work of Reparative Therapy** - by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi
- **Restoring Sexual Identity: Hope for Women Who Struggle with Same-Sex Attraction:** by Anne Paulk: 9780736911795
- **The Battle for Normality: A Guide for (Self-)Therapy for Homosexuality** by Dr. Gerard J. M. Van Den Aardweg
- **Healing Homosexuality: Case Stories of Reparative Therapy** (9780876683408): by Lucy Freeman and Dr. Joseph Nicolosi
- **Coming Out Straight: Understanding Same-Sex Attraction** - by Richard Cohen
- **Growth into Manhood: Resuming the Journey** - by Alan Medinger



- **A Parent's Guide to Preventing Homosexuality** - by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi and Linda Nicolosi
- **Reparative therapy of male homosexuality: A new clinical approach** - by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi
- **Straight Talk about Homosexuality: The Other Side of Tolerance** - by Richard Cohen
- **Desires in Conflict: Hope for Men Who Struggle with Sexual Identity** - by Joe Dallas
- **Orientation and Choice: One Man's Sexual Journey** - by David A Robinson
- **and all other books that were censored for this topic.**

God enabled me to love myself exactly as I was before I experienced any change in my sexuality.

CHRISTOPHER SIMS



CHRISTOPHER SIMS



BREE STEVENS

When I was 17, I was in a relationship with a girl, and she was the first person I ever had sex with. I was really into it, and I was really into her. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me.

When I was 17, I was in a relationship with a girl, and she was the first person I ever had sex with. I was really into it, and I was really into her. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me.

I had been wanting to make change for quite some time before the tragedy at Pulse happened.

ANGEL COLON



ANGEL COLON

Orlando, Florida, September 16, 2016

When I was 17, I was in a relationship with a girl, and she was the first person I ever had sex with. I was really into it, and I was really into her. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me.

When I was 17, I was in a relationship with a girl, and she was the first person I ever had sex with. I was really into it, and I was really into her. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me.

KEVIN WHITT



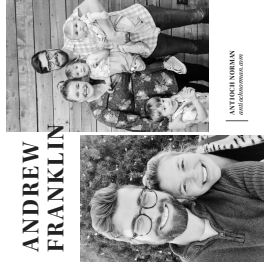
COMING OUT: KEVIN WHITT

I did not come to Christ seeking change in my sexuality. I simply came to Him with the desire for a healthy life.

KEVIN WHITT

One book I read about a guy coming out of the closet really changed my life.

ANDREW FRANKLIN



ANDREW FRANKLIN

ANDREW FRANKLIN

PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFFREY HARRIS

When I was 17, I was in a relationship with a girl, and she was the first person I ever had sex with. I was really into it, and I was really into her. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me.

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KRIS OLSEN



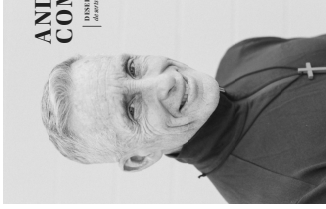
COMING OUT: KRIS OLSEN

I needed a counselor because when I multiply me out, the sleep comes.

KRIS OLSEN

I learned how to be a good friend through that all-in-all and to love someone who is different from me.

ANDREW COMISKEY



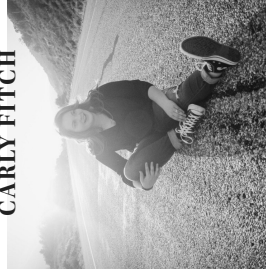
ANDREW COMISKEY

PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFFREY HARRIS

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When I was 17, I was in a relationship with a girl, and she was the first person I ever had sex with. I was really into it, and I was really into her. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me.

CARLY FITCH



I love the way that I look, being a woman and an icon, expresses that beautifully.

CARLY FITCH

When I was 17, I was in a relationship with a girl, and she was the first person I ever had sex with. I was really into it, and I was really into her. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me. I was really into her, and she was really into me.

4

After deciding I wanted to come out of the homosexual lifestyle, I met Gary, who is now my husband. We have been married 12 years, and we have two children.

MELISSA INGRAHAM
facebook.com/melissaingraham



MELISSA INGRAHAM

LOVE AND TRUTH NETWORK | www.truthnetwork.com

LOVE AND TRUTH NETWORK | www.truthnetwork.com

GARRY INGRAHAM



I was able to find a job, fight the negative reports about me, and determine my sexuality in a way that lined up with my faith and desires.

GARRY INGRAHAM
facebook.com/garryingraham

For the first time in my life, I was able to find a job, fight the negative reports about me, and determine my sexuality in a way that lined up with my faith and desires. I was able to find a job, fight the negative reports about me, and determine my sexuality in a way that lined up with my faith and desires. I was able to find a job, fight the negative reports about me, and determine my sexuality in a way that lined up with my faith and desires.

4

I started to ask questions. I needed answers or else I was in trouble (and not ending my life).

EDWARD BYRD
facebook.com/edwardbyrd



EDWARD BYRD

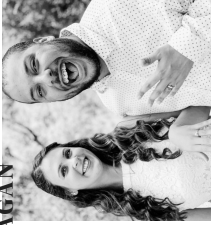
EDWARD BYRD MUSIC
facebook.com/edwardbyrdmusic

I started to ask questions. I needed answers or else I was in trouble (and not ending my life). I started to ask questions. I needed answers or else I was in trouble (and not ending my life). I started to ask questions. I needed answers or else I was in trouble (and not ending my life).

4

Today I live knowing that what once brought me the most pain from God who didn't avoid my pain or questions.

GABRIEL PAGAN
facebook.com/gabrielpagan



GABRIEL PAGAN

LOVE REVOLUTION CHURCH
www.facebook.com/loverevolutionchurch

Today I live knowing that what once brought me the most pain from God who didn't avoid my pain or questions. Today I live knowing that what once brought me the most pain from God who didn't avoid my pain or questions.

4

I feel comfortable and at peace embracing being a man. I am free.

JOSHUA PEREZ RIJOS
facebook.com/joshuarijos



JOSHUA PEREZ RIJOS

I feel comfortable and at peace embracing being a man. I am free. I feel comfortable and at peace embracing being a man. I am free. I feel comfortable and at peace embracing being a man. I am free.

4

I didn't know my own body had rejected me. I didn't realize that my body was simply responding to abuse.

LUCA GROPPOLI
facebook.com/luca.groppoli



OVER THE RAINBOW | www.overtherainbow.com
facebook.com/overtherainbow

LUCA GROPPOLI

I didn't know my own body had rejected me. I didn't realize that my body was simply responding to abuse. I didn't know my own body had rejected me. I didn't realize that my body was simply responding to abuse.

4

I now am totally free to love, without the burden I once carried.

KRISTINE STIRLING
facebook.com/kristinestirling



KRISTI STIRLING

I now am totally free to love, without the burden I once carried. I now am totally free to love, without the burden I once carried. I now am totally free to love, without the burden I once carried.

4

My life is why I'll move. I've been one of the lifestyle for 28 years.

KATHYRACE DUNCAN
facebook.com/kathyrace



KATHYRACE DUNCAN

My life is why I'll move. I've been one of the lifestyle for 28 years. My life is why I'll move. I've been one of the lifestyle for 28 years. My life is why I'll move. I've been one of the lifestyle for 28 years.

Differing Views on Christian Doctrine, Identity and Homosexuality

Used for discussion purposes. Some authors or organizations may fluctuate between categories.

LGBTQ

Revel

(Gay Partnership)

"God made me this way to enjoy partnership."

Identify. Gay-Compelled Determined from feelings and behaviors

Belief/Response: "Open and Affirming" Celebrate gay relationships

Biblical View: Revisionist Pro-Gay theology Liberal sexual ethics

Origin: Born this way, and God designed it this way

Emphasis: Live and let live Gay partnerships/marriage

Strongly Opposed to: Healing/transformation SSA roots and contributing factors

Proponents: - **O Fellowship / GCN -** Matthew Vines: *God and the Gay Christian* Justin Lee:

Mel White: *Stranger At The Gate* Randy Thomas: *Former VP Exodus*

Resist

(Gay Identified)

"I'm choosing to be obedient with my unchangeable affliction."

Identify. Gay-Constrained Comfortable with LGBTQ+ label and identity in Christ.

Belief/Response: Love the Gay Christian as is Encourage abstinence

Biblical View: Traditional Biblical ethics God affirms and loves people

Origin: Born with inclination, but God did not design it this way

Emphasis: Living a chaste, abstinent, God-centered life

Silent and/or Opposed to: Healing/transformation SSA relational roots and contributing factors

Proponents: - **Revive.us -** Wesley Hill: *Washed and Waiting* Gregory Coles: *Single Gay Christian* Nate Collins: *All But Invisible* Preston Sprinkle: *People To Be Loved*

CHRISTIAN

Renounce

(Repentance)

"I surrender my false identity and sinful behavior."

Identify: God Conquers Found in Christ, not in the struggle

Belief/Response: Call to repentance and obedience in Christ

Biblical View: Traditional Biblical ethics God loves us in weakness

Origin: Primarily a sin nature issue Result of The Fall

Emphasis: Support for godly living God will sustain you

Silent or Opposed to: Healing ministry SSA relational roots and contributing factors

Proponents: - **The Gospel Coalition -** Rosaria Butterfield: *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* Christopher Yuan: *Out of a Far Country* Sam Allberry: *Is God anti-gay?* Ed Shaw: *SSA and the Church*

Rebuild

(Transformation)

"My hope is in Christ for a truly transformed life"

Identify: God Created Found in Christ and His transforming work in us

Belief/Response: Repentance and discipleship towards obedience and healing

Biblical View: Traditional Biblical ethics God loves, heals and redeems

Origin: Both a sin nature and a developmental issue

Emphasis: Godly living, relational healing and gender wholeness/design

Promotes: Hope and healing through Jesus. His Church, counseling and discipleship programs

Proponents: - **Restored Hope Network -** Joe Dallas: *Desires in Conflict* Portland Fellowship: *Taking Back Ground* Andrew Comiskey: *Living Waters* Anne Paulk: *Restoring Sexual Identity*

Change **IS** possible, desirable, realistic and/or a focus.
Belief or Mindset
 Change **IS NOT** possible, desirable, realistic and/or a focus.

Jason Thompson
 www.portlandfellowship.com
 Revised 3/2021


4/10/22, 5:42 PM

Facebook restores Christian ministries' pages after being removed | U.S. News

THE CHRISTIAN POST

CP U.S. | WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 09, 2022

Facebook restores Christian ministries' pages after being 'incorrectly removed'

By [Brandon Showalter](#) ⁽¹⁾, Senior Investigative Reporter  ⁽²⁾



The Facebook logo is displayed at the 2018 CeBIT technology trade fair on June 12, 2018 in Hanover, Germany. | Alexander Koerner/Getty Images

Facebook has now restored the pages of Christian ministries it says were "incorrectly removed" from its platform amid a purge of content that offers "services that aim to change people's sexual orientation or gender identity."

The head of [Help 4 Families](#) ⁽¹²⁾, a Christian ministry and its sister organization called Living Stone Ministries, which aim to help individuals and families seeking to live in accordance with Christian sexual ethics, said Facebook removed the organizations' pages from its platform at the behest of LGBT activists.

Denise Shick, the director of Help 4 Families and Living Stone Ministries, both of which Facebook recently removed, said in an email to The Christian Post on Monday that the pages were taken down after a report was released by the [Global Project Against Hate and Extremism](#) ⁽¹³⁾ that compiled a list of [groups and organizations](#) ⁽¹⁴⁾ that minister to and counsel people struggling with unwanted sexual attractions or gender confusion. GPAHE has been pushing for social media giants like Facebook to ban these organizations — many being Christian — from its platform.

Although the GPAHE report acknowledged that the two Christian ministries create "safe places for individuals and families to openly share their grief and pain about homosexuality" and transgenderism, they were still deemed too controversial to remain on the platform, Shick told CP.

The GPAHE report argues that the views espoused and promoted by these ministries and other groups, such as so-called "conversion therapy," which, according to the United Nations, is tantamount to "torture" and an "egregious violation of rights."

From Feb. 2-8, Shick couldn't access her account, and her pages were taken down without notification.

Eleven years' worth of pictures are now gone, she lamented to CP after the ministries' pages had been taken down.

"If we are offering 'safe places' to 'openly share,' how is that hateful or extremist?" she asked. "We offer opportunities for people to share their struggles without condemnation. That is the definition of love and acceptance."

Shick is the daughter of a man who told her when she was 9 years old that he wanted to be a woman.

"This implies that what my father believed to be true was true for him. But my dad actually said that he wanted to be a woman. The word 'believe' means 'to consider to be true.' The word want, on the other hand, means 'to have a strong desire for.' My dad didn't believe he was a woman. He knew he was a man, but he wanted to be a woman. That desire became an obsession, and that obsession led to much pain for him and his family," she explained.

The social media giant no longer believes in the right to freedom of speech without censorship, Shick said. Her ministries notified their supporters and readers via email of the latest developments and have also moved their online communications on social media to MeWe.

"For over 200 years, people in the U.S. were free to hold differing beliefs and to speak about them without censure," Shick added, noting that this has changed because of the efforts of LGBT activists.

"Our voices need to be heard by contacting our congresspersons and senators," she added.

Following two inquiries from CP, late on Tuesday, a Facebook employee with knowledge of the matter said Shick's pages were "incorrectly removed and [have] been restored."

Shick confirmed Tuesday night that both Facebook pages had been restored.

CP was earlier informed that Facebook bans pages that contain the following:

- Our policies prohibit content explicitly providing or offering to provide products or services that aim to change people's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Under our policies, this includes products or services with the goal of changing an individual's sexual orientation; or changing the gender identity of a questioning or transgender person to being cisgender (i.e. match between their gender identity and assigned sex). Examples would include: Providing or offering to provide products aimed at offering or facilitating conversion therapy (e.g., books, apps, audiobooks, etc.). Providing or offering to provide services aimed at offering or facilitating conversion therapy (e.g., talk therapy, conversion ministries, clinical therapy, etc.).

In October 2020, Facebook, which has since been formally renamed Meta, removed without explanation the page of Restored Hope Network, a network of parachurch organizations offering therapeutic options and pastoral counseling resources for those desiring to leave the LGBT lifestyle and follow their convictions pertaining to sexual ethics.

Anne Paulk, the executive director of RHN, said at the time that the tech giant's move was an example of viewpoint discrimination.

"Their dismissive action — canceling our page as if it never existed, leaving a vague 'the link may be broken' message in its place — is shameful. Not even extending us the courtesy of a notification, a chance to offer our side of the very politicized story, is unconscionable."

She added in a follow-up interview Monday that the tech giants are silencing the voices they disagree with no matter how reasonable or compassionate those voices are.

"Truthful content is being removed that is outside of their approval zone — outside of the LGBT talking points," Paulk said.

"It is only a matter of time before the censors also get censored as well. This move to silence views leads directly to totalitarianism, speech control, and criminalization of speech that is unpopular of any kind. Courage is needed to counter these demands, to resist cancel culture, to speak despite pressures and outcomes no one likes. We at Restored Hope Network will continue to speak truth kindly."

The removal of RHN from Facebook came on the heels of Paulk's books and other authors who formerly identified as LGBT having their work taken down from online retail giant Amazon in 2019. The latest Big Tech scrubbing appears to be more of a deliberate and thorough effort to weed out and take down any perspectives that adhere to historic, theologically orthodox standards on gender and sexuality issues.

"Tech companies say they have taken steps to ban harmful content related to conversion therapy. But they have to do more, especially in non-English languages," Wendy Via, president and co-founder of GPAHE, said last month, according to Forbes.

Via, who is also a co-author of the report, went on to say that until online searches "lead people to only authoritative, trustworthy information about the dangers of conversion therapy, tech companies are complicit in spreading anti-LGBTQ hate."

