

CONSTRUCTING A HETEROSEXUAL SELF: A
QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FUNDAMENTALIST
CHRISTIAN GAY MEN AND SEXUAL
ORIENTATION CONVERSION
THERAPY

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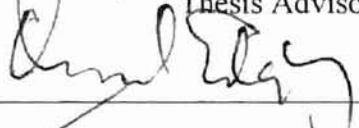
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I Introduction

We had gone to bed and I noticed he had a cross hanging over his bed and I asked him about it, I asked him if he believed in god and he said yes. At that point I just turned off, I mean I couldn't. I told him I know that I'm going to go to hell for this, but I just can't seem to stop it, I just enjoy it too much and it's always been that way (Field Interview, 55 year old male).

Religion and sexuality have always had a problematic relationship. The notion that a religious system could be indifferent towards sexuality seems very unlikely as indicated by Turner's (1991:112) observation that "(r)eligious orientations to human sexuality have occupied a variety of positions along a continuum between total denial and orgy." Assuming that religious orientations influence societal attitudes toward sexuality, religious institutions have continuously sought to incorporate or confine it. Davis (1983) suggests that this is due to sex being such an identity altering experience. Today, Christianity continues to have a significant influence on the regulation of societal norms and attitudes towards sexuality (Davidson et al. 1995; DeLamater 1981). Christianity specifically confines sexuality to heterosexual relations inside a socially recognized sacred bond of marriage between a male and a female. Sexual activity is viewed as being solely for reproductive purposes, equating any sexual activity for purely physical pleasure to being sinful (DeLamater 1981).

Historically, Max Weber (1946) noted that the conflict between religion and sexuality was an artifact of "religious rationalization" within Christianity, and linked to the broader processes of rationalization endemic to modern industrial society. Weber (1946:343) noted that though "(o)riginally the relation of sex and religion was very intimate," as religious beliefs become more codified, principled and logically consistent it

quickly rejected the sexual as “irrational.” This process of rationalization was congruent with the development of the modern type of bureaucratic authority that was slowly replacing the pre-modern type of traditional authority that was less codified, principled and logically consistent or “irrational.” Weber thought that the conflict between the opposing forces of bureaucratization and traditionalism within Christianity were intensified due to its orientation toward salvation. Weber (1946:343) explained that:

The brotherly ethic of salvation religion is in profound tension with the greatest irrational force of life: sexual love. The more sublimated sexuality is, and the more principled and relentlessly consistent the salvation ethic of brotherhood is, the sharper is the tension between sex and religion.

This view of “sexuality as unruly, intractable and resistant to rational management” is still acknowledged today by Jackson and Scott (1997:551) and (Davis 1983). Only by confining sexuality to the bond of marriage, and specifically for procreation, can Christianity face the dilemma of how to rationally justify the incongruity between destiny and merit, and an ascetic way of life that rejected temptations of the flesh.

Inner-worldly and rational asceticism can accept only the rationally regulated marriage. This type of marriage is accepted as one of the divine ordinations...given to man to live according to the rational purposes laid down by it and only according to them: to procreate and to rear children, and mutually to further one another in the state of grace. This inner-worldly rational asceticism must reject every sophistication of the sexual into eroticism as idolatry of the worst kind (Weber 1946:349).

However, the acknowledgment of sexual activity outside of marriage has been growing since the 1960s according to John K. Cochran and Leonard Beeghley (1991), and some mainstream Christian denominations have even softened their stand on issues of sexuality. Fundamentalists, for the most part, have rigidly maintained their position

that sexuality is confined to marriage and heterosexual acts that result in procreation (Cochran and Beeghley 1991). Despite this secularizing influence, Christianity continues to influence societal attitudes toward sexuality (Cochran and Beeghley 1991) which leaves little room for alternative forms of sexual orientations such as homosexuality.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the process of sexual orientation conversion therapy¹ conducted from a Christian Fundamentalist perspective, which seeks to change an individual's homosexual orientation to a heterosexual orientation. Sociological studies have shown Christian Fundamentalist beliefs² to be strongly correlated with antihomosexual sentiments (Herek 1987; McFarland 1989; Fisher 1994; Fulton 1999). This study investigates how individuals with strong fundamentalist religious belief systems reconcile their homosexual feelings and experiences.

Currently one seemingly viable option for this individual is for them to simply change their sexual orientation. Exodus International is one organization that expresses the idea that a person can alter their sexual orientation. Exodus International is a prevalent conversion therapy program that was founded on conservative fundamentalist and evangelical theology. It is a nonprofit, interdenominational Christian organization whose mission is stated as: "Freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ." Since 1976, Exodus International North America has grown to include over 100 ministries in the USA and Canada. They are also linked with other Exodus world regions outside of North America, totaling over 135 ministries in 17 countries. Although there are separate ministries that operate under Exodus, its primary mission is teaching people that religious belief can be used to overcome homosexuality. This study focuses on Exodus ministries located in Oklahoma.

Methods and Empirical Materials

This is an exploratory study due to the limited previous sociological research conducted on sexual orientation conversion therapy. This study used an ethnographic approach focusing on the description and interpretation of lived experiences (Denzin 1989). Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) describe ethnographic methods as having “a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena...investigation of a small number of cases...analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings...of human actions (248).” However, given the sensitive subject matter and the individuals in the study being at obvious turning points in their lives (an existential crisis) a more specific goal of this study was what Norman Denzin termed an “existential ethnography, that mode of ethnography that collects and studies problematic, turning point experiences in the lives of ordinary people (1989:141).” The main purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and interpret experiences in the lives of individuals who have gone through or are undergoing sexual orientation conversion therapy. An existential ethnography was useful to interpret and understand three interrelated and important aspects of sexual orientation conversion therapy:

1. How does an individual come to believe that their sexual orientation can be changed?
2. How does an individual change their sexual orientation?
3. What does it mean to change one’s sexual orientation?

In order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon in question data triangulation, a variety of data sources, was utilized (Denzin 1978). The three forms of qualitative methods included in-depth interviews, content analysis of relevant literature,

and field observations. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine individuals (eight males and one female) who claimed to have changed or are in the process of changing their sexual orientation. The interviews were semi-structured allowing the researcher latitude to follow-up on emerging issues and themes that were not apparent prior to the interview. Although primary questions were asked (see appendix 1 and 2) the focus was on probing the respondents' answers for a deeper and more extensive understanding.

Data obtained from the interviews was supplemented by a content analysis of five types of written materials: 1) written testimonies of individuals who have changed their sexual orientation; 2) literature that individuals and counselors use as guides in the process of changing sexual orientation; 3) handouts collected during an Exodus regional conference and a married men's retreat; 4) business cards of the biblical counselors; and, 5) Internet sites of local and the national Exodus Ministries.

One limitation of this data was that out of the approximately 50 testimonies read by the researcher, he only was able to converse with six of these individuals. These testimonies were downloaded from the Exodus Internet sites and were not analyzed to discover the efficacy of conversion therapy, or to discover if these individuals have indeed changed their sexual orientation, whatever that may mean. Rather these testimonies were looked at on two levels. At the aggregate level these testimonies begin to show a shared vocabulary and a lay theory of homosexuality emerges out of the testimonies. At the individual level these testimonies can be analyzed as a form of narrative or fiction, although not a fiction that is necessarily opposed to what is "true." "Fiction, usually a story, or a narrative, is something made up out of experience. A fiction is not opposed to something that is true. It is fashioned out of something that was

thought, imagined, acted out, or experienced...Fictions are true, but only within the stories that contain them (Denzin 1989:137).” These testimonies, which are always stories of success, true or not, can be seen as representative of the conversion therapy process, how it is designed to work. Participant observation was conducted on two separate occasions. The first was at an Exodus International regional conference. The second was a married men’s retreat.

Researcher Bias

A researcher does not enter the field with a clean slate and qualitative sociology is not value free. Inevitably the question arises, if not from the readers it surely does for the writer, whose side are you on. Initially this was an easier question to answer than it is now. When the research first began I considered Exodus ministries to be brainwashing individuals, perpetuating a negative image of homosexuals, and feeding false hope to an already troubled individual. In a word, my biases against conversion therapy were abundant. However biases can quickly fade when an individual breaks down in tears while recounting a near suicide attempt after an arrest. In the end my biases lie with the individuals who suffer from what they perceive to be mutually exclusive affections, Christianity and same-sex attractions. Perhaps it is naïve of the researcher to say so, but at the heart of this paper is not politics, gay rights, the conservative coalition, or the etiology of homosexuality. Rather it is personal stories, the turning points in the lives of individuals when they are forced to somehow choose what their life is going to be about from that moment on.

Research Question and Theoretical Framework

The question why would an individual with a Christian Fundamentalist belief system want to change their sexual orientation seems quite obvious. Rather a better question, and indeed the question directing this research, is how does a person change their sexual orientation. Without assuming that sexual orientation conversion therapy *does* work, it is essential to investigate how an individual comes to believe that their sexual orientation can be changed, how an individual changes their sexual orientation, and what does it mean to change one's sexual orientation. Asking how sexual orientation conversion therapy works makes it possible to address the issue from an interactionist perspective (Denzin, 1989). This interactionist perspective will be the theoretical framework directing this study, allowing for the observations and the theories that address them to develop together (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:208).

The research question is stated as follows: How do individuals who experience same sex desires and attractions construct a heterosexual self? As Kenneth Gergen states in *The Saturated Self* (1991) "For good or ill, it is the individual as socially constructed that finally informs people's patterns of action. And in the end, there is no means of moving past the constructions to locate the real (146)." The process of how these individuals socially construct their selves becomes of primary importance.

II Review of Literature

To trace something unknown back to something known is alleviating, soothing, gratifying, and gives moreover a feeling of power. Danger, disquiet, anxiety attend the unknown — the first instinct is to *eliminate* these distressing states. First principle: any explanation is better than none.... Consequence: a particular kind of cause-ascription comes to preponderate more and more, becomes concentrated into systems and finally comes to dominate over the rest, that is to say simply to exclude other causes and explanations. —The banker thinks at once of ‘business’, the Christian of ‘sin’, the girl of her love (Nietzsche, 1990 [1889]:62-63).

The goal of this chapter is to present the previous research conducted on sexual orientation conversion therapy, critiquing or commending the work, as it deserves, in conjunction with a deconstructive reading of the literature (Denzin 1989). “A deconstructive reading of a phenomenon involves a critical analysis of how it has been presented, studied, and analyzed in the existing research and theoretical literature (Denzin 1989:51).” Norman Denzin (1989:51) characterizes a deconstructive reading as follows:

(1) It lays bare prior conceptions of the phenomenon in question. This includes how the phenomenon has been defined, observed, and analyzed. (2) A critical interpretation of the previous definitions, observations, and analysis is then offered. (3) The underlying theoretical model of human action implied and used in prior studies is critically examined. (4) The preconceptions and biases that surround existing understanding are then presented.

There are three primary reasons why a deconstructive reading is warranted over what might be considered a more straightforward literature review. First, there is no sociological literature on sexual orientation conversion therapy; rather it has primarily been studied from a psychological, specifically psychoanalytic perspective. Second, any attempt at changing a particular behavior almost certainly presupposes that the particular behavior is for some reason unfavorable. Therefore a bias against homosexuality, heterosexism, is at the foundation of conversion therapy (Schuklenk and Ristow 1996).

A deconstructive reading allows for these biases to be brought out. The third reason for giving a deconstructive reading is that the underlying theoretical model of sexual orientation used in addressing sexual orientation conversion therapy must be critically assessed. At its base sexual orientation conversion therapy is inseparably linked to the etiology of homosexuality. Biological theories that attempt to normalize homosexuality consequently denouncing conversion therapy by providing evidence that it is naturally occurring and psychoanalytic theories that attempt to justify conversion therapy by arguing that homosexuality is caused by a breakdown in some early stages of child development have both been founded on the basis of causation. Which, as will be shown, are at best ill conceived and at worst oppressive. In order to address and analyze these issues the literature on conversion therapy has been divided into the following categories: (1) The etiology of homosexuality, (2) Justifications for conversion therapy, (3) The efficacy of conversion therapy, and (4) Polemics of conversion therapy. These four interrelated themes were either explicit or implicit in almost all the work on conversion therapy, and therefore make good organizing principles for analysis.

Etiology of Homosexuality

The research on homosexuality has historically focused on why and how homosexual orientation develops (Risman and Schwartz 1988). This research has been shaped by a positivistic view of deviance. The positivistic approach, for the most part, assumes deviance is real, existing in an objective experience of the people who commit the deviant acts and the people who respond to them. Deviance, from the positivistic approach, is definable in a straightforward manner as a behavior that violates a moral or value system that is widely shared, existing a priori. As a result positivists have devoted

their attention to deviance as a search for causes. They do this by asking two basic questions, what causes a person to deviate from the norm, and how can they be stopped (Conrad and Schneider 1980:1, 2)?

Although the search for the cause or causes of homosexuality continues there has been no sign of the issue being resolved (Risman and Schwartz 1988). In fact there are perhaps now as many “causes” for homosexuality as there are paradigms that are in the privileged position to determine them.³ Theories on the etiology of homosexuality have been group into two broad categories, constructionist theories and essentialist theories (Risman and Schwartz 1988). Social constructionist models of sexuality have focused on the social, political, and scientific debates on sexuality, specifically with a historical perspective, and how these debates and “scientific findings” have then been applied to sexual activities as labels and categories. “Such a perspective views all sexual conduct as historically and culturally determined, the meaning of which resides in a *reading* of bodily activities of individuals (Kimmel 1993:573).” Although the constructionist approach seems more promising to the study of homosexuality, the essentialist approach has received the bulk of the attention. This has occurred for two reasons. First the constructionist approach does not view deviance from a positivistic framework. Rather deviance is seen as a social definition. Morality and cultural norms are seen as socially constructed; they are relative to actors, context and a historical period. Morality is the product of people making claims based on values, interests, and views of the world (Conrad and Schneider 1980). Historically neither science nor society have taken this view of deviance. Homosexuality has traditionally been viewed as violating a moral law ordained by god or contrary to Darwin’s theory of evolution. Regardless, the deviation of

homosexuality has traditionally been seen as deviating from some objective reality. Also, and more importantly, constructionist theories do not lend themselves to vocabularies of motive that are essential to interaction.

Essentialist theories, on the other hand, attempt to trace homosexuality back to an identifiable cause(s), which tend to be either biological or psychological, thus allowing it to translate into acceptable vocabularies of motive. “A satisfactory or adequate motive is one that satisfies the questions of an act or program...an unquestioned answer to questions concerning social and lingual conduct (Mills 1990 [1940]:209).” Veracity aside, appeals to biology and psychology seemed to have proven useful as vocabularies of motive for homosexuality, perhaps due to the dominance of a medical model in today’s culture, and straightforwardness of such appeals. This search for the cause(s) of homosexuality can be analyzed as an attempt to construct acceptable vocabularies of motive. “To explain behavior by referring it to an inferred and abstract “motive” is one thing. To analyze the observable lingual mechanisms of motive imputation and avowal as they function in conduct is quite another (Mills 1990 [1940]:207).” In regard to this the most effective way to give a deconstructive reading is, as C. Wright Mills suggests, “to give sociological accounts for theories (terminologies) of motivation (Mills 1990 [1940]:214).” “The differing reasons men give for their actions (or the actions of others) are not themselves without reasons (Mills 1990 [1940]:208).”

Science has long been imputing motives to same-sex activity. Furthermore “the search for ‘causes’ continues because scientists (and science) are an integral part of a culture which believes that homosexuality must be caused by some fundamental and singular defect (Risman and Schwartz 1988:130).” These “causes” have been used to

justify, condemn, and in some way validate a particular belief about same-sex activity. For example, there have been studies that show people who believe homosexuals are “born that way” have more accepting attitudes about homosexuals (Gelman et al. 1993; Wolfe 1998). However, the reasoning here could easily be reversed. Given the plethora of “causes,”⁴ people are able to pick and choose what motivates homosexual activity. One can, perhaps just as easily, argue that a person with a more positive attitude toward homosexuality adopts a biological justification. This is precisely why, from a sociological perspective, it may indeed be more beneficial to slight the scientific veracity of etiological research on homosexuality. Rather what should be focused on is what Michael Kimmel (1993) terms “the sociology of gay essentialism.” One effective way to do this is to examine the essentialist theories as expanding vocabularies of motive, which are socially constructed, whether by science or otherwise, and culturally employed to in some way account for homosexuality or justify some action toward this behavior.

The present interest on the part of social scientists in theories derived from psychoanalysis would take on a very different coloration as soon as these theories were not regarded, positively or negatively, as propositions of “science,” but analyzed as legitimations of a very peculiar and probably highly significant construction of reality in modern society. Such analysis, of course, would bracket the question of “scientific validity” of these theories and simply look upon them as data for understanding of the subjective and objective reality from which they emerged and which, in turn, they influence (Berger and Luckman 1966:172).

