

Increased Understanding of Homosexuality from the Psychological Sciences

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Overview Same-sex attraction (SSA) appears to be a condition that results from various psychological wounds and issues that develop during childhood. SSA is thought to be a symptom of these wounds. Those who offer pastoral care to the individual with SSA must grow in their understanding of the psychological issues that are often seen in the childhoods of those with SSA. Also, pastoral care will require an understanding of the 'gay lifestyle' and the suffering present in many same-sex relationships. The psychological sciences can foster growth in respect, compassion, and sensitivity that will ultimately decrease shame, stigma, and isolation in a population that is yearning to know Christ's love in the Catholic Church.

Are individuals with same-sex attractions born that way? The American Psychological Association says no in their most recent statement (2008), "There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors."

Where do same-sex attractions come from? The American Psychological Association (2008) indicates, "Many [scientists] think that nature and nurture both play complex roles." Clinical psychologists who work with people with same-sex attractions (SSA) tell us that there are some common painful situations or relationships that people with SSA experience during their upbringing. Those providing pastoral care must be attuned to the struggle that the individual with SSA reports when discussing these experiences. The presence of one situation does not cause the development of SSA. Those with SSA often report many similar experiences including mother conflicts, father conflicts, sibling conflicts, peer rejection, poor body image, gender nonconformity, and abuse. Men with SSA also report that their father failed to welcome them into the 'male world' and failed to fortify their masculinity, parents failed to encourage same-sex identification, and parental loss; while women with SSA report that their father failed to act as a buffer in the relationship with her mother, extreme loneliness, and male betrayal.

What percentage of people with SSA have experienced abuse, and does that abuse cause SSA?

The rates of abuse are statistically higher in individuals with SSA. This suggests a connection but does not establish causality. Individuals in pastoral care must be attentive to the whole individual without imposing a template on anyone; however, in providing pastoral care, one should also be vigilant to the possibility abuse in the person's past. Compared with the general population, men with SSA were 7 times more likely and women with SSA were 3.5 times more likely to report childhood sexual abuse. Men with SSA were 2 times more likely and women with SSA were 3 times more likely to report childhood physical abuse. Men with SSA were 5 times more likely and women with SSA were 3.5 times more likely to report childhood neglect (Hughes et al., 2010).

Do people who have same-sex attraction ever develop opposite-sex attraction? Yes. Sometimes this happens spontaneously and is referred to as 'sexual fluidity'. A recent study reported on individuals across four time periods: wave 1 included kids in grades 7–12 (mean age of 15.8 years old), and wave 4 had the very same people now 24–32 years old. Of the males who reported that they had any SSA at wave 1, "over 80%" had exclusively opposite sex attraction in Wave 4. Of the females who reported that they had any SSA at wave 1, "over 70%" had exclusively OSA in Wave 4 (Savin-Williams and Joyner, 2014, pp. 415–416). On the other hand, sometimes sexual attractions change through involvement in

counseling. In a recent research study that followed people with SSA longitudinally through their treatment experience, a significant percentage experienced a change from same-sex attracted to opposite-sex attracted (Jones and Yarhouse, 2007, 2011).

Does Courage help people change to be attracted to members of the opposite sex? No. The purpose of Courage is *NOT* to 'change' people's sexual attractions. The purpose of Courage is to help individuals with same-sex attractions to live the virtue of chastity. Some people who attend Courage groups seek psychotherapy to help them 'change' their sexual attractions (e.g., 'reparative therapy'). The majority of people who attend Courage groups do *NOT* seek psychotherapy to help them 'change' their sexual attractions. Courage does not promote nor does it discourage 'reparative therapy'.

Do individuals who experience SSA have a higher prevalence of emotional and psychological disorders? Gilman et al. write: "Homosexual orientation . . . is associated with a general elevation of risk for anxiety, mood, and substance use disorders and for suicidal thoughts and plans" (2001, p. 933). Compared with the general population, many studies have documented that individuals with SSA experience increases in emotional disorders. In men, there are 2 times the amount of mood disorders, 2 times the amount of anxiety disorders, 1.3 times the amount of substance-use disorders; in women the statistics are as follows: 1.5 times the amount of mood disorders, 1.3 times the amount of anxiety disorders, 2.5 times the amount of substance-use disorders (Bolton and Sareem, 2011).

If the culture were more tolerant of homosexual behavior, would the prevalence of psychological disorders in people with SSA decrease? The prevalence of psychological disorders does not change because an individual with SSA lives in a culture that is more tolerant of homosexual behavior. This finding has been replicated in many studies only to find that 'gay-accepting cultures' show the same rates of psychopathology. The authors of one such study wrote, "This study was conducted in the Netherlands, which has a social climate toward sexual minorities that is less intolerant than that in the United States...Gay and lesbian people reported more acute mental health symptoms than heterosexual people and their general mental health also was worse" (Sandfort et al., 2006, p. 1123).

Do same-sex couples have more infidelity than opposite-sex couples? While 22.7 percent of opposite-sex couples have male infidelity (Wiederman, 1997), 82 percent to 100 percent of same-sex couples have male infidelity (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; McWhirter and Mattison, 1984). Research also showed that 11.6 percent of opposite-sex couples have female infidelity (Wiederman, 1997), 28 percent of same-sex couples have female infidelity (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983).

Is there a difference in interpersonal violence in the same-sex couple? Emotional abuse is reported by 49 percent of men in opposite-sex couples and by 83 percent of men in same-sex couples. Emotional abuse is reported by 48 percent of women in opposite-sex couples and by 82 percent of women in same-sex couples. Physical abuse is reported by 14 percent of men in opposite-sex couples and by 44 percent of men in same-sex couples. Physical abuse is reported by 24 percent of women in opposite-sex couples and by 56 percent of women in same-sex couples. Sexual abuse is reported by 2 percent of men in opposite-sex couples and by 13 percent of men in same-sex couples. Sexual abuse is reported by 9 percent of women in opposite-sex couples and by 13 percent of women in same-sex couples.

Conclusion The pastoral care of the individual with same-sex attractions should be approached with respect, compassion, and sensitivity as prescribed by the Magisterium (CCC #2358). Understanding the psychology of same-sex attraction provides a deeper understanding of the struggles that an individuals with SSA face. For more information, for additional recommendations for pastoral care, for recommended reading, and for the full bibliography, see: truthandlove.com and doctortimlock.com