"This disinformation causes mental and physical harm for individuals, and furthers societal harm."

Some of the ministries that have since been taken down have managed to evade detection by Facebook's algorithms because of the language being used in their materials. But that is not stopping GPAHE's efforts to remove them.

"Too much harmful misinformation is slipping through, especially in non-English languages," Via said.

Stephen Black, who leads First Stone Ministries in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and who was previously banned from using the platform and believes he's still being shadow-banned, told CP in a Monday interview that the Big Tech censorship tactics are as forceful as they have ever been, and they are not limited to Facebook.

"The level of aggression against free speech, choice, and self-determination is at a fury of assault unlike any other time in recent U.S. history. I have personally been shadow-banned, limited for many weeks, and scrubbed from social media at different times over the past five years," Black said.

"This secular humanistic faith is demanding censorship of sincere Christians believing in a choice to change and repent from sexual sin. Locally, here in Oklahoma City, we have gay activists who have called for the burning down of churches that will not affirm LGBTQ+ behavior as normal."

Black shared with CP a screenshot of a now-deleted Facebook post from activist Sara Cunningham of Free Mom Hugs promoting an upcoming Lifetime documentary about her story, saying that she hopes one of the effects of the movie will be "to burn the main-stream evangelical conservative non-affirming church doors DOWN. To the ground."

"Facebook and other social media outlets are being used broadly and unfettered to promote LGBTQ+ activists' messages of real hate and even calling for violence, while the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His love is being called hate speech," Black said.

Send news tips to: brandon.showalter@christianpost.com Listen to Brandon Showalter's [Life in the Kingdom](#) podcast at The Christian Post and [edifi app](#) Follow Brandon Showalter on Facebook: [BrandonMarkShowalter](#) Follow on Twitter: [@BrandonMShow](#)

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Absence of Behavioral Harm Following Non-efficacious Sexual Orientation Change Efforts: A Retrospective Study of United States Sexual Minority Adults, 2016–2018

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Background: Do sexual minority persons who have undergone unsuccessful sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) suffer subsequent psychological or social harm from the attempt? Previous studies have conflated present and past, even pre-SOCE, harm in addressing this question. This study attempts, for the first time, to isolate and examine the question of current psychosocial harm for former SOCE participants among sexual minorities in representative population data.

Method: Using nationally representative data ($n = 1,518$) across three cohorts of sexual minorities (centered in 1969, 1987, and 2003) in the United States (U.S.), persons exposed to SOCE were compared with the remainder not exposed to SOCE on two measures of internal distress—psychological distress (Kessler scale) and current mental health—and seven measures of behavioral harm: substance abuse (DUDIT); alcohol dependence (AUDIT-C); self-harm; suicide ideation; suicide planning; suicide intentions; and suicide attempts.

Results: The SOCE group was statistically indistinguishable from the non-SOCE group on any measure of harm. For behavioral harm, risk ratios were 0.97–1.02. Harm was equivalent for the two groups despite the SOCE group having experienced higher lifetime and current minority stress, greater childhood adversity, and lower socioeconomic status. Logistic regression models that adjusted for these differences suggest that SOCE exposure reduced the effect of minority stress and childhood adversity for suicide attempts, although this effect did not fully account for the equivalence between the SOCE and non-SOCE groups.

Conclusion: Despite higher exposure to factors predicting behavioral harm—minority stress, childhood adversity, and lower socioeconomic background—sexual minority persons who had undergone failed SOCE therapy did not suffer higher psychological or social harm. Concerns to restrict or ban SOCE due to elevated harm are unfounded. Further study is needed to clarify the reasons for the absence of harm from SOCE.

Keywords: sexual orientation change efforts, conversion therapy, minority stress, suicide, sexual orientation

BACKGROUND

Sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) is a summary term for therapies or programs that support change from same-sex to opposite-sex orientation in sexual attraction, identity, and/or behavior. The practice is subject to intense controversy. Sharply divergent bodies of research have presented evidence that it is ineffective and harmful (Drescher et al., 2016, p. 7; Blossnich et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2020) and that it is effective and of psychological benefit (Beckstead and Morrow, 2004; Jones and Yarhouse, 2011; Dehlin et al., 2015; Sullins et al., 2021). Currently, 20 U.S. states have imposed limited restrictions on SOCE, while in four states injunctions or legislation prohibit such bans (Movement Advancement Project, 2020). Opponents to SOCE claim, and proponents deny, that it currently includes proscribed techniques, such as aversive punishment or electric shock (Flenjtje et al., 2013; Rosik, 2017), and bans are typically written very broadly. The American Psychological Association (APA) Task Force on the topic has expressed concern that the practice of SOCE has “become mired in ideological disputes and competing political agendas” (American Psychological Association, Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation, 2009, p. 92).

The differing findings may be due, in part, to differing definitions regarding what constitutes SOCE. The precise range, harshness and focus of SOCE interventions is in dispute, with opponents defining them more broadly, aversively, and focused on same-sex conversion, while proponents define them as benign talk therapy or teaching that may or may not include changing sexual orientation in accord with the client’s goals.

As recently argued elsewhere (Sullins et al., 2021), the disparate research findings on SOCE may be due to incommensurable samples selected for study: those who find little efficacy but substantial harm from SOCE tend to select samples “exclusively or mostly dominated by LGB (lesbian, gay, or bisexual) identified participants” (Sullins et al., 2021), that is, persons for whom SOCE has, by definition, failed with respect to sexual orientation identity; while those who find more efficacy but little harm tend to select samples largely from persons who reject a former LGB identity (Jones and Yarhouse, 2011; Pela and Sutton, 2021; Sullins et al., 2021), that is, persons for whom SOCE has by definition succeeded in reframing sexual orientation identity. Two recent studies have examined samples comprised of both types of former SOCE participants, both finding no difference in harm (Lefevor et al., 2020; Rosik et al., 2021).

Recent claims of harm from unsuccessful SOCE, that is, among former SOCE participants among current sexual minority persons, have also entailed another form of bias, arguing from a lifetime association of increased psychological morbidity with SOCE exposure that SOCE induces harm (Meanley et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2020; Salway et al., 2020; del Río-González et al., 2021). The analytical challenge for such claims is that, unlike the morbidity observed, SOCE therapy is not lifelong or continuous, but is confined to a definite, restricted time in the life course, usually lasting less than a year. Recent re-examination of one such study by Blossnich et al. (2020, 2021)

claiming that SOCE “may compound or create ... suicidal ideation and suicide attempts” has found that failure to adjust for pre-existing suicidality invalidates its conclusions (Blossnich et al., 2020; Sullins, 2021). The problem was not only that much of the harm predated SOCE exposure and that harm following SOCE was substantially reduced compared to sexual minorities who had never engaged in SOCE, but also that other precipitating factors that may account for harm were not examined.

Blossnich et al. (2020), using the same data as the present study, did improve upon previous research by controlling for demographic covariates (although as we shall see their set of measures can be improved), and they carefully considered the differential experience of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). However, they ignored every other factor that may have affected differences in outcome associated with SOCE exposure. They did not consider any comorbidities, such as alcohol dependence, substance abuse, self-harming behavior, mental health, or psychological distress, all of which are known to be associated with suicidal morbidity and were measured in the Generations data used in their study. While speculating about the association of concealment with SOCE, they did not consult the well-constructed measure of concealment present in their own study’s data, which contradicted their speculation (as discussed further below). Most notably, although Blossnich et al. (2020, 2021) included strong proponents of minority stress theory (MST), which attributes harm outcomes among sexual minorities to the effect of stigma, discrimination, and other social stress, and despite speculating that higher stress may explain higher suicidality among former SOCE participants, they did not examine any of the multiple indicators of minority stress that were readily available in the data.

The aim of the present study is to amend this gap in the evidence, in part, by examining a larger set of covariates that may (or may not) help explain observed differences in harm outcomes for sexual minority persons who have been exposed to SOCE. Such an analysis, as already noted, has limited application to the adjudication of SOCE harm in that it does not represent all SOCE alumni, but only those who have not succeeded in at least one of the possible aims of SOCE, i.e., to support the re-orientation of persons from sexual minority to heterosexual identity. This limitation notwithstanding, comparison of this group with sexual minority persons not exposed to SOCE can shed light on two theoretical questions pertaining to the question of harm from SOCE. First, how much harm actually exists? Since studies of unsuccessful SOCE participants have generally agreed in finding higher harm than among successful ones, examining the unsuccessful SOCE participants can help determine the upper extent of possible harm. Recognizing the amount of harm among current sexual minority persons, moreover, is of clinical significance for this population even if net harm from SOCE, when both successful and unsuccessful participants are considered, were negative. As noted, prior studies finding harm from SOCE in the sexual minority population have only examined lifetime harm, including harm that occurred before SOCE, not present harm. The present study, by contrast, aims to examine the possibility of present

harm associated only with past SOCE involvement, not possible future SOCE. This is important for the question of causation, since harm associated with possible future SOCE cannot be an effect of SOCE involvement. Second, to what extent, if any, is current harm associated with past SOCE affected or explained by early life covariates, current comorbidities, or differences in minority stress? To the extent that both SOCE and harm associated with SOCE are mutually associated with factors that may independently precipitate harm, the attribution of such harm to SOCE involvement is spurious. In this case, SOCE involvement would serve merely as a marker for a set of conditions that would predict harm for any sexual minority person, regardless of SOCE involvement. The answers to these questions may help to characterize the sources of SOCE-linked harm, or its absence, with broad application to theories of sexual minority psychological distress and clinical interventions and have particular application to the controversial question whether SOCE therapy should be banned to prevent harm to sexual minority persons. To my knowledge, the present study is the first empirical examination of such questions in population-representative data.

DATA

The data for this study were collected as part of the Williams Institute's Generations study, an epidemiological study designed to examine the health and wellbeing of three generational cohorts of non-transgender sexual minority persons in the United States (Meyer, 2020). The cohorts consisted of persons aged 52–59 (Pride Generation), whose sexual coming of age took place around the time of the Stonewall riots and the start of the gay liberation movement; persons aged 32–41 years (Visibility Generation), whose early life experiences coincided with the beginning of the AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) epidemic and greater visibility and social acceptance for LGB people; and those aged 18–25 in 2016 (Equality Generation), whose early life experiences were affected by the growing focus on LGB marriage and employment equality. Eligibility was also restricted to the three largest United States racial and ethnic groups (Black, Latino, or White, although multi-ethnic identities that included one of these were also included; Krueger et al., 2020).

Participants were screened by the Gallup Organization's daily random digit dialing assay (both landline and cell phones) for 1 year beginning March 2016. Recruitment for Black and Latino participants extended for an additional year, until March 2018. Respondents who identified as “lesbian, gay, or bisexual” but not transgender (who were recruited into a separate companion study) were invited to complete a self-administered online or paper questionnaire, which required fifth-grade English proficiency. Calls to 366,640 Americans resulted in a sample of 3,525 eligible participants (1%), of which 1,518 (43%) completed usable interviews. Statistical weighting adjusted for the complex survey sample design, differential non-response, the extended sample of Black and Latino respondents, and known characteristics of the sexual minority population as

reflected in prior data collected by Gallup and the United States Census. The resulting data are designed to be generalizable to the United States population of sexual minority adults and have formed the basis for numerous prior studies and estimates for this population (Nock et al., 2009; Rothblum et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2021). More information about the study's methodology and sample characteristics is available online at <http://www.generations-study.com> and in several published reviews and methodological reports (Krueger et al., 2020; Meyer, 2020; Meyer et al., 2020).

MEASURES

For SOCE participation respondents were asked, “Did you ever receive treatment from someone who tried to change your sexual orientation?” and if so, their age when such treatment last occurred. Sociodemographic covariates included race and ethnicity, with categories of white, black, Hispanic, and other; educational attainment, with categories of high school or less, some college, college degree, and more than a college degree; poverty income, ranging from below poverty to over four times poverty income; self-rated current health, with categories of excellent, very good, good, fair, and poor; sexual identity, with categories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual, asexual, and other; sex assigned at birth, with categories of man and woman; and age in years.

Minority Stressors

The Generations data contained extensive measures of minority stress. Seven variables in all captured indicators of discrimination, stigma, or other stressors that could be related to SOCE. In addition to lifetime discrimination and childhood bully victimization, two variables—everyday discrimination and stressful life events—assessed current discrimination experiences. Follow-up questions for these four variables enabled the respondent to specify adverse experiences due to minority sexual orientation. Two variables—felt stigma and internalized homophobia—measured the respondents' attitudes, or perceptions of others' attitudes, due to their LGB identity. Finally, a series of variables labeled “chronic strains” assessed personal stress conditions, such as isolation, exhaustion, or conflict, but not specifically due to sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI). The following paragraphs describe these variables in more detail.

Discrimination Since Age 18

A series of nine items asked respondents how often since age 18 they had experienced discriminatory behavior or violence, such as being physically attacked or sexually assaulted, had property stolen or vandalized, had been verbally insulted, or had been denied a job or promotion. The response options for the nine items were never, once, twice, and three or more times. Analyses incorporating multiple instances were explored and found to differ very little from those simply reflecting the extent of any discrimination, so the last three response options were collapsed to form indicator variables indicating any experience (vs. none) of each of the nine forms of discrimination. One

item, on housing discrimination, yielded too few cases of sexual orientation discrimination (only 12) and was dropped from the analysis. The remaining eight indicators were then combined into a summative scale ranging from zero to nine expressing the extent of discrimination experienced by each respondent.

Stressful Life Events or Perceived Stress in the Past 12 Months

Eleven items asked about adverse experiences in the past 12 months. Most of these were similar to the events in the lifetime discrimination sequence, for example being robbed, having property destroyed, or fired from a job. Some items were very different, however, such as getting divorced or suffering a major financial crisis. Response options were only yes or no, indicating whether the event had occurred or not.

Everyday Discrimination in the Past Year

Another series of nine items asked whether “in your day-to-day life over the past year” the respondent had experienced such less extreme adverse actions as being treated with less courtesy or respect than other people, receiving poorer service at restaurants, being threatened or insulted, or having people act as if they were not honest or smart, or felt superior or were afraid of them. Response options were often, sometimes, rarely, and never. A variable constructed by the Generations staff reversed and combined the nine items into a single variable expressing the respondent's current level of everyday discrimination experience ranging from 1 (low) to 4 (high).

Childhood Bully Victimization

Respondents were asked “How often, if ever, were you bullied before you were 18 years old?” The mean of the 4-point response scale (often, sometimes, rarely, and never) was reverse coded so that higher scores indicated more frequent childhood bully victimization.

For the previous four measures, respondents who indicated having experienced any of referenced discriminatory behavior were asked follow-up questions whether the adverse experiences had been due to their age, sex, sexual orientation, transgender status, gender presentation, race/ethnicity, physical appearance (e.g., weight, height) or religion/spirituality. Respondents were instructed to indicate all causes that applied. Persons who included sexual orientation, transgender status, and/or gender presentation among the causes they listed were classified as having received SOGI discrimination, regardless of what other causes they may have also indicated. Those who did not include one or more of these three causes were classified as having received non-SOGI discrimination. SOGI discrimination and non-SOGI discrimination were therefore not mutually exclusive; a respondent could report experiencing multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination for the same or different adverse experiences.

Felt Stigma

Three items asked the respondent's level of agreement or disagreement with statements about the perceived opinion of

“most people (employers) where I live”: they “think less of a person who is LGB”; “will hire openly LGB people if they are qualified for the job”; and “would not want someone who is openly LGB to take care of their children.” Response options were strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, and strongly agree. A constructed variable included on the data file combined these items, the second one reverse coded, into a measure of current stigmatizing attitudes in the respondent's community of residence.