Using the interactionist work on motives (Mills 1940; Scott and Lyman 1968) it is possible to analyze the motives of homosexuality not as fixed elements “in” individuals but rather as terms with which interpretation of the conduct of social actors proceed (Mills 1990 [1940]:912). The avowal and imputation of motives are features of

interaction that arise in questioned situations (Mills 1940). The motives behind an individual's sexual orientation are not of a primary concern until their actions are called into question. For example, the question of sexual orientation is almost always directed at homosexual activity. Mills states that people "live in immediate acts of experience and their attentions directed outside themselves until acts are in some way frustrated (1990 [1940]:912)." Heterosexuals, as long as they abide by certain cultural rules, e.g. not straying too far from the wedding bed, need not account for their sexual preferences.

Furthermore, in regard to homosexuality, accounts for actions, whether avowed or imputed, cannot be separated from value judgements. Marvin B. Scott and Stanford Lyman (1990 [1968]:219) state: "An account is linguistic device(s) employed whenever an action is subject to valuation inquiry...Accounts are "situated" according to the statuses of the interactants, and are standardized within cultures so that certain accounts are terminologically stabilized and routinely expected when activity falls outside the domain of expectations." Accounts are statements made by a social actor or a group to explain unanticipated or unfavorable behavior. According to Scott and Lyman accounts generally take two forms: excuses and justifications. "Justifications are accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it...Excuses are accounts in which one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility (1990 [1968]:220)."

Scott and Lyman's (1968) primary concern was how accounts are used to smooth out interaction when activity falls outside the domain of expectations. However as Mills (1990 [1940]:911-912) points out motives can be imputed to criticize human action as well:

The motives actually used in justifying or criticizing an act definitely link it to situations, integrate one man's action with another's, and line up conduct with norms. The societal sustained motive-surrogates of situations are both constraints and inducements...Adjectives such as "good," "pleasant," and "bad" promote action or deter it. When they constitute components of a vocabulary of motives, i.e., they are typical and relatively unquestioned accompaniments of typical situations, such words often function as directives and incentives by virtue of being the judgments of others as anticipated by the actor

This is an important point because the primary focus here is not to examine how homosexual activity is justified or excused but how motives are imputed to homosexual activity in order to condemn the behavior. Responses to homosexuality are dependent on how the "causes" for homosexuality are constructed. If homosexual behavior is to be constrained the motives for the behavior need to come in the form of pathology. If homosexual behavior is to be excused and accepted as normal, appeals to biology have shown to be pragmatic.

The question of the causation of homosexuality in contemporary culture is often asked in such a way as to facilitate the biological/psychological debate, "Nature or Nurture?"⁵ The terms in which the question of homosexuality is asked often will constrain the motives to acceptable ones. These "Institutionally different situations have different vocabularies of motive appropriate to their respected behaviors (Mills 1990 [1940]:209)." The biological theories have come to the forefront as explanations of homosexuality, excusing same-sex behavior by displacing responsibility outside of human volition (Kimmel 1993). However this is not to say that psychological explanations of homosexuality are not still favorable in certain circles. Psychological explanations, for the most part, still hold to the notion that homosexuality is a pathology

due to “abnormal” development during certain stages of early childhood. These “causes” are employed in order to condemn homosexuality and justify attempts to change an individual’s sexual orientation from heterosexual to homosexual. In addition, individuals who claim to have changed their sexual orientation or who seek to do so reject or at least minimize biological motives, opting rather for psychological explanations of homosexuality.

“Biology as Destiny”

Homosexuality has been demedicalized now for almost 30 years. In this time the cultural view of homosexuality has shifted, somewhat, and along with it the etiological research on homosexuality. Biological theories have now replaced the psychological theories that once dominated as explanations of homosexuality (Gallagher, McFalls, and Vreeland 1993). Rather than using psychology to pathologize same sex behavior biology attempts to normalize it by way of naturalization. Recalling the positivistic view of deviance discussed above, deviance is seen to be violating morals or values that are real and objective. Biological theories of homosexuality strive to show that homosexuality is naturally occurring, therefore legitimating homosexuality while ascribing to a positivistic view of deviance. The reasoning is that if something is naturally occurring it could not possibly be deviant. This would perhaps be true if the positivistic view was an accurate view of deviance, but it’s not. Biological theories make a fundamental error by equating natural and normal. Biological causes, in this sense, attempt to debunk the argument that homosexuality is “unnatural” and therefore deviant. Michael Kimmel (1993:577) points out the uses of the current biological argument:

‘It points out that gay people are made this way by nature’,
observes Robert Bray, director of public information of the

national Gay and Lesbian Task Force. "It strikes at the heart of people who oppose gay rights and who think we don't deserve our rights because we're choosing to be the way we are." Michael Bailey and Richard Pinnard, the authors of the gay twin study, opined in the *New York Times* (Mar 12, 1993:A11) essay that a "biological explanation is good news for homosexuals and their advocates." "If it turns out, indeed, that homosexuals are born that way, it could undercut the animosity gays have had to contend with for centuries," added a cover story in *Newsweek* (Feb. 24, 1992:48). Such an understanding would "reduce being gay to something like being left handed, which in fact is what it is (*Newsweek* Feb. 24, 1992: 48).

Scott and Lyman (1990, 1968) point out that "the body and its inner workings enjoy something of the status of the sociological stranger as conceived by Simmel, namely, they are ever with us but mysterious. Hence biological drives may be credited with influencing or causing at least some of the behavior for which actors wish to relieve themselves of full responsibility (222)." Although Scott and Lyman (1968) do argue that the appeal to biological drives were fairly popular, I would add that the assertion of biological excuses has only grown in its appeal. Notice how often adjectives are placed in front of the word "genes" to biologically account for a certain type of behavior or appearance, e.g. "good genes," "bad genes," "fat genes," and "gay genes."

In this essentialist model, everyone has a deep, unitary sexual "self" that is relatively stable and unchanging (Kimmel 1993:574). Biological theories assert that homosexual individuals are "born that way" and aside from future biological manipulation sexual orientation is viewed largely as an immutable fact. Perhaps the most frequently cited study into the causes of homosexuality, that support a biological cause, is Simon LeVay's research on the anterior hypothalamus, a region of the brain that has long been associated with sexual behavior (Kimmel 1993). LeVay's research indicated that

the anterior hypothalamus is less than half as large in homosexual males as it is in heterosexual males (1991). LeVay built on his ideas in two subsequent books *The Sexual Brain* (1993) and *Queer Science* (1996). It is in *Queer Science* that LeVay's theory seems to come to fruition, and can be seen in the larger social context. LeVay asks, and attempts to answer, two questions: "What causes a person to be gay, straight, or bisexual?" and "Who cares?" (1996:1) LeVay's argues that by proving homosexuality to be biologically determined, it is thereby proven to be natural, immutable and should be "normalized" and eventually destigmatized.

Kimmel (1993: 577) argues that essentialist arguments that seek to "destigmatize" homosexuality by "normalizing" it can be explained from a "vocabularies of motive" approach. Mills (1940: 907) noted that the competition between "'mixed' motives and 'motivational conflict'" can tell us a lot about "competing or discrepant situational patterns and their respective vocabularies of motive." The point is that essentialist arguments are not merely stated reasons, but ways in which to influence others while at the same time trying to find new reasons which will mediate action. This is illustrated by the cultural retrenchment of the 1980s discussed by Kimmel (1993) in the following passage (579).

Such efforts must, of course, be understood in the context of social and cultural retrenchment from the acceptance-oriented, assimilationist policies of earlier administrations. The Reagan presidency gave the nod of permission to new forms of discrimination against gay men and lesbians whose demands for inclusion were made even more urgent by the Reagan and Bush administrations' punitive callousness to the mounting aids crisis. In that sense, attempting to naturalize and biologize sexuality has been an effort to stay the course, to hold on to what few gains they have made, and prevent further erosion of their position.

The effort to disarm antigay arguments that reject homosexuality on the claim that it is “unnatural” grossly oversimplifies the concept of deviance, viewing it from a positivist approach. Rather, “deviance is not a property inherent in any particular behavior; it is a property *conferred upon* that behavior by the people who come into direct or indirect contact with it (Erickson 1965, quoted in Lindsmith and Strauss 1968:390).” Deviance is a social definition; thus this normalization effort is easily subverted. Antigay forces could point to brain defects, suggest prenatal interventions and prevention such as abortion (Kimmel 1993; Gideonse 1997; Gore 1998). Kimmel (1993) gives an example of a headline in the *Washington Post* that addressed LeVay’s research: “Scientists Link Brain Abnormality, Homosexuality.” Another example comes from *Christianity Today* (June 22, 1992), where Joe Dallas, president of Exodus International, writes, “Are we to think that because something might be genetic in origin, it is therefore ‘normal’? What, then, do we say about genetic deformities or birth defects?”

Thus, the vocabularies of motive that attempt to normalize homosexuality become understandable. When identity is grounded in a preexistent category “we are relieved of accountability since responsibility is displaced onto essential structures outside of human volition. We can celebrate difference and obliterate the foundation for inequalities that are based on differences at the same time (Kimmel 1993:584-585).” However, it is important to understand that essentialist arguments are themselves socially constructed, with a history, emerging at certain times, disappearing at others (Kimmel 1993). “Conceptions of what is natural and what natural differences consist of is itself a cultural construct (Connell 1987:189 cited in Kimmel 1993).” Kimmel also argues that

essentialism reduces sexuality to merely sex behavior, stripping individuals of lived experiences while overlooking the complexity of history and change.

Regardless of the veracity of biological research into homosexuality, it is clear that, for the most part, it supplies accounts to defend homosexuality from prejudicial statements and actions. Biological accounts for homosexuality, by placing responsibility outside of human volition, makes possible the excusing of a behavior that is often situationally defined as deviant. Next is a discussion of another essential explanation of homosexuality, which pathologizes it and seeks to change it rather than excusing it as a manifestation of human nature.

Psychological "Causes," "Father Wounds"

Another essentialist theory of homosexuality is psychoanalytic theory, which views the behavior as pathology. This view is commonly asserted in order to justify attempts at changing an individual's sexual orientation, constraining their behavior to fit cultural norms. According to many psychoanalytic theories the primary argument for the causation of homosexuality is a "seriously disturbed father son relationship (Bieber 1976:163)." Although it must be pointed out that merely viewing the causes of homosexuality from a psychoanalytic framework does not lead to a justification for changing sexual orientation in its own right. Timothy Murphy (1992) makes clear that some psychoanalysts "reject the desirability if not the possibility of sexual reorientation (21)." However the most insistent advocates of sexual reorientation from a "scientific framework" are psychoanalysts, insisting on the pathological condition of homoeroticism. One such psychoanalyst is Joseph Nicolosi (1991) who asserts the cause of homosexuality:

In, reality, the homosexual condition is a developmental problem—one that often results from early problems between father and son. Heterosexual development necessitates the support and cooperation of both parents as the boy disidentifies from the mother and identifies with the father. Failure in relationship with father may result in failure to internalize male gender-identity... Failure to fully gender—identify results in an alienation not only from father, but from male peers in childhood... This disenfranchisement from males—and from the empowerment of one's gender—leads to an eroticization of maleness (xvi).

Constructing the “causes” of homosexuality in the form of a psychoanalytic theory becomes crucial to the process of sexual reorientation, constraining sexual behavior to meet cultural norms. Psychoanalysis pathologizes homosexuality, making “treatment” acceptable or even necessary. The following justification for sexual reorientation is from a 1962 study by Bieber et al.:

We have selected the patient-mother-father unit for analysis... We believe that personality for the most part is forged within the triangular system of the nuclear family. It follows then that personality maladaptation must also be rooted here... We assume that heterosexuality is the biological norm and that unless interfered with all individuals will be heterosexual... We consider homosexuality to be a pathologic biosocial, psychosexual adaptation consequent to pervasive fears surrounding the expression of heterosexual impulses. In our view, every homosexual is, in reality, a ‘latent’ heterosexual (cited in Drescher 1998:28)

Although Bieber’s study was done in 1962 his theory of motivation is still looming, justifying attempts at sexually reorienting homosexuals.

However due to influential academics, such as Thomas Szasz (1960, 1970) and Erving Goffman (1963), and a “pathologic” population that categorically rejected the label of pathology, homosexuality was officially demedicalized. It is interesting to note

that proponents who argue homosexuality is a pathology make much out of the fact that this demedicalization or depathologizing of homosexuality was due to pressures on professional organizations by groups such as the Gay Liberation Movement rather than “empirical” findings (Sturgis and Adams 1978), while they conveniently overlook the pressures from conservative moral values that influence and guide their own practices. The contemporary argument that homosexuality is a pathological condition does not carry the weight it once did.

With the demedicalization of homosexuality, an increasing awareness of gay rights (Crooks and Baur 1999) and the fundamental notion that meddling in other peoples’ lives, namely attempting to change someone’s sexual orientation, “is almost universally regarded as a bad thing (Edgley and Brissett 1999:138),” facilitators of sexual orientation conversion therapy are called to account for their actions. Biological research into the etiology of homosexuality, as previously suggested, and the political and cultural climate the research generated (Kimmel 1993) has also made accounting for conversion therapy the utmost importance. Jack Drescher (1998) describes the climate that contemporary conversion therapy takes place in, he points to five significant factors:

- (1) Their patients and potential patients are aware of affirmative identities for lesbian and gay men as that community’s public visibility increases;
- (2) there is a growing, significant scientific and social science literature that defines homosexuality as a normal variant of human sexuality;
- (3) rigid categories of masculinity and femininity are being increasingly deconstructed by feminists and queer theorists;
- (4) there is a growing body of research on antihomosexual attitudes and
- (5) homosexuality’s diagnostic status as an illness has been rejected by conservative psychoanalytic organizations (31).

Original Source: *Journal of Homosexuality*, 31(1), 1-15

As a result, the view that homosexuality is a pathology in need of a “cure” has been marginalized. In response to this marginalization, proponents of the homosexuality is a pathology view have founded their own organization: The National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH). In doing so, they have insured themselves against further marginalization, or at least revolts, by stifling dissent. Officers of NARTH have deemed it unacceptable for members or potential members to question the group’s beliefs (Drescher 1998).

NARTH is an association founded to study homosexuality. We make the assumption that obligatory homosexuality is a treatable disorder. Our members hold many variations of that essential view. The NARTH officers may opt to deny or remove membership when an individual’s written statements or public speeches show a clear antipathy to this position (NARTH, 1996 cited in Drescher 1998).

In this marginalization and the subsequent formation of their own organization it becomes clear that in order for a vocabulary of motives to “work” they must be accepted. This not only goes for accounts given for untoward acts (Lyman and Scott 1968) but also theories of motivation. “Motives (and theories of motivation) are of no value apart from the delimited societal situations for which they are the appropriate vocabularies. They must be situated...Motives vary in content and character with historical epochs and societal structures (Mills 1990 [1940]:215).” And in the societal structure of academia the view that homosexuality is a pathology has ran its course. Advocates who say homosexuality is treatable have in a sense lost their audience. Now they have chosen to play amongst themselves with the ability to excommunicate members for breaking their rules. Given their marginalized status and questionable motives, proponents of the view that homosexuality is pathology have now adopted new vocabularies of motive in order

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to justify attempts to alter sexual orientation. They have aligned themselves with religious denominations that condemn homosexuality (Drescher 1998:38), and adopted a vocabulary that invokes patients' rights as opposed to pathology.

Justifications for Sexual Orientation Conversion Therapy

Conversion therapy, sometimes referred to as reparative therapy, reorientation therapy, or aversion therapy, seeks to change an individual's homosexual orientation to a heterosexual orientation. Although the techniques and justifications for such a therapy have shifted somewhat over time the end goal remains the same. However, this is not to dismiss the justifications given for conversion therapy, indeed the justifications given for conversion therapy cannot be separated from the overall process. From a sociological perspective these justifications for conversion therapy is one of the most crucial areas for the analysis of this phenomena. Although there has been little literature written on the justifications for conversion therapy it is implicit in all literature on the subject, and therefore warrants attention.

Traditionally, the pathological view of homosexuality was all that was needed to justify conversion therapy. However as I have pointed out that has changed, this pathological view has been marginalized. Therefore different justifications have been put forth. In the literature on sexual orientation conversion therapy two other justifications are prevalent: justifications on the basis of consumer rights, dissatisfied homosexuals' rights as a consumer justify conversion therapy, where conversion therapy can be provided or sought out on the basis of a need for that service, and religious justification, where is homosexuality viewed as a sinful behavior and therefore must be changed.

Patients Rights, Consumer Justifications

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The prevailing justification for sexual reorientation can be seen in the following statement made by Joseph Nicolosi:

Therapists such as myself do insist on being able to provide treatment for those who want change. We defend our right to refine and present an argument for the causes of homosexuality. We are not “against” gays, but “for” the nongay homosexuals, and we support and value their struggle (1993:23).

This justification not only appeals to the individualistic vocabulary of motives that now seems to dominate many areas of contemporary culture (Mills 1940), but also to a consumerist vocabulary of motives. One in which the actor justifies his actions on the basis of “performing a needed service to individuals.” The standard service industry mantra, “the customer is always right,” has seemed to find its way into some areas of counseling psychology as well. This justification could be placed under *appeal to loyalties*, where “the actor asserts that his action was permissible or even right since it served the interests of another to whom he owes an unbreakable allegiance or affection (Scott and Lyman 1990 [1968]:225).” In our consumer culture few seem to be granted more allegiance than the consumers themselves.

