

## **Appendix B: Counseling with Homosexual Latter-day Saints**

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The observations and opinions contained in this report are completely my own and do not represent LDSFS. Since all files of past clients have been destroyed (according to practices within the offices where I worked), I am relying on what I remember from more than 30 years of clinical experience.

I estimate that over the course of my professional career I have counseled extensively with 400 men with same gender attraction. I followed up on a portion of these 400 and report on these contacts also. These 400 men are the subject of this report. This report does not contain the observations and opinions pertaining to my counseling with an additional 400-plus men and women with same gender attraction with whom I met only briefly (many of whom were associated with various support groups). I also do not focus here on interactions or counseling I did with gay community leaders and religious leaders, about 100 heterosexual women who were or had been married to husbands with same gender attraction; and many loved ones, family members, and priesthood leaders of individuals with same gender attraction. An additional 125 or more women with same gender attraction met with me for extensive counseling and seemed to have reasonable success, but I have very little follow-up information on them and consider this an area that needs further study.

About 200 of the 400 males who are the subjects of this report were married or had been married, and the remaining 200 were single and had never married. Over 70% of the men were returned missionaries. Many of this group of 400 had experienced same gender attraction by their early teens, and felt different than their peers. Others experienced it differently. For all, the beginning awareness of same gender attraction was unwanted and they did everything they knew how to stop or change it.

This quest for change constituted a deep spiritual crisis for these men. They came to professional therapy seeking a way to rid themselves of same gender attraction. Most were disillusioned when, after much effort and prayer, their sexual impulse or sexual attraction to men remained. Almost every male I with whom I have counseled had either seriously considered suicide or attempted it. They wanted to live Heavenly Father's plan, which most had taught as missionaries, and now they could not rid themselves of these strong unwanted sexual impulses so they could marry and complete the plan. With no way to rid themselves of their sexual impulses, most felt their choice was between living a gay lifestyle or suicide. Most did not consider living a temple worthy single life an option they were willing to accept.

Offering realistic hope to these men is fundamental. Professional therapies do not rid the person of same gender attraction. However, professional help can assist a person in

putting his sexual impulses into perspective with his whole self and also in choosing, through the use of his agency, to lessen the intensity, frequency, and duration of the same gender sexual impulse. Professional therapy can help a person deal with depression, which most have suffered from; control obsessive thoughts and behaviors and perfectionistic drives; develop more enriching same and opposite gender friendships; recover some of their lost self-worth, etc.

Only 20 or 10% of the 200 single men with whom I worked experienced enough reduction of their same-gender attraction to marry. These 20 men, except for one, had some opposite gender attraction and therefore might legitimately be classified as bisexual. Only once have I witnessed a single male with no opposite gender attraction develop such feelings and marry. He and his wife were still married happily after a five year follow-up. Most of the 12 men I followed up with from within the 20 were still married, although I am unable to fully report on the quality of these marriages.

About 50% of the 200 married men were divorced prior to or during the time I worked with them. After working with me, about 25 (12.5%) of the 200 married men, reported a reduction in their same gender sexual impulse, feeling more whole as a person and devoting less energy to the control of their sexual impulses. Most of the 10 I followed up with from this 25 were still married.

I would like to give a general summary to illustrate how I work with my clients. My first goal in therapy is to learn how persistent their same sex feelings seem to be. If the clients have feelings which have continued strongly for a number of years, I try to help them understand that the feelings will probably not go away. My second goal is to help them understand that once they accept the feelings, they can decide what to do about them. When they want to stay in the Church and not act on their feelings, I work with them on strategies to maintain control.

For example, I've worked with many returned missionaries who found that their missionary service did not rid them of the same sex feelings as they had hoped and they often come to me in a depressed state. They want to be rid of the feelings and learn how they can marry. I work to help them understand that only a very few may be able to achieve such a goal given the limited number of single men with persistent feelings who have been able to achieve successful marriages. I stress that they can serve others and continue church activity even if marriage is not possible. I work to help them manage and control their emotional and spiritual lives.

Follow-up support has taken place over periods of 2-10 years with about 50 men (10 of the 200 married men, 12 of the 20 single men who married and 28 other singles). This is where I have learned what really helps these men. Over time as they tried to remain temple worthy, the following seemed to make a difference: maintaining a close relationship with their bishop and Church leaders; being focused on expanding, growing and giving of their talents to the Church and others; not being obsessed with sexual impulses; developing meaningful friendships with others who loved them without condition; seeking the blessings of temple attendance; learning how and when to grieve

something they did not fully understand; seeking priesthood blessings regularly; giving thanks to God for all His blessings to them; and realizing they are using their agency to follow Christ throughout their journey. Of the 40 single men I followed up with, over 20 were still striving to live a temple worthy life.

The great need for these men, as they seek help from the Church, is to be met with open arms by fellow members and loved ones reaching out, offering love without limitation, sincerely offering to help build a circle of love around them, and allowing them their agency to come back to the kingdom of God. Equally significant is for Church members and loved ones to seek out, with the same love and understanding, those with same gender attraction who are less active in the Church. I remember a married man, after he regained his membership and temple recommend, serving in the high priests quorum the very men who years before were the circle of love that helped him come back.

There are so many lives affected by one person with same gender attraction. By reaching out as suggested, we are making an effort to reach families and also loved ones. Often the men with whom I have counseled have asked that I make direct contact with their families to encourage them to offer help. Often the bishops of these families did not know of their silent suffering. Recently I have worked with a mother and her children whose father and husband left the family to live with another man after 20 years of marriage. The ward rallied to form a circle of love around this family.

While we strive to help those who have already married, we should not hold out false hope to singles, because there are so few of these single men who are able to marry successfully. I feel a cautious approach is best with an emphasis on the possibility of a fulfilling single life. Recently I have worked with a young man who has experienced an increase in his opposite gender attraction; at the same time his same gender attraction has lessened. Nevertheless, he plans on waiting a year before he pursues marriage. I know a single male striving to live a temple worthy life who teaches the gospel doctrine class. Most in the ward know his struggle with same gender attraction and love and appreciate him.

By joining hands and forming a circle of Christ-like love that lasts over time, we can help many with same gender attraction have the courage and strength to live a single temple-worthy life and help a limited number to build up or maintain a marriage relationship or to accept whatever degree of spiritual healing they receive, with God's help.