Unconcealment (“Out”)

Four questions asked whether the respondent had disclosed his or her sexual identity to all, most, some or none of his or her family, co-workers, heterosexual friends or health care providers. Alpha (the intercorrelation coefficient) for the four items was 0.80. Following Pachankis and Bränström (2019), the degree of unconcealment or “outness” was measured as the average of those responding over the four items, thereby expressing the proportion of sexual identity disclosure to the groups to which one could reveal one's sexual identity.

Other Stressors

Other items measured stress that was not specifically identified as being related to minority sexual identity. This is not to imply that these stressors may not be empirically associated with sexual minority status, but only that they were not measured as pertaining uniquely to sexual minorities.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

The ACE score was expressed as the additive index of eight indicators of childhood experiences identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to be negatively related to adult health outcomes: sexual abuse; physical abuse; emotional abuse; substance abuse in the household; intimate partner violence in the household; mental illness in the household; a family member imprisoned; and parental separation or divorce. Three ACEs figured prominently in the analysis. Mental illness, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse were assessed with questions asking whether before age 18 the respondents had “live[d] with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or suicidal” had been sworn at, insulted or put down, or had been made to have sex or touch or be touched sexually by someone at least 5 years older. Indicator variables coded 1 for the presence or zero for the absence of each of these experiences.

Chronic Strains

Respondents rated 12 statements about their current lives as true, somewhat true or not true. The items related to general personal difficulties in life management, such as “you are trying to take on too many things at once,” “your job often leaves you feeling both mentally and physically tired,” and “you are alone too much.” A three-point scale of general chronic strains was aggregated from the responses. Unlike the other stressors measured, chronic strains were not specifically related to minority sexual orientation.

Internalized Homophobia

Internalized homophobia was a measured by agreement or disagreement five statements relating to dissatisfaction with having an LGB identity. Response options were strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, and strongly agree. Two of the component items were collinear with SOCE therapy: “I have tried to stop being attracted to people who are the same sex as me,” and “I would like to get professional help in order to change my orientation from LGB to straight.” These two items, which report on past or prospective actions, were not highly intercorrelated with the remaining three items on the scale, all of which report current attitudes: “If someone offered me the chance to be completely heterosexual, I would accept the chance”; “I feel that being LGB is a personal shortcoming for me,” and “I wish I were not LGB.” Removing the first two items improved scale alpha from 0.75 to 0.83. Thus, to achieve an unbiased measure for purposes of the present study, the scale was adjusted to include only the last three items. Average response on the items were combined to create a scale ranging from 1 to 5 measuring internalized homophobia.

Psychological Distress (Kessler Scale)

The Generations survey included the Kessler Scale of Psychological Distress (K6), consisting of six questions designed “to identify persons with a high likelihood of having a diagnosable mental illness and associated functional limitations” (Pratt et al., 2007). This 24-point scale, developed by a Harvard Medical School team led by Dr. Ronald Kessler (Kessler et al., 2003), has been validated by dozens of studies and is used to estimate the prevalence of mental illness in WHO surveys worldwide as well as most National Health Surveys in the developed world, including those of Germany, Australia, Canada, and the United States. Following Kessler’s scoring scheme and CDC usage, persons scoring 13 or higher were classified as experiencing non-specific serious psychological distress (SPD).

Current Negative Mental Health

Respondents were asked, “Now thinking about your mental health, which includes stress, depression, and problems with emotions, for how many days during the past 30 days was your mental health not good?” The reported number of days was taken as an indicator of the current level of negative or poor mental health.

Behavioral Harm

Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Alcohol and substance abuse were measured using the Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT-C; World Health Organization, 2001) a 3-item scale ranging from 0 to 12, and the Drug Use Disorders Identification Test (DUDIT), (Berman et al., 2005) an 11-item scale ranging from 0 to 35. Both instruments are responsive to criteria of the American Psychiatric Association’s (APA’s) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), widely used internationally, and have been well-validated for good psychometric properties in predicting active alcohol or

substance use disorders (Berner et al., 2007; Hildebrand, 2015). Following prior research (Berman et al., 2005; Berner et al., 2007), and as recommended by the Generations data documentation (Krueger et al., 2020), the prediction cutoff score for alcohol-related disorder on the AUDIT-C was assessed at 5 for men and 4 for women, and the score for substance-related disorder on the DUDIT was set at 6 for men and 2 for women.

Suicidal Behavior

Suicidal behavior was assessed using an instrument developed by the United States Army to assess risk in service members (Nock et al., 2014). Four questions asked, “Did you ever ... in your life have thoughts of killing yourself?; ... have any intention to act on thoughts of wishing you were dead or trying to kill yourself?; ... think about how you might kill yourself (e.g., taking pills, shooting yourself) or work out a plan of how to kill yourself?; ... make a suicide attempt (i.e., purposefully hurt yourself with at least some intention to die)?” Response options were “No,” “Yes, once,” and “Yes, more than once.” Follow-up questions for the yes responses asked how old the respondent was when they engaged in the suicide behavior or both the first and most recent of multiple instances of that behavior. For each behavior, current suicidality was indicated by having engaged in the behavior at least once in the past year.

Self-Harm

The survey instrument also asked about purposeful non-suicidal harm to oneself, such as “cutting yourself, hitting yourself, or burning yourself.” As with suicidal behavior, follow-up questions specified the timing and single or multiple instances. Current self-harming behavior was measured by a variable indicating the presence of any self-harming behavior in the past year.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The analysis proceeded in two stages corresponding to the two analytical questions of interest. First, the difference of means or proportions between the SOCE and non-SOCE groups for behavioral harm outcomes, covariates, and stressors was examined to determine the presence and extent of harm from SOCE. This analysis was performed using unadjusted population-weighted estimates so as to accurately reflect the level of harm in the presenting clinical population. Statistically significant differences were assessed by *t* test or *f* test as appropriate and effect sizes computed for those differences that were significant. In the second stage, possible covariate influence on harm associated with SOCE was examined by assessing the odds ratio for SOCE therapy from logistic regression models predicting each behavioral harm outcome after adjustment for demographic characteristics, early life covariates, current comorbidities, and differences in minority stress.

All analyses were adjusted for the complex sample design and employed survey weights to allow for generalization to the United States population of sexual minority adults, ages

18–27, 32–43, and 50–61. All regression models were certified for proper model specification using the Pregibon/Tukey goodness of link test (Pregibon, 1980) and for acceptable fit to the data using the Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness of fit procedure for complex sample designs (Archer et al., 2007). The variance inflation factor (VIF) for all included covariates ranged from 1.1 to 2.75, indicating a low level of multicollinearity. Analyses were performed using SPSS 25 and Stata 13 statistical software. As a secondary analysis of pre-existing public data, the present study’s methods were determined to be exempt from human subject ethical review under 45 CFR 46.104 by the Catholic University of America Institutional Review Board in Certificate 21-0016 issued March 12, 2021.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 presents selected demographic characteristics of the sample, comparing sexual minority persons with SOCE experience (“SOCE alumni”) with those who had not experienced SOCE.

Blosnich et al. (2020, 2021) present the same findings for education, age, sexual identity, and race, but do not include income and health status. Blosnich et al. (2020, 2021) reported gender identity (with categories of man, woman, and non-binary) rather than sex assigned at birth (with categories of male and female), however in the present analysis breaking out the small number (94) of binary cases introduced an unacceptable number of empty cells, and since the Generations sample screened out transgender persons, all persons identifying as man or woman were congruent with their birth sex, so the two measures are the same for these categories. Table 1 reports raw case numbers, but population-weighted percentages within covariates, to facilitate comparing the SOCE and non-SOCE groups.

As Table 1 shows, 6.9% of sexual minority persons in the United States have experienced SOCE therapy of some sort. This group differed significantly from the remainder who had not undergone SOCE (93.1%) on several demographic dimensions. SOCE alumni tended to be less affluent, less educated, less white, more black, and more male than were the persons who had not undergone SOCE. A total of 29% of the SOCE alumni were in poverty, compared to only 18% of the non-SOCE group; and almost half (47%) of the non-SOCE group, compared to under a third (29%) of the SOCE group, had income greater than three times the poverty level. Over half (51%) of the SOCE group, compared to only 42% of the non-SOCE group, had only a high school diploma or less education, and smaller proportions of the SOCE group had begun or finished college. Table 1 likely understates these educational differences relative to the actual population, since sample selection screened out persons with less than a fifth-grade education. The SOCE alumni included a higher concentration of black persons and a lower concentration of women than the non-SOCE group; these differences were significant at the 0.10 critical level. SOCE alumni were no

TABLE 1 | Demographic characteristics of lesbian/gay individuals, by experiencing sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE), counts, and weighted proportions; probability sample of sexual minorities, United States, 2016–2018 ($N=1,518$).

	Overall sample, N (%; SE) or mean (SE)	Experienced SOCE		p
		NO N (%; SE) or mean (SE)	YES N (%; SE) or mean (SE)	
SOCE experience		1,410 (93.1; 0.81)	108 (6.9; 0.81)	–
Income (as percent of poverty income)				
<100%	210 (19.1; 1.37)	187 (18.4; 1.41)	23 (29.3; 5.71)	0.0631
100–199%	279 (22.5; 1.41)	251 (22.0; 1.45)	28 (29.9; 5.86)	0.1912
200–299%	192 (12.7; 1.06)	179 (12.8; 1.10)	13 (11.6; 3.55)	0.7468
300%+	810 (45.6; 1.60)	766 (46.9; 1.66)	44 (29.3; 5.35)	0.0017
Educational attainment				
High school diploma or less	309 (42.5; 1.69)	283 (41.9; 1.75)	26 (50.9; 6.08)	0.1554
Some college	492 (31.9; 1.40)	464 (32.4; 1.46)	28 (25.6; 4.79)	0.1767
College degree	429 (16.0; 0.86)	403 (16.4; 0.91)	26 (10.4; 2.27)	0.0152
More than a college degree	288 (9.6; 0.62)	260 (9.3; 0.64)	28 (13.1; 2.77)	0.1913
Age in years	30.9 (0.37)	30.7 (0.38)	32.7 (1.43)	0.1846
Sexual identity				
Lesbian/Gay	833 (46.9; 1.59)	757 (45.3; 1.64)	76 (68.0; 5.94)	0.0002
Bisexual	493 (40.6; 1.62)	476 (42.0; 1.68)	17 (21.7; 5.70)	0.0006
Other sexual identity	181 (12.5; 1.04)	166 (12.7; 1.09)	15 (10.3; 3.14)	0.0000
Race/Ethnicity				
White	931 (59.5; 1.56)	871 (60.2; 1.61)	60 (50.5; 6.14)	0.1284
Black	180 (13.5; 0.99)	162 (12.8; 1.10)	18 (22.2; 5.36)	0.0858
Latino	158 (10.8; 0.98)	145 (10.7; 1.01)	13 (13.1; 4.10)	0.5696
Other racial/ethnic identity	249 (16.2; 1.14)	232 (16.3; 1.18)	17 (14.2; 4.21)	0.6234
Health				
Poor	56 (3.7; 0.62)	49 (3.5; 0.63)	7 (6.7; 2.94)	0.2859
Fair	206 (16.2; 1.27)	189 (16.1; 1.31)	17 (17.6; 5.10)	0.7809
Good	480 (33.2; 1.53)	448 (33.6; 1.59)	32 (27.7; 5.33)	0.2942
Very good	569 (34.9; 1.51)	538 (35.2; 1.56)	31 (30.0; 5.75)	0.3821
Excellent	187 (12.0; 1.04)	167 (11.6; 1.06)	20 (18.0; 4.52)	0.1701
Sex at birth				
Woman	812 (60.0; 1.53)	765 (60.8; 1.57)	47 (49.2; 6.15)	0.0679
Man	706 (40.0; 1.53)	645 (39.2; 1.57)	61 (50.8; 6.15)	0.0679

Values shown are weighted for population and survey design. CI, confidence interval; RR, risk ratio.

less healthy than the non-SOCE group, although their health was a little more diverse; higher proportions of the SOCE alumni reported being both in excellent and in poor health. Over a fifth (22%) of SOCE alumni were black, and although three-fifths (60%) of sexual minorities were female, the SOCE group was evenly split between men and women.

Table 2 compares the SOCE and non-SOCE groups on psychological health and the experience of minority stress. According to the MST, higher exposure to minority stressors should be related to lower psychological health, but in these data the SOCE alumni experienced higher trauma and discrimination, but did not express higher psychological

TABLE 2 | Minority stressors and mental health by experiencing SOCE, counts, and weighted proportions: probability sample of sexual minorities, United States, 2016–2018 ($N=1,518$).

	Overall sample ($n=1,518$), %; SE or mean; SE	Experienced SOCE		<i>P</i>	Effect size (<i>d</i>)
		No ($n=1,410$), %; SE or mean; SE	Yes ($n=108$), %; SE or mean (SE)		
Stressors					
Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)—mean (0–8)	3.33; 0.071	3.27; 0.073	4.18; 0.306	0.0041	0.035
Bullied in high school due to sexual orientation or gender presentation—mean (0–4)	1.89; 0.041	1.85; 0.041	2.50; 0.169	0.0002	0.478
Percent often bullied in high school due to sexual orientation or gender presentation	19.1; 1.29	17.6; 1.29	38.0; 6.08	0.0011	0.485
Lifetime victimization/discrimination due to sexual orientation or gender presentation—mean (0–8)	1.44; 0.071	1.29; 0.067	3.47; 0.379	0.0000	0.844
Percent ever assaulted due to sexual orientation or gender presentation	18.7; 1.24	16.8; 1.23	43.8; 6.12	0.0000	0.626
Everyday discrimination (past year) due to sexual orientation or gender presentation mean (0–4)	1.51; 0.027	1.48; 0.027	1.92; 0.125	0.0005	0.641
Felt stigma (past year)—mean (0–8)	2.71; 0.030	2.68; 0.031	3.13; 0.097	0.0000	0.338
Chronic strains (past year)—mean (0–8)	1.62; 0.011	1.61; 0.012	1.74; 0.050	0.0103	0.397
Internalized homophobia (adjusted)—mean (1–5)	1.63; 0.029	1.62; 0.030	1.81; 0.114	0.1062	–
Percent unconcealed (“out”)	56.4; 1.19	55.4; 1.23	69.8; 3.90	0.0005	0.292
Psychological distress (Kessler)—mean (0–24)	8.82; 0.18	8.77 0.19	9.39; 0.78	0.4408	–
Percent severe psychological distress (SPD—Kessler >12)	26.2; 1.50	25.6; 1.54	33.9; 6.11	0.1903	–
How many days in the past 30 days was your mental health not good?	11.9; 0.34	11.9; 0.35	12.0; 1.38	0.9587	–

Values shown are weighted for population and survey design. *N*, unweighted number of cases; SE, standard error; *P*, value of *p* of *t* test result; *d*, Cohen's *D*.

distress, than did sexual minorities who had not experienced SOCE.

Those who would later undergo SOCE experienced significantly higher ACEs in childhood. Of the eight ACEs measured, the SOCE alumni experienced an average of 4.2, almost one ACE higher than the 3.3 average for the non-SOCE group, although the corresponding effect size for this difference was marginal. Those who experienced SOCE were also much more likely to have been bullied in high school due to their sexual orientation. Thirty-eight percent of SOCE alumni, compared to only 18% of the non-SOCE group, had suffered frequent bullying in high school, a difference in effect of almost half a standard deviation. Lifetime sexual orientation victimization, a summary scale of eight adverse discrimination experiences, was also over twice as high for SOCE participants (3.5–1.3) as for other sexual minorities. This difference is highly significant, with a strong effect, at over 80% of a standard deviation. Forty-four percent of the SOCE alumni had been assaulted for their sexual orientation, compared to only 17% of those who had not participated in SOCE. The heightened adversity suffered by SOCE participants was not confined to the past. Significantly higher proportions of SOCE alumni had also experienced everyday discrimination, felt stigma and chronic strains, all measures of discrimination, stigma, and stress, within the past year.