Also worth noting here in Nicolosi’s statement is, “We are not “against” gays, but “for” the nongay homosexuals.” First of all, from this we can assume that Nicolosi may not be “against” gays but he certainly isn’t “for” them either. Additionally, presenting a differentiation between “nongay homosexuals” and “gays” as a psychological disorder is disingenuous. Rather what is here is what Szasz calls a “problem with living,” an individual who has same-sex attractions that are perhaps contradictory to their conservative or religious values.

Nicolosi points to the fact that the individuals who come to him for therapy are “somewhat conservative, and homosexuality goes against their social, religious or aesthetic values (1993:24).” However he utilizes this as a justification for changing sexual orientation. Sexual reorientation therapy is:

Now defended as a matter belonging to the domain of individual conscience: if a person would like to have a sexual orientation other than the one he or she does have, then therapy ought to be pursued and provided. Sexual orientation is thus no different from other products consumers may find on the shelves of medical practitioners (Murphy 1992:518).

What differentiates this justification for sexual reorientation therapy is that it does not depend upon medical language of disorder and cure. Instead they speak of wishes and preferences, of rights and duties (Murphy 1992). Nicolosi asserts the idea of personal change and growth over the idea of a cure, “a sense of progress toward a committed value is what is important (1991:22).” This justification technique can be categorized as *self-fulfillment*, in which everyone deserves the right to be what he or she wants to be (Scott and Lyman 1968). It is very interesting to note that although the goal remains the same, to alter a deviant form of sexual behavior and align it with cultural norms, the change in a vocabulary of motives makes the process seem less objectionable, but isn't that the point? However, understanding this phenomenon from a standpoint of vocabularies of motive allows for new points of argument against what many would consider a questionable enterprise.

Homosexuality as a “sin”

Another justification for conversion therapy is framing homosexuality as a sinful behavior.⁶ In which *appeal to loyalties* and *self-fulfillment* are important aspects. The

appeal to loyalties is an appeal to God, Jesus Christ and/or Biblical scriptures. An important aspect here is the belief that Biblical scripture is the inspired word of God. For the most part scripture is taken in a literal sense. Whereas some scholars and theologians have placed scripture in a historical context as to how homosexuality should be viewed (Helminiak 1994; Boswell 1980), this fundamentalist view makes no such distinction.

Normally three biblical scriptures are used in this appeal to loyalties:

If a man lies with a male as a woman, both have committed an abomination, they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them (Leviticus 20:13).

For this reason God gave them up for dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural pleasures for the unnatural and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed for passions for one another, men committing shameful acts with men (Romans 1:26-27).⁷

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards shall inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6: 9-10).⁸

In an obvious attempt to integrate Christianity and psychology in order to understand and in turn treat homosexuality, Ted Evans (1981) begins his discussion by quoting these three scriptures.⁹ In "Homosexuality: Christian Ethics and Psychological Research" Evans combines "biblical data" with "scientific data" in order to draw, what he determines to be, ethical conclusions on how to respond to the issue of homosexuality. The "biblical data" that Evans cites is what he calls inspired scripture. Evans argues that "inspired scripture" condemns homosexual acts. He makes the distinction between what he calls "the *condition* of homosexuality" and homosexual *behavior*. This is an important distinction for Evans' argument, where he goes on to say that the homosexual is not accountable for "possessing the condition, he is responsible for engaging in the behavior...The Bible does not pronounce the condition of homosexuality as a sin. All

scriptural references...cited to demonstrate the Bible's condemnation of homosexuality do so by condemning the behavior (1981:298)." Although it is of some interest to point out that homosexuality as a condition did not yet exist to be condemned. Indeed homosexuality as a condition did not exist until the mid 1800s. Evans' argument that "inspired scripture" condemns the act and not the condition is as result a false disjunction, and an attempt to retroactively argue for a psychological diagnosis, which does not hold. Evans fails to realize that the condition and the behavior were long held to be one and the same thing. "The sodomite has been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species (Foucault 1978 cited in Kimmel 1993)." Nevertheless Evans attempts to excuse same-sex attractions, "the condition of homosexuality," while condemning the behavior. This allows homosexuality to continue to be morally unfavorable. According to Robert Wuthnow (1987):

Moral codes must distinguish between the forces that are out of people's control and those that are within the realm of their will. That is, the inevitable and the intentional. In this way, cultural codes posit a moral evaluation of those behaviors that can be controlled through intent and will power, while forgiving or suspending evaluation for what is out of a person's control. Without this distinction it would be impossible to know what kinds of behaviors are to be subjected to moral evaluations (Turner 1998:505, 506).

Evans cites Ivan Bieber's study (1962) on the etiology of homosexuality conducted from a psychoanalytic framework, which I have previously discussed, to further support his argument. He explains his reason for citing Bieber's work as a cause for homosexuality:

I have presented this data to emphasize that the *condition* of homosexuality is not hereditary, but is a *learned* process which involves many complex factors. The recipient of this learning process does not ask for the condition, rather, it happens to him... Therefore, he is not held responsible for its occurrence since it would be absurd to hold one

responsible for the social interactions, role behaviors, and family patterns that characterize his early environment (1981:297).

Furthermore if the causes for these attractions are placed outside the individual “something that happens to him” not only does it excuse the attractions it makes a “cure” seem possible. Constructing the cause of homosexuality in this manner separates it from the individual; it does not exist innately within him. Therefore there is a belief that it can be altered.

Evans makes it very clear that to engage in the behavior of homosexuality “is a volitional response. It is an act of the will and therefore held accountable (1981:298).” As a result Evans concludes that homosexuals should seek forgiveness and alter their sexual orientation. Evans states that the repenting homosexual should be forgiven of their sins and this will bring potential healing. “Isolation and defensiveness of the homosexual are no longer necessary and thus, the desire for repentance and a full embracement of Jesus Christ is more optimal (1981:300).” However he goes on to say that “the unrepentant homosexual who actively believes that overt homosexual behavior is acceptable before God should be expelled from the fellowship due to his volitional involvement in what the Bible explicitly defines as immoral (1981:300).” Evans concludes his essay:

...It is true that very few homosexuals successfully change and lead heterosexual lives. But it is also true that almost all attempted changes from homosexuality to heterosexuality are done outside of the redemptive power of the Holy Spirit. Henceforth, due to our theological affirmations, this is indeed a significant factor. At the same time, I do not want to minimize the overwhelming complexity of the homosexual orientation and the inherent difficulty in changing sexual orientation. Nevertheless, God demands righteousness (1981:300).

Evans writes from a fundamentalist perspective, using a literal interpretation of biblical passages and seeing them as being divinely inspired. Although his ideas seem extreme they have been presented here for a few reasons. First, Evans ideas not only attempt to justify conversion therapy but also the condemnation of homosexuality. Second, the climate of these ideas and the combination of biblical scripture with psychoanalysis are present in the current conversion therapy programs. Third, Evans appeal to loyalty in saying, "I do not want to minimize the overwhelming complexity of the homosexual orientation and the inherent difficulty in changing sexual orientation. Nevertheless, God demands righteousness," is indicative of the religious justifications for conversion therapy. Lastly the distinction between the condition and the behavior is very important in understanding this particular view of homosexuality.

Another form of religious justification is the idea of *self-fulfillment*. Scott and Lyman (1968) use the idea of self-fulfillment, as everyone deserves the right to be what he or she wants to be. However with regard to religious justifications for conversion therapy this definition must be slightly amended. The idea of self-fulfillment becomes everyone deserves the right to become their true self in Jesus Christ. Self-fulfillment lies in an alignment with Jesus Christ. "The basis for a true identity and selfhood lies in a union with the resurrected Lord (Comiskey 1994:120)." This abstract idea, that self-fulfillment is to become Christ-like can perhaps be traced back to Thomas Kempis' book *The Imitation of Christ* (circa 1400).

Also utilizing this idea of self-fulfillment, although not to the same extreme, Joseph Nicolosi (1991), cofounder of NARTH and member of Exodus, has justified sexual orientation conversion therapy in a pseudo-scientific approach. His writings can

be characterized as conservative religious morality masquerading as scientific thought. However, Nicolosi's mask is translucent giving apparently no concern to those that might draw this conclusion:

Each of us, man woman alike, is driven by the power of romantic love. These infatuations gain their power from the unconscious drive to become a complete human being. In heterosexuals, it is the drive to bring together the male-female polarity through the longing for the other-than me. But in homosexuals, it is the attempt to fulfill a deficit in wholeness of one's original gender (xvi).

Here the justification, self-fulfillment, is one in which the individual can only be completed or complemented by the opposite sex. Also it is interesting to note that Nicolosi argues that romantic love drives i.e. motivates all individuals. However the concept of romantic love is a fairly new creation. In addition Nicolosi's statement that "homosexuals are attempting to fulfill a deficit in wholeness of one's own gender," makes clear that he believes the process of "true" self-fulfillment can only be accomplished if it prescribes to certain cultural standards.

Finally framing homosexuality as a sin is a powerful act of naming an action; to a religious person committing a sin is ultimately to be condemned to hell. This results in an internalized social control of the highest order.

The "control" of others is not usually direct but rather through manipulation of a field of objects. We influence a man by naming his acts or imputing motives to them—or to "him." The motives accompanying institutions of war, e.g., are not "the causes" of war, but they do promote continued integrated participation, and they vary from one war to the next. Working vocabularies of motive have careers that are woven through institutional fabrics (Mills 1990 [1940]:211).

If homosexuality is labeled a sinful behavior then the homosexual is already influenced to repent, change, or abstain from his actions. At the very least labeling their actions as sin creates deep feelings of guilt.

Efficacy of Conversion Therapy

Aside from Masters and Johnson (1979) and Bieber et al. (1962) there have been few studies that attempt to show the efficacy of conversion therapy. However there have been two studies in the past three years conducted by William Dreikorn (1998) and Robert Spitzer (2001).¹⁰ E. Mansell Pattison and Myrna Pattison (1980) also produced a study on the efficacy of conversion therapy. However each of these studies were set up very differently. Dreikorn conducted a qualitative study interviewing 15 males focusing on secular conversion therapy programs, while Spitzer conducted a qualitative study interviewing 200 individuals, 143 males and 53 females using individuals referred to him by Exodus International and Pattison and Pattison conducted a qualitative study focusing on a Pentecostal church group. However the outcomes of these three studies point to what I believe to be one main factor: a religious belief system, in which change is seen as not just probable but likely. Even Dreikorn's study (1998), which primarily focused on secular conversion therapy programs points out:

Ten of the 15 participants in this study indicated that their faith, participation in a church, study of the Bible, and/or the support of church members helped them greatly in their endeavor to overcome an unwanted homosexual orientation. Moreover, six participants in the study indicated they sought therapy due to religious beliefs that oppose homosexuality, and seven participants noted that it was helpful to them to have either a counselor or support group that shared their religious beliefs (178).

This is perhaps the most important observation in Dreikorn's study. In addition Pattison and Pattison (1980) reported through the support of the religious community subjects were offered a "folk therapy" which was paramount in producing a change.

Pattison and Pattison reported that the religious values and their belief system played an important role in their change of sexual orientation. All the subjects were very religious and believed that homosexuality was immoral. The subjects felt they had a religious responsibility to change their sexual orientation. Pattison and Pattison (1980) conclude their study with: "When homosexuality is defined as an immutable and fixed condition that must be accepted, the potential for change seems slim. In our study, however, when homosexuality was defined as a changeable condition, it appears that change was possible (1562)." This statement in a way makes sense, individuals act toward things on the basis of the meaning they have for them (Blummer 1969). A strong belief system that says homosexuals can change is no doubt a powerful thing. However, removed from that belief system the change seems unlikely.

Spitzer's study claims "highly motivated gays" can change. Spitzer concluded that 66 percent (94 out of 143) of the men and 44 percent (25 out of 57) of the women had achieved good heterosexual functioning, "being in a sustained, loving heterosexual relationship within the past year, getting enough satisfaction from the emotional relationship with their partner to rate a seven on a 10-point scale, having satisfying heterosexual sex at least monthly and never or rarely ever thinking of someone of the same sex during heterosexual intercourse." Although there have been critics to point to flawed sampling procedures arguing that a large amount of his study was referred to him from ex-gay ministries which are sponsored by religious conservatives, I do not see that

as the major problem. Any study of this nature is going to involve religious conservatives, there is no getting around that. In fact, aside from a particular religious belief system, I see no real motivation for an individual to desire to change their sexual orientation. Obviously there is a society at large that may still be unaccepting of homosexuality, but this too stems from religious orientations. The main problem I see with Spitzer's study, and this does stem from the religious conservative dilemma, is the pressure to acquiesce to the researcher, which is compounded by his method of conducting interviews, 45 minute phone interviews. Sex research whether it be masturbation, sexual fantasies, homosexual intercourse or heterosexual intercourse is like no other research in the sense that individuals many times report one thing while actually doing something very different. This is intensified when an individual belief system says that homosexuality is a sin. While Spitzer was able to conduct a large survey, it is important to question the reliability of asking someone about the intimate details of their life in a 45 minute phone conversation. The main point of focus here is that a large portion of Spitzer's sample was drawn from a religious conservative population. In which homosexuality is viewed as a sin and according to this belief system sin can be overcome through the grace of God. Therefore there is a strong belief system that supports the view that change is possible. This conclusion seems to concur with Pattison and Pattison's (1980) study and Driekorn's (1998) study. This is an important issue and will further be discussed in the next chapter.

Polemics of Conversion Therapy

Arguments against conversion therapy focus on two points, the lack of empirical evidence supporting its efficacy and the ethical implications of altering an individual's

sexual orientation (Halpert 2000; Tozer and McClanahan 1999; Haldeman 1994; Murphy 1992; Davidson 1978, 1976). Douglas Haldeman (1994) writes:

The lack of empirical support for conversion therapy calls into question the judgment of clinicians who practice or endorse it. The APA "Fact Sheet on Reparative Therapy" opens with the following statement: "No scientific evidence exists to support the effectiveness of any of the conversion therapies that try to change sexual orientation." A review of the literature makes it obvious why this statement is made. Psychologists are obliged to use methods that have some empirical demonstrable efficacy, and there is a paucity of such evidence relative to conversion therapy (226).

Opponents of conversion are quick to point out that there is virtually no empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of these techniques (Halpert 2000). The studies that have shown success in changing an individual's sexual orientation have been shown to have numerous flaws (Tozer and McClanahan 1999). Masters and Johnson (1979) asserted a 63% success rate in changing a person's sexual orientation. Bieber et al. (1962) claimed a 27% success rate in sexual orientation conversion. However as Tozer and McClanahan (1999) point out, these studies suffer from sever flaws, including inadequate outcome measures, definition of success, lack of follow-up, and researcher bias to name the most important.

The lack of support for the efficacy of conversion therapy is quite strong, and perhaps places conversion therapies in further jeopardy. However there is another issue opponents of conversion therapy have addressed, ethical concerns. Gerald Davison (1978) writes:

My proposal to terminate change-of-orientation programs rests on moral not empirical grounds. Arguments based on whether therapists can or cannot alter sexual preferences are irrelevant. Therapists, moreover, have no abstract

responsibility to accede to requests from clients for certain types of treatment...Therapists are characterized better as secular priests than as professionals applying ethically neutral techniques. Therapists should attend to large-scale social and political factors in their clients' lives as conscientiously as they attend to intrapsychic and interpersonal variables...renouncing these widely held programs can help professionals focus on the problems homosexuals have, rather than on the so-called problem of homosexuality (170).

Furthermore Timothy Murphy (1992) argues that conversion therapy appears as a form of blaming the victim, treating the person who suffers rather than addressing the social forces that devalue homosexuality. He goes on to argue that conversion therapy programs devalue homosexuality hindering the progress of society to view homosexuality in a positive way. "It matters not how one expresses those devaluations: as disease, disorders, psychopathologies, unwanted stress, or as personal, social and familial limitations. There would be no reorientation techniques where there was no interpretation that homoeroticism is an inferior state (520)." Douglas Haldeman (1994) adds to this view by admirably pointing out that the appropriate focus of the professional is to reverse prejudices, not sexual orientation.

However these scholars, while commendable in their position, seem to oversimplify the process of changing prejudicial attitudes towards homosexuality. Just as advocates for conversion therapy tend to oversimplify the process of changing one's sexual orientation. When prejudices, or any beliefs, that are as deeply ingrained in a social structure as religion they cannot simply be overthrown. Upon speaking to an individual who had tried and failed many times at trying to alter his sexual orientation, I asked why didn't he find a church that accommodated homosexuals? He succinctly replied, "The scriptures don't change."

