

# UNDERSTANDING ***Homosexuality***

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# Exploring the Homosexual Myth

by Rev. John Smid

***There is no such creation as a "gay" or "homosexual" person. There is only homosexual attraction and behavior; accordingly, there can be no change from a sexual identity that never existed in the first place.***

Adulterer? Fornicator? Swindler? Gossip? The apostle Paul clearly said people who habitually and impenitently behave in such a manner “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). These are actions that we all can get caught up in at one time or another in our lives. Nevertheless, if we are living a life dominated by any one of these or even several of them, God says it is possible for us to be sanctified by the washing of the blood of Jesus Christ and a willingness to submit to the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, which comes through a process of conviction, repentance and seeking forgiveness from God and others whom we have offended along the way. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

If we know the truth about these matters, then why do we accept the cultural definition of homosexuality? When non-Christians and Christians use the term “homosexual,” they often think of a person who is innately different from other types of people. We wonder how someone might have become a "homosexual." Families and friends of those caught in homosexuality go deep into grief and despair because they cannot imagine how their loved ones got there, and they believe it is a lifelong prison from which there is no escape.

Think of it this way: Mr. and Mrs. Jones came into my office grieving over their son’s ongoing homosexuality. They cried as I attempted to help them understand the real issues surrounding their plight. I asked them about their other children. “Well, John, our other son, lives with his girlfriend,” they replied. In an attempt to bring some reality to them, I asked why they were not so concerned about John. The truth became evident; they knew that there was hope for this other son either to marry his girlfriend or to leave her and get back to a moral life. Their son struggling with homosexuality, however, was in their minds and hearts destined to remain a "homosexual."

**Three Decades of Living a Lie.** For the past 30 years, the modern American culture has bought into a lie! We have been sold a bill-of-goods about the nature of homosexuality that is spiritually and practically untrue. The jury is still out on any form of biological or physiological causation of homosexual desires. The common belief among Christians and non-Christians is that homosexuality describes a person who has something innately different about him or her. For many people, the term "homosexual" has become a noun. Many believe this is a descriptive word

to help sort a certain person into a different category, a different type of gender, we might say.

Why the past 30 years? In 1975, the gay rights movement began to market the words “gay” and “homosexual” to refer to an inborn character or to the identity of men and women with same-sex attractions and behaviors. Today, they have succeeded in redefining those words to suit their agenda in our culture. The body of Christ (even ministries seeking to help those caught in homosexuality) regularly buy into that deceptive definition, often without thinking about it. How many times have we used the term “gay,” “orientation” or “ex-gay” to describe ourselves or someone else? Even in the church we talk about ministering to the "homosexual," immediately labeling an individual just as secular activists do.

**What Difference Does This Make?** If we define homosexuality as an identity, an inborn characteristic or a hormonal imbalance, there is no answer or hope. If, however, we call it what it really is - a struggle with sinful desires and behavior - then throughout Scripture we’re given ways to handle it.

If we use the false definition, where does one draw the line? Are you a homosexual because you have a homosexual thought for one moment in time? If not for one moment, then how long? A season? A lifetime? Is a man or woman a homosexual who engages in one act of homosexual behavior or a series of encounters or relationships? Are those who engage in exclusive homosexual practice for a lifetime the only “true” homosexuals? Often we have stumbled in our efforts to share the truth of freedom in Christ because we were wrestling with opponents over what makes a person a homosexual. Since there is really no such thing as a “homosexual,” then we are chasing a mirage, a cloud, something we will never be able to grasp.

As we battle with proponents of the idea that “homosexuality equals identity,” we lose ground by using their terminology. We lose more ground as we seek to put forward a solution based on the terminology of their lie. The truth is there are no homosexuals.

There are over one hundred ministries in the United States devoted to helping people and their families practically and biblically process through the dilemma of homosexuality (Exodus International "www.exodus-international.org"). These ministries are commonly called “ex-gay” ministries. Even in this slang title there is a subtle message that people used to be “homosexual”

and they aren't any longer. This message is clearly understood when we are talking about an adulterer or a thief because we know that we are speaking of a behavior, but when we are talking about leaving homosexuality, so many see it as a change in a more innate way than in behavior. Some Christians might be thinking of a miraculous change from one kind of person to another!

Over the many years I have worked with *Love In Action* I have heard of one common burden from many men and women: "John, I prayed all my life to be free from homosexuality, and God has not done anything to help me. I guess He either doesn't care about me, or He doesn't care about my homosexuality." This kind of thinking falls into deep theological error due to a great misunderstanding about the real issue of homosexual temptation, thought and behavior. God has never promised that He would take away the temptation (see 2 Cor. 12:7-10). It is often the case that we have a lifelong struggle in which God gives us the grace to live obediently according to His will and good purpose. Some people who have homosexually addictive thoughts or behaviors will pray that God would take them away. If He doesn't, they conclude there is no other option but to act on them.