Despite experiencing higher stress and stigma both currently and over their lifetimes, however, the SOCE alumni did not manifest higher psychosocial distress or even higher discomfort with an LGB sexual identity. There was no difference between the SOCE alumni and the non-SOCE group on internalized homophobia (as adjusted), psychological distress, the proportion found to be in severe psychological distress, and the number of days of poor mental health in the past month. Moreover,

the SOCE alumni were more likely to be unconcealed (“out”) about their sexual minority identity. Almost half (44.6%) of sexual minorities who had not experienced SOCE concealed their sexual minority identity from family, friends, co-workers or healthcare providers, but such concealment dropped to under a third (30.2%) for those with SOCE experience. The proportion of those who were “out” to at least one constituency was almost 22 percentage points higher with SOCE experience, and over a quarter (25.6%) of SOCE alumni were completely unconcealed to any constituency, compared to only 18.2% of those without SOCE experience (not shown).

The absence of SOCE-associated internal distress or disability is mirrored by similarly benign findings regarding behavioral harm. Table 3 compares unadjusted mean values by SOCE experience for the seven behavioral harm outcomes measured by the Generations data: non-suicidal self-harm, substance abuse disorder, alcohol dependence, suicide ideation, suicidal intention, suicidal planning, and attempting suicide. None of the seven behaviors have any statistical association with having undergone SOCE therapy, as indicated by value of *ps* ranging from 0.30 to 0.92 for *t* tests testing the difference of means. Indeed, for five of the seven the population risk with SOCE therapy is identical, to two decimal places, to the risk with no SOCE, and the highest risk ratio for all seven behaviors is just 1.03. The current risk of these harm behaviors for those who have experienced SOCE is no different than it is for those who have not experienced SOCE. In sum, SOCE experience has no statistically discernible effect on the risk of any present harm measured in these data: psychological distress, lower mental health, alcohol dependence, substance abuse, suicide ideation, suicide planning, suicide intention, and attempting suicide.

TABLE 3 | Unadjusted means and risk ratios, and adjusted AORs, showing current behavioral harm by experiencing SOCE, counts, and weighted proportions: probability sample of sexual minorities, United States, 2016–2018 ($N=833$).

	Overall sample ($N=833$), <i>N</i> (%; SE) or Mean (SE)	Experienced SOCE		Yes = No, <i>P</i>	Risk (odds) ratio	Multivariable AOR, <i>P</i>
		No ($N=1,410$), <i>N</i> (%; SE) or Mean (SE)	Yes ($N=108$), <i>N</i> (%; SE) or Mean (SE)			
Behavioral harm outcomes						
Self-harm (cutting, etc.)	47.23; 1.63	47.39; 1.69	45.08; 6.25	0.7217	1.00	1.03, 0.95
Substance use disorder (DUDIT)—percent	37.8; 1.58	37.8; 1.64	37.2; 5.85	0.9208	1.00	0.92, 0.80
Alcohol dependence (AUDIT-C)—percent	39.4; 1.55	39.1; 1.60	43.6; 6.15	0.4744	1.00	1.42, 0.23
Suicide ideation	45.4; 1.61	45.7; 1.66	42.5; 6.12	0.6167	1.00	0.76, 0.45
Suicide planning	32.9; 1.53	33.0; 1.58	31.7; 5.87	0.8341	1.00	0.71, 0.32
Suicide intention	15.6; 1.22	15.2; 1.25	21.0; 5.49	0.2984	1.02	1.24, 0.63
Suicide attempt	5.8; 0.84	5.8; 0.87	6.8; 3.28	0.7573	0.97	0.21, 0.03

Values shown are weighted for population and survey design. *N*, number of unweighted cases; SE, standard error; *P*, value of *p* of *t* test result; AOR, adjusted odds ratio. Mean comparisons were unadjusted. Column 4 tests the difference of means; column 6 tests the departure of the AOR from unity. Multivariable logistic regression models for column 6 were weighted and adjusted for demographics (age, sex at birth, sexual identity, race/ethnicity, education, health, and income; see Table 1); minority stressors [ACEs, psychological distress (Kessler), past month mental health, concealed sexual identity, internalized homophobia (adjusted), bully victimization, lifetime victimization/discrimination, everyday discrimination, felt stigma, and chronic strains; see Table 2].

Observed equivalence in the population, of course, may reflect the net result of covariate influences that counteract that of SOCE therapy. The findings presented in Tables 1 and 2, showing lower socioeconomic status and higher minority stress among the SOCE alumni, suggest that such influences are more likely harm-enhancing than not. In this case equivalent harm would indicate that SOCE likely had an ameliorating effect to bring the predicted excess of harm due to minority stress and/or poor early life influences into equivalence with the non-SOCE population, who were subject to lower stress. It is possible, however, that the reverse is true, with SOCE aggravating unobserved influences that would have otherwise lowered current harm for the SOCE group below that of the non-SOCE group.

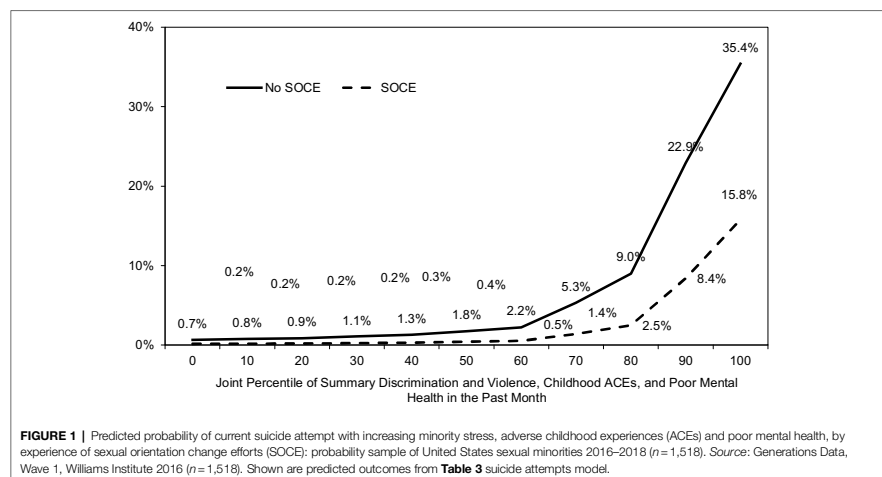
To address these possibilities, I examined logistic regression models adjusted for all of the demographic and stressor covariates presented in Tables 1 and 2. The corresponding adjusted odds ratios (AORs) for SOCE, with values of *p* indicating statistical significance, are reported in the Table 3 column labeled “Multivariable AOR.” Six of the seven AORs were non-significant, indicating that differences in stress and demography do not account for the lack of an association of SOCE therapy with these behaviors in the sexual minority population. Given this limitation, the sample AORs suggest that alcohol dependence and the declaration of suicide intentions may be moderately aggravated, and influences toward higher suicide ideation and planning may be moderately reduced, for the SOCE alumni.

The results for current suicide attempts are strikingly different. For this outcome, the AOR for SOCE is both statistically significant and strongly negative, indicating that those exposed to SOCE were about five times less likely to currently attempt suicide than were persons of comparable demographics and stress experience who were not exposed to SOCE. Unlike for the other six harm outcomes, the model for suicide attempts does not have an acceptable fit to the data, indicating that it is necessary to consider other factors, beyond the scope of

the present study, to fully account for current suicide attempts among sexual minority persons. With regard to the question under examination here, however, the model indicates that the experience of SOCE therapy was associated with a sizeable decrease in the risk of a current suicide attempt that would otherwise be predicted by higher exposure to childhood and minority stress experienced by the SOCE alumni.

Figure 1 illustrates the effect. The figure reports the predicted probability of a suicide attempt by joint deciles of three stressor covariates: ACEs, lifetime sexual orientation victimization and discrimination, and current poor mental health. Two effects in the figure should be noted. First, the probability of suicide attempts increases with increasing stress, but the increase is not linear. The marginal effect of higher levels of stress increases much more rapidly after the 50th or 60th percentile. Like the straw that broke the camel's back in the fable, a unit of additional stress on top of that of persons who were already highly stressed increased suicide attempt risk by a much greater amount than if it added to a low level of stress. Second, at every level of stress, past exposure to SOCE was associated with reduced suicide attempt risk, compared to those not exposed to SOCE. However, the effect of SOCE also increased sharply at higher levels of stress. In this model, for persons of equivalent stress, exposure to SOCE reduces the risk of suicide attempt, but we know from Table 2 that stress is not equivalent between the SOCE and the non-SOCE groups. In the joint distribution shown in Figure 1, median stress for the non-SOCE group is roughly 12 percentile points lower than that of the SOCE group. The figure illustrates that, as a result of these combined effects, the following claims can both be true: (a) SOCE reduces suicide attempt risk; and (b) the unadjusted probability of suicide attempts for SOCE alumni is equal to or greater than that of persons not exposed to SOCE.

It should be emphasized that this effect, while present in the data, does not by itself fully explain the observed equivalence



of the SOCE and non-SOCE groups on the risk of current suicide attempts. The development of a comprehensive model of suicide attempts among sexual minorities awaits further research beyond the scope of the present study.

DISCUSSION

The present findings starkly contradict those of a body of research that claims to find invidious harm, in particular suicidal morbidity, among persons exposed to SOCE therapy. By contrast, the present study, examining a large, credible representative sample of sexual minority persons using multiple well-validated measures appropriately sensitive to harm, has found that the experience of SOCE therapy was unrelated to any measure of present harm. Those who had undergone SOCE were no more likely to experience psychological distress or poor mental health, to engage in substance or alcohol abuse, to intentionally harm themselves, or to think about, plan, intend or attempt suicide, than were those who had not undergone SOCE. This finding is all the more striking since the SOCE alumni examined were characterized by conditions that, in prior research, have repeatedly been associated with higher levels of such behaviors: an unsuccessful SOCE outcome, higher minority stress, higher childhood ACEs, and lower socioeconomic status. This group constituted not only a test, but a stress test of the hypothesis that SOCE therapy induces harm. If any group were likely to suffer harm from SOCE therapy, this group would have done so.

To the extent that minority stress may induce or encourage the risk of suicidal behaviors, furthermore, in these data it

did so less strongly among persons exposed to SOCE than otherwise for the most serious suicidal behavior—suicide attempts. Although the reduction in suicide attempt risk with SOCE was sufficient to bring suicide attempts for the SOCE alumni into equivalence with non-SOCE group, with its lower experience of stress, this need not be the case. As **Figure 1** illustrates, due to their higher exposure to stress and childhood adversity, it is possible that the SOCE alumni could benefit from SOCE exposure and still also have shown higher harm.

As with any therapeutic intervention, clinical concern for aggregate outcomes following SOCE is rightly focused not on history but on prognosis. It would be a perverse policy indeed, for example, for heart surgery to be discouraged or even banned because those undergoing it experienced higher rates of cardiac dysfunction than the general population before the surgery. Yet that is the form of argument being put forward in many settings to restrict or ban SOCE therapy for sexual minorities. As the present study has found, the majority of suicidal morbidity occurred prior to SOCE, and the most serious form of suicidal morbidity was reduced following SOCE. Yet Blossnich et al. (2021), for example, dismissed concerns that morbidity may have predated SOCE exposure in advocating a ban on SOCE due to its association with higher lifetime suicidal morbidity. Other recent studies have presented the same flawed form of argument (Ryan et al., 2020; Salway et al., 2020; del Río-González et al., 2021). For these reasons, proposals to restrict therapeutic interventions based on superficial claims of lifetime harm should be met with skeptical caution.

Proponents of the argument from lifetime suicidality have attempted to defend such dubious reasoning by claiming

that persons undergoing SOCE are more exposed, as a group, to minority stressors, which in turn induce greater personal harm. Blossnich et al. (2020, p. 1027–1028), for example, attributed harm from SOCE to “the construct of perceived burdensomeness” resulting from minority stress, calling for further investigation into “specific constructs and mechanisms (e.g., enacted stigma, internalized stigma, and identity concealment) that could incite perceived burdensomeness and create the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors among survivors of SOCE.”

This argument also founders on the direction of causation. Since most suicidal morbidity occurred before recourse to SOCE, it is more likely that higher stress induced recourse to SOCE than the reverse, rendering this claim a good argument for reducing minority stress but a poor argument for restricting SOCE. The present findings, moreover, confirm predictions of higher minority stress, both currently and over their lifetimes, but fail to find any corresponding present harm, among those exposed to SOCE. Recently Meyer, the original proponent of MST, similarly found that changes in minority stress were not correlated with cohort trends in suicidal behavior in the Generations data (Meyer et al., 2021).

It is not possible for the present study to determine the mechanisms which reduce suicide attempts among former SOCE participants, but some suggestions in support of future research may be in order. With respect to MST, the present findings suggest three possibilities: either SOCE ameliorates the risk of harm deemed to be created by minority stress experiences; or those experiences do not induce harm, or as much harm, as MST predicts; or a combination of both.

Minority stress theory itself theorizes that minority stress may increase resilience under certain conditions (Meyer, 2003). In examining the possibilities, research might be rewarded by more fully elaborating the association between minority stress and harm, as in, for example, stress process theories which examine the interaction of individual characteristics with social processes, including cultural norms, in affecting stress responses throughout the life course (Pearlin et al., 1981; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Carver and Connor-Smith, 2010). In their classic typology of former SOCE participants, Shidlo and Schroeder found that about 10% of those they interviewed experienced a “resilient recovery of gay identity: ...these participants reported few or no long-term damaging effects and actually felt strengthened by their experience of having tried to change. Their failure at conversion therapy freed them to embrace their gay or lesbian identity without ambivalence or guilt” (Shidlo and Schroeder, 2002, p. 254). It may be that this result is more common than was reflected in Shidlo and Schroeder’s non-probability sample, accounting for the results observed in the present study. These ideas are presented as suggestions to be sorted out by future research and not as firm conclusions from the present study.

Scholarly proponents of SOCE restrictions have also suggested that restrictions or bans are warranted, or perhaps acceptable on other grounds, because it is not effective (Blossnich et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2020). As already noted,

this claim is empirically dubious because the evidence cited for it is based almost exclusively on samples of self-identified sexual minorities, which have explicitly screened out anyone for whom SOCE may have been successful. But even when SOCE is unsuccessful, as must be true sometimes even if it is not true always, such a deficit would only be pertinent to a risk/benefit evaluation if there were a corresponding risk. The present study has found that, even for persons for whom SOCE has had no efficacy, there is no discernible psychosocial risk.

Limitations

As Blossnich et al. (2020, p. 7) noted, the SOCE measure developed by the Generations researchers has not been validated and may not capture all forms of SOCE experience or all persons engaging in SOCE. They speculated that this may be due to greater concealment among SOCE alumni, but the present study has found the opposite to be true: SOCE alumni were significantly more likely to be “out” about their sexual orientation than were those not exposed to SOCE (See **Table 2**). Rather, the SOCE question likely was specified too narrowly: “Did you ever receive treatment from someone who tried to change your sexual orientation?” This prescriptive wording seems not to take seriously the claim of many SOCE practitioners that the goal of such therapy is to resolve psychological distress or value conflicts related to same-sex attractions, behavior or identification, which may or may not involve seeking to modify the current state of these elements of the client’s sexuality. (Opponents still define this as SOCE because the therapy is still open to the possibility of changing sexual orientation if desired.) Likely confusion or uncertainty over the SOCE question may be evidenced by the fact that almost half (49.1%, SE 6.12) of those who responded “Yes” to the SOCE question, indicating that they had gone through SOCE therapy, did not agree with the statement, “I have tried to stop being attracted to people who are the same sex as me.”

