

### Four Principles Of Growth

I am a therapist in private practice and am co-creator (with Rich Wyler) of Journey into Manhood (JiM), an experiential weekend for men seeking to change unwanted homosexuality. The JiM weekend is sponsored by People Can Change (PCC), a web based support organization that offers information, list-serves, and is beginning to coordinate face-to-face "JiM Groups" in a few major metropolitan areas. JiM and PCC are based to a large degree on the concepts I will be presenting.

Many men seeking to overcome homosexuality become frustrated and discouraged when they find that their feelings and attractions don't change as quickly or substantially as they had hoped. I believe that the reason these men become frustrated is because their efforts at change are not broad enough. By this I mean that their work, however intense and sincere, has not covered enough areas of life to bring about real change. For instance, a man might focus on overcoming sexual addiction but spend no time building healthy relationships with other men. Or, he may work on spiritual healing but give little attention to healing his emotional wounds.

Diminishing homosexual feelings and opening the way for heterosexuality to emerge seems to require efforts in four broad, overlapping areas. These are:

- Masculinity (i.e., men changing have to feel manly and relate to other men)
- Authenticity (e.g., getting out of the false self, facing real feelings in open relationships)
- Need fulfillment (having those relationships, experiences, and opportunities that strengthen, nurture, and lead to joy and personal satisfaction)
- Surrender (letting go of everything that prevents change from happening and letting in the things that restore growth processes)

These Four Principles are interdependent and synergistic. They are interdependent in that, in many instances, one principle cannot be lived without another being lived at the same time. They are synergistic in that they affect and are affected by each other and it is the interactivity of all the principles that causes substantial and lasting growth to occur.

Splitting these principles out is somewhat like putting a prism in white light, with white light representing the overall growth process. The prism shows us the different wavelengths that exist simultaneously in a whole beam of light.

My hope in splitting the change process out into these four "wavelengths" is to empower us to create whole growth processes, rather than to allow men to languish in incompleteness.

#### The Problems

To give context to the Four Principles, let me first characterize my view of the problems that men with same-sex attraction (SSA) face. They have problems in four main areas:

**Insufficient Masculinity.** This refers to their feeling inadequate as men and having an insufficient connection with other men and to the masculine world. Men with SSA tend to be disconnected from the male world and from other men. And they are disconnected from their masculinity—from their own genderedness.

**Inauthenticity.** They are not just disconnected from their genderedness, but also from their most genuine feelings and impulses. Bracing against shame and deep fears of abandonment, they tend to interact with the world through a false self that has been carefully constructed so as to not arouse disapproval. They are not authentic.

**Unmet Needs.** With only limited access to their feelings, they tend to have difficulty perceiving their needs. They may also have beliefs about themselves and feelings of guilt that steer them directly away from meeting their needs. This means that their needs cannot be met, further weakening them emotionally and causing them to seek false means of self-nurture.

**Emotional Rigidity.** They tend to have difficulty making emotional shifts and being emotionally vulnerable. Their emotional and relational patterns tend to be rather rigid. Also, they often have deeply engrained thought and behavioral patterns.

I see all of these issues as reverberations and elaborations of painful childhood relationships where the boy was shamed and placed in double binds by his parents and peers. Most damagingly, he was placed in what I call a "gender double bind," by the overall situation of his boyhood.

#### Gender Double Bind

A double bind is a situation where there is no good way out—where there is pain or trouble no matter what you do. You are damned if you do and damned if you don't. To quote the rock group The Cure: "If I go there will be trouble; If I stay it will be double."

The men dealing with same-sex attraction that I and my colleagues have known over many years typically describe a particular family dynamic marked by double binds. This dynamic may be played out in a variety of ways, but the essence of it is that the boy is punished or hurt for being himself with his authentic personality, feelings, and needs.

The hurt and the punishment may be simply that his parents ignore his feelings and needs. Or it may be that he is disciplined or offended by a parent and then prevented from, or punished for, expressing his feelings about it. Or, more extremely, he may be abused and then beaten for crying. Parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and others can create double binds.

One of the worst double binds these boys experience involves their gender. They come to believe that it is bad to be a boy, or that they are unacceptable as a male. If they assert their masculinity, they are punished or shamed.