**What Does Happen When a Person Leaves Homosexuality?** The early Christians never viewed people with homosexual struggles as being born with that particular disposition. Today, as believers, we would never say, "Johnny was born a thief or extortionist," and then add, "Let's pray that God changes his genetic structure or innate predisposition from thief to philanthropist." We do this regularly, however, when referring to those who struggle with the sin of homosexuality.

The Devil, working behind the scenes, has succeeded in redefining the meaning of key words, and therefore we only reinforce and strengthen a false identity by calling individuals by a name that does not apply. Homosexuality involves feelings, attractions and sexual behavior; it can be a mind set, and it can include cultural association. From these factors, one can embrace it as a personal identity. People investing their lives into this kind of identity can expend so much of themselves that to think of leaving that identity can be quite threatening and very difficult even to discuss.

Based on that false identity, many people we see at *Love In Action* who struggle with homosexuality can tell of the heart-wrenching pain of waiting for a "change" that never comes. They struggle with feelings of rage, confusion, rejection, abandonment and hopelessness because their prayer for change was based on a lie. They are asking God to change them from something they never were in the first place.

The first step of the process is to move away from the subtle

lies of the Enemy and take back the truth in our communication and thinking. God can and will bring progressive freedom from struggles with homosexual thoughts and practices as we begin to adjust our thinking and the thinking of those to whom we minister the truth. Jesus declared, "then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

**Foundational Truths.** At *Love In Action*, our belief is based on three foundational truths.

- Truth One: There is no such creation as a "gay" or "homosexual" person. There is only homosexual attraction and behavior; accordingly, there can be no "change" from a sexual identity that never existed in the first place.
- Truth Two: The truth for most men and women who struggle with homosexual behavior is that they will, at times, continue to experience attractions in large and small ways for a lifetime. It is often misleading and harmful to speak vaguely of "total" deliverance without mentioning the normal, ongoing struggles with temptations all believers have.
- Truth Three: God sees homosexuality as sin like any other, and directs us to apply the same biblical model to it that we would to any other sin. His real solution for deliverance and healing is based on repentance and obedience.

Does this mean that people choose homosexuality? Not exactly. The feelings, the temptations or the desires are certainly not chosen. They culminate from what we might call a conspiracy of factors, and then as with any temptation, they just come about. We believe God holds us accountable for the ways we act upon those challenges that come to us. People are responsible for the choices they make when acting on wrong sexual desires or behaviors.

Biblical change from homosexuality requires that we respond correctly to the message God speaks of in 1 Corinthians 6. This message of repentance will bring forth the truth that will, in fact, set people free from this kind of bondage. When we begin to see homosexuality as a sin, a behavior and a wrong mind set, then and only then can we find forgiveness and freedom.

There is no such thing as a homosexual! There are many individuals, however, who struggle intensely with homosexual temptation and addictive behavior. Once we get the message right, then we will be effective in ministering to those caught in this kind of deceptive bondage.

© 2001 - Rev. John Smid is the Executive Director for *Love In Action* and has worked with this ministry since 1986. John left his homosexual life-style in 1984.

# The Root Causes: The Child Development Process

by Rev. John Smid

*Today there is intense debate on why men and women develop same-sex attractions. In this series, our director gives his perspective on this vital question.*

## Part One: Birth to Four Years

During the past few years, I've had many opportunities to speak with groups on the issue of homosexual development. It's been exciting to see Christians gain a much better understanding of how men and women end up in the gay lifestyle.

As these believers relate these factors to their own lives, they see that all of us have struggled with many of the same "root" issues. Homosexual strugglers are not really that different; they have just attempted to resolve their emotional and relational pain in a different way.

Understanding the causes of homosexuality takes away some of the mystery surrounding this issue. Hopefully, this series will be illuminating to you, whether or not you struggle with homosexual issues in your own life.

### Different Opinions

There is a tremendous lack of agreement on what exactly causes homosexuality. The scientific community has intensively studied the physiological questions, but it has come to no solid conclusions. Some studies (seldom publicized) emphasize the importance of family and other relational factors in a child's life. Other studies (accompanied by major media publicity) emphasize the possible role of inborn or other genetic factors, but when other researchers attempt to duplicate these findings, often these studies cannot be reproduced.