In addition to low specificity, the SOCE measure may also exhibit low sensitivity. In the Generations data, attempts to resolve or change same-sex attractions were much more widespread in the sexual minority population than was indicated by the proportion who have undergone SOCE therapy. Almost a third (30.9, 95% CI 27.9–33.9) of the sexual minority population reported having attempted to change their sexual orientation to become heterosexual, but the SOCE question only captured under 7% of respondents, an amount four times lower.

Although the Generations data used in the present study have many strengths, they also have some limitations. The strong complex survey design assures that they were accurately representative of the target population, but they did not include the entire LGB population. As with any cross-sectional data, causation cannot be attributed with certainty. Some age ranges were screened out, as were persons below a fifth-grade education and some smaller racial minority groups.

CONCLUSION

Examining a strong representative sample of sexual minority persons in the United States, the present study has found that the prevalence of current or prospective behavioral harm among sexual minorities is statistically identical for those who have experienced SOCE and those who have not. These findings not only fail to find harm, but also present positive evidence of the absence of harm, from SOCE therapy. With respect to suicide attempts, SOCE appears to mitigate the harm attributable to elevated stress. Further study is needed to clarify the reasons for the absence of current harm, despite not only higher minority stress, but also higher childhood stress and lower socioeconomic status, experienced by those exposed to SOCE.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data for this study are publicly available from the following data repository: Meyer, Ilan H. Generations: A Study of the Life and Health of LGB People in a Changing Society, United States, 2016-2019. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2020-08-25. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR37166.v1>.

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ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical review and approval was not required for the current study in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. As a secondary analysis of pre-existing public data, the present study's methods were determined to be exempt from human subject ethical review under 45 CFR 46.104 by the Catholic University of America Institutional Review Board in Certificate 21-0016 issued March 12, 2021. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in the underlying survey data collection.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

DS: conceptualization, data analysis, writing—original draft preparation, and writing—review and editing.

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NATIONAL TASK FORCE FOR THERAPY EQUALITY

REPORT TO THE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

May 2, 2017

**In Their Own Words
LIES, DECEPTION, AND FRAUD**

Southern Poverty Law Center, Human Rights Campaign, and the National Center for Lesbian Rights' Hate Campaign to Ban Psychotherapy for Individuals with Sexual and Gender Identity Conflicts



The National Task Force for Therapy Equality is a coalition of licensed psychotherapists, psychiatrists, physicians, public policy organizations, and psychotherapy clients/patients from across the United States of America. Their purpose is to secure therapy equality for clients that experience distress over unwanted same-sex attractions and gender identity conflicts



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February 2016, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Human Rights Campaign (HRC), and National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) against People Can Change (now called Brothers Road), accusing the Virginia based non-profit organization of committing consumer fraud, namely, by offering, marketing, selling, and performing services that purport to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, commonly referred to as "conversion therapy." This complaint was a part of the Respondents' ongoing effort to curtail the therapy rights of individuals, and their families, who experience sexual and gender identity conflicts by enacting legislation to ban licensed psychotherapy on the state and federal level.

This complaint prompted the National Task Force for Therapy Equality, a coalition of psychotherapists, psychiatrists, physicians, public policy organizations, and clients who experience unwanted same-sex attractions and gender identity conflicts, to launch a comprehensive investigation titled:

In Their Own Words – Lies, Deception, and Fraud: The Southern Poverty Law Center, Human Rights Campaign, and National Center for Lesbian Rights' Hate Campaign to Ban Psychotherapy for Individuals with Sexual and Gender Identity Conflicts

As this report will detail, the three Respondents have been actively working together for at least five years in a deceptive and fraudulent hate campaign with the goal of deceiving law makers on the state, federal, and international level to track legislation to ban licensed psychotherapy for clients (minors) that experience unwanted same-sex attractions and gender identity conflicts. To date, six states and several cities and jurisdictions have passed such legislation into law, prompting several lawsuits across the country.

This report will demonstrate the following:

- The three Respondents have actively and knowingly engaged in deceptive and fraudulent marketing practices of the kind the FTC considers malicious, which are particularly deceptive and misleading to consumers and the general public. This complaint is pursuant to the FTC's definition of unfair practices, defined as those that "cause or are likely to cause substantial injury to consumers which is not reasonably avoidable by consumers themselves and not outweighed by countervailing benefits to consumers or to competition" (15 U.S.C. Sec. 460).
- The three Respondents have supported witnesses on the state, federal, and international level that have delivered unverifiable and fraudulent testimony in front of law making bodies in the effort to persuade legislative action to ban psychotherapy. Through multiple examples, it has now been proven these witnesses have lied and engaged in a variety of deceptive practices on behalf of the Respondents' hate campaigns to ban psychotherapy.
- The three Respondents, through their marketing campaigns, are actively using large sums of money in the effort to ban psychotherapy by using deceptive and fraudulent practices. These practices are misleading to the general public, and, as this report documents, it is highly unlikely that the three Respondents are measures of the false and misleading nature of how their statements distort the facts and research around psychotherapy to help clients with sexual and gender identity conflicts. As such, they are knowingly misleading consumers in their efforts to profit from such activities.
- The three Respondents, through their marketing campaigns, have actively and knowingly distorted the law to promote efforts to ban psychotherapy for clients with sexual and gender identity conflicts, including misleading statements regarding the 2009 American Psychological Association Task Force report on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation, as well as other research (e.g., Ryan et al., 2009). The three Respondents use these misleading statements to make false and misleading claims that psychotherapy is harmful and ineffective for minors who experience sexual and gender identity conflicts.
- The three Respondents, through their marketing campaigns, have actively distorted the scientific research in promoting the "born gay" hoax, a notion that has been dis-

As this report will detail, the three Respondents have been actively working together for at least five years in a deceptive and fraudulent hate campaign with the goal of deceiving law makers on the state, federal, and international level to exact legislation to ban licensed psychotherapy for clients (minors) that experience unwanted same-sex attractions and gender identity conflicts.

The National Task Force for Therapy Equality (NFTTE) respectfully requests that the Federal Trade Commission ("FTC") investigate and stop the libels, slanders, deceptions, and misleading actions of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Human Rights Campaign (HRC), and National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), which have made broad sweeping claims of fraud and harm towards professional sexual orientation change therapists, and their clients.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Formal Purpose of this Complaint

The National Task Force for Therapy Equality (NFTTE), the following licensed therapists, and the following therapy clients respectfully request that the Federal Trade Commission ("FTC") investigate and stop the libel, slander, deceptive, and misleading actions of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Human Rights Campaign (HRC), and National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), which have made broad sweeping claims of fraud and harm towards professional sexual orientation change therapists, and their clients.

In accordance with the substantial scientific and anecdotal evidence that demonstrates sexual orientation change is possible for some individuals, and the lack of accurate research to support the assertion that Sexual Orientation Change Effort (SOCE) therapy is fraudulent and/or harmful, the NFTTE, licensed therapists, and therapy clients request that the FTC conduct an investigation into the sexual orientation change efforts to ban psychotherapy.

The actions of the SPLC, HRC, and NCLR seek to invalidate and end the practice of professional sexual orientation change therapies and will result in a denial of free speech of therapists and therapy clients, restriction of their religious rights, and in some cases, may pose harm to the mental and emotional health of clients, who could experience depression, anxiety and/or suicide ideation due to a lack of available therapists who share their values and goals.

As such, we define the efforts of the SPLC, HRC, and NCLR as malice, and are particularly deceptive and misleading to consumers and the general public. This complaint is pursuant to the FTC's definition of unfair practices, defined as those that "cause or are likely to cause substantial injury to consumers which is not reasonably avoidable by consumers themselves and not outweighed by countervailing benefits to consumers or to competition" (15 U.S.C. Sec. 456).

We respectfully request that the FTC take enforcement action to end the actions of the SPLC, HRC, and NCLR, which seek to defame change therapists, change therapists, and their clients, or to render a judgment against the three organizations for their actions, which are deceptive and misleading to consumers and the general public. We also ask that the FTC require these organizations to immediately publishing slanderous remarks about change therapists, and their clients, and require them to cease and desist publishing all deceptive statements including those within their public speeches, social media, online videos, and on their websites.

B. Overview of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Human Rights Campaign (HRC), and National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)

Southern Poverty Law Center – Respondent
Respondent Southern Poverty Law Center ("SPLC"), located in Montgomery, Alabama (www.splc-center.org) is a multi-million dollar law firm, organized as a non-profit, committed to targeting and prosecuting SPLC identified "hate" groups. Until recently, the SPLC included an interactive "Hate Map" that identified nearly 100 therapists and ministers who help individuals with sexual and gender identity conflicts. The Respondent recently removed this map in the aftermath of Floyd Corkins, a gunman that was inspired by the SPLC's "Hate Map" to enter the Family Research Council in 2013 and attempt to murder conservatives. The SPLC LGBT Human Rights Project is dedicated to the fraudulent pseudoscience of proving genetic homosexuality and to profiting from alleged harm of falsely named "conversion therapy." The SPLC initiated the lawsuit of Ferguson v. DONAH, exploited recruited plaintiffs, biased court proceedings, and manipulated overly broad consumer fraud laws in a New Jersey State Court to target and prosecute organizations. In 2014, the Federal Bureau of Investigation removed the SPLC from the "Resources" page of its Civil Rights Division. An internal FBI e-mail seems to suggest that the decision to remove the SPLC from this list was prompted by a meeting with congressional staffers, who expressed the concerns of the board of the Family

Until recently, the SPLC included an interactive "Hate Map" that identified nearly 100 therapists and ministers that help individuals with sexual and gender identity conflicts. The Respondent recently removed this map in the aftermath of Floyd Corkins, a gunman that was inspired by the SPLC's "Hate Map" to enter the Family Research Council in 2013 and attempt to murder conservatives.

Petitioner therapy clients include over 1,000 individuals and families who seek help from licensed professional therapists to heal trauma from sexual abuse, to resolve unwanted same-sex attractions and/or gender identity conflicts. The Respondent recently removed this map in the aftermath of Floyd Corkins, a gunman that was inspired by the SPLC's "Hate Map" to enter the Family Research Council in 2013 and attempt to murder conservatives.

proved and refuted by organizations such as the American Psychological Association through their 2008 Position Statement and 2014 APA Handbook of Sexuality and Psychology. The Respondents have perpetrated this lie to further their respective political agendas, and in so doing, have raised untold sums of money from unsuspecting consumers and the general public.

- The three Respondents have also engaged in smear and defamatory attacks on licensed psychotherapists and faith-based ministers providing help and assistance to those who experience sexual and gender identity conflicts. Until recently, one of the Respondents (SPLC) included an interactive "Hate Map" that identified nearly 100 therapists and ministers on their website. The Respondent recently removed this map in the aftermath of the crime of Floyd Corkins, a gunman who was inspired by the SPLC's "Hate Map" to enter the Family Research Council in 2013 and attempt to murder conservatives.

- One of the Respondents (SPLC) was also reported to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in 2017 by the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) for engaging in practices of using "opinion-based smears and innuendos" as though they were educational while violating governmental regulations and using tactics that claim shields it from liability lawsuits. The Respondent's blatant engagement in political activity is a clear violation of their 501(c) 3 status with the IRS, says the complaint.

By engaging in these deceptive and fraudulent practices, the National Task Force for Therapy Equality accuses the Respondents of perpetrating unfair harm on millions of consumers and the general public, hundreds of licensed mental health providers, and thousands of clients and potential clients that experience sexual and gender identity conflicts. Because their hate campaigns have already resulted in therapy bans enacted in at least six states and several other cities and jurisdictions, this report respectfully requests the FTC to review these fraudulent and deceptive practices and to promptly order the Respondents to cease their activities in the effort to protect therapists, clients, consumers, and the general public from further harm. In addition, we respectfully request the FTC to order the three Respondents to issue press releases, correct inaccurate statements on their websites, and actively work with legislators across the United States to reverse legislation that has been passed into law so that further harm can be avoided.

One of the Respondents (SPLC) has also made broad sweeping claims of fraud and harm towards professional sexual orientation change therapists, and their clients.

Research Council (FRC), whose presence on the SPLC's "hate watch" list inspired Floyd Corkins the gunman that targeted the FRC in 2012 in order to "kill as many employees as possible."

Human Rights Campaign – Respondent

According to their website (www.HRC.org) the Human Rights Campaign is located in Washington, DC and is "America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve LGBT equality. By inspiring and engaging individuals and communities, HRC strives to end discrimination against LGBTQ people and realize a world that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all. The Human Rights Campaign envisions a world where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people are ensured equality and embraced as full members of society at home, at work, and in every community." While HRC works to defend the rights of the LGBT community, they have actively worked to marginalize, defame, and discriminate against individuals that experience unwanted same-sex attractions and gender identity conflicts. Until recently, they have distanced themselves from formal efforts to end what they label "conversion therapy" for minors. However, in a February 14, 2017 press release on pending legislation in New Mexico to ban "conversion therapy," they stated: "NCLR and HRC have partnered with state equality groups across the nation to pass state legislation to end conversion therapy."

National Center for Lesbian Rights – Respondent

Located in San Francisco, CA, the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) launched the #BanPerfect Campaign in June 2016 to end "conversion therapy" in five years by passing laws across the country to protect LGBT kids from these dangerous practices, fighting in courtrooms to ensure their safety, and raising awareness. According to their website (www.nclr.org), the NCLR "focuses on employment, immigration, youth, elder, law, transgender law, sports, marriage, relationship protections, reproductive rights, and family law to create safer homes, safer jobs, and a more just world. Each year, NCLR shapes the legal landscape for all LGBT people and families across the nation through its precedent setting litigation, legislation, policy, and public education. For more than three decades, NCLR has led historic cases, and is still thriving today in pursuit of justice, fairness, and legal protection for all LGBT people."

II. THE PARTIES

- A. Licensed Psychotherapists**
Over 20,000 licensed therapist, psychiatrists, and physicians represented by the National Task Force for Therapy Equality.
- B. Therapy Clients/Patients**
Petitioner therapy clients include over 1,000 individuals and families who seek help from licensed professional therapists to heal trauma from sexual abuse, to resolve unwanted same-sex attractions and/or gender identity conflicts, and to heal from the consequences of homosexual activity, including depression, anger, addiction, disease, and suicide.
- C. Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)**
- D. Human Rights Campaign (HRC)**
- E. National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)**

III. WRITTEN AND VERBAL STATEMENTS FROM THE SPLC, HRC, AND NCLR

A. Applicable Law

Section 1 of the Federal Trade Commission Act ("FTC Act") prohibits unfair and deceptive acts and practices, including statements. The FTC considers whether there has been a rep-

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1. Petrus C. (May 10, 2015) was transmitted by the Southern Poverty Law Center's hate campaign against ex-gays. Retrieved online at <http://www.revolutionandculture.com/?p=1010>

2. A. Brown, R.C. Liberman. (2016). DONAH Case: The Federal Legal Proceedings for Sexual Orientation Change Efforts in New. <http://www.wnd.com/2016/02/sexual-orientation-change-efforts-under-attack/>

3. "Remot. 1/27/2017. EXCLUSIVE: FBI Removed SPLC, NCLR from Resources Page Over 'Number of Consumers'." Retrieved online at <http://dallasbee.com/2017/02/01/exclusive-fbi-removed-splc-and-nclr-from-civil-rights-resource-page-because-of-a-number-of-consumers/>

4. Miller, M. (2/17/17). Bill to Protect LGBTQ Youth From "Conversion Therapy" Moves Through New Mexico Senate Committee. Retrieved online at <http://www.kunm.com/story/36110611/bill-to-protect-lgbtq-youth-from-conversion-therapy-moves-through-new-mexico>

Plentiful evidence (multiple large, prospective, longitudinal, representative sample and cohort studies) makes clear that both same-sex attracted individuals (including bisexual and mostly heterosexual individuals) account for most of the change in attraction, behavior, and identity over time.¹²

Klepac and Diamond say: "Historically such individuals (mostly heterosexual) have been treated with skepticism and suspicion by laypeople and scientists alike. They have been viewed as either closeted lesbians or closeted gay men, with the latter being assigned a heterosexual label to avoid the stigma associated with same-sex sexuality or as confused or questioning heterosexuals."¹³

Klepac and Diamond urge that "it is critically important for clinicians not to assume that any experience of same-sex desire or behavior is a sign of latent homosexuality and instead to allow individuals to determine for themselves the role of same-sexuality in their lives and identity."¹⁴

The falsehoods that the SPLC, HRC, and NCLR promote lead the public and some mental health professionals to assume that all individuals who experience any same-sex attraction are really exclusively homosexual and would be happier leaving their heterosexual marriage and breaking up their family to go into a same-sex relationship. An anecdotal illustration of the harm comes from the experience of a man whose therapist told him his sexual attraction could be resolved and he would be happier having his wife and daughter go away relationships. In despair, not relief, he left his marriage and family, and for nine years he had gay relationships, living a life he did not want to live. At the end, he decided to go back to change his sexual attraction, and he married a woman. But he grieves they care for his daughter look like he was not living with her and raising her full time, a loss that can never be made up to them, or her.

