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Is Sexual Orientation Change Possible?

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Is it possible to change one's sexual orientation? The gay community would say no. So do major psychological organizations. And that's the perception one gets from the media as well. You might be surprised to learn, however, that a lot of research has been done in the area of sexual orientation therapy, and many people have experienced a lasting change in their sexual orientation. When it comes to the question of whether change is possible, the data, not political correctness should be determinative. So what is the data?

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health followed ~10,800 adolescents between the ages of 16 and 22, recording various bits of information over time, including sexual attraction. The findings regarding sexual orientation were published in the journal Archives of Sexual Behavior in 2007.[1] Researchers found that 81% of females who reported same-sex attraction at age 16 reported opposite-sex attraction at age 17. Similarly, 61% of males who reported exclusive same-sex attraction at age 16 reported opposite-sex attraction just one year later. Only 25% of those boys who continued to experience exclusive same-sex attraction at age 17 reported same-sex attraction at age 22. Seventy-five percent of them had gained opposite-sex attraction over that five year period. All of this without any therapy, faith-based or otherwise.

These findings were in line with an earlier study, conducted in 1992 by the National Health and Social Life Survey. They found that three out of four boys who self-reported as gay at age 16 no longer did so at age twenty-five. When it comes to same-sex attracted adolescents, at least, one is more likely to gain heterosexual attractions than keep their same-sex attractions. Change is not only possible, but more likely than not. In fact, 3% of the United States heterosexual population claims to have experienced same-sex attractions in the past (either exclusive, or bi-sexual), which is roughly the same amount of people who presently describe themselves as gay or bisexual.[2] The likelihood of change is so great that, in the words of Dr. Whitehead, "Ex-gays outnumber actual gays."

In their book, *My Genes Made Me Do It*[3], Neil and Briar Whitehead cite many other studies indicating that same-sex attraction is not fixed, but amenable to change:

- Former president of the American Psychological Association, Nicholas

Cummings, wrote in USA Today: “[C]ontending that all same-sex attraction is immutable is a distortion of reality.”[4] As chief psychologist for Kaiser Permanente in San Francisco, Cummings oversaw hundreds of patients who were successful in changing their sexual orientations.[5]

- Rosario et

al conducted a longitudinal study of homosexuals (1996, 2006) and found that 43% experienced lasting change of varying degrees.[6]

- A New Zealand

longitudinal study of 1000 children followed from birth found that 1.9% of men age 21-26 with exclusive opposite-sex attraction moved to exclusive same-sex attraction, while 1% moved from exclusive same-sex attraction to exclusive opposite-sex attraction. For women, 9.5% with exclusive opposite-sex attraction moved to exclusive same-sex attraction, while 1.3% moved from exclusive same-sex attraction to exclusive opposite-sex attraction.[7]

- Kinnish et

al found that the number of people who are moving from exclusive same-sex attraction to exclusive opposite-sex attraction outnumber those who are exclusively same-sex attracted and bisexuals combined.[8] A homosexual orientation is much more amenable to change than a heterosexual orientation. According to this study, “exclusive opposite-sex attraction is 17 times as stable as exclusive same-sex attraction for men, and exclusive opposite-sex attraction is 30 times as stable as exclusive same-sex attraction for women.”[9]

- SavinWilliams

and Ream conducted a large USA ADD-Health survey with adolescents. They found that 75% of men who claimed same-sex attraction at age 17 reported exclusive opposite-sex attraction at age 22. Among girls, almost all of those who claimed initial same-sex attraction at age 17 moved to exclusive opposite-sex attraction by age 22.[10]

- After 20 years of researching

the treatment of same-sex attraction and homosexuality, psychologist Gerard van den Aardweg concluded that “two thirds reached a stage where homosexual feelings were occasional impulses at most, or completely absent.”[11]

- Jones and Yarhouse found that 15% of their study group experienced substantial change, while many others experienced significant change. While traces of same-sex attraction remained, the authors concluded that they were now “heterosexual in a real sense”. [12]

These are just a portion of all the available studies, but they clearly reveal that sexual attraction is not fixed and immutable. That doesn't mean everyone will experience change. All researchers agree that the greatest change is seen most

among those who are highly motivated to change, those who have not engaged in homosex, and those who are younger. Nor does it mean that everyone who experiences change will experience the same degree of change. Change comes in a spectrum. Some will only experiencing a lessening of the intensity of their same-sex desires; others will cease or nearly-cease experiencing same same-sex attraction, but not acquire opposite-sex attraction; others will cease experiencing same-sex attraction and acquire some level of opposite-sex attraction. One thing is for certain: even if some do not experience change, the notion that change is impossible for anyone with same-sex attraction is contrary to the evidence, and contrary to the experience of so many who claim to be exgay.