The homosexual community has no solid answers either. Many men and women claim they were "born gay," although they have no evidence. Others feel that they grew into the orientation, nevertheless, now they have no choice on how they live out their sexuality. A few realize that they could make major changes in their lives, but the whole idea seems too difficult and fearful to attempt.

The religious community is not settled on the matter either. Many conservative Christians have concluded that homosexuality is a sinful and totally disgusting lifestyle from which no one can be saved. Other believers think there is no hope for change. Therefore they welcome people active in homosexual behavior into their churches, even promoting them to leadership positions.

### Life Development

Understanding how homosexuality develops is vitally impor-

tant because it helps us formulate an appropriate response. I believe that homosexuality develops out of a series of decisions in response to our life development process. Through the power of Jesus Christ, and as adults make new decisions, they can experience change in regard to their homosexual struggles. Based on this conclusion, I would like to discuss some of the basic elements that I see in childhood and adult developmental growth.

As we look at these elements, keep in mind that I will be looking at general principles. This is not the "final word" on homosexual development. It is wrong to draw up one pattern and then try to squeeze every person into that particular box, but after six years of working at *Love In Action*, I have found many similarities in the lives of the people I have counseled. I have also been able to look back at my own past to find answers to the questions surrounding homosexual development.

### Definition

First, what exactly is homosexuality? Here's a good definition from Dr. Lawrence J. Hatterer, author of the book, *Changing Homosexuality in the Male*: "One who is motivated, in adult life, by a definite preferential erotic attraction to members of the same sex and who usually, but not necessarily, engages in overt sexual relations with them."

This definition clearly addresses both persons who are active in homosexuality and those who have experienced homosexual thoughts.

Hatterer's definition shows that homosexuality is different than just looking at members of one's own sex and admiring their abilities or physical characteristics. It involves an erotic attraction that God has designed us to experience for the opposite sex.

### The Beginning

Homosexuality does not drop out of thin air at puberty or later. Many people feel as though their homosexuality began before their conscious memory, even at birth.

This does not surprise me. Many studies show that the first four years lay the foundation for how we respond to events over the course of our entire life. From conception to about the age of four is the time when we obtain our foundational security from those closest to us, primarily our parents. Only through rebirth in

Jesus Christ can we change our lives to the extent that we overcome negative effects of those first years.

Our immediate family's vocal tones and emotional atmosphere are often the only input we receive for several weeks after birth. Are they comforting and soothing, or absent and rough, causing a shocking awareness in our tiny spirit that we have entered a new and hostile environment? Our mother's security with her own life is quickly communicated either positively or negatively to the new infant.

Although we have no conscious memory of these events, they have a profound impact on our future. Babies are incredibly sensitive to their environment, not only physically, but also emotionally. You can almost hear them saying, "How long will she let me cry? How long do I have to stay in this soiled diaper?" The baby is constantly reacting to its new home, which is quite different from the security and comfort of the womb.

Within a short time, the baby begins to receive restrictions. Sometimes food is not immediately forthcoming. Sometimes parents are slow to respond to a midnight crying session.

Later on, discipline must be administered. Is it consistent? Is it harsh? Is it there at all? By this point, most input is from the feminine representative of God, a mother or significant other. At a deep, unspoken level, the child is grappling with some basic questions about life: "Am I important to these people? Is this world safe? When I am hurt, does anyone care?"

This young baby is not really aware of sex or gender. For the most part, the adults around the baby aren't really interested in gender either. It is a baby, cute and cuddly (when not screaming for food or attention of some kind).

When a child moves toward two years old, he or she will discover all kinds of new things while watching intently for the parent's response to the new discoveries. "Can I touch? Can I go? How far?" The baby is still assessing the world by testing the boundaries and responses.

By this time the baby is looking for a place. "Am I accepted unconditionally even though I make mistakes? Is my life secure?" Already the baby is looking for her own personhood, a sense of personal identity which comes very early in life.

### **My Experience**

When I was just a little over two years old my parents experienced some major marital problems. In seeking the best for my siblings and me, they decided that we should be sent to live with several secure and qualified relatives in another state.

The home I went to (being separate but close to my siblings' home) was loving and safe, but my entire world, the only one I had known since birth, was totally disrupted. Who in the world were these strange new parents and siblings? At two-and-a-half

years old, my foundation for security was shaken to the core.

My parents did the very best they could in a difficult situation. They wanted to see my needs being met in a good and loving environment, but I had no way of knowing that.

Less than one year later, I returned to my birth home, which was another big shaking of my environment and family. How was I to settle all this at three years old?

### **Other Factors**

The "performance scale" is another factor that plays into these first few years. "Am I accepted with or without my performance being up to par? When I am good, I get attention and affirmation. But what happens when I am bad?"