Yes, they should. Some not exclusively same-sex attracted individuals want to protect their heterosexual relationship and family by stopping periodic same-sex behavior. Should they be able to do that help? Yes, they should. Some not exclusively same-sex attracted minors or young adults aspire to be able to live in an opposite-sex relationship and to procreate children with their partner and raise them together, to make people easy to do, but they may need help to change periodic or a small amount of same-sex attraction. The SPLC, HRC, and NCLR tell them they can never change and try to make people to help them be illegal.

Also, both the American Psychiatric Association¹⁵ and the American Psychological Association¹⁶ endorse childhood transgender identity fluctuation. As many as 75% to 98% of gender-confused boys and as many as 70% to 88% of gender-confused girls will eventually accept their chromosomal sex by adolescence or adulthood if allowed to do so.

Change in the norm for sexual orientation and childhood gender dysphoria. Therapy that is open to exploring an individual's potential for a shift in sexual attraction or gender identity is better aligned with the norm of change and direction of change for sexual orientation and childhood gender dysphoria than gay-affirmative or conversion therapy.

Adolescents who experience any same-sex attraction, behavior, or identity self-label should not be led to interpret these as meaning they have a stable sexual orientation trait. Researchers nowadays do not even try to measure homosexuality as a stable or coherent trait. Instead, they often measure sexual orientation by one or more of these separate components: sexual attraction, behavior, or self-identity label. The APA Handbook says that these do not necessarily match within the same individual.¹⁷

127 R. Savin-Williams & J. Joyner, *Sexual Orientation and Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Young Adults*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2014, 45-64, 104, 105; Diamond & R. Klein, *Sexual Orientation and Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Young Adults*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2014, 126, 130, 131, 134, 135.

13 Klepac & Diamond, 2014, 126, 130, 131, 134, 135.

14 Ibid., 127.

15 Prevalence of mental disorders among adolescents and young adults in the United States: 2001-2010. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 50(10), 1085-1094.

16 American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013, 602-603, 605, 606, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000.

17 R. Klein & R. Diamond, 2014, 126, 130, 131, 134, 135.

18 Ibid., 127.

19 Ibid., 127.

20 Ibid., 127.

21 Ibid., 127.

22 Ibid., 127.

23 Ibid., 127.

24 Ibid., 127.

25 Ibid., 127.

26 Ibid., 127.

27 Ibid., 127.

28 Ibid., 127.

29 Ibid., 127.

30 Ibid., 127.

31 Ibid., 127.

32 Ibid., 127.

33 Ibid., 127.

34 Ibid., 127.

Diamond and Rosky concluded: "Several...studies have now been completed and they unequivocally demonstrate that same-sex and other-sex attractions do change over time in some individuals." Across several large, population-based, prospective, longitudinal studies, among same-sex attracted individuals who changed, 50 to 100% changed to exclusive heterosexuality."

Udry and Chantala, examining the data from the first two waves, found 80% of exclusively same-sex attracted boys experienced change in sexual identity just one year from age 16 to age 17. After one year's time, only 11% remained identified as exclusively same-sex attracted. The majority, 51%, migrated toward or to exclusive heterosexuality, with 48% exclusively opposite-sex attracted and 6% newly attracted to both sexes.

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For example, heterosexual minors who had same-sex attraction and behavior forced upon them by childhood molestation could have bisexual attraction, homosexual behavior, and heterosexual identity, if there is a sense that the same-sexuality does not represent the authentic self.

Diamond and Rosky concluded: "Several...studies have now been completed and they unequivocally demonstrate that same-sex and other-sex attractions do change over time in some individuals." Across several large, population-based, prospective, longitudinal studies, among same-sex attracted individuals who changed, 50 to 100% changed to exclusive heterosexuality."¹²

Opponents of SOCE often claim that sexual attraction can never change from exclusively same-sex attraction to exclusively opposite-sex attraction. But that is not true. The University of Chicago 1993 (US) National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS) conducted by Laumann and colleagues reported that "men who report same-gender sex only before they turned eighteen, not attended, constitute 42 percent of the total number of men who report ever having a same-gender experience."¹³ This study continues to be highly regarded and had not ceased to be cited by leading researchers to this day, as exemplified by numerous citations in the APA Handbook.¹⁴

There is yet more excellent evidence of complete change from exclusive same-sex attraction to exclusively opposite-sex attraction in adolescents. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (AddHealth) is also highly regarded and is reviewed in the APA Handbook. It has now gone through five waves of data collection on a national, nationally representative sample. Udry and Chantala, examining the data from the first two waves, found 89% of exclusively same-sex attracted boys experienced change in sexual identity in just one year from age 16 to age 17. After one year's time, only 11% remained identified as exclusively same-sex attracted. The majority, 51%, migrated toward or to exclusive heterosexuality, with 48% exclusively opposite-sex attracted and 6% newly attracted to both sexes. These results show that nearly half of adolescent boys changed from exclusive homosexual attraction to exclusively heterosexual attraction in just one year. For 35% of the boys, same-sex attraction dropped out, but heterosexual attraction had not developed. They became neither-sex attracted. Boys who were neither-sex attracted in early adolescence went on to develop attraction to women in the Add Health study as Savin-Williams and Ream continued to follow attraction to women in the Add Health study and Ream continued to follow attraction to women in the Add Health study.

In support of findings of Savin-Williams and Ream, the data show that similar results were found in the Growing Up Today Study (GUTS) in 2013. This study, a large, prospective, longitudinal cohort study of the children of women participating in the Nurses' Health Study II research, was also mentioned in the study, and there was no indication any of the participants had such therapy.¹⁵

Opponents not only regularly claim therapy that is open to exploring any avenue of change such as electric shock or electroconvulsive shock therapy (ECT) is ineffective and also death-threatening. Electroconvulsive shock therapy (ECT) is not used in behavior modification to modify behavior. We know of no instance where clients were dropped out, but heterosexual attraction had not developed. They became neither-sex attracted. Boys who were neither-sex attracted in early adolescence went on to develop attraction to women in the Add Health study as Savin-Williams and Ream continued to follow attraction to women in the Add Health study and Ream continued to follow attraction to women in the Add Health study.

Savin-Williams and Ream (2007), commenting on the findings of the first three waves of the Add Health study, said that, overall, the majority of shifts in sexual behavior were toward heterosexuality, even among those who were not sexually attracted in the first wave, and that some individuals who indicated non-heterosexuality one and five years later."¹⁶ All attraction categories other than opposite-sex were associated with a lower likelihood of stability over time.¹⁷

127 R. Savin-Williams & J. Joyner, *Sexual Orientation and Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Young Adults*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2014, 45-64, 104, 105; Diamond & R. Klein, *Sexual Orientation and Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Young Adults*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2014, 126, 130, 131, 134, 135.

13 Klein & Diamond, 2014, 126, 130, 131, 134, 135.

14 Ibid., 127.

15 Ibid., 127.

16 Ibid., 127.

17 Ibid., 127.

18 Ibid., 127.

19 Ibid., 127.

20 Ibid., 127.

21 Ibid., 127.

22 Ibid., 127.

23 Ibid., 127.

24 Ibid., 127.

25 Ibid., 127.

26 Ibid., 127.

27 Ibid., 127.

28 Ibid., 127.

29 Ibid., 127.

30 Ibid., 127.

31 Ibid., 127.

32 Ibid., 127.

live consequences for behavior a client wanted to increase and aversive consequences for behaviors a client wanted to decrease. When electric shock was used, an adult client chose the level of shock, and the shocker was trained to avoid an arm or leg, never the genital. The use of electric shock was voluntary, not coerced. Aversive methods such as electric shock certainly were not just used to unilaterally sexual behavior. They were also used for cessation of smoking and alcohol abuse.¹⁸

Behavior modification was so popular among therapists that an individual practically had to be a behaviorist to be the chair of a psychology department in a college or university. Therapists latched on to huge contracts for behavior modification. Use of electric shock to diminish same-sex attraction stopped, not because of lawsuits, but because the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, second edition. By the end of the 1980's, behavior modification was being replaced by cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT) that was becoming dominant, and aversive methods such as electric shock went by the wayside.

To our knowledge, psychopharmacology has not used electric shock, or other aversive methods for adolescents, and we know of no reliable evidence that licensed psychologists ever used electric shock on minors for sexual behavior. If anyone who was born in recent decades claims they received electric shock or aversive methods from a licensed mental health professional when they were a child, especially for same-sex attractions or gender identity, their claim should be taken with a very large grain of salt. But if there was a case where such a method was used, the claimant should make a complaint to the licensing board in their state, and doing so will stop its use.

There is no evidence that "electroconvulsive shock" was ever used by licensed mental health professionals to modify sexuality, contrary to the claims of the NCLR and Washington state bill HB 1541 quoted above. Electroconvulsive shock therapy (ECT) is a method used by some psychiatrists for the most severe cases of depression, mania, or some other severe psychiatric disorders.¹⁹ Electroconvulsive shock therapy is not the electric shock method that was used in behavior modification to modify behavior. We know of no instance where clients were dropped out, but heterosexual attraction had not developed. They became neither-sex attracted. Boys who were neither-sex attracted in early adolescence went on to develop attraction to women in the Add Health study as Savin-Williams and Ream continued to follow attraction to women in the Add Health study and Ream continued to follow attraction to women in the Add Health study.

The SPLC, HRC, and NCLR also claim that therapy with lightning that is open to SOCE change results in "suicide" or "death." Opponents frequently cite research by Egan et al. (2009) about suicide in same-sex attracted minors as if it is about SOCE change therapy, but that research is open to SOCE change, not even mentioned in the study, and there was no indication any of the participants had such therapy.²⁰

Opponents not only regularly claim therapy that is open to exploring any avenue of change such as electric shock or electroconvulsive shock therapy (ECT) is ineffective and also death-threatening. Electroconvulsive shock therapy (ECT) is not used in behavior modification to modify behavior. We know of no instance where clients were dropped out, but heterosexual attraction had not developed. They became neither-sex attracted. Boys who were neither-sex attracted in early adolescence went on to develop attraction to women in the Add Health study as Savin-Williams and Ream continued to follow attraction to women in the Add Health study and Ream continued to follow attraction to women in the Add Health study.

In reality, the APA Task Force report found research evidence for the safety and effectiveness of both therapy that is open to change and gay-affirmative therapy to be inconclusive. "Inconclusive" just means the task force had no idea. The Task Force also reported that no data for the safety of gay-affirmative therapy existed.²¹ "Lack of evidence" as whether a

207 R. Klein & R. Diamond, 2014, 126, 130, 131, 134, 135.

21 Ibid., 127.

22 Ibid., 127.

23 Ibid., 127.

24 Ibid., 127.

25 Ibid., 127.

26 Ibid., 127.

27 Ibid., 127.

28 Ibid., 127.

29 Ibid., 127.

30 Ibid., 127.

31 Ibid., 127.

32 Ibid., 127.

33 Ibid., 127.

34 Ibid., 127.

35 Ibid., 127.

36 Ibid., 127.

37 Ibid., 127.

38 Ibid., 127.

39 Ibid., 127.

40 Ibid., 127.

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Yet the evidence that sexual orientation change efforts, or SOCE, are harmful is virtually all anecdotal - "the kind of evidence which critics of SOCE refuse to accept with regard to the effectiveness question."

[T]he APA reported anecdotal evidence of both benefits and harms, but ultimately declared that "the recent studies do not provide solid causal evidence of the efficacy of SOCE of or its harm."

In their Own Words, a report by the National Task Force for Therapy Equality Page 31

The SPLC, HRC, and NCLR also perpetuate the false and misleading impression that sexual orientation is immutable, like skin color. Sexual orientation is not resistant to change; in fact, it is the norm for sexual orientation to change. The American Psychological Association recognizes sexual orientation change. Sexual orientation is not resistant to change; in fact, it is the norm for sexual orientation to change. The American Psychological Association recognizes sexual orientation change.

Most adolescents and adults who identify themselves as same-sex attracted will change toward or to exclusive opposite-sex attraction. Therapy that is open to change is for more congruent with the norm of change in adolescent and adult sexual attraction development than is gay-affirmative therapy. So it should be successful for some, and how dangerous can it be?

They that is open to SOCE change is generally a form of therapy but opponents to a client's free choice of change using any contemporary form of talk therapy. Contemporary licensed mental health professionals use no coercion or aversive methods. If any exceptions occurred, licensing boards would address these issues. The SPLC, HRC, and NCLR grotesquely misrepresented therapy that is open to a client's goal of change in sexual attraction or behavior or gender identity. Their fragment and deceptive claims scare minors and adults and are used to deprive children of therapy.

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therapy is safe or effective - whether the therapy be heterosexual-affirmative therapy or gay-affirmative therapy - does not equal evidence that the therapy is ineffective or harmful. Put another way, lack of evidence does not equal evidence of lack.

If lack of conclusive research evidence is grounds for labeling a product "harmful, quackery, make oil, bogus, consumer fraud" and something that "should be banned," then gay-affirmative therapy, transgender-affirmative therapy, "walk and see" therapy,²² and many other approaches to therapy should be given those same labels and be "banned."

Peter Spigg, senior fellow for policy studies at the Family Research Council, offered the following analysis of what the APA has said about sexual orientation change efforts in his testimony to the state of Vermont.²³

The American Psychological Association (APA), under the weight of ideological opponents of reorientation therapy, has criticized and discouraged but never banned reorientation therapy. Yet even the APA acknowledges that "participants reported beneficial effects in some studies perceived change in their sexuality, such as in their sexual orientation [attraction], gender identity, sexual behavior, [and/or] sexual orientation identity."²⁴

Critics cite another APA statement that there is "no sufficiently scientifically sound evidence that sexual orientation can be changed." This, however, means only that the evidence does not meet all the criteria for "gold standard" science research, such as large, random samples, a prospective and longitudinal design (tracks people before, during, and after therapy), and use of a control group.

Yet the evidence that sexual orientation change efforts, or SOCE, are harmful is virtually all anecdotal - the kind of evidence which critics of SOCE refuse to accept with regard to the effectiveness question.

"[T]he APA report of anecdotal evidence of both benefits and harms, but ultimately declared that "the recent studies do not provide solid causal evidence of the efficacy of SOCE of or its harm."

Psychopharmacology, in general, results in harm for 5% of adults and 15-24% of minors.²⁵ For anti-change therapy to actually justify their claims, they would need research that meets scientific standards and demonstrates that harm from therapy that is open to change significantly exceeds the greater harm of harm and is open to such data exists.