The homosexual who seeks to change his sexual orientation through conversion therapy finds himself being pulled in two separate directions. From one side they are being told that their desires and attractions are sinful or pathological and should, perhaps at any cost, change their sexual orientation. Conversely they are being told, in the name of human rights, diversity, and/or ethics that they should accept their homosexual feelings and desires as normal and natural and should embrace a homosexual identity. Erving Goffman (1963) eloquently depicts the absurd situation that these stigmatized individuals find themselves:

Even while the stigmatized individual is told that he is a human being like everyone else, he is being told that it would be unwise to pass or let down "his" group. In brief, he is told he is like anyone else and that he isn't... This contradiction and joke is his fate and his destiny. It constantly challenges those who represent the stigmatized, urging these professionals to present a coherent politics of identity, allowing them to be quick to see the "inauthentic" aspects of other recommended programs but slow indeed to see that there may be no authentic "solution" at all. The stigmatized individual thus finds himself in an arena of detailed argument and discussion concerning what he ought to think of himself... To his other troubles he must add that of being simultaneously pushed in several directions by professionals who tell him what he should do and feel about what he is and isn't, and all this purportedly in his own interests (124-125).

In this absurd position is where we find the individuals that make up this study. However to their benefit and perhaps to their credit they do have something that is sometimes sociologically difficult to account for, faith. In a sense this faith is both a gift and a curse.

III Analysis

I have people who call, one guy who calls all of the time and says you know, it's people who told you this, it's people, it's people, it's people, it's religious people. I'm like yeah well we live around people. But what am I supposed to do, I've got to make my own choices and he's wanting to change the world and I just wanted to change myself (Field Interview, 31 year old male).

In conducting this study there were as many, if not more, differences than similarities in the personal stories of these individuals. On the surface level what seems to be at stake is the "eternal life" of the individual. In which each individual seems to be subjected to their own existential crisis. All the individuals reported having religious/spiritual beliefs from an early age and struggled with homosexual feelings from an early age (from 8-14). However their struggles, for a long period of time, remained private. Some individuals chose to enter into homosexual relationships, others remained celibate, while others got married "as a quick fix" to their struggles. Each was attempting to reconcile their homosexual desires with their Christian belief system in their own way.

However upon entering conversion therapy programs perhaps the most important thing they discovered was a coherent vocabulary, and meaning system. This is what Exodus offers, Exodus does not "change" an individuals sexual orientation but rather provides a meaning system in which change is possible. Through the interaction with counselors, other group members, a belief system is forged in which homosexuality takes on an entirely new meaning. They are able to change the meaning of same-sex attractions through learning a shared vocabulary. The following is a presentation and discussion of the "personal experience stories, narratives that relates the self of the teller to a significant set of personal experiences, (Denzin 1989:38)" of these individuals

situated in the larger context of a conversion therapy program, Exodus International. These personal experience stories are grouped in common themes in which this process of conversion therapy can be analyzed. A large amount of what follows are statements collected during interviews and field observations, and are categorized under three main headings: Exodus' Lay Theory of Homosexuality, The Divided Self, and Turning Points.

Exodus' Lay Theory of Homosexuality

In order to accomplish the goal of altering a person's sexual orientation it is imperative that practitioners, whether they are secular or religious, have a working theory to address the issue. In the review of literature it was shown how a particular theory of homosexuality consequently shapes responses to it. Exodus' lay theory of homosexuality is no different. A lay theory enables experiences to be meaningful and understandable (Denzin 1986). Furthermore a lay theory allows for actions, here conversion therapy, to be taken, giving them a sense of purpose and direction.

A lay theory is an interpretive account of human behavior developed by a person on the street (Schutz and Luckman 1973). This theory may draw upon common sense, scientific knowledge, personal prejudice, or the collective wisdom of a social group. It may be a well-informed theory, or a theory riddled with inaccuracies and scientifically out-dated understandings. It will be fitted to the biography and life experiences of its user. It will be a theory that weaves the self and the history of the subject into a coherent tale, or story, that may be happy or sad" (Goffman 1961). *A lay theory is a theory of self* (Denzin 1987:78).

Exodus' lay theory of homosexuality is more than a theory of causation, although that is an important part, their primary focus is theological. From the data collected, Exodus' lay theory of homosexuality is based on these six assertions. (1) The cause of homosexuality is threefold beginning with the child not properly bonding with his father,

then he does not identify with his male peers, and at puberty his struggle to gain male reassurance is distorted into a sexual craving for the same sex. (2) Homosexuality as a sin, not only the behavior but also the desires and fantasies for same sex activity as well. (3) All sin can be overcome through the grace of Jesus Christ. (4) Faith in God's grace is the most important part of overcoming homosexuality; prayer worship and a "healthy" image of God are very powerful tools in receiving this grace. (5) Casting aside the old "false" self and resurrecting the new "true" self is the end goal, and this "true" self is defined as what God's original intent was for them as a Christian, in other words the heterosexual self is the true self. (6) Having homosexual temptations does not mean that you have not been "changed." These assertions all culminate in the belief that homosexuality can indeed be altered. With this constructed belief system the individual is now able to view their same-sex attractions in a new way, homosexuality begins to take on a new meaning. With this new meaning of homosexuality, ergo themselves, constructed these individuals are able to act toward their same-sex attractions in a new way (Blummer 1969).

Constructing Causes of Homosexuality

There is an identifying, longing, and desiring for male attention and a lot of homosexuals will begin to think that because they have an attention or longing to be with men, which is daddy really, it's daddy's love, that they're longing for – they sexualize that or begin to think that is sexual (Field Interview, Statement by a counselor).

There were, however, contradictions to these assertions of the lay theory in my interviews. For example, recounting what caused one respondent to be homosexual was not a bad relationship with his father, but rather he claimed his mother was cold and distant. He was aware that he was an anomaly in regard to others attempting to change

their sexual orientation. "My story is different, in that my relationship with my father was loving. However..." This simple statement makes clear how ingrained the idea is that a distorted father son relationship should indeed be the cause of homosexuality. It is through deviations that we are better able to see cultural norms, and his admitted deviation magnifies the perceived norm here, that homosexuality is caused by a "longing for daddy." What is of primary importance is that historically accurate truth is of little importance. These childhood memories are reconstructed with the help of counselors and support group members to reach an acceptable vocabulary of motivation. One that places causes of homosexuality outside the individual, allowing for an initial excuse of the behavior while at the same time justifying changing this behavior because of its pathological nature. "Childhood events are murky, memories change as relationships with parents and siblings are altered over the lifespan, and what is "found" often depends on what one is seeking....the patient develops with the psychiatrist a form of narrative or constructed truth as opposed to a historically accurate truth, and it is the narrative truth that largely determines the outcome of the treatment (Gergen 1991:163-164)." The following accounts were gathered during interviews and speak strongly to both the ideas of a constructed narrative truth and a common vocabulary that traces the cause of homosexuality to a dysfunctional father son relationship.

I have come to understand what...like...what caused what I for what for me I accept for the causation for (my same-sex attractions). And its not just a simplistic kind of thing, I mean there is a lot involved with it. But the key ingredients I think were number-one I was born with a clubbed foot and had to have two operations when I was a child. I think the pain not so much of the surgery itself, but I remember being alone in the hospital at night, mother I think was staying somewhere in the city, but wasn't able to stay with me. And then terrible dreams as a result of the anesthetic, and then they had to massage that foot and after the cast was off, and dad did it and I don't know what he had been instructed but it was

extremely painful, he did just not have much patience with my pain. Then I was molested as a child not, not abused I mean I think there is a difference, I was exposed to homosexual activity as an eight year old by a teenage cousin, I already had this syndrome where it came from I don't know. The possibility that I had been abused as a small child, because I have some kind of hazy recollection of being under a blanket and mother finding me hysterical out in front of the house and I thought I had lost her, and I just and an individual kind of mixed in that whole thing (Field Interview, Statement by a 55 year old male).

Well, I was molested as a little boy. So I was exposed to sexual perversion at 6 years old. So the whole idea of sexuality and sexual stimuli was opened up to me at a very early age. That brings a lot of distortion into a child's life...It wasn't until I was probably 12 or 13 that I felt attracted and wanted to pursue sexually, men. At the same time, I was molested again. And then by the time I was 14 I embraced homosexuality and started having sex with men. I never related the sexual abuse to my going into puberty and having these longings and attractions and sexual desires for men. But I now know, after years of dealing with my stuff and counseling and discipleship of myself that there's definitely a connection (Field Interview, Statement by a 41 year old male).

I was born 1-1-1950. My mom said that from day 1 I didn't like him (his father) and he didn't like me. I didn't know how important that was or still don't know exactly how important that is now, but I know it had an impact on me. I grew up, I had a neat grandpa and he would come and pick me up and it was me and him and that was cool. And then he died when I was pretty young. As far as my dad goes, it seems like it was always a struggle with him. I can look back now and see that, but I didn't know that. I just remember a couple of times when I was little, feeling different. I remember my dad taking me outside and we had an old catcher's mit that was his and it had been stored for years so it was like flat as a pancake. And he made me wear that thing and he threw the ball at me and when I, I mean it hit the glove and dropped. And after a couple of times he got disgusted and stormed back into the house and that was the only time I can remember him playing with me. So I didn't measure up there, I don't think it was so much that I was a sissy as much as I just didn't know how and I wasn't under any male influences. I had an older sister, a year and a half older, and we'd play together. I don't think there was any sexual things in my life until somewhere around 9 or 10. This was on my dad's side now... my mom and dad split and they didn't divorce but they split and during that time my sister and I were forced to make a choice between my dad and my mom. We were so scared of my dad and we both went with him and we were scared if we didn't what would happen. And that lined me up for molestation by my dad's youngest brother. He messed with me for quite a while. He would have been 17 or 18, I'd say. And I was like 9

or 10. I think about a two-year period over the summer because we were having to stay with them on the farm, my grandparent's farm. So anyway, but it wasn't appalling to me, it wasn't horrible. He was the only man that had ever wanted to spend time with me and I treasured those times. I looked forward to them. Even though what he was doing to me was sexual, I didn't know what sex was. But at the same time, it didn't feel bad. It was kind of enticing to me really. See, here's a man, in my eyes a man, and he wanted to mess with me and have me mess with him (Field Interview, Statement by a 51 year old male).

There are probably about two dozen main root causes and it's very, until you get in, in (a particular conversion therapy program) you go in and start dissecting all of this one by one and pulling it apart and looking at how does this apply to me and where does this happen in my life? And most of them apply to one degree or another. I think most of them; there may be a few of them that maybe don't apply to me. Like me, I never wanted to wear women's clothing; I never wanted to be a girl. And as a matter of fact when I was really heavy into the gay lifestyle I hated women, I didn't want to be around them and especially lesbians. You couldn't get me near a lesbian bar. And so I mean that was really ironic as opposed to my preteen years when girls were my best friends. But it wasn't like, the dynamics again are different for every individual because we're all unique and we all go through life phases differently and we have different experiences and happenings in our lives... This program is very thorough, its something that takes a whole nine months to go through and gets very in depth. There's not one answer because we're all different. But there are several dynamics at work, I find. And it felt really good to be able to put some, make sense of it all, it felt really good to understand and be able to see it in writing and understand what happened in my life and it was like a big light coming on and I can actually go back and see what was going on in my life and all of those years I'm going why is this happening to me of all people, I don't want this. And I could go back and the Holy Spirit really helped me go back and actually rethink what was going on in my life during those periods. You know, I first hit puberty and how I felt inadequate and I was envious of the other boys and how that, at that time, I was so close to the girls and all of my friends were girls and it really helped to see and put the pieces of the puzzle together (Field Interview, Statement by a 35 year old male).

One can rightly draw the conclusion that these statements on the individuals etiology of homosexuality is directly related to psychoanalytic views on homosexuality previously discussed in the review of literature. Scott and Lyman (1968) have pointed out that homosexuals have made biological appeals to account for their behaviors. Here the

reasoning is the same but the goal is altogether different. Homosexuals who wish to alter their sexual orientation adopt a vocabulary of motive that not only allows for this, but also makes it seem altogether possible. Also at work here is what Scott and Lyman (1968) term the *sad tale*, “a selected (often distorted) arrangement of facts that highlight an extremely dismal past, and thus “explain” the individual’s present state (1990 [1968]:225).” The *sad tale* as it applies here is used in justifying homosexual attractions. It is very interesting because it works on two levels. Although the *sad tale* excuses the initial act, same-sex attractions, these attractions are alterable because it places the cause outside the individual. Also allowing homosexuality to continue to be morally unfavorable, distinguishing, as it does, between the inevitable and the intentional (Wuthnow 1987). Although the initial attractions were inevitable, according to these statements, continual participation in homosexuality is not, because homosexuality is viewed in such a way as being alterable. “Woundedness,” is a term frequently used by counselors and individuals who have gone through the program or who are currently involved with it. Basically it is the same as Scott and Lyman’s (1968) *sad tale*. “Woundedness” functions as a perceived cause of their homosexual feelings. This “woundedness” can be anything from sexual abuse, physical abuse to an emotionally distant father. Another term used for this same idea is “father wounds.”

These vocabularies and constructed causes were not pulled out of thin air nor were they discovered in some epiphany of realization. They make up an acceptable vocabulary of motives that is deeply embedded in the history of conversion therapy and Exodus ministries. The written testimonies reflect this as well. An individual who wishes to alter their behavior or desires would be hard pressed to do so if they grounded

these behaviors and desires in the seemingly immutable structure of biology. However, as previously shown, if one wishes to change an individual's sexual orientation the adoption of a vocabulary that invokes pathology and believes homosexuality is formed as result of a dysfunctional father son relationship seems optimal.

Homosexuality as a Sin

This assertion is directly related to the section in the literature review, in which homosexuality is framed as a sin for a justification of conversion therapy. This justification acts as an *appeal to loyalties* (Scott and Lyman 1968). There is however one important distinction to be made here. Where Evans (1981) distinguishes between the *behavior* of homosexuality and the *condition*, Exodus' lay theory of homosexuality does not. This lay theory does however distinguish between thoughts/temptations and fantasies/desires. Also deeply imbedded in the idea that homosexuality is a sin is the idea that traditional gender roles are being violated. Homosexuality is often referred to generically as "*sexual brokenness*" which has been defined simply as devastation brought about by behaviors outside of God's original intent of sexuality. It must be kept in mind that that biblical scripture is seen as the inspired word of God. Therefore the bible is interpreted literally and the idea of sin is directly pulled from this. These following statements were taken from biblical counselors who had "changed" their sexual orientation.

Masculine is the initiator; the feminine is the responder. Masculine initiates he moves forward to make the feminine feel secure. He is a provider, he is a conqueror.... He is able to make good choices and decisions and lead, for the most part. Not that women don't, women do. But for the most part the feminine responds to the masculine. He initiates even the way we are physically made we initiate. We bring woman into pleasure. It's really it is amazing when you think about the physical aspects of masculine or feminine. You cannot create a life outside of engaging in heterosexual intercourse. So the man is the initiator the

female is the responder. She responds and gives back and that is the way we are physically made too. The man gives the seed and she responds by giving back the life. That is the life he created. And that is why there is no such thing as homosexuality, there isn't, there is homosexual sin. There is only heterosexuality because it is innate within creation itself (Field Interview, Statement by a Counselor).

First of all you have to understand what the word sin means. Biblically it means missing the mark, like a bull's eye. From a scriptural aspect is it a sin, is it missing the mark, is it out of God's perfect intention for your life, for a man to start thinking how he would like to be with another man sexually, Yes it's a sin. Jesus said that if a man looks upon a woman to lust after her he has already committed adultery in his heart, that is a sin that is missing the mark of God. Sometimes we view the word sin and we even scale sin, as this is the worst sin, this is an okay sin. We think Gossip is an okay sin, but Gossip is one of the most detrimental hurtful mean things that anyone can do. We put different levels on it God doesn't. All sin destroys, it kills. So is it a sin, when a person can look at another man or another women depending on their views and find that they are attractive or beautiful or handsome? No, it's not a sin. Is it a sin to have a sexual *thought*? No it's not. It's what you do with the sexual thought, if you take the thought captive, you hold it in your heart and begin to cultivate it and allow it to become a *desire*, a want to go that way then it becomes a sin. Then you have entered in and embraced the temptation and said in your heart that is where I want to go with it. And you enter in to a place of *fantasy*, that is sinful behavior (Field Interview, Statement by a Counselor).

We have a worldview, the Christian worldview, goes to a higher law. In our view, it's a higher law to go to the law of God about that so it's something that the body of writing that we call scripture speaks out against and so we've adopted that worldview. So I guess it would just be a difference in worldview (Field Interview, Statement by a Counselor).

(The idea that homosexuality is violating a moral law) is based upon the 10 commandments. It's based upon the laws that are very clear of what harms another person and harms your relationship with people and harms your relationship with God. It's based upon the two greatest commandments, thou shall love the lord, your god with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. So moral law has to do with breaking the fulfillment of the law, which is love. Now ceremonial or dietary law doesn't. The kind of clothing I put on doesn't hurt anybody. Do you understand? Because gays, they'll compare the scripture that says don't wear the garment that's woven with two different fabrics to that it's an abomination for a man to lie with a man – and they are two different things. Ceremonial law refers to the way you present yourself before god. That's kind of hard to understand, but moral law

never changed. It never has and never will change (Field Interview, Statement by a Counselor.)