Often when a child is disobedient, the relationship with parents is affected and he/she may perceive rejection based on performance. Another child may see a sibling gaining acceptance and approval through certain actions, and will begin to compare himself or herself with the sibling. He/she may even copy the behavior in an attempt to gain similar approval.

A very difficult factor which is growing increasingly common is sexual violation early in life. I have heard many stories of men and women who have been introduced to sexual feelings and experiences at a time in their life when they are not emotionally or physically capable of responding to such actions.

This type of molestation can lay a confused and damaged foundation that takes a lot of counsel and validation to overcome. The effects on the child can vary, depending on the degree of abuse, the relationship of child to abuser, and the reaction of others when the abuse is discovered. In many cases it is not the actual violation that causes the deepest damage. The emotional injury is multiplied when shame, disbelief and hostility are heaped upon children, leaving them with no support or resources to deal with the violation.

### **An Important Stage**

It is vitally important that parents realize the crucial foundations of emotional security which are laid during this early stage of life. While one-year-olds give us a lot of googles and giggles mixed with "Dada" and "Mama," they are very much in tune with their surroundings. They are listening and responding more than we know.

The elements that I see necessary in developing healthy children during this stage are unconditional love and acceptance without comparison to performance. There must be security and protection from violation of personhood (such as trauma, sexual abuse, or abandonment). If violation occurs, there must be comfort and affirmation.

The young toddler also needs freedom to explore his or her

own personhood and identity. Permission to do this must be granted by parents and other family members. For example, the child should be directed to good activities, rather than merely hearing a continual “no” to unproductive or harmful exploring.

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## Part Two: Two to Six Years—Gender Affirmation

In part one we spent time learning how to build a secure foundation in a baby’s life. Unfortunately, we cannot hold our children at one stage of development until their emotional needs are fully met. Children quickly move into the next phase of growth whether or not they get all the love and emotional support that they need in any given season of their life. When parents give them this security and love, they have a better chance of becoming happy and secure adults. When these elements are missing, broken or violated the growth process becomes stunted.

### Gender Identity

Now our topic involves providing a healthy gender identity to children. One important issue to remember throughout this series is that at times, the lack in a child’s life is more perceived than actual. For example, a father flies to his parents’ home to care for an emergency, leaving a young son behind. The boy may interpret Daddy’s absence as rejection, even though the father deeply loves the child. As this example indicates, young children may not understand the reality of such a family situation, and base their response on a wrong perception.

Something new happens when a baby becomes a toddler. Suddenly, this child becomes a little boy or a little girl. This stage of development marks the beginning of an important process - gender affirmation. Failure to affirm a child’s gender can cause life-long confusion in the sexual identity.

### Power of Words

On a practical level, at this age words begin to make sense and their application is being learned. Much of the communication is gender-related: “Oh, Bryan, you are just like your daddy!”; “Susie, you don’t want to play with that. Trucks are for little boys!”; “Jennifer, come with mommy. We are going out with the girls today.”

It’s amazing how often the words boy, girl, cute, handsome and many other gender-related expressions are used in this vital period of life. A young child is also acutely aware of emotions and their relationship to words, because he or she is learning how to express himself or herself with the new found language.

### Little Boys

The nurturing of a boy’s gender is quite different from the necessary ingredients for security in a little girl. The boy needs to

transfer his identification with “mom” to a very new and different relationship with “dad.” This transfer can be perceived as scary and unwelcome, or affirming and exciting, depending upon how the significant male figure invites this little boy into his world.

The baby boy comes out of the womb relating specifically to the mom. Typically, mom feeds, diapers and closely bonds to this boy. This constant relationship with female adults is typical in day-care situations as well. When the boy reaches the age of about two or three years, it is time for him to begin participating in the world of his father or another significant older male more.

The period of ages 2-6 is vital for a growing boy. He is experiencing his first knowledge of his male gender. Basically the boy needs to be affirmed into a secure identity. He needs his father to welcome him into the male world. “Darryl, let’s go for a walk together” or “Johnny, all us guys are going to watch the ball game together today.”

### Father-Son Affection

It’s also important for a father to be free (even lavish) with his physical affection toward his son. Hundreds of men who have come through our office have made statements like, “I can’t remember my father ever hugging or kissing me” and “My father never told me, ‘I love you.’”

Other fathers abruptly withdraw physical affection from sons at a certain age. “We’re too old for that stuff anymore,” they scoff, and their sons are emotionally devastated.

It’s also important for a young boy to have physical contact with his father’s body. Healthy activities might include wrestling, sitting on Dad’s lap, and bathing or swimming together. These bonding times provide a strong emotional link between father and son, and help satisfy a young boy’s curiosity about the male body.