On the other hand, they cannot abandon their maleness because it is integral to who they are. And to make matters worse, there is no one they can safely articulate their dilemma to. So they remain stuck in this Catch 22 for years, feeling despair and hopelessness. Gender Double Binds (GDBs) are created from a profound rejection—by parents or the environment—of a boy's gendered self, whether by blunt force or by exquisite unconscious targeting.

It is important to note that the GDB experienced by any particular boy is created within the mind and emotions of the boy himself. Typically, there are real factors in the environment that contribute to his beliefs and feelings. And in some cases, these factors are more a matter of the boy's perception than of external forces working on him.

When boys routinely experience double binds, they become afraid of self-expression and even afraid of their own feelings. They develop defenses against feeling and create an inauthentic "false self" that doesn't arouse the disapproval of those around them. They become often passive and stuck in life. GDBs add to this a defensiveness against their own genderedness—against their own boyish masculinity.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Vic – "I think I knew from the womb: 'You'd better not come out male.'" But his mother didn't just expect him not to be male. He experienced a very strong expectation from her to be female—a fundamental violation of his body, mind, and spirit. To be male meant abandonment and death. To be female meant substantial loss of self.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Dave – Grew up feeling weak and inadequate—to try to be masculine would bring humiliation. Also, there seemed to be something bad, dirty, or even evil about masculinity. To be masculine meant shame and badness. To shun it brought more inadequacy, shame, taunting, and alienation from self and others.

## Restarting Growth Process

The Gender Double Bind stops growth into mature masculinity and heterosexuality. The goal of gender affirming psychotherapy, the JiM experiential weekend, and JiM groups is to unblock the developmental processes arrested by problems in childhood so that normal growth can resume. But this growth needs optimal circumstances to proceed—especially when it has become blocked by powerful emotional and behavioral defenses. This requires a multifaceted approach that addresses all four of the problem areas described above. The Four Principles of Change are a way of guiding that process.

## Masculinity

The general concept of masculinity includes three more specific areas. These are internal, interpersonal, and societal concepts of masculinity. "Internal" refers essentially to gender identity—the sense of maleness and masculinity that a boy or man has of himself. "Interpersonal" is about connections and affiliation with other men. And "societal" has to do with social concepts of masculinity, and with male roles.

## What Are The Problems?

GDBs impact each of these three areas. Internally, the problem is that men with SSA typically feel a sense of inadequacy in their masculinity and may even doubt their maleness on less conscious levels. Despite a conscious knowledge of their given gender, they may feel feminine or weak in their maleness. One man described himself as having been "colonized" by his mother. Other men have mentioned that they can see their mother reflected in their own bodily movements or hear her voice when they speak. These men tend to view "normal" (i.e., heterosexual) men as having some mysterious masculinizing quality that they lack. They also tend to disconnect from their bodies, which—being irrefutably male—are a key element of the GDB.

Interpersonally, the problem is that men with SSA have become defensively detached from other men. The sense of being fundamentally different from other males, which arises from GDBs, has put a profound wedge between the boy and his male peers, teachers, leaders, and relatives.

The pain experienced in early relationships with these other males, which is typically described by men with SSA, deepens the defensiveness by adding an unconscious decision to never again attempt bonding. Defensive detachment leaves SSA men generally isolated from close, personal, non-gay relationships with other males.

Societally, men with SSA tend to feel alienated from, and resentful of, concepts of masculinity and male roles. This is essentially an extension of their internal and interpersonal detachment from masculinity and men. And the societal disconnection then interacts with the internal and interpersonal disconnection in a sort of "feedback loop," reinforcing and exacerbating the overall sense of being out of step with the whole concept of maleness.

## How Is The Principle Of Masculinity Lived?

The GDB must be broken in order for a sense of masculine sufficiency (having enough maleness inside you and around you in your life) to develop and grow. And, the GDB is broken by exposing the lies in it and by contradicting them experientially. Ways to expose some of the most common GDB lies are discussed below.

*Lie:* "If I behave in masculine ways (i.e., according to socially defined male roles) I will be humiliated, rejected, or shamed." This lie is exposed and contradicted through little-by-little trying on typically masculine behaviors, including anything from sports to spitting. Some behaviors will stick and others will be dropped. Gradually, the newly adopted behaviors become integrated into the man's overall personality and contribute to a deepening of his sense of masculinity. Having mature male role models is important in this process.