Well, in the beginning God created a male and a female. And his intention was for one man to be with one woman. And when you engage in sexual activity within the confines of marriage, these two people become one. In homosexuality, when a man has sex with a man he actually strikes at the very masculine soul of that man. Because in understanding the roots of homosexuality a man who is attracted to the same sex and who is trying to fulfill his longings and desires on the inside have to do with father hunger, a need to be able to relate correctly with men, a need for male affirmation. Some of these things which are healthy and legitimate needs, he now engages in sexual activity which actually strikes at the very thing that he is trying to fulfill within even that other man. It actually brings confusion and distortion to the soul of that person which harms him. That harms him, that does not help him. You're never going to get beyond it hurting a man in his soul. What a man is longing for is companionship and love from another man. That's not wrong in itself, but when you take it to the step of actually engaging in sexual acts, you are bringing distortion in that relationship. So whenever a man and a woman come together in covenant marriage relationship to love and to lay down their lives one for another, then they are actually fulfilling god's intention. But when a man has sex with a man, obviously, I mean I don't know if you understand what homosexuals do from a physical aspect – it's unclean, it's not good, it's not healthy, and it's actually even harmful. They engage in anal sex, that's harmful. It's not helpful at all...It's not love, it's lust (Field Interview, Statement by a Counselor).

Although these statements are admittedly lacking in personal experience and detail they are presented because I feel that these counselors influence on the individuals they counsel is very strong. And such adamant statements on the immoral nature of homosexuality are bound to have a strong influence. Recalling C. Wright Mills' statement, "The "control" of others is not usually direct but rather through manipulation of a field of objects. We influence a man by naming his acts or imputing motives to them—or to "him." (1990 [1940]:211)." When such damning statements are made about homosexuality it becomes clear that individuals conduct will be controlled to some extent, particularly when an individual prescribes to the same belief system.

Another interesting aspect here is we see how traditional gender roles and biological reductionism play a large part in justifying the sinful nature of homosexuality, in which our natural design dictates how we should function. This is a very old idea and can be traced back to Aristotle's *The Politics* in which an individual achieves "virtue" by serving their natural function, which is in part regarded as fitness for a task (1962:93). Statements such as: "When a man has sex with a man he actually strikes at the very masculine soul of that man," and "The feminine responds to the masculine. He initiates even the way we are physically made we initiate. We bring woman into pleasure. Its really it is amazing when you think about the physical aspects of masculine or feminine" are obvious appeals to biological reductionism. Murray S. Davis (1983) asserts that homosexuality is singled out above all other deviant forms of sexuality "for specific condemnation because it involves both a deviant, intragender, sexual object and a deviant, oral or anal, sexual linkage."

Overcoming Sin

As I suggested earlier on the surface level what seems to be at stake is the "eternal soul" of the individual. However this dilemma of transforming the homosexual places an entire belief system at stake. The Christian view of sin and grace was for the most part officially set in May 418 by St. Augustine. In which the remission of past sins and the aid in not committing future sins can only be accomplished through the grace of God (Kirwan 1991).¹¹ In a sense this idea is placed in jeopardy if homosexuals cannot change and along with it an entire belief system. One of the primary tenets of Christianity is that sin can be overcome, and if homosexuality is framed as such logic follows that homosexuals can change.

If the lord really did come to set us free and free indeed then I'm going to believe that I can actually be really free and never really have to deal with this anymore. And it might take a while before that becomes true in my life, but if there is a God and he is over everything and he's capable of doing that and he wants to bring that to pass for us, then I'm going to believe that that can happen (Field Interview, 31 year old male).

This idea is reinforced again and again in the symbolism of the cross, baptism, and the Catholic confession. Although the key phrase in the following statement (italicized) was most likely for effect rather than anything else, however we can perhaps understand where the passions and urgency that make up this debate come from.

I turned around and said something to one of the pastor's sons that was there, the one that I had seen. And he invited me to go up to the altar with him. He said will you go with me and I ended up doing that and uh. I basically got down there and prayed and said God, if you still can change me, I'm all for it. I told the pastors this is what I've been going through and this is what I'm dealing with and you know if God can change me I'm all for it. *And the pastor's wife looked at me and told me that if God can't change you, I'll be the first to say he's dead. And that really meant a lot to me, this lady, this little gray haired saint of God. Having that much confidence.* And after she said that they introduced me to two other sets of parents that were there. They both had gay sons, one of them had just died of aids and the other one was still active in the gay lifestyle, but they had been praying for him and were expecting God to bring him home. But they had prepared themselves for what to expect and what's going on in the gay lifestyle and what causes it and how the dynamics work and they minister God's unconditional love to me.... that along with what my pastor's wife had said really touched my heart and broke me, I broke that night (Field Interview, 35 year old male).

Furthermore in this statement it is apparent how important a reliance on faith is for these individuals and the individuals that surround them. The importance of faith is the focus of the next assertion of this lay theory of homosexuality.

Importance of Faith

The fundamental tenet of Exodus International is "the freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ." This statement in itself shows the

importance placed on faith in this process of conversion therapy, in which there is a focus on constructing a “healthy” image of god, prayer worship, and “spiritual healing.” The following statement speaks to the idea of “spiritual healing” and is an exemplar of the Exodus standpoint.

From very small children we are impacted by our environment and have no capacity to evaluate what's right and what's wrong, what's true and what's false. We incorporate all of these false belief systems before we ever even know what a belief is, in a way. We see people respond to things in a certain way. The example that God gave me was it's no wonder people have such a hard time receiving and keeping supernatural healing or healing direct from God even though they believe the word says it because they've been raised to believe that when you're sick you take medicine, you rest, you go to the doctor and that's a belief system that is incorporated that has to be consciously changed before they can really receive and hang onto a supernatural healing. And sometimes it will happen in spite of those belief systems, but I believe it's because both of the power of prayer and because enough of that has lodged deep enough in their spirit or their heart or whatever you want to call it that it's begun to erode that old belief system. It's a combination of things and that's why prayer is such a powerful tool you know in the healing of grief whether it be homosexuality or whatever it is because you have the fear of God and ultimately you begin to change understandings (Field Interview, 55 year old male).

This is also a good example of the altering of belief systems that is important to take place if “change” is to occur, which will soon be addressed in detail.

Another aspect of the importance of faith in overcoming sin is to have a “healthy” image of God. The assumption is that one’s image of God is based in an image of their father. As one individual stated, “Our only concept of who god is usually impressed or based on our relationship with our earthly father.” However this is a problem because as has been shown the cause of homosexuality has been constructed here as a faulty father son relationship. Therefore many of these individuals are said to have a “Distorted image of God.” The goal of one afternoon at a married men’s retreat for recovering

homosexuals became to voice and restore this distorted image of God. As the group leader stated, "To move from head knowledge to heart knowledge."

Sitting in a large circle of eighteen men the opportunity/reluctant responsibility, depending on the individual, to speak was passed along. Each individual chose from a list of six distorted images of god what their view was, why and what they would do to correct it. The list of Distorted Images of God included: (1) The God of Impossible Expectations; (2) The Emotional Distant God; (3) The Disinterested God; (4) The Abusive God; (5) The Unreliable God; (6) The God Who Abandons.¹² This group discussion infused with religious worship and psycho-babble functioned at two levels. First it reinforced the idea that a dysfunctional relationship with their father had indeed led to their homosexual attractions.¹³ Second it elevates the importance of a personal relationship with God over any other possible relationship. In a sense this is displacing worldly sexual desires, desires of the flesh, for otherworldly spiritual fulfillment (Weber 1946, 1958).

But I always had a view or mentality that God was far away that God was in heaven, that Jesus was in heaven and away from me and that the holy spirit somehow mysteriously did certain things sometimes on the face of the earth. I didn't have a real understanding that Jesus Christ really was God incarnate that he was God in the flesh. And that he came from heaven and became a man and he did that so he could relate to every single thing we had ever gone through. And beginning to come into that revelation and knowing that is what gave me the revelation that he was accessible and not only was he near me he was now to live in me and that Christ actually makes his place in and god does makes his dwelling in a temple and the temple that he is now longing to dwell in is the temple of human beings. And so I am a temple and when that became revelatory to me and when that became manifested, and not just in the head knowledge, but something that became a part of me that changed everything about my belief system. So it's not just communicating in some religious words about Jesus being a personal savior because that is usually said in Christendom. It is much deeper than that. Christ is definitely a personal savior, but he is my companion, he is the lover of my soul. And when I

say lover sometimes that conjures up areas of sexuality. We have been created with a longing to be loved and Christ comes in to fulfill that place in my life (Field Interview, Statement by a 41 year old male).

But I'm free. I can go past these places and not even have a desire to stop most of...I won't say I never think about it, I mean it never comes to me again, but I can dismiss it. It's just not something that I'm going to go back to. And I credit that to understanding. To understanding myself, understanding who I am and how you know...my picture of god was, I loved Jesus and what I came to understand was that I loved Jesus because he was protecting me from the wrath of God. All of the pain and made the sacrifice and shed his blood so that I could be free from the wrath of God, but my father, God, was still a whole lot like my father. If I messed up I was going to get it, I was going to pay the price for what I had done. Well, we do that because that's the way the system he has set in place for us to be blessed works. If you plant a bad seed, you're going to grow a bad crop. But it's not god holding a hammer over your head, it's just the way he has set it up to bless us. And if we won't walk in the place of blessing we can't expect to have the blessing, but he's not sitting up there breathing fire every time we make a mistake and that was the concept I had (Field Interview, Statement by a 55 year old male).

Oh yeah, definitely, it's a process and it's a journey. It may take you six months, it may take you six years or it may take you the rest of your life, but it depends on how well you grow spiritually. Because if you're praying, you're reading your bible, you're getting closer to god, again these things of the flesh are going to have less effect on you...I don't consider myself to be gay. I mean I don't class myself in that bunch anymore and I don't identify with that anymore and that's what you need to be able to say. I mean I am just as heterosexual as any guy down the street here. And I don't want to say that I've arrived because I haven't arrived and if you want to be honest all of us, none of us can say that we have arrived and are perfect. I do, and I do occasionally find myself, I may see an attractive man and there may be some feelings come up so I have to understand it's okay to look at somebody and say that they're attractive that doesn't mean that I'm lusting for them or that I'm ready to go jump in bed with them okay. And it's very freeing because I do that at my men's group and it's like it's okay to say somebody is a handsome or attractive individual, man or woman. It doesn't mean you want to go have sex with them. And that's very freeing for people to understand that. But I find that as...there are two things. My relationship with the lord, the closer I am to the lord, and this is true of anybody in their walk with the lord, the closer I am with the lord the less effect I have with my fleshly desires or lust. And if I've not been reading my bible or not been praying I'll have more of a problem. I kind of use that as a barometer. And that's true, I'm finding now that I'm involved in a men's group, even in the heterosexual ministry now it's true

for every man. If you're not pursuing the lord these fleshly appetites are going to start surfacing more and more and you need to start using those, I start using those as a flag. That's a big sign for me, you need to pray, you need to go read your bible....(Field Interview, Statement by a 35 year old male).

The "True" Self

In our view, every homosexual is, in reality, a 'latent' heterosexual (Bieber 1962 cited in Drescher 1998:28)

We want to help people discover who they are in Christ (Field interview, Statement by a counselor).

Another assertion of Exodus' lay theory of homosexuality is the idea of a "true" self, a heterosexual self. In a sense this idea carries over from other secular conversion therapy programs that assert that there is a core heterosexual self that has in some way failed to develop fully. Homosexuality is a form of arrested development according to some psychoanalysts (Freud 1905; Bieber et al. 1962; Nicolosi 1991). However this idea is compounded by the belief that God would not create a homosexual, and a persons "true" self is what God had planned for their life. Conversion therapy is a search for a true self, who you are in Jesus Christ. In which true identity and true self should be based on a relationship with God, not on sin and woundedness (Comiskey 1994). "To be man means to reach toward being God. Or if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God (Sartre 1957:63)." Again here the displacement of "earthly desires of the flesh" for "otherworldly spiritual fulfillment" is seen.

The truth of the matter is that none of us are homosexual period. God didn't make a homosexual. What did he make? He made men and women and Satan's been here every since to pervert and to cause behaviors. Homosexuality in the bible, you won't find it, at least not in the original text. They had words for homosexuality, but they didn't use them. They used behaviors. And this was homosexuality between, or in other words behavior, same sex sexual behavior between two people of the same sex is called sin period. So God doesn't identify them as their sin and we don't identify people as their sin. And that's why I don't even like

the term because that's again identifying with something that God didn't create. We can identify it as a problem, but not as the person. And I grabbed a hold of that false identity for a while. Finally, ..I know who I am, now I can tell you today who I am, I'm God's son, I'm Jesus' brother you know I am the beloved and I am walking free. I am not a counselor, that's not my identity. I counsel, it's something I do, but it's not who I am if that makes sense. Part of it is just helping people discover their true identity and when they do, we've gotten so wrapped up with labels and heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pedophile, and incest. It's a way that we can describe our behavior. But I mean, I don't know gay is the only sin that I know that people identify as their identity (Field interview, Statement by a 51 year old male).

Well God created a male and female and to be able to have security within our being we need to know who we are. A lot of people don't even know who they are. And if we don't have that understanding if don't glean and gain that understanding then we become dysfunctional. And become unfulfilled and so we need some understanding, to understand what those things are that is why people are so messed up. It is because they don't know who they are; they are trying to find their identity, so much in the gay lifestyle. Cause they are seeking and searching cause they don't know so it is important to know how we've been created and God's intention for our lives (Field interview, Statement by a 41 year old male).

Here the true self is directly linked to God and the natural world of God's design (Gergen 1991). This natural design here being that "God created a male and a female." However there is another view of this true self that is worth noting. This individual did not believe that homosexuality was a sin but rather it was his commitment to his wife (he married at 20 as a quick fix to his same sex attractions) and living his life in accordance to how he believed God wanted him to live it that kept him from pursuing same sex relationships. The focus of this statement is living in accordance to how he believed God wanted him to live.

But it just, it really occurred to me..just think about it, what if God really has a great idea for your life? What if we're actually created for some reason. What if sin, that nasty word that gets everybody riled up, is not something that God just doesn't like someone, just doesn't like tomatoes, (Pointing to the tomato he had removed from his hamburger), you know? He just doesn't like you doing this, what if it's not about tomatoes, what if

it's nothing about doing anything, what if all of these things were you, just take you off of the ultimate purpose he has for what and what if it's all about your happiness? What if he knows that if you go this way you'll be this way and if you go this way, you'll be great. And I had great experiences in OKC, you know I was seeing different people and perfectly comfortable, like this person I was seeing, I prayed with him and everything was good. One night I was in OKC, there was this guy who was just the bomb and he was just attractive, he was hitting on me. I was all, man I want to go do something, you know what I mean. It was just like this situation, I was just like this is so incredible, I just can't believe this is happening. This guy was a Greek god you know. But you know what, I really felt like God said 'no, it's not right, don't.' And it's was the one time I said no, I appreciate it but I just don't feel right about it. It ends up two weeks later I find out that he is HIV positive. Now, lets think this through. Okay, but seriously, okay, so are straight people, but clearly more gay people are (HIV positive). What if God didn't want me to be connected with this person because I was drinking that night and if I would have done something with him and I would have got sick, would that affect my life? Would that give me the quality of life of not seeing my son graduate from high school? So what if it's not about that God hates this path, but it's God's got a cool plan for my life and if I just listen and do what I feel is right in situations, then what if my life turns out really well. You know, it's not about what you can't do, it's just like you can do whatever you want to do but I just, as God, God kind of knows what's best in the circumstances (Field interview, Statement by a 35 year old male).

Sexual Thoughts vs. Sinful Temptations

Prevalent throughout many of these previous statements, is the assertion of Exodus' lay theory of homosexuality that same-sex thoughts or attractions do not mean that an individual has not been "changed."

Actually, I think I could be tempted until I die, but for me to actually consider it as something that's, maybe there's a better way to say it because temptation isn't necessarily sin. It's just being presented. I mean Jesus was tempted, so. Yeah, I'll probably be tempted with this until the day I die. It may be an issue only for a split second, ten or fifteen or whatever you know (Field interview, Statement by a 31 year old male).

This seems to contradict a statement by the same individual previously discussed:

If the lord really did come to set us free and free indeed then I'm going to believe that I can actually be really free and never really have to deal with

this anymore. And it might take a while before that becomes true in my life, but if there is a God and he is over everything and he's capable of doing that and he wants to bring that to pass for us, then I'm going to believe that that can happen (Field interview, Statement by a 31 year old male).

However in Exodus' lay theory this is a not a contradiction. Because homosexuality is seen as a sinful temptation, "elements of 'passion,' are considered residues of the Fall (Weber 1946:349)." Mankind has to deal with sinful temptation all the time.

By altering a belief system and learning a new vocabulary of meaning, these same emotions and attractions begin to take on new meanings. Often sexual attractions for one sex or the other are seen as a part of the person having the attraction. In a sense the attraction is internalized leading the individuals to identify themselves as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. However in Exodus' lay theory individuals do not identify with their same-sex sexual attractions. Rather these attractions are seen as being foreign to them, and not a part of them. Many of the assertions in Exodus' lay theory function so as to culminate in this idea: The "cause" of homosexuality is placed outside the body in a faulty father son relationship, homosexual desires are framed as sinful, the "true" self is a heterosexual self, and finally homosexual attractions are nothing but sinful temptations common to us all. In these assertions we see that a belief system is being forged one in which homosexual attractions are not only alterable, but are also foreign to the body and inflicted upon the person. Furthermore, giving a new meaning to these emotions allows for an individual to respond to them in an entirely new way, "emotions are essentially *cultural performances* learned and enacted on appropriate occasions (Gergen 1991:165). In this sense the individual may indeed have the same same-sex attractions, however through Exodus' lay theory of homosexuality these attractions are given a new meaning

allowing individuals to act toward their emotions in different ways (Blummer 1969). The following statements illuminate this idea.