As I grew up, my father’s extreme modesty fueled an exaggerated curiosity in me about other boys and men, including their physical bodies. I feel strongly that this came from my natural curiosity not being satisfied early in life.

This curiosity was so great that it became one more factor which pulled me into the homosexual lifestyle. I had an insatiable desire to know what other men were really like—physically and emotionally—and how I measured up to them. This curiosity became eroticized, and sexual experiences with other men pro-

vided a counterfeit solution to the problem.

It is vitally important that the boy and the father engage in frequent activities together. A father and mother will greatly increase the solid identity in their son through their mutual encouragement of the father-son relationship. This will mean that the mother has to release her little boy to the father's care, allowing them to spend time together without her interference.

Every little boy has a strong desire to "grow up and be like daddy." At a young age, his hope is not broken; everything he sees in his father appears to be a positive example of manhood.

A boy's desire to copy his father is damaged by emotional pain from both parents, but mainly the father. This pain can come from abandonment or absence, harshness in language or behavior, or some other disappointment in the relationship.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Another factor that can break the growth patterns into maturity is sexual violation of a young boy. Male sexual abuse is more common than some parents imagine; current studies estimate 1 in 3 girls will be abused by age 18—and 1 in 4 boys.

Some men in our support groups remember having sex-related fantasies from the age of four or five years old. Of course, these boys did not understand the implications of adult sex, but they were the victims of inappropriate touch or sexual fondling.

These early sexual experiences are not necessarily attached to "good" or "bad" feelings, but more likely produce confusion and fear. A boy's response to abuse will depend greatly on the security he has found in relating to his parents.

If there is little affection between the boy and the father, sexual abuse will seemingly fill the natural needs for touch and affection. An adult abuser typically showers attention and "love" on the boy before attempting abuse; if a boy is hungry for such intimacy, he is vulnerable to the overtures of an abuser.

### **Little Girls**

A little girl does not have quite as difficult a transition to make, but she will be very interested in just how her daddy responds to her. Is he interested? Is he caring and affirming? Does Daddy pay any attention to me at all? How much attention does he pay to others around me? Children are assessing their world in very specific ways at this age.

A young girl will experience nurturing by her mother and will judge her gender identity very quickly by comparing herself to that significant female figure in her life. The girl will desire affirmation and will search for her identity just like the boy, but the channels of that affirmation will come from a little different direction.

This little girl wants to know who she is in the eyes of her

father. She will look to her mother for role modeling, but to her father for how well she is doing. The responses from her father produce the score card of passing or failing as a little girl.

Since this male affirmation is so important to a daughter, the breakdown of the father-daughter relationship has a dramatic effect on her. Great damage can come from negative remarks and derogatory comments about her character and girlish qualities.

"My father never affirmed my femininity," recalls Carol, a former lesbian. "In fact, he made fun of my attempts to be pretty. I'll never forget the first time I tried to apply eye shadow. He glanced at me and snarled, 'You look just like a prostitute!' I was so humiliated that I wanted to die. I didn't wear make-up again for over a decade." Carol's self-esteem as a woman was shredded by her father's negative attitude.

A father can greatly secure his girl's feminine identity by building her up as she grows into her appropriate feminine identity. Dad must be careful to affirm both sons and daughters. A girl can suffer from seeing her brother receiving exaggerated affirmation of his maleness. She may begin to feel like she would be more loved if she were a boy. In their quest for parental affirmation some girls will place energy in copying the masculine behaviors that they see affirmed and idolized in their brothers.

One former lesbian remembers begging her parents for a cowboy outfit. This clothing made her look more like her brother who got a lot of attention from their father. This girl also spent a lot of time working in the garden, helping Daddy in order to gain his approval and affection.

### **Sexual Trauma**

The violation of a little girl's emotions or physical body through abuse is devastating. Sexual violation can cause a girl to shut down in traumatic fear to any relationship involving a man. Healing requires recognition of the trauma, validation of the feelings and fears stemming from it, and the resolution of those feelings. Although the violation is extremely traumatic, the resolution always requires validation of feelings and giving comfort, regardless of the child's age or circumstances.

### **Summary**

In summary, this time in children between ages 2 and 6 is vitally important in regard to their gender development. This period lays the groundwork as the child faces one of the most difficult seasons ahead, the harsh reality of peer relationships at grade school.