Those who claim it cannot be possible because they tried to change and were not able to do so fall prey to the “my chimney” fallacy: “If it aint coming out of my chimney, it aint smoke.” While we may not be able to say why some do not experience change, that is no reason to doubt the experiences of so many who claim to have experienced genuine change, and no reason to cover up the multitude of scientific studies that show change is possible both with and without therapy. The facts, not political correctness, should inform this issue.

1. Savin-Williams et al., “Prevalence and Stability of Sexual Orientation Components during Adolescence and Young Adulthood,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 2007. The abstract can be found at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/m/pubmed/17195103/>. 2. Kinnish KK, Strassberg DS, Turner CW. 2005. “Sex differences in the flexibility of sexual orientation: a multidimensional retrospective assessment.” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 34:175-83. Quoted in Alan Shlemon, “Once Gay, Always Gay?”; available from <http://www.str.org/articles/once-gay-always-gay#.Uq8jEuLxQnh>; Internet; accessed 16 December 2013. 3. Neil and Briar Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It* (Lafayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers, 2013), 231. E-book version available online at <http://www.mygenes.co.nz/download.htm>. Chapter 12, “Can Sexual Orientation Change,” is available at <http://www.mygenes.co.nz/PDFs/Ch12.pdf>; Internet; accessed 08 January 2014. 4. Nicholas Cummings, “Sexual reorientation therapy not unethical”; available from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/07/30/sexualreorientation-therapy-not-unethical-column/2601159/>; Internet; accessed 07 January 2014. 5. Robert Carle, “When Government Keeps Teens from Seeing the Therapist”; available from http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2013/11/11181/?utm_source=RTA+Carle+Therapy+Ban&utm_campaign=winstorg&utm_medium=email; accessed 17

December 2013.6. Rosario M, Meyer-Bahlburg HFL, Hunter J, Exner TM. 1996. The psychosexual development of urban, gay and bisexual youths. *Journal of Sex Research* 33:113-26. Rosario M, Schrimshaw EW, Hunter J, Braun L. 2006. Sexual identity development among gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths: consistency and change over time. *Journal of Sex Research* 43:46-58.7. Dickson N, Paul C, Herbison P. 2003. Same-sex attraction in a birth cohort: prevalence and persistence in early adulthood. *Social Science and Medicine* 56:1607-15.8. Kinnish KK, Strassberg DS, Turner CW. 2005. Sex differences in the flexibility of sexual orientation: a multidimensional retrospective assessment. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 34:175-83.9. Neil and Briar Whitehead, *My Genes Made Me Do It* (Lafayette, LA: Huntington House Publishers, 2013), 231. E-book version available online at <http://www.mygenes.co.nz/download.htm>. Chapter 12, "Can Sexual Orientation Change," is available at <http://www.mygenes.co.nz/PDFs/Ch12.pdf>; Internet; accessed 08 January 2014.10. Savin-Williams RC, Ream GL. 2007. Prevalence and stability of sexual orientation components during adolescence and young adulthood. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* 36:385-394.11. van den Aardweg G. 1986. *Homosexuality and Hope: A Psychologist Talks about Treatment and Change*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Books.12. Jones SL, Yarhouse MA. 2007. *Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation*. Downer's Grove, Illinois: IVP. Jones SL, Yarhouse MA. 2011. A longitudinal study of attempted religiously mediated sexual orientation change. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 37(5):404-427.

In the article above, Whitehead states the "ex-gays outnumber actual gays".

That conclusion is based upon the study below, according to Whitehead.

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Sex Differences in the
Flexibility of Sexual
Orientation: A Multidimensional
Retrospective Assessment

- Kelly K. Kinnish Ph.D.,
- Donald S. Strassberg Ph.D.,
- Charles W. Turner Ph.D.

Abstract

The flexibility of sexual orientation in men and women was examined by assessing self-reported change over time for three dimensions of sexual

orientation (sexual fantasy, romantic attraction, and sexual behavior) across three categorical classifications of current sexual orientation (heterosexual, bisexual, and gay). The primary purpose of the study was to determine if there were sex differences in the flexibility (i.e., change over time) of sexual orientation and how such differences were manifested across different dimensions of orientation over the lifespan. Retrospective, life-long ratings of sexual orientation were made by 762 currently self-identified heterosexual, bisexual, and gay men and women, aged 36 to 60, via a self-report questionnaire. Cumulative change scores were derived for each of the three dimensions (fantasy, romantic attraction, and sexual behavior) of orientation by summing the differences between ratings over consecutive 5-year historical time periods (from age 16 to the present). Sex differences were observed for most, but not all, classification groups. There were significant sex differences in reported change in orientation over time for gays and heterosexuals, with women reporting greater change in orientation over time than did men. Bisexual men and women did not differ with respect to self-reported change in orientation.