So it's a change or transformation that comes about as I change my belief system. And out of that belief system change about myself...it's funny how now um, I was thinking about that the other day, is what, I don't remember what the pivotal point was, but now there's so many things I hang in there on. I still have being married and have two kids that are growing and the needs and financial needs and all this that come at me and there is a tendency to want to run. Not so much back to the lifestyle, even though.. I'll tell you this too, I know I could go back. I have a choice today. To me that's what deliverance is. Deliverance is giving me a choice today. There was a time I didn't have a choice. Everything I thought about was a perverted type thing or in other words it would take something that was nice and turn it sexual. And today that isn't there, I have a choice. Now I can sit and I can ponder and I can remember and I can think things, but I don't care to (Field Interview, Statement by a 51 year old male).

I usually say that's not what God would think about it and I'll think about something else and I'll pray and ask God to take those thoughts away. There have been times I had scriptures I use during those times. And actually in my billfold I have this little sheet, this little paper I typed off a couple of years ago about captivating your thought patterns about life and renewing your mind and scriptures on those kinds of things. So it's always with me, so if I ever you know, I look at it, I just look at it. I have one in everyone of my bibles. I have one in my office, you know I have one in a certain place in my office. So, I think it's just equipping yourself, you know you have this weakness, you know Satan knows you have this weakness and so he's going to attack you. And you know you do get stronger over the years, you do get stronger (Field Interview, Statement by a 43 year old male).

It doesn't mean that people don't have temptations or thoughts or feelings that they have generally genuinely made a complete change from having once believed that they were homosexual only completely embracing a gay identity to completely embracing a heterosexual identity and I am one of those people. People do change, people change all the time. And even if you are "born" with something even if they were to find that there is a homosexual propensity genetically for someone does not mean that person has to suffer with what we might deem a handicap. That you can rise up above that....Now, if you ask a question like do I find men attractive. Yeah, I find men attractive. Have I had thoughts of my past or homosexual activity? Yeah, I've had thoughts. Having thoughts and having attractions have nothing to do with the reality that my heart has

been changed. There was a time in my life when I couldn't think of even anything different and longed and desired to engage in that kind of behavior. To engage in that kind of behavior now makes me ill to think of it – to actually engage in that kind of behavior. So, my heart is definitely changed in that regard and my desires have. But, there is a place and I think it's even natural with a lot of men that they compare themselves among themselves and it's not sexualized. But for someone like me, it had become sexualized and so there is a stigmatism beside it that causes a little bit of unnervedness to me because of where I have been (Field Interview, Statement by a 41 year old male).

If I did it, it might be fun for the moment, but I'd have to pay a price I'm not willing to pay for it in separation from my Father (God), in broken relationships, all kinds of things that I cherish. See the lie before was that, I can do this because my wife still hasn't left me. And I still have my family and I can still be in church you know, I can still function as a normal human being in the things that are important to me. And I realized that all I was doing was bringing a lot of pain. I mean God says he has given us callings about repentance so we can operate in a ministry and have a certain amount of effectiveness even when we're in sin. The problem is, we're not as effective as we would be otherwise. We are bringing falseness to something that is very precious and when you're exposed and fall it's very damaging to people who have trusted what they've heard from you. Not just trusted you as a person, but heard the word that you've taught, the things that you've taught because hypocrisy is a very destructive thing. I just would not ever risk that again (Field Interview, Statement by a 55 year old male).

Habit patterns of the flesh, I mean you just have to...I mean habits, old habits don't break easily you know. And we have created habit patterns and it's no different from...I mean you know, now that I have victory over this, I'm working on my diet because I need to lose weight (Field Interview, Statement by 55 year old male).

There are times whenever I am tempted to masturbate and I'm like "why was I tempted?" I don't even know why. It seems like there's no explanation whatsoever and so I'm like Lord, I really want to know what's causing this. And so, like I said earlier, it might take me a while to understand where (the need to masturbate stems from). And I don't murder myself, condemn myself if I don't know. I mean it's not that important. But, I definitely am in a position where I can actually wait on the Lord because I do want to know. And I trust that he will reveal that to me...I still definitely see myself in the process of getting more and more free, which I think everybody does. And actually saying that I am free from homosexuality on one hand. Um, the scriptures say we're supposed to recognize ourselves as dead to sin and it's kind of like laying down the truth according to the scripture whether or not you feel it. So, I have that

basis set in place. But, I guess sometimes I'm still, though it's work. Hang on, I'm going to go back. Three or four years ago, anytime I was tempted I would say I am homosexual. Well, in my mind. This is what I struggle with and this defines who I am. But now, as time goes by, I don't readily think that way anymore and it's not because I've been programmed any different, it's just changing. If I get tempted, I'm thinking why am I tempted, you know, it's like "I'm not a homosexual, what's this all about." And uh, processing it and it may take a few days or weeks to understand what triggered that or... There's a guy in my church that I consider very attractive and he's got a great sense of humor, he makes people feel welcome, he's like a jock kind of guy. And he's not like a typical jock, he's not stuck up you know. And so, I like him, but there's something beyond liking him that is clicking in me. And I'm like ok this could be dangerous because if I give into this, then I'm going to go in my mind where I want to go. But because he's the same person he wouldn't go that way. I'm the one at fault here. I need to reposition my thinking here and where did this come from in the first place. You know, I found someone that uh... fit into my old fantasy and I had seen this in other people I go to church with. There's several people in my group of friends that happen to be. Not my friends personally, but broken people that I can actually see really quickly what their deal is. Um, but if you have an unborn fantasy in something and something comes up to you that fits that aspect of your fantasy. You pull them into the fantasy and that's what happened with me. There's something about him that I pulled into my fantasy and I had to separate him back and say no, this fantasy is something back then, it's not something that I readily focus on and so I separate it away and what is it and uh. So, what I am tempted to do is to make that person my everything today. Um..but what I've done is I'll just keep my, the times that I talk to this guy on Sunday mornings or whenever the guys hang out and not make him my immediate friend. So I just start separating myself and start putting my heels in the dirt and letting go of the rope. He's like a horse and I just have to put my brakes on and be like no, chill, chill, I'm getting excessive with my feelings for him. So, that kind of.. I don't know if that describes what you asked, but.. So basically what I've done is to say okay I've been down this road before and that's not the way to do it. I'm taking a slower approach, letting. If there's going to be a friendship develop, it's going to develop because there was a lot of boundaries and trying out the friendship thing the slow way rather than the quick way. Which I think is wise (Field Interview, Statement by a 31 year old male).

Also in this last statement it becomes apparent that in helping dealing with these “sinful temptations” real and symbolic boundaries are often created (Athens 1995).

When I gave my life over to the Lord, I did some things and made some real stark boundaries with people who were involved in the gay lifestyle. It was Christ and I was revealing where I stood with Christ and that alienated a lot of my friends. As a matter of fact, angered some people that were supposedly my friends at the time....When it really gets down to it, you're not going to find a devoted Christian man that really loves the word of God and walks with Christ that's in homosexuality. You'll find some religious people and you'll find even ministers that are in homosexuality, but they don't have a real love for the word of god. They don't have a real love for the person of Jesus Christ. They're explaining away things all of the time and their “Christianity” is very socialistic (used as a tool for socializing) (Field Interview, Statement by a 41 year old male).

I can go where there's gays and if I hang around there long enough guess what, some of that will come back. But today it's a matter of I don't want to go there. It's almost like an alcoholic. If you don't want to slip then don't go where it's slippery. What's the need to be there? What am I doing there? And pornography, I was into pornography too, that's part of this, gay pornography by and large. But still I don't go there. Because it can still get its claws into me. Am I free today, yes. Can I go back, yes. I think that's what freedom means, I am free to do either one. But every morning that I wake up anymore isn't about gay thoughts. It's a freedom that I didn't know I could have, that's awesome (Field Interview, Statement by a 51 year old male).

What changed in my life was a decision that I made. It is a decision, there wasn't any big transformation. It started with the decision to change my life. It's that simple. You have to make a decision and then embrace that decision. A lot of the guys that I have seen that attempted and have tried to come through (this particular conversion therapy program) they're sincere, but don't want to let go of a lot of those friends or a lot of those things. They don't want to turn around.. And the number one thing that they are told when they come to (conversion therapy programs) is you've got to get rid of your idols and turn around and replace those idols with healthy relationships over here that are going to be good for you. Just like my friend R., he would not find friends that weren't in the gay lifestyle. He wanted to embrace the friends. And it's not saying that you can't be friends with people because I still love, I don't, I can't go and socialize with my gay friends because, and I don't, I don't have a desire to, but you literally have to cut the strings because it's a whole lot easier for them to pull you down than for you to pull them up. So anyhow, that's the biggest

thing that I've seen in people who have turned around and went back into the lifestyle. They did not want to cut the strings, they did not, a lot of times going through the program you're digging up these root causes and issues. Some of those things are very painful. A lot of them, there's a lot of molestation and stuff, a lot of unforgiveness and bitterness and hatred toward their parents, a lot of it. Very hard stuff to deal with. And a lot of it is easier to just say "hey, I was having a whole lot better time back here when I didn't have to deal with any of this." And so, it is, you do see about 50% of the people turn around and say I don't want to deal with this anymore and I don't want to have to trust God. They have to fully rely on God and they have to break these relationships and go through and clean out their house and get rid of all of their porn and all of their magazines and things that remind them of that past. There may be things that will, you know, maybe there's a picture or something that they bought with that person and that's going to be on the wall in their house haunting them, something for them to think about in the back of their mind. You know, you have to go through and clean your house and get rid of all of those personal effects (Field Interview, Statement by a 35 year old male).

there is a change that comes almost instantaneously, just a change in the way you look at it, a change in the way you feel about it, but then it's a process too just because it's like any other habitual behavior. You still, there's still a part of the flesh that's programmed that way that if you didn't learn anything to set a barrier against that then I don't know how successful I would be, you know, if there were no effort being put into continuing to change that thing. But it's like I said, I've reached the point now where I just rarely even think about it. And I don't think about it in the context of wanting to even then. But when I do, it's just, I have a freedom from it that I have never had even in the two year period when I was immersed in the church and thought I was free. I was not free from masturbation, and still was not free from thoughts and fantasizing and times and things like that. I was just too busy to do anything about it (Field Interview, Statement by a 55 year old male).

This lay theory of homosexuality is made up of personal accounts of experience.

Although it remains questionable if this theory could indeed be generalized to Exodus' as a whole it nevertheless captures the experiences and meaning system of the individuals in this study. Now I move on to two other important themes that although they are not explicitly a part of this lay theory of homosexuality, were still very important themes that came about in the research process, The Divided Self and Turning Points.

The Divided Self

Sexual orientation conversion therapy is a biased enterprise, in a society where homosexuality was not devalued there would most likely not be a search for the causes of sexual orientation, and there would surely not be programs, which seek to alter sexual orientation. This societal bias is often religiously justified. Homosexuality like other biases and prejudices can be internalized, directed back toward oneself. However unlike other forms of stigma the homosexual can “pass” in many situations as a heterosexual. Often the individuals in this study sought out different interactional situations and relationships for the different and conflicting selves (Goffman 1959). Unable to reconcile these conflicting selves they sought out separate situations where each self could exist independent of the other. However with strongly internalized religious beliefs and deeply felt attractions to the same-sex, again here seen as mutually exclusive affinities, neither their homosexual nor Christian self were allowed to flourish. In this sense he may see himself as part of the in-group and the out-group at once creating an emotionally divided self. The term divided self is taken from Norman Denzin (1984, 1987) and William James (1904). The divided self has been described as being fractured into multiple selves that add up to nothing, feelings of fear, anger, depression, despair, rejection, self-pity, inadequacy, shame and guilt are common (Denzin 1984). “The emotionally divided self lives two lives, one that is inner and perhaps fantasy-based and one that is outer and perhaps real (Denzin 1984:209).” The individuals in this study experience simultaneously what they perceive as mutually exclusive emotions, two forms of existence, Christian and homosexual. Denzin (1984) borrowing on the work of Harry

S. Sullivan (1953) describes three aspects of the emotionally divided self, the “good me,” the “bad me,” and the “not-me.”

The “good me” refers to those self-personifications “which organize an experience in which satisfactions have been enhanced by rewarding increments of tenderness....The good me, as it ultimately develops, is the ordinary topic of discussion about “I” (Sullivan 1953:161-162).” The good me encompasses those things about the self that the subject takes pride in, cherishes, and values highly....The “bad me” describes those features of the self that cause the subject guilt and anxiety...The not-me refers to refers to those personifications characterized by the “uncanny emotions” of awe, dread, loathing, and horror. The not-me elements of the self may include sexual acts that are taboo in the subject’s culture. These emotions of the not-me persist throughout life, often erupting in nightmares in adulthood. The not-me elements of the self refer to a “private mode of living” (Sullivan 1953:72) (Denzin 1984:212-213).

These following statements taken from field interviews highlight this idea of divided self.

When I was a kid I had same-sex attractions. Easily before Jr. High, elementary school, and it’s been one of those things, I’ll always remember it as a part of me. I always was interested in that. I think each person has to decide for themselves, from the standpoint that all during high school and all during junior high, it was like no, I’m not, I’m going to pretend not to be. I went to a Christian university, I have a masters in theology and so my life was going down this church ministry path and I honestly gave a lot of thought about it. I got married when I was 20, just turned 21 and I thought that would solve the problem. Because at that point I was the good boy and I had never had sex with anybody, I’d never.. I just thought about all of these guys, but you know, that’s how you cure being gay, you go get married, very simple. The challenge with that is that unless you deal with whatever issues you have it just gets, it doesn’t go away and so what I found myself into, 12 years of being married, one child, very difficult work situation from just, in very, very hard hitting, very competitive, very...it was busy in all of these different areas. I was like, I had this desire in my life and I’m doing well and I ended up going down to (a particular city) and meeting a business partner who was gay and introduced me to that lifestyle. I was like ‘oh my gosh’ when I saw it, I was like I can’t believe this, I feel great, I feel, you know this is incredible, I can’t hide this part of me. But then I had a whole lot of turmoil between the Christian world saying that was sin because you know they’re not

accepting of it at all, it's not a disorder, it's not, it's just wrong...just change it. It's hard to say just change it. So that's been a real challenging situation. I'm probably unique from the standpoint that I did actually graduate with a master's degree in theology so I'm not, I'm just...any padded answer doesn't work for me. You know, you can't say just pray this prayer and you'll be better. Well, you know, I prayed the prayer and I wasn't better (Field Interview, Statement by a 34 year old male).

When I met my wife, she was Lutheran, so I converted from Methodist to Lutheran just because that's what she was. We got married in a Lutheran church. We started going and we found a church we liked a lot. And then when we moved to Kansas City, that's where it finally boiled, bottled up so much in me that I, she threw me out basically. And by this time I was into pornography, I had found out that there were gay magazines in bookstores and things like that. I still hadn't had the activity, but I was buying magazines. I'd buy like three girly magazines and one boy magazine kind of so they wouldn't... And I'd go and I'd just masturbate and this would be on my mind. Until finally, she basically threw me out. And when she did my, and this was after seven and a half years of marriage, and I that's when I went ahead and just went over my fears and discovered and met some guy. I didn't have the slightest idea who he was, I just wanted to try an encounter. I kind of got hooked on it. It was like. It wasn't really sexual really as much as a feeling of this is what I want. I went to some gay bars, this guy told me about some gay bars. And I went and I messed around a little bit. Then, my first partner and I, one night we met and talked and I remember when he kissed me it was like I came alive. It was like something told me, 'this is who you are.' I felt like a man for the first time in my life. It's weird, but that's exactly how I felt, I felt somebody recognizes me as a man and wants me as a man even though it was another man. But that is what I was seeking for was that feeling that I am a man. I remember that it didn't dawn on me that it was homosexuality. It may sound stupid, I remember going outside the bar in Kansas City and walking along the street. They used to have like cocktail hour you know for business professionals would go in there and so it was still evening, the light was out, the sun was out still or whatever and I was walking down the street and this car load of kids went by, they had their windows down and they were screaming Faggot. And I started looking around to see who they were talking about, it was me. I was the only one on the street and I think that's the first time it dawned on me that I was the equivalent, that this behavior that I was in, that's what I was. I don't know what I ever thought I was, I guess I just thought that I was a man doing this and enjoying it. But that's the first time I connected it with that lifestyle, and I was ticked. I didn't like it at all. I didn't like that connotation. I didn't want to be a faggot or a queer or anything else even though this was pulling me in this way. A great time of my life in the lifestyle was trying to accept this behavior as who I am, as an identity (Field Interview, Statement by a 51 year old male).