## Part Three: Six to Twelve Years—Same-Sex Relating

For some children, starting kindergarten or first grade can be the most traumatic day of their young lives. *Who are all these kids? they wonder. Where are my mom and dad? I've never been away from them like this before.*

Grade school can be a very rewarding time of life if children are prepared for it. When not prepared, this time can provide wounds and hurts that act like the final nails in the coffin of their already-confused identity.

### The “Safe” Years

After the earlier stages of forming gender identity, a young child gets some time to learn how to walk into their gender role. The years from six to twelve are designed by God as the “safe” years to explore same-sex relationships. These years are safe because they are not impacted by sexual hormones.

Little boys and girls will probably discover emotional relationships with their same-sex friends. They will most likely form some relationships because they idolize another friend. But these relationships will not be driven by adult hormones into sexual immorality unless the foundation has already been broken down (such as by sexual abuse).

### The Haven of Home

During grade school comes the discovery that other children are different. One boy may tease another boy about his big ears. A girl will get persecuted because she has red hair. This teasing happens a lot during these years. The effect can vary from little impact to deep emotional wounding.

Negative effects can be minimized by a supportive home. Think about the little red-haired girl who gets teased three times in one day about her hair. She goes home crying. Her father takes her in his arms and tells her, “Janice, God made your red hair. I think it’s very special. I love your hair!”

The comfort and affirmation she receives from her dad allows her to walk back into the mockery of classmates, feeling a little more secure because of her father’s support.

This safe haven of a secure home with loving parents is so crucial to a child’s well-being during these years. This secure place can provide a lot of resolution to the natural traumas that come into a child’s life from the first days of kindergarten until the early days of puberty. Often it is not so much the wounds from peers that cause long-term identity problems. Rather, the wounds have impact due to a lack of validation and comfort from parents.

In the bigger picture, no matter what the emotional wounds are and how they come about, the child needs someone to acknowledge the hurts and to offer arms of loving comfort. This

is true even in the severe case of sexual violation. A child’s most important need after being abused is to have someone acknowledge the pain and give the child a safe place to release it. Of course, God is the ultimate source of validation and comfort, but He often uses us to be His ears and arms.

Kids don’t purposely tear each other down just because they want to inflict pain. They are discovering the differences between themselves and others. Some kids are short, some skinny, some blonde and some have big ears. Everyone is different. These children don’t know how to respond to the differences they see.

### Homosexuality

How do these facts affect the development of homosexuality? Little boys or girls may not have the opportunity to identify with a same-sex parent and be drawn into his or her world.

If a father figure is absent, a little boy will look to other boys for validation. If these boys are full of rejection and ridicule, this closes another door to entering the world of men. Out of fear and insecurity, the little boy stays in the kitchen with mom.

I remember during grade school when there was a gathering of people in our home. I was more comfortable hanging around the aunts and female cousins. Although I knew that I really belonged in the other room with the men and boys, I felt so unable to relate that I stayed out of that room and looked on from afar.

I was so torn during those times that I hated holidays. These days were full of fears and uncertainty as to who I actually was and where I belonged.

For the little girl, the role modeling of her mother is vitally important. An example of healthy interaction might be the mother and daughter sitting in front of a mirror while the mother is putting on make-up. “Jennie,” the mother says playfully, “let’s put a little lipstick on you, too. Then you can be just like Mommy!”

The father also plays a vital role in his daughter’s development as he affirms her femininity and reinforces her identification with the mother. “My, what a beautiful dress!” he exclaims before church. “You’re sure my pretty girl. I’m proud of you!” Little comments from Daddy can make a huge difference in a little girl’s view of herself.

The grade school years are also the season when name-calling becomes a favorite pastime for kids. Names like “sissy,” “fag,” “tom-boy” and “butch” bring much confusion regarding role identity. These words will probably not deeply hurt the little boy or girl who are secure, but for those who are struggling, they

will often assume that they fit these names.

Labels can play a big part in moving a child with a weak identity into the actual behavior that fits the label. "If they are calling me that name all the time, that must be who I am." The ugly names cause deep wounds, and they begin to take root in the tender places of a child's growing identity.

### Sexual Violation

If sexual abuse takes place during these formative years, other factors begin to distort the growth process.

For a boy, violation can cause him to completely distrust men. He may reject or question his maleness. *Why would another boy or man find me attractive?* He wonders. *Am I really a girl?* A boy may have another unconscious response; *Maybe this is the way to receive the attention from men that I've always wanted.*

For a girl, sexual molestation may cause a complete detachment from boys or men due to fear of further abuse. This detachment may even cause her to take on the masculine role as a protection. She fears becoming a "woman," which means being

weak and vulnerable.