Will anecdotes claiming harm from therapy that is open to change that some opponents' reports should be carefully checked for validity. That is, there are 400 reports of self-reported sexual orientation change spanning 125 years. Dr. Alfred Kinsey himself, arguably the father of scientific study into homosexuality, helped more than 80 homosexual men make a "diagnostic" heterosexual adjustment, which either consisted or largely replaced earlier homosexual experience.²⁶ The record includes that he helped a "boy."²⁷

Former APA president Nicholas Cummings highlighted the 1975 APA resolution that homosexuality is not a mental illness. As former San Francisco psychologist, he was a member of homosexuals' change and live very happily heterosexual lives."²⁸ Dr. Robert Spitzer, famous for his parallel resolution to remove homosexuality from the list of mental disorders in the American Psychiatric Association, published research showing change therapy is effective for

124 P. Spigg, *Written Testimony in Opposition to Vermont Bill S.132, For Prohibition of Conversion Therapy*, 2014, 10-11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100.

125 Ibid., 127.

126 Ibid., 127.

127 Ibid., 127.

128 Ibid., 127.

129 Ibid., 127.

130 Ibid., 127.

131 Ibid., 127.

132 Ibid., 127.

133 Ibid., 127.

What is "ex-gay" and why do their books matter?



SEP 11, 2019 —

In the context of Amazon censoring "ex-gay" testimony books of Anne Paulk, Joe Dallas, and others, someone asked, "what does ex-gay even mean?"

"Ex-gay" is a label used to describe someone who once lived or identified as gay or lesbian before, but no longer do. Labels are of course something one chooses to self-identify with. "Ex-gay" also has been used by individuals who once had same-sex sexual desires but never lived or identified as gay or lesbian.

The "ex-gay" label sometimes is also used by those who are just starting a journey out of homosexual behavior, lifestyle, and identity, for which they believe it is a sin that separates them from God. These individuals are new in their faith walk in Jesus Christ. They are desiring to live fully authentic as they believe God has destined for them, and so they choose to use that label in faith as it becomes the truth.

Christian ministry has always included evangelism of the faith, as commanded by Jesus. It includes discipleship in the faith. These are accomplished through solid biblical teaching, life testimonies (Rev 12:11) and life experiences of those who have gone before. Those books being censored by Amazon share the authors understanding of how Christianity directs us to live in Christ, mind, body, and spirit. Those books are being censored, solely because of their religious message. It is religious discrimination.

Our "ex-gay" Christian community desires to be a safe space for people who seek authentic discipleship in the Christian faith with their goal of aligning their lives, behaviors and identities included, with the teachings of Jesus Christ. These books are a needed and desired part of our Christian community.

We are disciples of Jesus, and our life stories are being censored because of a lie.

The "conversion therapy" straw man lie used to censor our books is conflating our testimonies of conversion to Christ with faux claims of electroshock therapy, drug aversion techniques, and coercive shameful behaviors by imagined licensed therapists. It is incredibly defamatory towards and bullying of our ex-gay Christian community. Our lives and our faith in Christ is not personally harmful to people who identify as LGBT. Not a single one of these Christian testimonies and discipleship books speak of harming anyone identified as LGBT but instead encourages love, life, peace and joy everlasting in Jesus Christ.

Again, it is a lie that these books are pushing "conversion therapy", the pejorative term used by those activists who identify as LGBT. In truth, these books are Christian testimony and

discipleship books. Hope for those seeking to walk a journey of faith in Jesus. They guide people out of sinful behaviors and by that nature, it frequently occurs the reader elects out of the LGBT community and elects into the flock of God, into the church fellowship, into life in Jesus Christ.

Renouncing our former way of life as gay-identified, and pursuing Jesus, creates a problem for the narratives of the LGBT community who are determined to silence and erase our community.

The political and cultural lobbies aligned to LGBT identity have a death grip on the narrative that you're born gay or that once identified as LGBT one cannot change, that sexual orientation is fixed, immutable. Both are untrue beliefs or faith statements. The recent gene study showed we are not born with gay behaviors, and Lisa Diamond research shows sexual orientation is fluid. Also, common sense tells us desires can change. They use this false belief narrative in every place and every way possible to attempt censorship or erasure of our community or anyone else who subscribe to their faith.

The spirit (Eph 6) behind the LGBT activism against "ex-gays" is the same spirit against Jesus. We are Jesus' workmanship, evidence Jesus is alive and has authority, that he heals, changes hearts and minds, that He is who he says he is, the Lord, the King of Kings, the judge of mankind. That spirit is offended at our choices. In fact, our choices simply existing as a contrast to their choices, is too much to bear for their seared conscience. The work of Jesus in our lives, as written in the books being censored, weighs too much on their conscience as well. So they do everything they can to censor and bully us.

They wrapped their disdain for Jesus, for our choices to follow him, and our telling of His works, into a strawman lie, known as "conversion therapy."

What is this spirit (Eph 6) behind the censorship really saying? "How dare you suggest people can convert to follow Jesus and leave OUR community! How dare you say we are wrong. We are offended. You are pushing conversion [to Christ] therapy. What you are saying is hate speech!" And so they send their hate our way, encourage others to do so, including Amazon via their censorship.

Again, these books are encouraging Christian discipleship, which is a lifestyle choice where we pour all our heart, mind, body, strength, and soul into, including our identity and behaviors. Now, because God desires that none should perish, we pray for those who persecute us. Love does no harm. Love is patient. In our "ex-gay" community, love our neighbors has a meaning. Do unto others has meaning. "If you love me, obey my commands" has meaning. "God loves you" has meaning. "Jesus is Lord" and "Jesus is my Lord" has meaning. We have love, as God defines love, for those who who are still identifying and living as LGBT.

The manner of our ex-gay stories is testimonies of Jesus, the living Savior and Lord of our lives, working in us. The one whose workmanship is ever healing and sanctifying. He sustains us for today and gives us hope for tomorrow. He rescued us from eternal death and brought us into the light. And as Jesus said, he is "the way, the truth, and the life". We believe that, and try to live it the best we can by his grace. And we have the right to write about it and we have civil

rights protecting our books from discrimination based on our religion. This is religious discrimination.

Sign the petition asking Amazon to restore the Christian books they have censored!
<http://chnng.it/QhpmXG4PHy>

Please share this petition again! Keep the momentum going. Let's aim for 25k signatures this week.

Please like our facebook page for more updates
<http://www.facebook.com/exLGBTRights>

Please sign up on our website so we can stay in contact with you.
<https://www.voiceofthevoiceless.info/subscribe>

Other synonyms for "ex-gay" include ex-LGBT, X-LGBT, LGBT-EX, LGBT-X.

#oncegay #changedmovement #changedmvmnt #censored #christian #exLGBTRights #exlgbt #voiceofthevoiceless #stopcensorship #freedomofreligion #civilrights

2/9/2020 0 COMMENTS

WHAT IS CONVERSION THERAPY?

October 17, 2019 by Elizabeth Woning

THE "CONVERSION" OF THE APA

The drama around so-called "conversion therapy" is not new. In fact, Americans have seen all this before... in the 1970s as LGBT activists first began attacking therapeutic approaches to homosexuality. Political pressure by early activists resulted in the removal of homosexuality from among the American Psychiatric Association's listing of diagnoses. In the same way today, Christianity is in the crosshairs. Will prohibitions against homosexuality be removed from the Bible? Or worse, will Christianity, with its historic teaching about male-female marriage, be banned? That certainly is the direction LGBT activists are headed. Conversations focusing on the efficacy of so-called "conversion therapy" reveal a legacy of moral questioning that modern psychology and Christian faith have grappled separately with for decades. Central to the debate is a conundrum that continues to linger: should homosexual behavior be accepted and even promoted in society when the feelings can be reduced or eliminated?

To read the entire article please [click here](#)

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9/17/2019 0 COMMENTS

Are Ministries Helpful or Harmful to LGBT People?

[A link to an article that shows the truth for those who care about truth on whether Christian beliefs are harmful or helpful to LGBT people](#)

https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/09/56790/?fbclid=IwAR3RAYzwAyyIjg4fOMnyMarSjVeum8xpbjVWU16_z2kb3NjXTytdidFtLhAY

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9/1/2019 0 COMMENTS

I AM NOT A GAY CHRISTIAN - Daniel Mingo



Two Prisms

called the Gay Christian Network. Quoting from their website, www.gaychristian.net, "Founded in 2001,

the Gay Christian Network (GCN) is a nonprofit Christian ministry dedicated to building bridges and offering support for those caught in the crossfire of one of today's most divisive culture wars. Our membership includes both those on Side A (supporting same-sex marriage and relationships) and on Side B (promoting celibacy for Christians with same-sex attractions)." Side A believes Father blesses same-sex marriages, while Side B believes celibacy is more in line with Father's will. Personally, and for the record, I would lean more towards Side B because of its stance on celibacy. But that's really not why I'm tackling this topic today, or why I would choose not to affiliate myself or Abba's Delight with this network. What would absolutely prohibit me from identifying with either group is the fact that they have found and majorly declared their identity to be in their sexual preference. I find the use of the adjective "gay" not to be Biblically sound—not because the word "gay" is not used in the Bible, but because there is no support in Biblical text for such a description of a Christ follower. Rather, Biblical text calls for Christians to separate ourselves in all ways from that which has kept us in sin. By our actions, as well as mentally, physically and verbally. As a born-again believer, I learn to become more perfectly conformed to the image of Jesus, the Word of God made flesh. If I then identify myself as a gay Christian, I am branding myself with a name and identity that Father neither meant for me to have, nor that He has Biblically authorized. The fact is, there is not even one portion of Biblical text that approves homosexual acts. Those who support same gender sexual behavior, I believe, have taken passages out of context not considering the entirety of what Scripture has to say about living a life of holiness, in an attempt to conform the Bible to their feelings and attractions, rather than holding their feelings and attractions in obedience to the Scriptures. Paul tells us, "Therefore from now on we recognize no man by what he is in the flesh...Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 2 Cor 5:16a,17. If I am a new creature in Christ, why would I ever want to take on an identity for myself that is contrary to His life in me? That would be counter-productive to becoming more perfectly conformed to the image of Jesus. Therefore, I train myself to think in agreement with the Scriptures, speak things that are in agreement with the Scriptures, and act in ways that are only in agreement with the Scriptures. To me, this leaves no room for taking on a gay Christian identity. This brings up another interesting thought! Have you ever heard any believers identify themselves as depressed Christians? Or slothful believers? Or fear-filled disciples? I'm sure there are many Christians who suffer depression, are slothful and live in fears of all kinds, but you don't see them identifying themselves in those ways or making declarations to justify/build their identities around those issues. There would seem to be a significant amount of deception in taking on identities that move us away from being more perfectly conformed to the image of Jesus, rather than closer to it. Maybe in my walk I have been fortunate in my understanding of where my identity lies. I knew instinctively my same-sex attractions were not in line with Father's design for human sexuality as set forth in the Word. I never wanted to take on a gay identity. There was never a time when I thought hooking up with guys was an OK thing with God, whether for relationships or just for sex. So, I learned early the importance of having my mind renewed; and the power words have that we speak; and that my true identity is in Christ and not in my sexuality, career, roles as husband or father, or anything else. When it came time to come clean with my wife about my attractions and the behaviors I'd engaged in, she knew immediately this was not who I was. As she has described it, she had seen the man of God I was, how I pursued my relationship with Him. Paraphrasing her, this sin had leeches itself onto me, and we just needed to figure out how we were going to get it off of me. That was 21 years ago when I began my healing journey. I read an article last week called, "Love Wins: The Shifting Landscape on LGBT Issues in the



from a conservative family fighting for a progressive cause." I recommend the article, although there is much to disagree with in it. There were some good and truthful points in it as well. What was glaring to me, though, was the beginning of the title "Love Wins..." As I read through the article in its entirety, I was looking for something specific in what he might say about love, since he declares himself to be a Christian. I was looking for any indication of how we express our love for God. As it turns out he means how we love one another—gay-to-gay and straight-to-gay. In one of the article's section-titles called "Love wins," Snyder writes, "One of the recent rallying cries for the LGBT movement has been 'Love is love.' One of the most common phrases in Christianity is 'God is love.' Everyone is pushing the Love agenda but not enough of us are practicing it. Love means listening more and yelling less. Love means pausing long enough to consider another perspective. Love means making an effort to get to know someone from a dissimilar background. Love means taking risks and stepping outside of what's comfortable. Love means being willing to face criticism for ceding an inch to the other side." And for me, this is where the biggest deception of all comes in. Everyone will forever talk about learning to love each other, and the different ways to go about doing that, but what about our love for God? "We love Him because He first loved us." (1 Jn 4:19) And Paul writes to the Corinthian believers that nothing will ever separate us from His love: nothing we can do or say, nor any identity we can attach to ourselves. Nothing. Our primary charge is to love Him in return. We express that love in our obedience to Him. Jesus fulfilled the Law and summed it up by saying for us to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul and mind; thus declaring love to be the greatest commandment. Jesus also said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Yet another time, Jesus spoke to the Pharisees saying, "For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say and how to say it. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore, the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me." John 12:49,50. Jesus instructs us to love the Father the same way He loved Him, by being obedient to His Word. Jesus did not reinvent or reinterpret Father's message, but that is exactly what is being done by those who justify their same-sex love relationships. The article omits obeying God as our primary charge from our Father in our days on earth conforming to the image of Jesus. Rather, Snyder goes right to the gay Christian's entitlement to love the way they want to love and hope Father will bless it. Reinventing and reinterpreting God's Word to fit our feelings is one way we "worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator," as Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. So, how do I identify myself as a Christian as it relates to my same-gender attractions? I am an adopted son of the Most High God, a brother to and co-heir of King Jesus, saved by His grace for good works towards building His Kingdom. I am dying daily to my flesh, and the sins that so easily beset me (of which homosexual lust is one). And I am daily being more perfectly conformed to the image of Jesus.

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5/27/2019 0 COMMENTS

Why do Some Gays hate ex-gays so much?

Phillip Lee



While not entirely, our conversation(s) and our exchange largely began because I became concerned and alarmed with all the media attention given to the bullying of members of the gay community, and, not much, to my knowledge, was or is being offered, mentioned, or discussed regarding the hate that is often spewed and perpetrated against men and women that have said, "No" to homosexual practice and have rejected the gay identity.

Yes, I am using the word "hate."

I am confident many today are not aware there continues to be men and women with unwanted same-sex attraction that have and are making the personal decision to leave homosexuality. As a result, formerly gay-identified men and women are often reviled simply because they dare to exist.

Should not "diversity" and "tolerance" be a two-way street by recognizing and including the once gay-identified man or woman? We are real, and we are here. Therefore, I must express my growing concern of the often widespread "intolerance" practiced against those who decide to face and break free of the snare of same-sex attraction.

Here's the question: Why do some gays (hate) ex-gays so much?

Thirty-three years ago, I said goodbye to homosexuality and the gay identity. Like all faithful followers of Christ Jesus, I had to face the decision of accepting or rejecting Christ's Lordship. Coming out of homosexuality required deep emotional healing and a restructuring of my whole identity, as our Creator, God, is the only One who knows exactly how to restore our personality.

I remember so vividly when coming to know Christ at the age of 35, what it meant for the first time in my life to be a man. But more importantly, what it meant to be a godly man. For me to deny or not share what Christ has done in my life would be the equivalent of denying Him.

Thankfully and gratefully, I am far from the only individual that has experienced change. God has not been silent to the cries of men and women wanting freedom from homosexual feelings and behavior. Many have experienced the power of Christ to address the deep needs of both men and women trapped in same-gender struggles.

One gay activist challenged me by stating, "Phillip, while I commend you regarding your concern about 'intolerance,' I just can't get my head around (ex-gay). Why don't you just be true to yourself?"

"Be true to myself?"

"That is exactly what I am doing."

What makes one individual happy and content may not make someone else happy, because we are all individuals. I, like any man or woman, deserve the right to self-determination and happiness. To give sexual orientation protection to one group while excluding another is outright discrimination.