I was in the middle. I knew what was right, what was right with God, but I just went over here. I struggled with it for so long and didn't act out, I just, I just got to the point that I'm just going to do it. I said, I don't care God I can't do this anymore, I can't just keep saying no and not think about this guy or this guy you know I just, I just couldn't do it. And I think, I think part of it too was this other guy, he'd already, I think he'd been in relationships before. So that, it wasn't like his first time. It was my first time, but you know I never did ask him that or anything, but I don't know. I don't think he was even a Christian. I mean he said he went to church when he was young. And a lot of people go to church, but that doesn't mean you know anything (Field Interview, Statement by a 43 year old male).

There was a lot of guilt and shame and it was stuff you know that I would never talk with anybody about ever. And I, my wife, well I would say she was the second person that I had ever talked to about it. The first person of course would've been the sexual relationship that I had right out of high school with a guy....The guilt was a big part of the reason I left the church. And I had at that time, there was an incident that happened that I remember where I got upset with my pastor and that I guess was kind of the straw that broke the camel's back type of thing. It was just... And I'm still close to these pastors today. I mean they think of me as one of the kids. Anyhow, I kind of got hurt and quit going....I was mad at God. I was angry with him because I felt that he let me down. Before I decided to marry (my wife), I had told him if you can change me, I believe that you can and you know that this is going to work out and he didn't do it. And, or at least he didn't do it the way I wanted him to do it. And felt that he let me down and I was angry with him for putting me in that position to hurt her and now we had a little boy involved and it's going to mess up his life (Field Interview, Statement by a 35 year old male).

I couldn't reconcile that at all. I never saw it in the bible. I never heard anyone say that it was... Well, I probably did hear that it was bad... I had a lot of guilty feelings. I didn't want to be homosexual. I didn't want to have attractions to men (Field Interview, Statement by a 41 year old male).

It was that same love hate kind of thing, I was appalled that I was even interested and I didn't want, I guess I didn't want anybody to associate me with that. I mean you know, it was totally hidden, I would go and watch through the holes they have in the wall and that kind of thing. But it was, I didn't want it you know and yet I did, the only way you can understand that feeling is to understand the power of sin. That's what sin is that deceitfulness, that draws us to something that is pleasurable and has immediate gratification, but then is followed with the consequences instead of with the things God offers us which start out having to be

worked for. It's like credit...I mean Satan's on credit and God's on work for it first and then pay for it and you've got it. So, I came back here and went to college and that's where I really go into actually doing things... I remember telling a guy, we had gone to bed and I noticed he had a cross hanging over his bed and I asked him about it, I asked him if he believed in God and he said yes. At that point I just turned off, I mean I couldn't. I told him I know that I'm going to go to hell for this, but I just can't seem to stop it, I just enjoy it too much and it's always been that way. I've had to shut off and that's what happened. I mean when they talk about Bill Clinton being able to compartmentalize his life and you know does he not even realize that he's lying about so many things. That's what it was like, I was two different people. That person was not the person I saw myself as and wanted to be. That person was, it was almost like a demonic spirit, but you know I don't believe that it was totally demonic, I know that spirits gravitate toward that kind of thing and you will be influenced and possibly become controlled by that kind of a spirit, but I always, I mean not always, but much of the time I was fighting it in every way I knew how....The only way I could continue to go to church was I would ask forgiveness. For a long time I would do it, then I would ask forgiveness then it got to be so frequent and I mean I was married and had kids, but I had a lover for 5 years and then after we broke up I had another one for a couple of years and they were, the weren't just sex partners, they were dear friends. After I broke up with this first guy who I had been with for 5 years, I saw another guy a couple of times and I was really attracted to him and I think he was to me. But I said I wanted to see him again and he said, "No, I'm not going to do that." And I asked why and he said, "Well, because I can't really trust you. You've betrayed your wife and you've betrayed Earl and I don't want that kind of a relationship" and I had never even thought of it that way before. It just, it was so eye opening was what it was. I had put up a shield to protect myself from the things that happened in my home as a child and in a sense, deep in my heart I had made up my mind "I am going to be in control of my life when I get out of this house, I am going to be in control of my life and I'm not going to put myself in a place to be hurt like that" and so this is the way Father (God) said it to me several months ago, he said the irony is trying to be in control when you were totally out of control. Because in those kinds of relationships I could basically take it or leave it. I mean they were intimate in a way, but I didn't have to make myself vulnerable in any way I didn't want to. They were just there wanting the same thing I wanted and if I wanted to share feelings or wanted to tell them something I could, but I didn't have to. In a marriage, you can't have it that way you know, you have to be vulnerable and I didn't know how to be vulnerable. I didn't know how to let people inside of me because I knew if anybody really got inside of me besides someone who's gay, they would find something they couldn't accept and I couldn't accept and I couldn't tell them why I was that way and I couldn't stop being that way and so I had,

it was a protective thing, a shield in a way, to where I could get what I needed sexually and affirmation from men and affection and all of the things that we all need deep inside and they are real, genuine, legitimate needs. But I could not satisfy them legitimately because it made me vulnerable in ways I didn't want to be vulnerable.

I never wanted my real world to know because I worked for a Congressman, I was president of a public policy foundation, I worked for a mayor, I worked for campaigns, I was active in the church and there was no way I was going to come out (Field Interview, Statement by a 55 year old male).

William James (1904/1961) describes the emotionally divided self: "There are persons whose existence is little more than a series of zigzags, as now one tendency and now another gets the upper hand. Their spirit wars with their flesh, they wish for incompatibilities, wayward impulses interrupt their most deliberate plans, and their lives are one long drama of repentance and of effort to repair misdemeanors and mistakes (Cited in Denzin 1984:235)." Next I turn to the turning points, the events in the lives of these individuals that encouraged them to seek out help for their "affliction."

Turning Points

In order for the self to change itself, it must get outside itself. A communicative and meaning system that stands in metarelationship to the self-system of the subject must be entered into (Bateson 1972 cited in Denzin 1984:236). One sure way to get individuals outside themselves, to view themselves as objects of their own experience, is to call their actions into account (Mills 1940). Whether it is the generalized other, here God is often credited with that role, legal sanctions of an arrest, or two worlds, the gay world and the church world, colliding in the parking lot of a gay club, these individuals actions were called into account. These turning points are the primary reason these individuals sought out conversion therapy programs. Denzin (1989) terms this the epiphany. "It occurs in problematic interactional situations where the individual confronts

and experiences a crisis (Denzin 1989:17).” The epiphany is located in those interactional situations where personal troubles become public issues. The following statements illuminate the epiphanies in the lives of these individuals.

When my little brother died, we were only 18 months apart in age, this was a major turning point in my life. For the first time in years, I began praying earnestly. My mind became opened to the fact that I would spend eternity somewhere...And what happened was coming into a revelation that God was not just some traditions, doctrines, and religion something that was intangible. That there was actually a tangibility to a faith in a God that there was an accessibleness to the creator of the universe. And when that became revelatory to me in 1983 when I actually entered into knowing God as a person that he was accessible that's when everything changed for me. Because what happened during that time the scriptures came alive they weren't just dead words on a page, they were living to me. They were God's words and I began to really believe them and I was transformed, within a very short period of time. Now that's not to say I did not struggle that I did not struggle with sin. And certainly struggle in the area of sexual sin, because I was pretty much, before I had given my life over to the Lord a sex addict. If you meet God, if you meet the creator, which I have it is not that big of a struggle, I am not saying it is easy it was hard, and matter of fact it is one of the most hardest difficult things anyone will ever do, especially if they have had a lot of experience in sexual perversion, it is a very difficult thing to over come. But with God in knowing him in coming to know him it is very accessible (Field Interview, and written testimony, Statement by a 41 year old male).

I had become a Christian about three years before and I specifically I had an encounter with God. And um the problem with the encounter that messed me up so much was that I was actually having sex when God showed up and that, it kind of blew my mind because that wasn't in my idea of who God was. And um, but even to this day I think I heard him out of a voice, which is you know and I'm even more reasonable than I was back then, but it was, I mean it was a shocker to me and for whatever reason I determined...God's voice didn't say you know you're really messing up and you shouldn't be doing this with this girl, the message was "I love you what are you doing?" In that the first year (after that experience) I was relatively isolated and didn't have any other idea except that I needed to resist the feelings and thoughts that were on the inside. I would say that was a pretty terrible year. At the end of that year I found a counselor who became a great sounding board for things I was thinking and feeling. And you know an objective other person and what came out of that was learning language and dialogue to explain the things that I had felt forever...Basically how I thought and how I felt and how I perceived

myself changed from being exclusively homosexual to just being really content. I was just a really content person and stayed in that content place for a number of years until for whatever reason heterosexual thoughts and desires began to emerge, which is honestly where I'm at now. That's why I didn't consider myself to have changed at all, just to have abstained. It wasn't until I started working on other feelings and issues and trying to answer for some of the things that I had gone through in life that you know processing the idea of my gayness being a real issue got really highlighted. Somebody, you know, about three weeks after my experience or whatever, I was at church and somebody asked me to share a testimony. I mean, I had talked with some people about what had gone on, but the thing that was shocking to me was that the things that were in front of me I was in the middle of a huge battle trying to make things right. I mean I had done so many people wrong, it wasn't, it just it was not a good thing. But homosexuality wasn't an issue for me initially. This lady wanted me to share and um it was a huge event – about 900 people. And I hadn't shared and she said tell them you know how you used to be gay. I'm going yeah?, because on the inside I still was, but the things that had been dealt with was the general sense of having just lived irresponsibly. And that was large in my mind and I knew something radically had changed in that area. I mean I had the conviction to move forward into something....For me, I came to a point where I was willing to not depend on myself for my own – I wasn't the final answer in my life anymore. And um gave my will, my life, my um and mostly just my brokenness. It had never occurred to me to give God the good part of me, but everything I viewed as bad I gave to God and said that he could do with it whatever he wanted to. And that initial moment was at a point that I had just gotten tired of my own way and came to believe that I was really wrong. Maybe a humbling kind of place. But what changed for me immediately was that I had a very strong sense of a love of God and it was a very sustaining sense that someone other than me loved me and it lasted for about six months and it was really, a really stabilizing thing that happened to me. (Field Interview, Statement by a 39 year old female).

Immediately after this (he was arrested in the park for indecent exposure while attempting to solicit sex) happened, I, they took me to jail and I didn't think they were going to let me go because I wasn't from (that city) so they said I couldn't get in on that program that lets you out on you know, your own recognizance. It was too late, I didn't really know any attorney's that I could call. Those I did know, I really didn't want to know (about the incident). And it got too late to get a hold of anybody and I tried to get a hold of somebody from bail bond and I couldn't get anybody to answer their phones and so I thought I was going to have to stay all night. They were packing, you know giving us the clothes and everything ready to pack us off when they came and got me and said they had changed their minds and decided to let me go under that program. But in

the meantime, I had called my wife and made up a big story about what had happened. The car being stolen and they found it and I had to wait until the inquest was over and all that. A big lie and, and she accepted it and the next day when I got out I stayed in a motel. I got out at about three o'clock in the morning and called her early and told her I was on my way. And I stopped by the bar association thinking that maybe they could refer me to an attorney. I went on home and on the way home, I just decided I just couldn't handle this anymore and in my mind that I was going to drive into a barricade, I mean into an overpass, or into a truck, whichever came first and uh, you know, I had it up to 90 mph and a diesel coming down the highway and I was ready to pull out in front of it, when something in me said "do you want to kill somebody else too." And that kind of snapped me out of that thing and then you know, I don't know, I guess it was just my flash that well look you know, you've been able to lie your way out of this so far. Because I had been up here for a doctor's appointment, a checkup, for because I had a tumor that they were checking up on and you can make excuses up to go back and see an attorney and they'll probably do, because I had been arrested once before in Washington and the police took me in and I paid a fine and I got out of it. So I figured as soon as I get an attorney, that's all I'll have to do is pay the fine and it'll be over like it was before and I may have to make a court appearance, but even if I have to do that, I can finesse that. And so, and I decided to pull out you know. God got you out of jail and nothing has happened so far, maybe you can lie your way out of it. Well, that night, no it was the next night, my wife, she said, no it was that night, Friday night. Uh, she wanted to put on a tape, we had this minister's series on the anointing. She said we haven't heard the last tape, would you like to listen to it? I didn't want to, I was exhausted and wanted to go to bed, but I didn't want to let on that there was anything wrong. So far I had been able to keep her cool you know. So I said sure and about three-fourths of the way through he started talking about integrity and how the only thing a Christian has is his integrity, and his word, and his honor, and uh you know if you don't have that, you don't have very much. And it was just all I could do to keep from crying, I just fell to pieces right there. And the Father (God) began to talk to me and he said "Look, you know, if you'll be honest, I can take care of this." Yeah, I'm just hearing this in my spirit now. I say, God talked to me because I hear these things and it's like I don't even, it's not my mind, I know what it is, you sit and cogitate and think about things, but this just came to me. It said, "If you'll be honest I can help you and we'll get out of this alright. If you won't be honest, there's not a thing I can do for you and you might as well just go ahead and do what you plan because you're going to have to be honest to ever get healed." So, I went to bed with that in my heart and woke up Saturday morning. It was still there so I took my wife aside and told her I needed to share something with her and you know, well back up. I first wanted to tell my pastor, I thought that would be the easier way and help me break it

to her and Father (God again) said “no, whose the most important person in your life. She’s the one who has to know first?” It just about killed me to have to tell her again. She thought that I’d been free for 10 years and but you know, she is just an amazing woman and she’s been my only wife, my only woman, been with me through all of these years (Field Interview, statement from a 55 year old male).

An incident came up at camp and it scared me to death. And it wasn't, I mean it was not right but it wasn't as bad as it could've been you know I just grabbed this guy. We were all sleeping, we have guys all sleeping and I was a counselor and I was over like four or five guys, high school guys. It was just a guy's camp and the girls' camp was like two miles away. So and I just grabbed this guy and I was masturbating and I just grabbed his arm or something like that you know. It's probably been about three years ago, three summers ago or something like that. And that happened you know and that just scared me to death. Because, I don't know, I was really having a struggle that week anyway with thoughts and feelings and some of those guys and I thought no that's not right, pray on that thing and God will take care of that. But I don't know, it just got so built up, I guess, it just, it was a real spiritual battle because I think I had been fighting it for a couple of days or nights. I had a friend, another adult guy friend and he knows a lot about me and I tell him all about myself and my sexual stuff. And he was also at the camp that year he was also working there. So after what happened that night I went to him and I said I just need to talk to you, I just did something that really scares me to death and I've got to talk with God. And it was like three or four o'clock in the morning you know. So we talked and we prayed and I just stayed up the rest of the night and just prayed until I fell asleep and I couldn't stay awake any longer and I went back and went to sleep (Field Interview, Statement by a 43 year old male).

I started going to the MCC (a gay church) in St. Louis and that's where I did have an encounter (with God). I was sitting there listening to their stuff and they, again it was not the fellowship (that should be credited for the encounter). I think it was a personal, something going on, but I didn't exactly know how to channel it. They let me take AA to that church. They didn't have a meeting for them and they let me put a meeting there so at least they knew where I was coming from, the pastor did. Anyway I was sitting there and the church at the time was an old Greek Orthodox Church and they had moved to Chicago and they sold this church. And they were really upset when they found out it was a bunch of gays buying it, but they couldn't stop the sell once it started. But anyway, I was sitting there and all of that said because if you can imagine St. Louis and this was a historical area and a huge old cathedral. Up there, what do you call those, fishholes that are hanging in there? There were saints that I'd never heard of, St. Henry, I mean, you know, who are these guys. And the stain

glass windows were just fantastic. I'm sitting there and I watch and I'm looking and I'm seeing, I see this hand in the clouds and it just keeps coming and it comes down and it touches me inside. I've never felt anything before or after to compare. I knew I was loved, I knew I was accepted, I knew I was saved. I've never been the same. I didn't walk out of the lifestyle that day, but I had a deeper hunger for him. I knew I was loved, I knew that the churches weren't telling the truth, that God doesn't hate me and that I'm not going to hell if I'm a homosexual. And so there was the starting for me. It was the desire to get the message out, that you guys are not going to hell. That was my hunger for MCC. Why is there an MCC, because the church isn't doing a good job. The church is condemning people instead of loving them. Instead of telling them the truth, God does love them. Does he want them to change? Yes. This is not homosexuality; it's fornication pure and simple. It's sex outside of marriage. God calls all sex outside the marriage sin. They're hung up on the minor. They're hung up on homosexuality, so why should we be hung up on fornication, neither one is going to keep you out of heaven in my book. I believe with all of my heart that's what God showed me. Anyway, I came back because I didn't see anybody trying to tell people the truth. So this was the start of my exodus, even though I didn't know that I could be free. I was trying to make everything fit. In that church, everybody here, it was all gay. I mean I didn't know any straight friends. Well, I worked at a convenience store so I knew straight people, but they weren't my friends. Where I shopped and ate or whatever, I went where gay people either worked or owned whatever. That was my well, You're not going to get through in that environment. One day I'm sitting at the MCC church, actually it wasn't even a day, it was the night, a Sunday night service and I just felt like God said 'that's it.' I felt like, what if I'm wrong and he's right, that love. In other words, I believe that the love of Christ compels us. I believe the scripture says that and I think that's what happened with me is he just loved me so much. I realize he saved me from so much. What if he's right and I'm wrong? And I abruptly quit that night. I never went back. I lied, I went back one time. One time I went back and when I walked in that door it was like somebody hit me with a fist in my stomach. I am serious, I doubled over and the wind was gone out of me and I sat half way through the service and then I got out of there. I was like what are you doing here Berry? And I have never gone back (Field Interview, Statement by a 51 year old male).