She thinks, *if women always become victims, then I don't want to be one.* Eventually this girl may begin to hang around with the guys with an attitude of, *If you can't beat 'em, then join 'em.*

### Summary

In summary, it's very important that children get the opportunity during elementary school to become comfortable with other children of their own age and sex.

In most adult homosexual men coming to *Love In Action*, we find a lack of significant and trusting relationships during grade school. They often felt alienated and distant from other boys and felt more comfortable with a few trusting girls.

In the women we see, violation at the hands of older boys or men often occurred during these years. Little girls need to be protected during this stage of life. If they already see themselves as feminine, this awareness needs to be nurtured and guarded.

## Part Four: Puberty to Adulthood

The onset of puberty brings a new discovery about our identity. We have already known that we are a boy or a girl (our gender identity). Now, in our early teens we begin to wrestle with our sexual identity and what it means to be an adult male or female in our culture.

Sexual identity describes how we identify with relationships and activities which reflect our maleness or femaleness. A young woman, for example, may reject her femininity by dressing in men's clothing and pursuing only "male" activities.

### Process of Growth

God has designed an interesting sexual development process. The earliest stage involves accepting our gender identity at a very young age. We test that identity through relating to kids like us. Then comes puberty, and we move into a new and insecure time of beginning to relate to the opposite sex.

### Changes in Young Men

I have my own theory about how God gives men the appropriate "push" to get them interested in women. If a teenage boy has accepted his male gender, has found acceptance in the world of men, and feels comfortable with a few buddies, he would be quite content to stay in the company of men. But then something new enters his world - hormones! His sexuality awakens, but he has no desire to carry out his sexual desires with his buddies. A

healthy sexuality searches for the "other," the opposite gender which complements and completes one's own gender.

The young man looks around and finds that women have a mystery about them that is curious and attractive. He may focus on a particular young woman at school. *Who is she? He wonders. How does she think? Why does she act that way?*

### Changes in Young Women

Adolescent girls, on the other hand, respond differently to the hormonal input that comes at this clumsy age. Young women begin to hunger for someone to seek them out, someone to affirm them in their new-found femininity. They can begin to romanticize their relationships. Crushes become a prevalent part of their relationship experiences. Flirting can send a message that they are available for a young man's pursuit.

### Ideal Scenario

Let's look at an example. Jerry is a 15-year-old freshman in high school who is venturing into the heterosexual realm. He begins paying attention to Diane, a fellow student in his math class. It begins with a little talking here, a little touch there, maybe even a little poking in jest or an offer to help her carry her books.

All during this time, Jerry is wondering how Diane will respond. Perhaps they even begin dating, the next step of finding

out which kind of female he likes to be around. Does he like a girl who is talkative or quiet, is self-sufficient or seemingly helpless, is smart or resourceful, is energetic or passive?

Diane begins to feel affirmed as a woman, because of Jerry's pursuit of her. She thinks, *I must be special to him. He thinks I'm attractive.* If she is interested in Jerry, Diane will probably let him know in some way, whether it is through flirting or just outright telling him.

After a few years of dating and casual friendships, Jerry and Diane are able to make knowledgeable and thoughtful selections as to the characteristics they'd like to find in a marriage partner.

These teen years are full of clumsy failures and perceived rejection. Most of us would rather not repeat the years of puberty and young adulthood, but God's intent is that we grow separate from the security of our family and discover our place in the adult world of mature heterosexual relationships.

### **Negative Scenarios**

Now you have seen a basic healthy plan for living through puberty with a positive outcome. Men like Jerry and women like Diane grow up with the necessary ingredients for making wise relationship choices.

#### **Tom**

Unfortunately this ideal scenario doesn't always occur. Tom lost out on the rites of passage into manhood. His father deserted the family when Tom was two, marking his young life with a same-sex deficit.

After a grueling season of rejection and confusion during grade school, Tom now moves into his teen years with more questions than answers concerning his manhood and gender identity. He questions his identity and begins to wonder if he is really like the other boys. Then he notices that the other boys are growing physically and their facial hair is darkening. *What about me? He wonders. I'm still short and undeveloped. Why am I not like the other boys?*

Tom begins to find other men sexually attractive. This is not surprising. Tom really never understood other boys, so they are the object of his curiosity and as I said previously, the object of our curiosity often becomes the object of our sexual desires.

#### **Sarah**

A girl who has missed the appropriate affirmation of her femininity or who has been the victim of emotional or physical abuse may be blocked from embracing her God-given sexual identity. The natural desire to respond to a man's interest will be blocked by fear of again becoming the victim of abuse.

Sarah is one example. Her father was an alcoholic who was verbally abusive and made sexual advances when he was drunk. She struggled with her value as a woman and felt very inadequate

to respond to the boys around her.