Without testimony from all sectors of society, including the ex-gay community, public policy on the topic of homosexuality is seriously flawed.

Ex-gay men and women are routinely denied equal access to participate in public school events and present on diversity day.

Ex-gay conferences, workshops and seminars are frequently picketed by pro-gay protesters.

Transgendered individuals are affirmed for changing their gender, but former homosexuals are ridiculed for making the decision to address and change their sexual orientation.

Ex-gays are subject to an increasingly hostile environment where they are labeled as perpetrators of (hate) simply because they advocate for or live out a different belief and view of homosexuality.



homosexuality honestly, compassionately, and courageously.

Yes, homosexuals have the right, as do others, to believe that homosexual behavior should be accepted as normal. However, they do not have the right to demand everyone else agree with them.

True love is loving in spite of our differences and treating each other with kindness and respect. This is what it means to live in a society in which freedom of speech, religion (and belief) are guaranteed.

I'm real. I'm here. I will not be silent.

Pastor Phillip Lee

Executive Director

His Way Out Ministries

www.hiswayout.com

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5/8/2019 0 COMMENTS

When a Former Homosexual Says That They have Been Healed or Changed, What do They Mean? by Dr. David Kyle Foster

[PURE PASSION-SUNDAY, 7 APRIL 2019](#)

A Symphony Without Music

It is a constant mantra of activists, that people who are same-sex attracted are born that way and that there is no hope for change, -i.e., they can never develop opposite-sex attractions or lessen their same-sex feelings. No wonder the suicide rate among homosexuals is 3-5 times the average, even in locations around the world that are the most supportive of such a lifestyle! No hope is being given to the vast numbers of homosexuals who don't want to be gay.

Their minds, bodies and souls are telling them that there is something wrong with being sexually attracted to people whose bodies are not designed for committing such acts, so much so that every time a male homosexual commits one of the most common sexual acts on their partner, he actually damages the mind, soul and body of that partner (1 Corinthians 6:18). When pressed, most any proctologist will admit to that, even those whose livelihoods depend on such patients.

Ask yourself, "Would a good God really create someone with an orientation to act in ways that He condemns and that does harm to his partners? Would a good God really create someone with an orientation that results in domestic violence rates, substance



Such activists use their mantra to orchestrate special rights and to force legal and professional adherence to their point of view. The consequence of non-compliance to their demands is censorship as well as personal and professional persecution and destruction (2 Timothy 3:12) – even fines and imprisonment. In truth, a class of people who have faced persecution in the past can now be counted among the most heartless and frenzied persecutors on the planet.

For the Activist, What if the Claim of Change is True?

One claim that makes such activists furious is the assertion by former homosexuals that God can and has changed them to one degree or another – that the causes of their homosexual attractions are dysfunctional and can be healed, resulting in the waning of homosexual desire and in some, the rise of natural, heterosexual desire. [The reason for this breadth of transformational outcomes is complicated and an important teaching all its own – a teaching that can be found in the [Sexual Healing Reference Edition](#)].

- Their fury undoubtedly stems from the fact that if this claim by former homosexuals is true, then people are not born that way and can change if they surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the sanctifying leading of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 24). You can see scores of testimonies to that fact in the video, [Such Were Some of You](#).

- If the claim is true, then there is no basis for special rights or forced compliance.
- If the claim is true, then people who want to leave the lifestyle can find hope, healing and God's direction for walking free from those things that have caused their same-sex attractions.
- If the claim is true, they can have hope that the Lord will forgive, heal and transform them as they pursue an intimate relationship with God the Father.
- If the claim is true, as stated clearly in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, then the impending sentence of eternal separation from God for those who commit homosexual acts can be rescinded by Almighty God.

What Happens to Those Who Reject God's Will

Alternately, those who harden their heart against God's loving commands will eventually lose the conviction that they must have in order to repent (1 Timothy 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; Acts 28:27; Ephesians 4:19, 30). They will lose the God-given



Isaiah (64:7) clearly laments, “There is no one who calls on Your Name, who arouses himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us and have delivered us into the power of our iniquities.”

Reminiscent of Satan's first lie, (Genesis 3:1), they will fall for another of his lies: “Did God really say that you must repent of homosexual behavior.”

The sad truth is that these precious people are being led down a path that leads to destruction. They are being persuaded by those who do not know God to ignore His will in the matter. They are missing out on His saving grace and His power to bring healing, change and transformation to every area of their lives.

Just the Facts!

Surprisingly, a number of secular therapists (some of whom are lesbian) have gone public in declaring that science has proven that sexual desire can change.

(See <https://www.frc.org/sexualorientation> and <https://www.frc.org/issueanalysis/are-sexual-orientation-change-efforts-soce-effective-are-they-harmful-what-the-evidence-shows>).

Dale O'Leary has compiled an impressive list of 440 studies, articles and books relating to conversion therapy, many from peer-reviewed and professional journals, and provided excerpts from them totaling in excess of 45,000 words. You can find this incredibly useful resource here. <https://daleoleary.wordpress.com/2018/08/13/change-of-sexual-orientation/#more-540>

A recent book by Stephen Black ([Freedom Realized](#)) also bears witness to the power of God to change anyone who will forsake their sin in order to follow Christ. In the 25 years that he has been helping homosexuals, among those who made a serious attempt via his ministry program to experience change through Jesus Christ, at least 72% found lasting freedom from sinful behavior. In former lesbian Anne Paulk's book, ([Restoring Sexual Identity](#)), she reported that up to 81% of lesbians who made an earnest attempt to find healing and transformation through Christ found lasting freedom.

So What Do Former Homosexuals Mean When They Say That God Has Changed Them?

1. For some, they mean that in humbling themselves before God and turning away from



24).

2. For some, it means that in pursuing an intimate relationship with God the Father, with all their heart, (Deuteronomy 4:29; Psalm 105:4; Jeremiah 29:11-14; Hebrews 11:6), they have received from Him divine revelation as to the causes of their aberrant attractions (in addition to the primary cause, which is our fallen nature). And on the heels of that revelation, they have pursued Him for the healing of such traumas as well as for a supernatural impartation of those things that went missing during their childhood and adolescence.

3. For some, it means that they have learned not to try to find healing or the power to achieve freedom on their own, (2 Corinthians 2:21; Philippians 2:13), but have wholly relied on God to not only show them what is wrong, but to empower them to renounce and refuse any such behaviors in the future (Acts 17:28; Galatians 2:20; 2 Peter 1:4; Jude 24).

4. For some, it means that in finding healing for the deficits and traumas that lie behind their same-sex attractions, such enticements have progressively lost their coercive power. In essence, the attractions have begun to wane in substance and power, causing their identity to change from being “a homosexual” to being “a chaste child of God”.

5. For some, it means that they have found a true identity in Christ that joyfully adheres to His moral commands, no matter what temptations may linger. Their stony heart of rebellion has been replaced with a heart for God. Their rebellious will has been transformed by His grace, love and the beauty of His holiness (Titus 2:11-14; Romans 2:4, 5:14, 6:8-14, 8:5-14; 2 Corinthians 5:14).

6. For some, it means that over time, their homosexual attractions have (to one degree or another) been replaced by natural heterosexual attractions.

7. For some, it means that the transformation has been so complete that the old homosexual identity and attractions have lost all power and presence. They now enjoy sexual relations with a marriage partner of the opposite sex.

The Transforming Mercy & Love of God

To sum it up, the grace, mercy and love demonstrated by Jesus’ death on the Cross has persuaded such former homosexuals to receive the love that they’ve always craved. They have been supernaturally changed in what they hold dear and have surrendered their will to the will of God. And they have been infused with the life of God, who has given them everything they need for life and godliness, through their knowledge (intimacy) of



The world would like us to think that for someone to be “changed”, they must be zapped

free from all temptation to that behavior – a claim that is nothing more than sophistry. It is a standard that those same people don’t require for alcoholics, drug addicts, sex addicts and a host of other disorders.

Yes, the road to freedom from bondage can be long and arduous. We are strengthened in such trials. We are healed, delivered and transformed by such trials. In a sense, our brokenness has provided an opportunity to be made more Christlike, to be strengthened in our new identity in Christ, and to respond to His love with a sacrificial commitment of our own – one that results in being transformed into His image from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18).

That’s what it means to be changed! But no matter what level of change a person realizes in this life, in forsaking sin to follow Jesus Christ, they have become born again and will soon be on their way to meet the true lover of their souls – the one who demonstrated His love for them on the Cross (Romans 5:8) – and a marriage with Him that will last forever (Revelation 19:9).

Can the God who created everything and everyone change a person who experiences same-sex attraction? Let me answer the question with another question: “Is there anything that the creator of all things cannot do?”

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Dr. David Kyle Foster (M-Div, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; D-Min, Trinity School for Ministry) is the author of *Transformed Into His Image* and *Love Hunger* and is the founder/director of Pure Passion Media (www.PurePassion.us). Read more of his take on sexual sin and brokenness in his newest book, [The Sexual Healing Reference Edition](#).

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Why Some People Remain in Sin, Bondage & Brokenness by David Kyle Foster

PURE PASSION·THURSDAY, 9 MAY 2019



It's a problem of putting the cart before the horse. We too often launch off into man-made solutions that

can never produce the interior transformation that is necessary for lasting freedom. Such “solutions” often teach us (overtly or covertly) to rely on a “system” rather than on God.

Worldly solutions are “maintenance programs” that teach us to keep ourselves from falling by our own wisdom, discipline and power. They can be helpful in a secondary way, but should never be offered as the primary solution.

In contrast, God offers a “transformation program” by which He heals the underlying wounds, transforms the will and keeps us from falling by His power and love (Jude 24; Psalm 37:23-24, 55:22; 1 Peter 1:5).

True freedom comes not from focusing on the bondage, but on the Savior. In 2 Peter 1:3, the Holy Spirit says that through our knowledge of Him, God’s divine power has already given us everything we need for life and godliness. The solution, therefore, is not found in the wisdom of the world. It is found through intimate knowledge of Him and the appropriation of the power that already resides within us by virtue of His divine presence.

Self-Deception

Some people don’t want to change because they receive too much sympathy, affirmation and attention by staying broken. Others recoil because of the pain that results from revisiting the wounds that have contributed to their dysfunctional behavior.

Our inclination is to deceive ourselves into believing that we want freedom from something when we really don’t. Our hearts are deceitful and duplicitous (Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 15:19). For example, I used to regularly cry out to God for freedom from a particular bondage. One night the power of God fell on me and I knew that He was finally answering my prayer. But to my utter shock, my first thought was “Oh no!” In that moment, I realized that I had been begging for deliverance from something that I still wanted. Hidden within the recesses of my mind, I didn’t think I could live without it. Deep in the interior of my heart, I still loved it. My pleas for help had not been coming from a desire to walk in holiness, but from self-deluded, performance-based religion.

Primary Reasons for Failure to Find Freedom

1. Failure to Make an Across-the-Board Commitment to Holiness

The Kingdom of God is not a supermarket. We cannot say that we want freedom from one sin without being willing to be freed from them all.

God wants us to commit to holiness at every level. Thankfully, He does not lay them all upon us at once, but brings them up as we are ready to deal with each one. As we forsake the things of the world and fix our heart permanently toward the things of God, He then responds with revelation and empowerment.

2. Failure to Believe In and Act Upon God’s Power to Deliver and Keep Us

Most of us haven’t a clue just how much power God has and how little power Satan has. We need to pursue God in His Word to understand and believe who we are in Christ and the authority He has given us (Luke 10:18-19).

I recommend “truth therapy” – regular meditation on the truths of Scripture, even when they seem to contradict what we feel and experience in our battle with sin (Hebrews 11:1).

Some of us are so enslaved to our feelings that we are incapable of believing anything else. When I fail to become planted in the ground of my identity in Christ, His call on my life, and His empowerment of that call, I’m a sitting duck for the lying thoughts and feelings that invade my soul.

3. Failure to Undergo a Transformation of the Will Through a Belief In and Embracing of God’s Unconditional Love (Jeremiah 31:3b-4a)



One day, I was in the midst of committing a besetting sin when the Lord spoke to my heart, saying, “If you turn to me right now, I will love you, forgive you and embrace you.” Ignoring the voice, I continued with my sin until satisfied, at which time the Lord repeated the same words to me.

It was a moment I’ll never forget as I realized that His focus was not on my sin, but on His desire to communicate to me that all He really wanted was for me to turn to Him and receive His love. In that moment, He had so taken my heart by this otherworldly love that I now wanted to do His will. In essence, He changed my will through the repeated experience of His grace and love. For the first time, I chose to do His will, not because I was supposed to, but because I wanted to (Titus 2:14). “For it is God who is at work in us both to will and to do that which is according to His good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). In essence, we just need to get under the spout where the glory comes out!

4. Failure to See Healing as a Process with a Purpose

As we live in intimacy with Him, God shows us the root causes of our behavior, the needs that we have been trying to meet, and His more perfect provision to meet those needs. Through our pursuit of healing, we develop a relationship of love and dependence on God because we have need to turn to Him often for power over temptation and healing from brokenness.

Bondage is essentially a problem of broken relationships – first with God, and second, with human beings. We must come to know Him as He really is and forsake the fiction that our minds have created that has convinced us to run from Him and not to trust Him.

5. Failure to Develop an Intimate Relationship with God the Father

Many of us fear intimacy. It is where we’ve been hurt. But intimacy with our perfectly loving Father is another matter. Jesus said that if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father (John 14:9). Do you love Jesus? The Father is just like Him!

Another fear is that we intuitively know that intimacy with someone means commitment and a loss of independence. But we soon learn that intimacy is the deepest level of knowing, of loving and of feeling. It produces the fruit of inner joy. Foundationally, it has to do with our response of love to the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.

6. Failure to Humble Ourselves in Absolute Dependence on God

The pride of self-sufficiency and independence is the fruit of ignorance. The truth is that we are already, completely dependent on God’s power and wisdom in order to have any kind of meaningful existence.

In our culture, humility is considered a weakness. We think that life’s problems are challenges that God expects us to deal with on our own. However, without continual dependence on God, we’re like infants left out in the middle of a freeway. We are completely dependent on God to reveal to us what is true as distinguished from what the world says is true (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

Jesus said that without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). Consequently, the closer I get to Him, the longer I sit at His feet and allow Him to uncover the depths of my heart, the more I am going to grow in the humility of understanding the grace that I stand in, and I will love Him even more. And so, our first response to bondage, brokenness or temptation must always be one of utter dependence that turns to God for power, wisdom and strength.

7. Failure to Learn & Practice Spiritual Warfare

The Bible teaches that the weapons of our warfare are mighty to pull down strongholds – but only when employed in the ongoing reality of these first six pillars of incarnational relationship and empowerment. In other words, spiritual warfare involves using the power of God, the wisdom of God, the discernment of



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received the depth of the revelation of His love and awesome beauty that transforms the heart and mind. Once that has been accomplished, without even realizing it, we will find that we are already wearing the weapons of our warfare (Ephesians 6:10-18) and have been marked by the evil one as dangerous.

First Things First

The primary reason that so many of us do not experience victory over the sin and brokenness that so easily besets us is that we do not put these spiritual principles first when attempting to find freedom. In fact, one second of revelation from the God who loves us is worth a lifetime of therapy. This is not to say that therapeutic approaches are unimportant in some cases. It is simply a matter of placing first things first so that any help that we receive from men will bear fruit that will last (John 15:16).

* * * * *

Dr. David Kyle Foster (M-Div, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; D-Min, Trinity School for Ministry) is the author of [Transformed Into His Image](#) and [Love Hunger](#) and is the founder/director of Pure Passion Media (www.PurePassion.us). Read more of his take on sexual sin and brokenness in his newest book, [The Sexual Healing Reference Edition](#) and listen to his twice-weekly podcast at <http://www.purepassion.us/index.php/podcasts>.

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