And at this point after 12 years we (he and his wife) were kind of drifting apart anyway, she was busy. But in light of the bigger picture, the big picture was that I worked for a Christian ministry, I went to (a Christian University), I worked in the church for a while, my wife taught at (the same Christian University) and it was like 'oh, my gosh' you know. And so what happened was that she finally just got, she thought something was up, she thought I was doing drugs, she thought I was on crack or something, she thought something was really weird you know. So in

trying not to go crazy she had asked the VP of the company, whose been with the company forever, you know just to follow me one night. And I told her, you know I'm going out with some friends. You know, I didn't lie to her, I was like I'm going out with some friends. I didn't tell her I was going to the (local gay clubs), but I was you know going out. And so, what was interesting is the worlds never connected. The gay world and the church world never crossed. Now there were people at the club who I would see at church the next day, but the church would never be where the gay people were. So this guy I'm seeing, we're dancing and I walk out of the club and I see the VP of our company standing right there. He's all shady, he's got his glasses down because he's embarrassed to be in there. I walk out and I never really realize the connection between that world and this person. I didn't realize he's not supposed to be in this world because I was friends with everybody and it was great. Well, that was huge. The next day I have everybody in my house because this is huge. I mean and truly there's parts of that that isn't good. I shouldn't be married and seeing somebody else, it's not a right situation. In my mind I justified it because it was like, it's not a girl, I'm not cheating, I'm just having sex where some of those friendships turned out to be more than just friends. It was like what am I going to do now with this situation, this is one big mess. So I told my wife, you know, this is what's up. And she was like freaking out. And so I ended up that night, literally moving out of the house (Field Interview, Statement by a 34 year old male).

Although these "turning point experiences" (Strauss 1969) did not lead to a change in sexual orientation they invariably lead to seeking out conversion therapy programs or other sources to help deal with what they considered an affliction. These individuals incorporated the lay theory of homosexuality previously discussed subsequently leading to a change in their belief system about their sexuality and themselves.

IV Conclusion

I didn't start this counseling right away. I started with an Exodus group where I wasn't getting much help except they gave me a book. And it began to just knock my socks off, for me to realize that I didn't have to do this, God could take it. Because I had reached the place where I just wasn't at all sure that God could do anything about it although I had never accepted the fact that I was made this way, because I knew the bible said it was wrong. But I had tried so hard so many times and walked long enough free from it and fallen back into it that I didn't think I had any hope. But the one thing I had never done, I had never been able to say to my wife, after counseling times or periods when I thought I got healed, I was never able to say 'I know I will never do this again' because I didn't have that kind of conviction. Now only time will tell, but in my heart I know I will never do this again, I will never be there again because my whole belief system has changed. I understand what I needed and I know where to go to get it (Field Interview, Statement by a 55 year old male).¹⁴

This last ambiguous statement full of both despair and hope speaks to the central issue of sexual orientation conversion therapy. I believe one of the primary misconceptions, perhaps because it was mine, is that sexual orientation conversion therapy programs claim to or do change something "in" an individual namely their sexual orientation. However with regard to the individuals in this study, this is not true. All reported to still having same-sex attractions to one degree or another. As I noted earlier there is a seeming contradiction in many of these statements, they believe you can be healed, but that you will always be tempted. This temptation is arguably the same physiological response the individual had before their "conversion." What then is being changed?

A quick review of the sociological literature on conversions points to the answer. Robert Park and Ernest Burgess (1924:309) describe conversion as a "sudden mutation of life attitudes." Kurt and Gladys Lang (1961:153) state conversion involves "a complete turn-about in central values that is fairly permanent." For Ralph Turner and Lewis

Killian conversion is “an emotional transfer of loyalty and total acceptance of a new belief system.” Richard Travisano (1970:600) asserts “conversion is signaled by a radical reorganization of identity and, meaning, and life.” Anselm Strauss (1969:119) adds conversion refers to “those radical shifts of identity that are in some measure are coached, furthered, and forced by external agents.” As we saw above Denzin (1989:17, 141) attributes dramatic self change to an epiphany, which “occurs during problematic interactional situations where the subject confronts and experiences a crisis that illuminates personal character and signifies a turning point in a person’s life.” Tamotsu Shibutani (1961:523) describes conversion as a drastic transformation in behavior patterns that “are accompanied by a psychological reorientation in which the person sees himself and the world in a different light. He retains many of his personal idiosyncrasies, but develops a new set of values and different criteria for judgement.” All of this to say the main similarity in all these statements on conversion is the idea of a change in a belief or meaning system. Admittedly none of these authors were studying sexual orientation conversion therapy but I concur with them. Regardless how it comes about, through “brainwashing” (Strauss 1969) or an “epiphany” (Denzin 1989) the primary similarity is that a change in belief system has occurred. In which actions—past, present and future actions—take on new meanings. Shibutani states that “the adoption of a new perspective makes possible a re-examination and re-definition of oneself (1961:527).” With this new perspective the actor is able to evaluate past actions, such as in the construction of causes of homosexuality, where the actor determined a dysfunctional father son relationship to be the cause of their same-sex attractions, and present actions where same-sex sexual attractions are separated out from the body as sinful temptations.

To one extent or another all of the above ideas of conversion excluding the first two, Park and Burgess' (1924) and Lang and Lang's (1961), seem to fit the experiences of these individuals. These shifts in identity were indeed "coached and furthered by external agents (Strauss 1969:119)." However there were also crisis that occurred during problematic interactional situations that illuminated personal character and signified turning points in their lives (Denzin 1989). Although it must be said there is one important point of separation from these theories of conversion. In the end, although their dilemma is magnified, these individuals face a problem that is common to the postmodern period. Whether it is dieters (Pestello 1995), recovering alcoholics (Denzin 1986, 1987), or graduate students, in the postmodern period where all selves seem possible (Gergen 1991) we all strive to construct what is perceived as the most appealing one.

A Word on Further Research

Although the goal of this study was never to evaluate the efficacy of conversion therapy but rather to analyze how the process works, at times I felt myself being pulled that way. In a culture that values product and outcome it is sometimes difficult to focus purely on process. Although I have personal biases against such a study I will make two remarks on how I believe a study on the efficacy of conversion therapy should be done. First it must be longitudinal. My study was in a sense a snapshot, although personal lives were recounted, there is no way in knowing where those individuals are as I sit and write my findings. Any study on the efficacy of conversion therapy must take into account long term effects to see if this "change" is maintained. The second remark is, and in a sense this speaks to my personal or academic bias against such a study in the first place,

the way the interested parties have theorized about sexuality in order to address conversion therapy needs to be rethought. However, in theorizing about sexuality in a way I am about to propose would most likely nullify any interest in efficacy of conversion therapy. I believe there is another way to theorize about sexuality, which can be traced back to a statement made by Alfred Kinsey (1948):

It would encourage clearer thinking on the matters if persons were not characterized as heterosexuals or homosexuals, but as individuals who have had certain amounts of heterosexual experience and certain amounts of homosexual experience. Instead of using these terms as substantives which stand for persons, they may better be used to describe the nature of the overt sexual relations... (Cited In Plummer 1975:97)

Furthermore sexual attractions must always be explained in a relational sense. What is an attraction or a desire if not an attraction to or a desire for another social object? Perhaps then a more successful way to theorize about sexuality in general is not on the individual level but at the relational level. "If it is not individual "I"s who create relationships, but relationships that create the sense of "I," then "I" cease to be the center of success or failure, the one who is evaluated well or poorly, and so on. Rather I am just an I by virtue of playing a particular part in a relationship (Gergen 1991:157)." This is a theory that moves past the politics of sexual identity. However as long as homosexuality is stigmatized "scientists" will look for causes that will either condemn or condone the behavior. And this type of theorizing will not sit well with etiologists. In the end I find it disheartening that "science" cannot be separated out from biases and political agendas, as if the fate of accepting someone for being homosexual rested in the balance of what motivates their sexual desires.

NOTES

1. This process of altering an individual's sexual orientation has at least four names: aversion therapy, sexual reorientation, reparative therapy, and conversion therapy. However in this paper I will use the terms conversion therapy and sexual reorientation. I chose to use conversion because of its religious connotation. The term reorientation is used because it seems to be a generic term for the overall phenomenon. Furthermore slanted terms such as aversion and reparative (as in correcting a wrong) illustrate the inherent bias against homosexuality involved in the overall process.
2. A Christian Fundamentalist belief system is often measured with the following items or some form of them: (1) I am sure the Bible contains no errors or contradictions; (2) It is important for true Christians to believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God; (3) The Bible is the final and complete guide to morality; it contains God's answers to all important questions of right and wrong; (4) Christians should not let themselves be influenced by worldly ideas; (5) Christians must try hard to know and defend the true teachings of God's word. Also some items have focused on life after death, the existence of hell, and the value of prayer (McFarland 1989; and Herek 1987). One speaker at the Exodus regional conference closed his presentation with a short discussion on prayer. He asked the audience the rhetorical question, "do you know how to pray, I mean really pray?" He went on to say that you should talk to your lord, pray to him for two hours at a time. Another group leader at a married men's retreat gave a acronym to the Bible: basic instructions before leaving earth. The most important staple of the fundamentalist belief system is the belief that the Bible is inspired scriptures from God, and adherence to these scriptures. After that the belief in hell, life after death, importance of prayer and the rest seem to fall into place.
3. Gallagher et al. (1993) summarized the etiological theories of male homosexuality. Psychological theories of male homosexuality include: Dominate Mother (Evans 1969); Weak Father (Bene 1965); Dysfunctional Parent Marriages (Bieber, Dain and Dince 1962); Cross Dressing (Green 1974); Parents' Wish for an Opposite Sex Child (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948); Birth Order (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Only Child (Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948; Seduced by a Same Sex Adult (Stoller and Herdt 1985). The biological theories include: Genetic Inheritance (Bailey and Pillard 1991); Hypothalamus-Structural Difference (LeVay 1991); Prenatal Hormone Development (Dorner, Rohde, and Stahl 1975); Brain Organization (Allen and Gorski). It is interesting to note the time difference between the two, the psychological theories coming much earlier than the biological theories. Although it could be argued that that is how science progresses, I would argue that given the increasing favorable view of homosexuality in the sciences and culture in general there has been an attempt to ground the cause in nature. At base the question of causation is a biased one. One only looks for the "true" cause of homosexuality not for scientific purposes, whatever that is, but political reasons. "A human

psychologist: what does he really study men for? He wants to gain little advantages over them, or big ones too—he is a politician (Nietzsche, 1990 (1889): 87).”

4. See note 3.
5. Perhaps the most interesting aspect to the nature/nurture debates whether it be homosexuality, alcoholism, or (fill in the blank with your favorite vice) is the fact they will never be resolved. Biological theories will not refute psychological theories nor vice versa because they are playing two separate language games, and both make up two separate “speech communities (Scott and Lyman, 1968).” “Speech communities are composed of human aggregates in frequent and regular interaction. By dint of their association shares of a distinct body of verbal signs are set off from other speech communities (Scott and Lyman, 1990 [1968]: 237).” Speech communities also define what are appropriate forms of communication, they are located in the social structure in any society, and mark off segments from one another distinguishing types of activities. Furthermore some individuals, often “scientists” are dwellers in only a single speech community (Scott and Lyman 1968).

The most effective way, I believe, to look at this is debate over the causes of homosexuality as a language game (Lyotard 1984). Here the language games being played takes two forms as “denotative utterance” and “prescriptions.” In the “denotative utterance” the sender, here the biologist, psychologist, psychoanalyst, sociologist etc., their addressee (the person who receives it), and their referent, the homosexual person or homosexuality in general, are positioned in a specific way. The utterance places the sender in the position of “knower,” the addressee is put in the position of having to accept or contest the utterance, and homosexuality becomes something that demands to be correctly identified and expressed by the statement that refers to it. For example, the denotative statement that homosexuality is an illness or normal puts the sender in the position of the knower and addressee in the position to accept or contest the statement and homosexuality as something that needs to be correctly identified. Prescriptions, on the other hand, come in the forms of instructions, recommendations, requests, pleas, etc. The sender here is clearly placed in a position of authority, he expects the addressee to perform the action referred to. The prescription entails accompanying changes in the position of addressee to the referent i.e. the homosexual (Lyotard, 1984). For instance the sender expects addressee to act toward homosexuality in a certain prescribed manner such as treatment or acceptance. The theories of the causes of homosexuality are then best seen as language games, in which the debate between psychoanalytic and biological theories arise because these are very different games made up of very different rules. Lyotard states, “It is useful to make the three observations about language games. The first is that their rules do not carry within themselves their own legitimation, but are objects of a contract, explicit or not, between players. *Second is that if there are not rules, there is no game and that even an infinitesimal modification of one rule alters the nature of the game, that a move or an utterance that does not satisfy the rules does not belong to the game they define.* The third remark is suggested by what has just been said: every utterance should be thought of as a move in the game (1984: 10, italics added).”

6. Later in the third chapter, Analysis, I will discuss the idea of sin in more detail. However for the purpose here sin simply means a violation of religious dogma or divine law.
7. These scriptures are not cited here to ignite a debate about their “true” meaning. Rather they are presented to simply show what scriptures are used to argue the sinful nature of homosexuality. Daniel Helminiak (1994) presents a very good discussion on the historical context of these scriptures and is justifies homosexuality in the face of these scriptures.
8. While doing this study I noticed that homosexuality is not always used in this verse, and could not have been used in the original text. Many versions of the bible use the term fornicators as opposed to homosexuals. This particular version was used because it was quoted in Evans (1981).
9. This article has been reprinted in an interesting book entitled *Psychology and Christianity Integrative Readings* (1981) edited by J. Roland Fleck and John D. Carter. In which an entire section is devoted to sexuality. If there were any doubts to whether psychology has its greatest function as a moral police force a quick skim through this book should clear that up.
10. I have come to find out that at least two individuals involved with my study were also in Spitzer’s study. When I first began my research I was told that these individuals were involved in a study that would hopefully place homosexuality back on the list of mental disorders.
11. An opposing view by Pelagius and his followers basically argued that no divine command is unfulfillable by man. Therefore the grace of God is not needed for the prevention of future sins. This view of Pelagius was determined to be heresy (Kirwan, 1991).
12. “God is not dead he has become hyperreal, there is no longer a theoretical or critical God to recognize his own.” This statement by Baudrillard (1983: 159) is one of his many that have both intrigued and perplexed me. However in the context here it begins to make sense. When listing the attributes of God omniscient, omnipotent, etc. we know have to add a list of individuals personal ideas as well, which may very be psychological dysfunctions. In this sense any grand narrative that has been used to conceptualize god has been broken down.
13. Inevitably it became my turn to “share” with the group. In doing so I realized first it is not difficult to “recall” times where your father was “emotionally distant,” “unreliable” or some other parental dysfunction. But more importantly and more relevant here is the fact that in our society where cultural norms dictate that the mother be the primary caregiver, to some extent it seems to be the role of the father or men to be “emotionally distant.” Isn’t emotional distance a staple of traditional

masculinity? I pose two questions here, How many self-identified heterosexual men had a “dysfunctional” father son relationship? And doesn’t Exodus with their alignment with the religious right which focuses on traditional values perpetuate the idea of a distant father figure.” These are perhaps two contradictions that exist within this lay theory.

14. There is an irony to be appreciated in the groups chosen name “Exodus” which refers to the Hebrew slaves being freed and leaving Egypt. They were free from this bondage only to find they had no place to go, forty years of wandering in a desert was to be their fate.

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APPENDIX

Data Collection Instrument

1. Tell me about you religious/spiritual background.
2. What do you perceive as the causes of your homosexuality?
3. Were you openly gay?
4. Why did you decide to seek out help in order to change your sexual orientation?
5. Tell me about the process of changing your sexual orientation?
6. Where are you in the process of changing your sexual orientation?
7. Do you still have homosexual attractions?
8. How do you deal with these feelings?
9. How important of a role does your faith play in the process?
10. What did your friends/significant others think about you wanting to change your sexual orientation?
11. How important is it that other people perceive you as being changed?

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 4/30/02

Date: Tuesday, May 01, 2001

IRB Application No AS0157

Proposal Title: UNTITLED: QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION CONVERSION
THERAPY

Principal
Investigator(s):

Gabriel K. Lowe
006 CLB
Stillwater, OK 74078

Jean VanDelinder
006 CLB
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research, and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 203 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Gabe K. Lowe

Candidate for the Degree of

Masters of Science

Thesis: CONSTRUCTING A HETEROSEXUAL SELF: A QUALITATIVE STUDY
OF FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIAN GAY MEN AND SEXUAL
ORIENTATION CONVERSION THERAPY

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