Sarah had such feelings of inferiority that she began dressing in baggy clothes that hid her developing figure. Her deep fears of womanhood caused her to begin identifying herself with men through her mannerisms and dress.

Because of her victimization, Sarah had grown to feel that being feminine meant being weak and vulnerable to abuse. *I will never put myself in that position, she decided. Besides, I don't need men. I can get along just fine without them!*

#### **Cindy**

Cindy is another example. Recently we were discussing her teen years. Cindy, a former lesbian, told me that she experienced the romantic desires and sexual fantasies that come with the hormones of puberty, but her desires were for other girls.

Looking back, Cindy sees that she was longing for the nurturing of her mother and thought that maybe she could get this from another girl. Also, people had told Cindy all her life that she looked and acted like a boy. When Cindy became attracted to another girl who was obviously interested in boys she began adopting a more masculine dress and hair style. *Maybe if I become more like a boy, she will also like me,* Cindy thought.

Among healthy adults, I've noticed that differences tend to attract. I've seen young women marry men who are so much like themselves that, later in the marriage, the couple is fighting over their similarities. Their feelings are so similar that the relationship tends to be dull and routine. Sadly, some of these marriages do not last. One party escapes the marriage to find someone else who is more "exciting" (and different) from their spouse.

### **My Search**

During my early years, I was not able to find the affirmation of my gender that I needed. In my late teens, I thought that my loneliness and internal struggles would end if I got married.

What a mistake! Even in marriage I could not find security or a deeper sense of my masculinity. At the age of 24, I discovered the world of homosexual relationships and left my marriage in a further attempt to find affirmation of my male identity.

Homosexuality seemed like the only place I could find other people who understood me. I thought that the acceptance of these gay men would give me a sense of security and belonging. But the gay life-style failed to deliver the wholeness for which I was seeking.

There is a significant difference between the heterosexually-oriented person and the homosexually-oriented person (besides the difference in direction of sexual drive). Heterosexually-oriented people have found their gender and sexual identity, and act in ways that show their security. But the homosexual strugglers are doing things to try to find something they never received.

To use a computer analogy, a heterosexually oriented woman has a floppy disc that is titled "woman," so each experience that relates to her femaleness can be stored in that file. The homosexually-oriented woman receives information relating to femininity, but she has no file to put it in. The "information" and experiences that should affirm her get lost.

**Growing Throughout Life**

The developmental cycle does not stop with young adulthood. God allows us to continue growing and developing all through our lives.

Look around you at older couples who have security in themselves and in their walk with the Lord. Often you will find that the man has begun to swap traditional "roles" with his wife. He becomes more nurturing and she takes on more leadership and responsibility. The husband is doing more dish-washing and cleaning; the wife is handling finances and taking the car in for repairs.

This diversity of roles can be excellent preparation for the future. In old age, a marriage will be disrupted by the death of one spouse. This huge adjustment will be less traumatic if both husband and wife can learn each other's duties and responsibilities.

**A Final Word**

This four-part series has given you basic principles that I have observed and studied. I have just scratched the surface; there is so much more that could be discussed. I hope you will use these principles as a starting place and as you think about them, you will be able to come up with additional insights on your own.

*Rev. John Smid is the director of Love in Action and has been involved in this ministry since 1987. Copyright ©1993 by Love in Action.*

*Love In Action...*



**The Source**

A 2-week (non-residential), 28-day or 3-month residential program designed to help men and women live sexually & relationally pure lives and chemically dependent free lives through Jesus Christ.

**Refuge**

An intensive discipleship program designed to minister to adolescents struggling with broken and addictive behaviors, such as promiscuity, alcohol & drug addiction and homosexuality.

**Serenity Garden**

A support group network for women who want to grow deeper in their relationships with Christ and with others.

**The Wives' Track**

A two-week program designed to help wives begin to focus on their own recovery and needs.

**Radical Living**

A discipleship model designed to minister to men, women and families struggling with relational and spiritual hardships. It is offered through a 20-week discipleship program, 2-day general conference or 4-day leadership conference.

**Family and Friends Support Group**

A weekly support group for people with loved ones involved in addictive and out of control lifestyles.

**Sojourners**

A support group where sexual strugglers can find the support and encouragement needed to begin and continue recovery.

**Other**

In office and telephone consultation.



**L O V E I N A C T I O N**

P.O. Box 171444 ~ Memphis, TN 38187 ~ Phone 901-751-2468 ~ Fax 901-751-1922 ~ [info@loveinaction.org](mailto:info@loveinaction.org)

[www.loveinaction.org](http://www.loveinaction.org)