*Lie:* "If I expose my true self to "normal" (i.e., heterosexual) men, they will shame me and push me away." Creating friendships with so-called "normal" men is the only way to contradict this lie. This must be done consciously, carefully, and with intention. Very often, the first step is to make deep and real friendships with other men in the process of change. The JiM weekend, JiM groups, and the many other SSA ministries and support groups offer opportunities for making such friendships in a safe and accountable environment. The New Warrior Training Adventure, New Warrior Integration Groups, church and synagogue groups and community clubs and associations offer opportunities for making the leap into close friendships with heterosexual men.

*Lie:* "If I pursue my authentic gender atypical interests (e.g., art, music, style, or nursing) I cannot be masculine and other men will not be able to relate to me." The truth is that you don't have to give up your passion in order to prove you're a man. Rather, the challenge is to integrate that passion into an overall masculine personality and self-image.

*Lie:* "If I express masculine power, aggression, and anger I will be punished and abandoned." This lie is core to the GDB and the contradiction of this lie often has a profoundly freeing and masculinizing effect. The root of this lie often goes all the way back to early childhood when the boy's attempts at individuating and separating from mother went off track. Separation from mother, development of male identity, and acquisition of personal power are very closely tied together. Failure to separate from mother typically has a cascading effect, derailing the other processes as well.

Contradicting this lie requires careful processes that lead the man into sometimes terrifying emotional places. There, he experiences feelings and conflicts he may have avoided for decades. The core of this work is typically anger, which is often conflicted by feelings of love and guilt. Working through these conflicts restarts the process of individuating and developing personal power, which deeply impacts in a positive way the sense of masculinity. It also provides increased energy and drive to do the other hard work of the change process to be described below.

## Authenticity

To understand the principle of Authenticity, we must break it down into two related sub-principles. The first is Internal Authenticity, which in essence implies being whole within your self and accepting yourself totally, rather than splitting off, repressing, or hiding parts of yourself. This requires an understanding of who you are on a level deeper than your job description, sexual feelings, or the labels given you by family and friends. It takes the capacity to feel and tolerate the full range of your own feelings, which can sometimes seem conflicting, confusing, and painful. And it depends on an ability to integrate these feelings, along with your beliefs about yourself, others, and the world into a self that can meet the challenges of life and relationships. Internal Authenticity might appropriately be termed "the technology of self."

Interpersonal Authenticity is the second sub-principle within the overall concept of Authenticity. Simply put, Interpersonal Authenticity is the ability to be fully present and assertive in relationships to the degree appropriate and to respond out of your genuine self in those relationships. This starts with the assumption that each relationship is unique and calls for differing degrees of openness. Openness, or self-disclosure, is not synonymous with Interpersonal Authenticity. Not every relationship warrants disclosure of personal details and only a few relationships are conducive of true intimacy. Nevertheless, Interpersonal Authenticity suggests the ability to be genuine and true to your self in a majority of relationships whether intimate or more superficial.

### What Are The Problems?

As boys, these men experienced emotional conflicts (e.g., double binds) that outstripped their own internal resources and the resources of their families and peers. As a result, not only were these specific conflicts left unresolved, but the boy's capacities to resolve internal crises did not develop. This left them unprepared to surmount conflicts over the span of their development. The pain and insecurity of unresolved conflicts caused them to shut down the feelings and split off the aspects of themselves that created the conflicts. They may have given up their anger or split off their assertiveness or needs for male friendship. They often disconnect from their bodies in order to avoid their feelings. They develop a "self" that doesn't create conflict, but that is also false. They have lost who they truly are.

Lacking the ability to resolve emotional conflicts, existing with important parts of the self split off, and interacting with the world through a false self prevents these men from relating authentically with others. They may be friendly, personable, and "nice," but they typically struggle with relational essentials including intimacy, attachment, self-assertion, empathy, honesty, and forgiveness.

### How Is The Principle Of Authenticity Lived?

The principle of Authenticity starts with risking being whole. At first, wholeness must be explored in a very safe place (perhaps a

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