

Exposing the Deeper Meaning Behind Same-Sex Attraction

by Shannon Ethridge, M.A.

“I think I might be gay.”

After 20 years in youth and college ministry, these words don't surprise me anymore. Few young people go from childhood to adulthood without questioning their sexual values or sexual orientation somewhere along the way.

Perhaps you've had a friend make a similar confession to you, asking for your opinion or guidance. When *Every Young Man's Battle* and *Every Young Woman's Battle* released almost a decade ago, we heard from hundreds of teens who wanted to know how to live a life of sexual integrity if they experienced same-sex attraction. I confess, I often struggled over how to guide them with confidence. I'll bet you know the feeling.

By putting the right tools in our ministry tool belt, we *can* help peers look beyond the *fruit* of such fantasies to discover the *root* of their same-sex attraction. I believe there are several reasons why a teen may feel drawn toward a same-sex fantasy or actual relationship. Here are just a few theories:

1. **The “Rebel” Factor** – As we emotionally separate from our families of origin, we often reject our parents' spiritual and sexual values in an attempt to develop our own moral codes. If homosexuality was considered a big “taboo” in their home, walking on that side of the street often serves to satisfy one's urge to be shockingly rebellious.

2. **The “Ghost” Principle** – Many men and women with same-sex fantasies have experienced a traumatic loss of a significant same-sex figure – either through death, divorce, or emotional disconnection. Therefore, the homosexual fantasy is the brain’s way of re-creating the male-male intimacy or the female-female intimacy that was lost in the mother/daughter or father/son relationship.
3. **The “Fix Me” Factor** – When one grows up with a dysfunctional parental relationship, it’s easy to feel innately “broken.” The concept of having an older, wiser same-sex partner who can “fix me” is the brain’s way of trying to right that wrong, and can make fantasizing about that particular person appealing.
4. **The “Cannibal” Effect** – Cannibals only make meals out of people whom they admire and want to emulate. Similarly, humans are usually attracted to someone who possesses a strength or characteristic that they believe they need more of in their own lives. Sometimes this desire for the *characteristic* is mistaken as sexual desire for the *person*.
5. **The “Pinnacle” Principle** – It’s interesting how God created the heavens and earth, then the animals, then man, then woman, then retired from creating anything else! The female body, which has inspired more music, art, and literature than anything else in this world, is surely the “pinnacle” of God’s creation, and as such is the object of many fantasies, even those of women.
6. **The “Familiarity” Factor** –We’re more intimately familiar with the body of one gender or another simply because that’s the skin that we’re in, so same-sex fantasies may simply be a reflection of what we “already know,” rather than what we want “more of.”

7. **The “Danger/Default” Factor** – When a woman is physically, sexually, or emotionally abused by a man, it’s easy for her brain to conclude, “I’ll never feel safe with *any* man.” By default, this sense of danger only leaves one other gender in her mind with which she can be comfortable enough to explore her own sexuality – *women*.

In addition, all-things-sexual can look rosy in fantasies, but is the homosexual lifestyle really as rewarding as it may appear in a young person’s mind?

Exposing the REALITY of Homosexuality

I asked several gay men and lesbian women to tell me what the homosexual lifestyle is *really* like – all of the glamour, mystery, and fantasy aside. In addition to the obvious – fear of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted infections, and fear of societal rejection, responses included:

- *Fear of relational failure* - Few homosexual relationships ever make it past the 2-year mark¹
- *Fear of being cheated on* - Both gay men and lesbian women are often unfaithful to their lovers. Many self-described “monogamous” homosexual couples also reported an average of three to five partners in the past year.²
- *Alcohol and drug abuse* – Many use not just illicit sex, but also excessive drinking and drugs, to medicate their emotional pain. Approximately 25% to 33% of people in the homosexual lifestyle are alcoholics compared to 7% in the general population.³

- *Domestic violence* – Because many homosexuals come from broken or abusive homes, anger and hostility easily translate into physical abuse. According to one study, women are 44 times more likely to be abused by a lesbian lover than a husband, and men are 300 times more likely to be abused in a homosexual relationship than in a heterosexual marriage.⁴
- *Higher Depression & Suicide Rates* –Studies indicate that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth are up to four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. And those who are rejected by their families are up to nine times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.⁵

In an article entitled *Gay Rights: The Facts Behind Homosexuality*, www.faithfacts.org highlights the ravages of the lifestyle by examining these types of statistics and concluding that “homosexual behavior is marked by death, disease, disappointment, promiscuity, perversity, addiction, and misery.”⁶ Indeed, the social implications of choosing a gay lifestyle are minor compared to the physical, mental, and emotional torment one may face.

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Cindy’s Search for a Soft Place to Land

Cindy attended a church where she felt a special connection to the women’s ministry leader, Lydia. She eventually worked up the courage to admit to Lydia that she struggled with fantasizing about other women, and was bewildered by the fact that a heterosexual Christian woman would struggle with entertaining such thoughts.

“Lydia assured me that sexual confusion is relatively normal and asked a series of questions over the course of several meetings together to try to help me make sense of it all,” Cindy explained. “We discussed my relationships with my mom, dad, and siblings, and about how in 1995 our world literally came crashing down around us.”

When Cindy was 14, her 10 year-old sister, Penny, was spending the night with some close friends. Shockingly, their house caught fire in the middle of the night when lightning struck their roof. Everyone inside was burned to death, including Cindy’s sister.

“We all tried to cope as best we could, but my mother was never the same fun-loving, affectionate person. She was more like a walking zombie, staring into space while putting one foot in front of the other, assuring everyone she was fine, but completely oblivious to the needs of anyone else around her.

“As I shared these stories with Lydia, it became crystal clear why lesbian fantasies would invade my mind on occasion. She explained that sexual fantasies are often the brain’s way of trying to heal from past trauma, and that we often orchestrate events in our imagination to line up with what our soul longs for most – and I’ve spent years longing for my little sister to have survived that fire, and longing for my mother to snap out of her grief and return to being the woman that I felt so safe with and cherished by.

“In light of these connections, I’ve never again questioned my sexual orientation. I’m a heterosexual woman, and even if lesbian fantasies creep in on occasion to distract me from the pain I’ll always carry around in my heart, that’s okay. I control them. They do not control me.”

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It's important for every human being to understand that we *are* the captain of our sexuality ship. We may not always have control over what sexual thoughts initially come into our minds. But we have complete control over how much energy we give them. We decide which fantasies we pay attention to, and which ones get ignored because they don't line up with our spiritual values. We determine which direction to take at every turn, and with God's help, we have the power to stay completely on course as we navigate the waters of healthy sexuality.

And what a privilege when we are able to help our peers do the same.

Shannon Ethridge, M.A. is a certified life coach, conference speaker, and best-selling author of 19 books including the Every Woman's Battle series and her latest book, The Fantasy Fallacy: Exposing the Deeper Meaning Behind Sexual Thoughts (Thomas Nelson, 2012). Shannon also delights in mentoring aspiring writers and speakers through her B.L.A.S.T. Program (Building Leaders, Authors, Speakers & Teachers). Learn more at www.shannonethridge.com.

1. <http://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=IS04C02#edn7>
2. <http://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=IS04C02#edn7>
3. <http://www.faithfacts.org/christ-and-the-culture/gay-rights#ravages>.
4. <http://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=IS04C02#edn7>
5. <http://www.suicide.org/gay-and-lesbian-suicide.html>
6. "Gay Rights," www.FaithFacts.org